



# Frequently Asked Questions for housing and related service providers

**Current as at 9 April 2020 – Subject to updating**

## Housing and related service providers are Essential Services

Essential social services at COVID-19 Alert Level 4 are those that meet one or more of the following four criteria.

1. Where the social service is the only way for people accessing food and other goods they need to survive (e.g., money management (but not budget advice), food banks, and other delivery of essential goods).
2. A social service that provides and supports a place for someone to live (e.g., Supported Accommodation, Housing First, Public Housing, Residences, Bail Hostels, Night Shelters, Family Homes, remand homes, foster carers of children in state care, resettlement services for recent migrants and refugees).
3. A social service that supports disabled people to maintain critical wellbeing (e.g., disability services for those with high needs or very high needs and excluding disability employment services).
4. Crisis support for people who are unsafe (e.g., Funded helplines, refuges and family violence services, foster care support services, sexual violence crisis services).

[The COVID-19 website continues to be updated with more information on essential services](#)

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### 1. What about transitional housing are my services essential during the COVID-19 Alert Level 4

Yes. Services provided by Transitional Housing Providers are classed as essential services during the COVID-19 Alert Level 4. You should be continuing to support individuals and whānau during this time following safe practices guidance provided by the Ministry of Health.

### 2. What about motels?

Motels that are utilised to provide a place for someone to live are considered to be social service accommodation.

Any entity that provides accommodation services for essential workers, isolation/quarantine or emergency accommodation is also included in the social service accommodation category.

### 3. How will my staff identify themselves as essential workers?

Your Chief Executive or General Manager will receive an email from HUD providing the Essential Service proof required. Essential workers will be able to show it to authorities as needed during Alert Level 4.

### 4. What is HUD doing to help make beds and other household furniture an essential service so I can tenant my properties?

We are actively working with the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) to determine the minimum furniture requirements during this time and what furniture moving services can be made an [essential service](#).



## Staff safety

### 5. What about the safety of my staff?

The health and safety of your staff should not be compromised.

You may have changed the way you interact face-to-face by providing footpath services – talking away from an open door and not entering premises.

You may have already changed your service offering including removing face-to-face services by using technology to support clients during this time.

You may want to consider a staggered approach to your services including shift-based work, staggered breaks and continue physical distancing. You may also want to consider aspects around staff security at this time due to people's heightened anxiety and stress at this time

Personal hygiene measures are still considered a highly effective way to stop the spread of COVID-19. Keep up to date with information on the Ministry of Health website.

### 6. Where can I find the most up to date information to keep my staff safe?

The [COVID-19 Website](#) and [Ministry of Health COVID-19 guidelines](#) are regularly updated. Please continue to keep yourself up to date with this information.

## Continuation of services

### 7. What service offering should I be providing during this time?

As organisations supporting people and whānau with a place to live, we can confirm that your organisation's work and people are 'essential services'. This can also apply to some specific supply chain staff and contractors where the service or product provided is essential to the safe continuation of your service or business, examples of this are food supplies, cleaning and essential maintenance services.

This means you will continue to operate during COVID-19 Alert Level 4, along with services such as supermarkets, hospitals, doctors, pharmacies and service stations.

You should identify whānau who could be at high risk for complications from COVID-19 - those who are over 70 (over 60 for Māori or Pacific peoples) or have underlying health conditions and continue to make contact with them during this time to understand what their support needs may be.

We appreciate that these are difficult times and the way services are provided will need to change including physical distancing and using technology to provide services that you would normally undertake face to face.

Please contact us if COVID-19 is affecting your team's ability to deliver services or changing the needs of the people you work with. You can contact [Justine Angell](#) or email or [ProviderEnquiries@hud.govt.nz](mailto:ProviderEnquiries@hud.govt.nz).

### 8. Can providers be compelled to provide services?

We are investigating this further to understand what services MUST be provided in order to provide the minimum standard of care. If you feel that you or your staff's safety could be compromised in any way you are encouraged to discuss this with us so that a workable solution can be found.



**9. What activities can we undertake with placements and tenants at different COVID-19 Alert Levels?**

HUD is working closely with other agencies and the sector to develop guidance for the different COVID-19 Alert Levels. As this is developed, we will share this information with you.

