Expressions of interest for the construction of new Alice Springs Hospital staff accommodation will be called within the next week.

Planning Minister Kon Vatskalis said 15 two and three bedroom units for staff at the Alice Springs Hospital will be built on land which has been set aside on the western side of the old Alice Springs Gaol site.

Mr Vatskalis said the land will be sold by Expression of Interest for the construction of a minimum of fifteen units, to be leased back to the Territory Government.

The Minister for Health and Community Services said the Government was committed to the recruitment and retention of nurses and other health professionals and construction of additional accommodation will assist that aim.

"This project will go a long way to addressing the shortage of accommodation for staff and their families as well as visiting students."

At present the Alice Springs Hospital has 36 units of accommodation, (excluding the 120 rooms with common facilities in the Dennison and Stafford Wings) with an occupancy rate of 100 per cent.

Mrs Aagaard said the mix of accommodation would include units which can be shared, units for families and units for students.

"Student accommodation is a particularly important part of our nurse recruitment strategy," she said.

Mr Vatskalis said the chosen site, part of the heritage precinct of the old gaol, will see the units constructed within the requirements of the Heritage Conservation Management Plan, already in place over the land.

He said the construction project will provide a substantial boost to the Alice Springs building industry. Work on the project is expected to begin in the early part of 2003.