



AUSTRALIAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION



National People with Disabilities and Carer Council

# NATIONAL DIALOGUE ON UNIVERSAL HOUSING DESIGN

## STRATEGIC PLAN

July 2010

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## **WHAT IS UNIVERSAL HOUSING DESIGN?**

Universal Housing Design means designing Australian homes to meet the changing needs of home occupants across their lifetime.

It recommends the inclusion of key easy living features that aim to make homes easier and safer to use for all occupants including: people with disability, ageing Australians, people with temporary injuries, and families with young children.

A universally designed home should:

- be easy to enter;
- be easy to move in and around;
- be capable of easy and cost-effective adaptation; and
- be designed to anticipate and respond to the changing needs of home occupants.

A universally designed home seeks to enhance the quality of life for all occupants at all stages of their life by including safer and more user friendly design features.

## **A NATIONAL DIALOGUE**

In late 2009, the Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children Services, Bill Shorten, convened the National Dialogue on Universal Housing Design, bringing together representatives from all levels of government, and key stakeholders groups from the ageing, disability and community support sectors and the residential building and property industry.

The members of the National Dialogue are:

- Australian Human Rights Commission
- Australian Institute of Architects
- Australian Local Government Association
- Australian Network for Universal Housing Design
- COTA Australia
- Grocon
- Housing Industry Association
- Lend Lease
- Master Builders Australia
- National People with Disabilities and Carers Council
- Office of the Disability Council of NSW
- Property Council of Australia
- Real Estate Institute of Australia
- Stockland

The National Dialogue members recognise that achieving the outcomes set out in this Strategic Plan will rely on the ongoing cooperation and contribution of the members and all levels of government over the next ten years.

Note - The members of the National Dialogue have been provided secretariat supported by the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. The Department of Industry, Innovation, Science and Research and the Australian Building Codes Board have acted as observers to the Dialogue given the discussion around developing guidelines. The Department of Planning and Community Development and the Building Commission, Victoria have provided technical advice on the guidelines.

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## OBJECTIVE OF THE NATIONAL DIALOGUE

National Dialogue members recognised that traditionally most homes have not been designed or built in a way that can easily accommodate the changing needs of households over their lifetime.

National Dialogue members have agreed that there is a need to develop a national approach to the issue of Universal Housing Design. Such an approach would resolve the confusion of definitions and approaches to improving access in and around our homes making them easier and safer to live in for all people, regardless of age or ability.

National Dialogue members believe it is important that the community at large is informed and educated about the benefits of Universal Housing Design.

The National Dialogue members have agreed to work together to explain to the Australian community the benefits of Universal Housing Design - that it is about making homes easier and safer for young families, people who have short or long term injuries or illnesses, as well as senior Australians and people with disability.

*The National Dialogue members have agreed to pursue an aspirational target that all new homes will be of an agreed Universal Housing Design standard by 2020 with interim targets to be set within that 10-year period.*

This Strategic Plan has been developed to assist in this effort. It sets out a program that will help realise the benefits of Universal Housing Design across all Australian communities.

The Strategic Plan aims to provide a pathway over the next decade to assist all National Dialogue members in working toward the aspirational 2020 target.

The Strategic Plan recommends a number of steps that, with the support of the Commonwealth and state and territory governments, the ageing, disability and community support sectors and the residential building and property industry, can help to:

- establish nationally agreed performance and technical guidelines for Universal Housing Design;
- promote greater understanding of the value of Universal Housing Design within the community;
- promote the education and training of the residential building and property industry in Universal Housing Design practices;
- identify appropriate incentives and mechanisms to assist in achieving the agreed aspirational target.

This Strategic Plan reflects a decision by National Dialogue members to take the initiative to lead the way on Universal Housing Design and thereby provide a platform for government to pursue relevant policy initiatives over time that deliver the desired level of change in residential building design.