**10. Under what COVID-19 Alert Level will HUD allow placements into Public and Transitional Housing?**

HUD is working with the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) and Community Housing Aotearoa (CHA) to ensure appropriate guidance and advice is developed in this space for each COVID-19 Alert Level. This guidance will be based on the direction from the Government on what services can be undertaken at each alert level.

**11. Can we keep our doors open for a limited amount of time per week, so families that don't have phones or internet can make contact?**

You need to ensure you can operate safely during this time, in a manner which minimises the risk of COVID-19 transmission. [More information can be found on the COVID-19 website.](#)

## Supporting Homelessness

**12. What is HUD doing to place homeless people into housing?**

HUD is leading work to urgently bring on more housing supply for New Zealanders living in vulnerable accommodation and/or who are homeless.

We are leading a cross-agency response that is working at pace and leaving no stone unturned.

We are also working with community housing providers, Housing First providers, iwi and Maori housing providers, and private accommodation providers to secure more places.

HUD is totally focused on this critical role and more accommodation continues to be brought on board.

We are working with our providers to move people from accommodation with unsatisfactory arrangements (for example, where people can't self-isolate if required), into more suitable accommodation.

HUD is working with iwi and Maori Housing providers to find alternative accommodation to support Maori communities, including portable cabins and local campsites.

HUD is also working to support housing and service providers with whatever they might need to continue to operate through this lockdown period.

**13. How many motel places have HUD sourced to place homeless (including rangatahi, street rough sleepers and others) into?**

As at Thursday 8th April 2020, the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has sourced over 900 additional places in motels across the country to house the homeless during the COVID-19 Alert Level 4 Lockdown.



#### 14. Why did HUD choose motels?

There are multiple reasons for this decision, for example:

- Motel units are already furnished and provide individuals and whānau with the appropriate homewares to use and utilities are connected.
- Motels did not require additional furnishings therefore limiting additional movements of people during the COVID-19 Alert Level 4.
- Motels can be brought on at pace bringing new supply to the market to house rough sleepers quickly.
- Other agencies were looking at other solutions around Hotels/Campervans for temporary solutions for isolation and quarantine support
- Longer term options are still being considered but are more difficult during Alert Level 4 due to movement restrictions.

#### 15. How are those rough sleepers being supported?

We are aware of the dynamic needs of some of our rough sleeper whānau and the need to provide wrap around support as required. As such, HUD has engaged with Housing First Providers and other community groups across the country to support rough sleepers and those in need of urgent accommodation into a motel and provide wrap around support while they remain there.

### Shared accommodation

#### 16. What about people in shared accommodation?

Every effort has been made to move as many people into single whānau / family dwellings as possible.

Additional services may be required to support an extended whānau where there are living challenges, and service providers are asked to respond as best they can to support these people.

How these additional services may look will vary from place to place and we will maintain a register of the various scenarios and share working procedures with you as they are developed to support providers.

Where a housing client is in self-isolation and needs MSD assistance, they can still call 0800 559 009.

#### 17. I have shared facilities within my accommodation, what is the best way to make these common areas or shared facilities available to individuals and whānau?

Facilities such as shared kitchens and laundry should be well monitored and operated in accordance with Ministry of Health guidelines particularly around cleaning of surfaces and physical distancing. A roster system would help to keep households separate; however, the shared facility should still be monitored. Cleaning products must also be made available and the shared facility cleaned in between each use.



## Motel providers

### 18. What about moteliere, how do we comply?

The Ministry of Health has [information for motel and hotel owners](#) including supporting guests who need to self-isolate and [cleaning guidelines](#).

Where you are not providing daily cleaning services you must provide access to cleaning products for motel guests.

Shared facilities should be accessed on a rostered system and have been cleaned down between guests accessing these facilities, such as the laundry.

Access to cleaning facilities should be made available when guests request it.

Motel units need to be thoroughly cleaned between guests and made available to new guests where a guest has decided to leave that unit during COVID-19 Alert Level 4.

The Ministry of Health website states there is little risk to motel or hotel staff when a guest is self-isolating, but it's important your staff take extra precautions such as avoiding close contact and washing hands.

There are [guidelines for people who need to self-isolate](#), including the safe use of shared bathroom facilities.

If any of our clients need to self-isolate while staying in your accommodation, please ensure they continue to have clean linen. If you're concerned and you're unable to service their room or unit as you normally would, please talk to us.

If any of our clients are self-isolating and need MSD assistance, we're asking them to book phone appointments online using MyMSD, contact their case manager directly, or call 0800 559 009 if they can't reach us any other way.

If anyone becomes unwell while staying at your accommodation, they should contact Healthline on 0800 358 5453.

### 19. Where can we send our clients to self-isolate if we are unable to support them?

HUD is working closely with moteliere and Housing First providers to bring on more supply at pace, to ensure vulnerable people have suitable accommodation and support during this difficult time.

### 20. If I have additional places, I can offer to HUD to support rough sleepers or people who need to self-isolate who should I contact?

You can contact us by email at [Justine.Angell@hud.govt.nz](mailto:Justine.Angell@hud.govt.nz) or [ProviderEnquiries@hud.govt.nz](mailto:ProviderEnquiries@hud.govt.nz).

### 21. MSD front line offices are no longer open, how can I support my client with an emergency need?

MSD will continue to provide support to clients through various online channels including phone calls. They are currently experiencing high demand, so please be patient when phoning them.



**22. I am a motelier delivering Transitional/Emergency Housing, what cleaning guidelines should I follow?**

The [COVID-19 Website](#) and [Ministry of Health COVID-19 guidelines](#) are regularly updated. Please continue to keep yourself up to date with this information. Further information around [cleaning activities can be found on the Ministry of Health website](#).

If you have individuals and whānau staying and are unable to service the rooms each day due to staffing concerns, at a minimum you must provide cleaning products to the individual rooms and advise those staying of your cleaning expectations, so rooms are kept clean and hygienic.

**23. I am a motelier delivering Transitional/Emergency Housing and I want to evict my guests due to their behaviour. What steps should I take?**

Evictions should not be taken lightly. All forms of support should be considered, and attempts must be made to address the issue with the individual or whānau before any eviction takes place.

The motelier and Support Services Provider must work together to attempt to influence change in the person's behaviour. Violence and illegal behaviour as well as behaviour that put's others at risk should be acted on immediately, and the Police called if there is risk to anyone's personal safety. Please contact your Contracts Team Relationship Manager or [Provider.Enquiries@hud.govt.nz](mailto:Provider.Enquiries@hud.govt.nz) to discuss the matter further if the circumstance is not related to a person's health or safety.

## **Continuation of payment to providers**

**24. Will quarterly invoices continue to be paid?**

Yes. HUD and MSD will ensure that contracted funding will continue to be paid as normal.

**25. Will HUD continue to pay Income Related Rent Subsidy invoices?**

Yes. Contracted funding will continue to be paid as normal.

**26. What about contract compliance?**

Our current funding commitments remain in place and we will show flexibility with your contractual obligations. We are committed to supporting you in doing whatever it takes to continue to deliver services and support your communities.

Where a contractual breach is significant, or you anticipate there being a significant breach of your obligations, please ensure that you make contact with your HUD Relationship Manager as soon as possible to discuss this.



## Continuing housing developments

### **27. My development was due to be completed, what does this mean for my payments?**

HUD recognises that developments will be delayed due to moving to COVID-19 Alert Level 4. There is no intention to penalise providers in instances where developments are delayed. We anticipate that developments will be completed and that these will be tenanted, and that development funding will be paid in the usual manner once lockdown is completed. If you are concerned about the implications of any such delay you should contact your HUD Business Development Manager or [Provider.Enquiries@hud.govt.nz](mailto:Provider.Enquiries@hud.govt.nz) to discuss this.

### **28. I want construction on my development to continue, is this an essential service?**

No. Essential services have been defined on the COVID-19 website. Only essential building services for critical infrastructure or where there is an immediate need to maintain human health and safety at a home or workplace are able to be undertaken during the COVID-19 Alert 4 period.

### **29. Will the current Sustaining Tenancies Invitation to Partner on GETS be extended?**

Yes, HUD is currently assessing how this will be delivered in the current environment. HUD will update GETS as soon as possible.