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## TOWARDS 2020 - A STRATEGY FOR UNIVERSAL HOUSING DESIGN

The Strategic Plan is focused on increasing national awareness of the issues around Universal Housing Design and to set out a program to help all Australians realise its benefits in their own homes.

National Dialogue members believe housing that incorporates Universal Housing Design principles can have social and economic benefits for all Australians.

For the home occupant of today, Universal Housing Design seeks to enhance the overall comfort, safety and liveability of the home. For the home occupant of the future, these same features could enable key living spaces and features to be more easily and cost effectively adapted to meet changing needs and abilities.

A wide range of Australians immediately benefit from homes that are universally designed, including:

- families with young children who need to get strollers and prams into their homes and want safer homes;
- people who sustain temporary or permanent injuries which limit their mobility, for example sporting and motor vehicle injuries, who would potentially require less time in hospital if they could safely move around their home while recovering;
- ageing baby boomers who are looking to renovate their existing homes to better accommodate their future needs;
- older people who are particularly vulnerable to slip, trip and fall injuries in their homes;
- people with disability and their families who are looking for a home that will accommodate their current and future needs;
- people with disability who wish to visit the homes of friends and relatives; and
- home care workers and family and friends who provide in-home care and support.

The Strategic Plan recommends a number of steps that, with the support of the Commonwealth, state and territory governments, the ageing, disability and community support sectors and the residential building and property industry, can help to achieve our aspirational goal that all new homes would incorporate universal design features by 2020.

The Plan establishes key milestones for the next 12 months. The National Dialogue members intend to reach agreement on milestones covering the next 3 years (2012-2014). The National Dialogue members will continue to review progress against these milestones and establish further milestones as they work towards the 2020 goal.

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## Milestones

The National Dialogue members have agreed to pursue the following milestones over the next year:

1.	Release the <i>Livable Housing Design Guidelines</i> and Strategic Plan.
2.	Establish a formal structure or entity that will be guided by the National Dialogue members to support and encourage the realisation of the agreed goals set out in the Strategic Plan.
3.	Identify and formalise the role of the Commonwealth government in the delivery of the Strategic Plan.
4.	Develop a national awareness campaign and brand for Universal Housing Design.
5.	Adoption of bronze level Livable Housing Design elements by Dialogue members and all levels of government into existing promotional programs for best practice housing design.
6.	Lobby Government for adoption of the bronze level Livable Housing Design elements for all new social and affordable dwellings that receive Government funding for construction.
7.	Establish a website to host information developed by the National Dialogue and link these resources to the residential building and property industry and the ageing, disability and community support sectors websites.
8.	Establish a working group to develop a training and awareness strategy and package for the residential building and property industry.
9.	Commence work on establishing a baseline dataset for existing housing stock with regards to the prevalence of universal housing design features.
10.	Introduce a market research program to determine the level of demand for, and take-up of, Universal Housing Design by consumers.
11.	Establish a working group to develop a range of incentives and supporting mechanisms to promote the Guidelines.
12.	Commence work on establishing the monitoring and evaluation strategy which will assess the achievement of the agreed housing targets as part of the agreed review process.

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## Implementation Plan

National Dialogue members envisage a three-pronged approach to implementing their vision for Universal Housing Design.

### **1. *Market Transformation***

The aim is to create a widespread awareness of the benefits arising from Universal Housing Design for both the residential building and property industry, for existing home owners and new home buyers. Options to be considered for encouraging market transformation include:

#### **a) *Creating consumer awareness***

- create a brand name to make it easier for consumers to recognise and choose housing which offers Universal Housing Design features
- develop a national consumer awareness campaign to inform, educate and enthuse home buyers about the benefit of selecting a universally designed home
- develop an awareness campaign to target the residential building and property industry to increase the adoption of Universal Housing Design principles in new housing
- identify champions to provide the public face for the consumer awareness campaign.