### **30. I have a Public Housing Capacity Contract with HUD and am in the middle of my development. I am concerned about the cost and contract implications of the COVID-19 Alert Level 4 Lockdown, who should I contact about this.**

In the first instance please contact your HUD Business Development Manager to discuss your concerns further. You can also contact us at [Provider.Enquiries@hud.govt.nz](mailto:Provider.Enquiries@hud.govt.nz).

### **31. Will HUD cover the costs incurred of hiring new personnel, properties remaining untenanted or development delays due to the COVID-19 Alert Level 4?**

HUD is currently working through what funding options could look like for Community Housing Providers and Transitional Housing Providers to minimise any financial impacts of COVID-19 Level 4 Lockdown. Once we have confirmation of this, we will update all Providers.

## Registration

### **32. I am a registered Community Housing Provider and need to provide additional support to my current tenants, will this affect my Registration status?**

Be assured that your organisation will not lose registered status as a result of disruptions beyond its control caused by Covid-19 or if you provide support to tenants that would not usually fall within the bounds of being a landlord. Community Housing Regulatory Authority (CHRA) will be taking a pragmatic approach to regulation and expect you to do the same regarding tenant welfare. If you are not sure who the best contact is in the Authority by email: [chra@hud.govt.nz](mailto:chra@hud.govt.nz).



## The role of the Ministry of Social Development

### 33. What services is MSD no longer continuing

MSD is continuing to support clients for the delivery of critical services through phone and online channels. Further information about the non-essential processes MSD has had to pause for Community Housing Providers is listed below:

- Prioritising IRR decreases when a client's income is impacted by COVID-19
- Pausing all Annual Reviews for clients
- Pausing all debt recovery actions for rent arrears
- Pausing Public Housing Assessments
- Public Housing Transfers between Housing Providers.

### 34. What if a client contacts me about their reduced income?

For urgent/prompt IRRS re-assessments for tenants impacted by COVID-19, MSD has asked community housing providers to email as follows:

- Email [GNL.Provider.Support@msd.govt.nz](mailto:GNL.Provider.Support@msd.govt.nz) with the subject line: COVID-19 Reduced Income
- Please include details of how COVID-19 has affected the tenant's income, together with any other relevant information
- These emails will be prioritised by MSD.

### 35. My tenant is in rent arrears, what does this pause mean for me?

Please do your best to negotiate a re-payment plan with your tenant during this time. If a tenant has rent arrears as they have reduced income due to COVID-19 we ask you to email

[GNL.Provider.Support@msd.govt.nz](mailto:GNL.Provider.Support@msd.govt.nz) with the subject line: COVID-19 Rent Arrears.

Include details of the tenants income situation, the amount and period of arrears, and confirm they are a signatory on the tenancy. We appreciate this will affect the work you do and potentially the levels of debt you carry in the short term. We are committed to ensuring Community Housing Providers are not financially impacted by this, please talk to your Relationship Manager about any impacts or contact [Provider.Enquiries@hud.govt.nz](mailto:Provider.Enquiries@hud.govt.nz).

### 36. What about rent increases that MSD already advised us to change?

HUD is working with MSD on these changes and will inform you once we have a response.

### 37. Will MSD continue Annual Reviews?

No. MSD will pause Annual Reviews for up to six months while they focus on their critical services to New Zealanders. There will be no change for Community Housing Providers as HUD will continue to pay the IRRS. IRR will still be reassessed for clients who proactively contact MSD during this time.

### 38. What about Tenancy Reviews, are they continuing?

No. Tenancy Reviews will also be paused unless a client contacts MSD proactively. If they contact MSD, MSD will advise that they are not progressing the review at this time.

### 39. What about clients who need a Public Housing Assessment?

Public Housing Assessments will not be completed during this time as it is not feasible to gather all the information via phone-based assessments. MSD will continue to meet a client's housing need through emergency housing accommodation. The Public Housing Assessment process will recommence as soon as soon as possible after the COVID-19 Level 4 is reduced.



**40. Is MSD still outbound calling clients**

MSD Contact Centres are very busy during this time. Outbound calling to clients on the Public Housing Register will be paused while MSD focus on delivering critical services.

**41. I need to transfer a tenant to another Housing Provider; how can I do this?**

MSD have paused their public housing transfer activity and we do not expect tenants to move from their existing residence unless there is an urgent health and safety issue. You will need to speak with the other housing provider to determine if a transfer is feasible during this time. Please follow your tenancy management processes and principles before considering this transfer.

**42. What about evictions?**

Tenancies will not be terminated during the Alert Level 4 period, unless parties agree, or in limited circumstances. Tenants who had previously given notice can stay in their home if they need to stay in the tenancy during the lockdown period. Tenants can be evicted if they cause significant damage or there is significant anti-social behaviour. Please speak with us before you continue this eviction.

**43. I have Income Related Rent (IRR) increases due to take effect within the next 6 months, do I still apply this increase?**

No. Any IRR increase notifications that have been sent through and are due to take effect from 26 March 2020 should not be applied to the tenant for an initial period of six months. More information can be found on the [HUD website](#).

**44. I have Income Related Rent (IRR) increase notifications from the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) in Business Online Services (BOS) do I increase the tenants rent?**

No. Any IRR increase notifications that have been sent through and are due to take effect from 26 March 2020 must not be applied to the tenant for an initial period of six months.

**45. If a tenant proactively contacts MSD due to an income increase, will their IRR be reassessed, and an increase apply?**

No. The rent freeze prevents any IRR rent increases but allows rent decreases.

**46. Will BOS still update the IRRS schedule based on an IRR increase already assessed and due to take effect in the next 6 months even if we cannot apply it?**

Yes. The Income Related Rent Subsidy (IRRS) schedule will still apply the IRR change. Providers will need to ensure that the correct IRRS subsidy is claimed. HUD will work closely with MSD to see what IT remedies can be applied to ensure we can align the schedules in the future.

We will let you know when this work commences and when we will be able to resolve the discrepancies. The Contract Management team will continue to support you during this time to ensure providers are not financially disadvantaged by the schedule applying the incorrect IRR.

If you have any questions about this please contact your Relationship Manager within the Contract Management team or [Housing\\_Provider\\_Support@msd.govt.nz](mailto:Housing_Provider_Support@msd.govt.nz).

**47. Can I recover rental arrears which have already been established from my tenants during this time?**

Yes. You should seek to come to an affordable arrangement for the tenant to repay the rent arrears. If there are serious rent arrears issues, contact MSD for rent arrears support for your tenants.



**48. My tenant has increasing rent arrears, what will MSD do to support me?**

Depending on the circumstances MSD can consider Recoverable Assistance Payments or Advance Payment of Benefit to help with rent arrears or if this is not available to the tenant a Rent Arrears Assistance payment may be available. Normally tenants must demonstrate they are at risk of losing their tenancy due to those arrears. Tenants will need to repay any advance payments made by MSD.

As there is a pause on evictions for Kāinga Ora – Homes and Communities and Community Housing Providers, to lessen stress on tenants we recommend that you do not issue 14 Day Breach Notices at this time.

**49. My tenants are not paying water and electricity charges, how can I help them?**

The Government has doubled the Winter Energy Payment for those receiving New Zealand Superannuation and Veteran's Pension and those on a main benefit. Clients don't have to apply for Winter Energy Payments, it is automatically paid. When a client's rent includes water rates (also referred to as water charges), the portion of arrears that relates to the water rates can be included for Rent Arrears Assistance if;

- the rental property has a separate water meter and the tenancy agreement states the tenant is responsible for this cost.

Clients may be able to receive a Special Needs Grant to meet the cost of refilling a water tank where they meet all requirements for this payment, and where the property they live in is either: owned by them or rented by them and they are responsible for refilling the water tank.

**50. MSD has increased my tenants order on benefit to pay an increased IRR which will not take place. What should I do?**

Unfortunately, in some cases this was unavoidable as some in-flight banking orders for rent increases could not be stopped in time. Notify MSD immediately and they will reduce any outstanding orders on benefit. You should refund your tenant the overpayment. Please do not use the additional rent payment to offset existing rent arrears or damages without permission from your tenant to do so.

**END**