#### **b) *Promoting & recognising industry leadership***

- promote the Livable Housing Design Guidelines through the residential building and property industry associations
- establish accreditation and recognition programs for homes incorporating Universal Housing Design elements
- provide industry training on the Guidelines and Universal Housing Design principles
- promote the purpose and benefits of Universal Housing Design through the ageing, disability and community support sectors
- establish a web site to act as a portal for the Guidelines, including checklists, 'how to' guides and case studies
- establish an award for Livable Housing Design as part of the National Disability Awards.

### **2. *Providing Incentives***

National Dialogue members see a role for all levels of government to work together with industry and consumers to promote Universal Housing Design principles. An essential element of promoting a new initiative, such as the publication of the Guidelines, is to provide a range of incentives and support mechanisms to stimulate voluntary industry uptake. Some examples of incentives that should be considered to support the voluntarily adoption of the Guidelines include tax incentives, development assessment incentives, preferential interest rates and rebates.

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### **3. Public Policy Integration**

The support of all levels of government is essential to achieving the 2020 target. To this end, National Dialogue members believe that Government should:

- be the ‘first mover’ in relation to the adoption of the Livable Housing Design Guidelines. This should apply to housing projects funded by the Commonwealth and state and territory governments
- commit to the training of the residential building and property industry in practical Universal Housing Design and building skills
- commit funding to promote residential building and property industry programs that promote education and training and the voluntary adoption of Universal Housing Design.

#### **Guidelines**

A key milestone of the Strategic Plan is the release of Livable Home Design Guidelines. A national approach to Universal Housing Design has the potential to benefit both the residential building and property industry and home owners by providing clear and consistent guidance. The Guidelines have therefore been developed to assist the residential building and property industry and governments to build homes that can respond to the changing needs of households.

The application of Universal Housing Design principles in new housing provides an important opportunity to avoid or reduce the costs associated with retrofitting homes to improve design and function. On this basis, National Dialogue members have prepared a set of voluntary Livable Home Design Guidelines that can be applied in new houses. However, many of the principles can be readily applied in existing homes.

The Livable Home Design Guidelines have been prepared with a hierarchy of options that a home owner, builder or developer can choose to apply in any new building project.

The first level, Silver, comprises of six core Universal Housing Design elements and is intended to apply to all new homes.

The second level, Gold, contains enhanced and additional universal design elements for new home construction. The Gold level elements are also eventually intended to apply to all new social and affordable homes that receive government assistance or funding for construction.

The third and highest level, Platinum, is intended to be more of an aspirational set of guidelines for people wishing to design houses with optimum accessibility features in mind.

The Guidelines are intended to be a living document. It is not a “one size fits all” standard, and we recognise that no single document can describe a home that meets the needs of all abilities.

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## Housing Targets

National Dialogue members propose a 10-year timeframe for the implementation of this Strategic Plan, with the aspirational target being that all new homes will be of an agreed Universal Housing Design standard by 2020.

The application of the Guidelines is a key element of working toward the aspirational target. Therefore interim targets for the adoption of the Guidelines are proposed to assist National Dialogue members to gauge the uptake and improvement in awareness of Universal Housing Design over the next 10 years.

The agreed interim targets for voluntary uptake of the Guidelines for all new residential housing are:

- 25 per cent to Silver level by 2013
- 50 per cent to Silver level by 2015
- 75 per cent to Silver level by 2018
- 100 per cent to Silver level by 2020

National Dialogue members hope that home owners will see the benefits of Universal Housing Design principles when renovating an existing home.

National Dialogue members believe that the Commonwealth and all state and territory government providers of social housing should commit to delivering all new public housing to an agreed Universal Housing Design standard. The targets proposed for the uptake of the Guidelines by the Commonwealth and states are:

- 100 per cent to Silver level by 2011
- 50 per cent to Gold level by 2014
- 75 per cent to Gold level by 2017
- 100 per cent to Gold level by 2019

## Ongoing Review

In order to assess the progress of achieving these targets, National Dialogue members recommend that a series of ongoing reviews be undertaken at two to three year intervals across the 10-year period.

The review should look at the level of voluntary uptake of the Livable Home Design Guidelines by all sectors - residential building and property, aged care, public and social housing - and the level of consumer demand for these features. These reviews, the first of which is recommended to commence in 2013, should identify areas of successful application, any barriers to uptake, and whether there is a need for other incentives or measures to stimulate adoption of Universal Housing Design principles.

The National Dialogue will continue to advise the Commonwealth on the outcomes of these reviews and progress made towards the aspirational target that all housing will be of an agreed universal housing design standard by 2020.

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## THE CASE FOR UNIVERSAL HOUSING DESIGN

### *What are the drivers?*

#### **1. Ageing population**

A key driver for adopting Universal Housing Design principles lies in the significant demographic change taking place in Australia. In 2007, there were 3.35 million people aged 60 years and over representing 17 per cent of the population. By 2050, this figure is set to rise to 26 per cent.<sup>1</sup> Recent increases in life expectancy for older Australians have also been accompanied by an increase in years of life lived with disability.<sup>2</sup>

Ageing baby boomer, many of whom have both the financial resources and desire to live independently, add to the sectors of the community who will be looking for more flexible housing design.<sup>3</sup>

#### **2. An unmet need**

Australians born with or who acquire a disability during their lifetime can also significantly benefit from Universal Housing Design.

One in five Australians has a disability. Of the 4 million people who have a disability, 84 per cent are affected by a physical condition or limitation that restricts everyday activities.<sup>4</sup> Physical disability remains the most commonly reported disability among people aged less than 65 years.<sup>5</sup> Conservatively, it is estimated that close to 3 million people, or 16 per cent, of the Australian population have one or more physically disabling conditions.<sup>6</sup>

Of the 20 per cent, families who have a child with disability represent a specific market for universally designed homes. One in 12 children aged between 0-14 years has a disability, representing 317,900 children.<sup>7</sup> After learning/intellectual disability, physical disability is the second most prevalent disability amongst children accounting for 162,800 children or 4.2 per cent of all children.

Conservatively one in 10 households has a person with disability that requires some level of assistance with daily activities.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, research undertaken in the United States estimates that there is a 60 per cent probability that a new house will be occupied by at least one person with disability over its lifetime (assumed to be 40 years). The probability increases to 91 per cent when you account for visits by friends and relatives who have a disability.<sup>9</sup>

A universally designed home has benefits for people who have a physical limitation or mobility impairment. However features such as a continuous path of travel to a level entrance are equally beneficial to people who are blind or have low vision and those affected by endurance issues.

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2003). *Disability, Ageing and Carers: Summary of findings* (No.4430.0). Canberra, ACT: ABS.

<sup>2</sup> According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2004). *Disability in Australia: Trends, in prevalence, education, employment and community living* (Bulletin No.61). Canberra: AIHW, census data indicates that between 1998 and 2003, the expected years with disability increased by 0.7 years for men and 1.2 years for women and for a severe or profound limitation, increased by 0.2 and 0.6 years respectively.

<sup>3</sup> Judd, B et al. (2010) *Dwelling, land and neighbourhood use by older home owners*. AHURI Final Report No. 144. Melbourne: Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, UNSW-UWS Research Centre.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2009) *Australia's welfare 2009*. No.9. Canberra: AIHW.

<sup>6</sup> Wen, X., & Fortune, N. (1999) *The definition and prevalence of physical disability in Australia*. Canberra: AIHW.

<sup>7</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2006). *Disability updates: Children with disabilities*. Bulletin No.42. Canberra: AIHW.

<sup>8</sup> ABS, Disability, Ageing and Carers 2003/04. Cat. No. 4430.0.

<sup>9</sup> Smith, S., Rayer, S. & Smith, E. (2008) *Aging and disability: Implications for the housing industry and housing policy in the United States*. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 74:3, 289 – 306.

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### **3. Changing life circumstances**

Ability is not static and changes throughout a person's lifetime. Whilst some Australians are born with disability, the most commonly reported cause of physical limitations and impairment for people of all ages is an accident or injury (22 per cent).<sup>10</sup> Over 14,000 hospitalisations a year result from sporting injuries.<sup>11</sup> While these hospitalisations do not all impact upon mobility, the incidence of temporary disability as a result of injury is increasing. Incorporating Universal Housing Design features would enable a home to better accommodate changing needs and abilities of the home's occupants.

### **4. Growing consumer interest**

Finally, a national survey conducted with older homeowners has found 78 per cent support Universal Housing Design principles in their own home and over 60 per cent support the widespread incorporation of Universal Housing Design principles in Australian housing.<sup>12</sup> Further, qualitative focus group research with people including recent homebuyers, builders and renovators and people aged 60-plus has shown that Australians believe that Universal Housing Design features makes a home safer and more functional for all people.<sup>13</sup>

#### ***What are the benefits?***

##### **1. Improving home safety**

Falls in the home environment cost the Australian population \$1.8 billion in public health costs. The home environment remains the most common location where falls occur, accounting for 62 per cent of all falls. Home based slips, trip and fall injuries continue to increase with fall injuries sustained by people over the age of 65 years increasing over 18.5 per cent compared to 16 per cent for all age groups (between 2002-03 and 2004-05).<sup>14</sup> Children under 9 years of age have the highest proportion of slip, trip and fall injuries for all age groups under 65 years.

A universally designed home removes the some of the features and elements that create slip, trip and fall hazards in the home.

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<sup>10</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2009) *Australia's welfare 2009*. No.9. Canberra: AIHW

<sup>11</sup> Henley, G., (2007) *Hospitalised football injuries 2004-05*, AIHW National Injury Surveillance Unit, Research Centre for Injury Studies, Flinders University, South Australia, p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (2010) *Dwelling, Land and Neighbourhood Use by Older Home Owners*, p. 282.

<sup>13</sup> Victorian Department of Planning and Community Development (2008) *Accessible Housing Program: Community Awareness Campaign, Qualitative Research Executive Summary*, Auspoll.

<sup>14</sup> Monash University Accident Research Centre. (2008) *The relationship between slips, trips and falls and the design and construction of buildings, (funded by the ABCB)*.

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## **2. Reducing home renovation costs**

Research suggests that incorporating Universal Housing Design principles upfront has a minimal impact on the cost of construction. The Victorian Government has estimated the cost to the homeowner of including four adaptable and visitable housing design features in a new home is 22 times cheaper than retrofitting those features into an existing home.<sup>15</sup>

Further, as building costs increase over time, there are also potential cost savings in future home modifications when Australians include Universal Housing Design features in their new home or when renovating their existing home. A New Zealand study found that the initial average outlay of \$2,000 to build to the equivalent of a universal housing design standard had a threefold economic return. In other words, the implied rate of return in real terms was between 6.5 per cent and 8.0 per cent.<sup>16</sup>

## **3. Savings for Government**

Universal Housing Design can result in a reduction in government health and community sector spending due to reduced fall hazards in homes, resulting in fewer accidents. This can lead to benefits including:

- reduced health care costs,
- reduced cost of future government-subsidised home modifications,
- reduced need for aged care residential accommodation,
- reduced need for in-home assistance,
- shorter hospital stays, and
- the freeing up of carers to return to the workforce.

The Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) has estimated that if 20 per cent of new homes included universal housing design, the cost savings to the Australian health system would range from \$37 million to \$54.5 million per annum. Assuming 100 per cent adoption in new homes, the cost savings ranged from \$187 to \$273 million per annum.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Victorian Department of Planning and Community Development (2009) *Visitable and Adaptable Features in Housing Regulatory Impact Statement*.

<sup>16</sup> New Zealand Ministry of Social Development, (2009) *Economic effects of utilising Lifemark at a national level*.

<sup>17</sup> Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (2010) *Dwelling, Land and Neighbourhood Use by Older Home Owners*, pp. 188-189.