

# Accessible Housing ABCB Options Paper

Submission by the Summer Foundation, November 2018

## About the Summer Foundation

The Summer Foundation works to change human service policies and practices related to young people (18-64 years old) living in, or at risk of entering Residential Aged Care (RAC) facilities.

Our vision is that young people with disability and complex support needs will have access to services and housing that supports their health and wellbeing and a good life in the community.

We are committed to working with governments and other stakeholders towards achieving accessible and affordable housing for young people with disabilities with complex support needs. We are committed to working to ensure that the NDIS and other state and government policy initiatives realise their potential to end the forced admission of young people with disabilities into residential aged care.

Our response to the ABCB Options Paper is focused on accessible housing issues for people with complex needs. We recognise however, that universal housing design will benefit the entire Australian community, especially the ageing population.

## Personal experiences of young people in residential aged care

The following case studies of people with disabilities illustrate how inaccessible housing results in social exclusion, the ability to return home after an illness or injury and forced entry into nursing homes. It is clear that introducing accessible housing regulations that require minimum standards will reduce social isolation, reduce cost for modifications, and enable an ordinary family life.

### *Sally\*<sup>1</sup>*

*Sally\*, an artist and performer, was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis at the age of 31. Since this time Sally has tried to maintain her career as her health has deteriorated.*

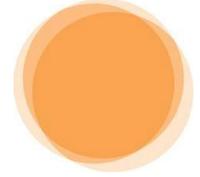
*After a hospitalisation Sally was sent home with a walking frame, manual wheelchair and a ramp for the front step. She quickly discovered it wouldn't work because a wheelchair could not fit in the bathroom. Sally had no other option but to return to rehab while she waited to find accessible housing. Despite not needing to be there, she ended up staying for three months and had to give up her job.*

*Sally has since moved into accessible housing designed for ageing residents in mind, though this has not resolved the issue of inaccessible housing. Sally explains:*

*"Before I became disabled I was a very social person, I'd visit people, I'd house-sit, I'd stay at other people's houses. My life shrank so much when I started using a wheelchair. It's isolating, it's depressing. I barely see my friends now.*

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<sup>1</sup> \* Names have been changed.



*You don't realise it until you're where I am now. I don't get invited to go to anyone's house for dinner, I don't get invited to birthday parties, because people know 'Sally won't be able to get in.' It becomes a big hassle if someone does invite me – can you fit through the doorway? Are you going to be able to get into the toilet?*

*I can't go to my parent's home. At Christmas time there's no one I can go and have Christmas with, except for one person. We had to sort out so many issues though first and I still can't use the toilet. Tell me, do you have to do a practice run before you get through the door of your friend's place?*

*It has really had an impact on my emotional and psychological wellbeing to not be able to spend time with people. I'm stuck in my own home.*

*The aching loneliness of social isolation is a society-wide issue. It has huge implications. If all new builds had a requirement to have a certain width doorway, it makes it so much easier to know that I could go visit a friend, just drop by and have a coffee."*

*Michelle\**

*Michelle's family is her world. Michelle, her husband and daughter had taken time out of their normal routine for a camping trip around Australia. During the trip, at the age of 39, Michelle suffered a stroke that had a significant impact on her mobility.*

*Once funding became available and Michelle was able to be discharged home, her husband started the long process of looking for a rental home for the family. He looked at around 38 houses. They finally settled on a home, but it was inaccessible.*

*When they moved in Michelle was fearful of using her wheelchair in the rental property. If the chair damaged the property they could be evicted, and to her this would mean returning to a nursing home as there were no other accessible housing options available to her.*

*The doorways and hallways were narrow and Michelle couldn't fit through in her wheelchair so she spent most of her time in bed, which she kept in the dining room as she couldn't move freely through the house. Although it was good to be close to her family it was hard as she wasn't able to participate in daily life. She lost her identity as a mum and a wife.*

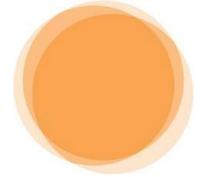
*There was not enough space in the bathroom and on three occasions Michelle and her wheelchair went through the wall while she was being showered. Her husband had to fix this each time.*

*After a long housing journey, Michelle has now moved into an accessible apartment, which has allowed her and her husband to return to work, and her daughter to go to university. "We've become that family again, finally."*

*Rachel\**

*Rachel\*, aged 16, was living like any young adult, about to start year 11. Until one day when she was getting ready for her part time job and a sudden accident left her with a severed spinal cord.*

*Rachel's friends and close-knit family were pivotal in supporting her through her recovery. For the next 9 years Rachel lived in a cramped unit below her Nan's home. The outside*



*stairs, the only access to the home above where the rest of her family lived, were a reminder of what she was missing and left her feeling isolated.*

*“It isn’t the nicest having to be so separated from your family, you do live together but totally separate.” The unit she lived in had extremely narrow hallways and doors making it difficult for Rachel to maneuver her wheelchair, often leaving gashes in the doors and walls. The lack of space meant there was no room to turn her chair into the kitchen, where preparing meals was already difficult. A small lip into the bathroom from the narrow hallway made getting in and out problematic. Rachel wonders how she survived so long.*

*Rachel has now moved into her own accessible apartment which she describes as the biggest life-changing event since the onset of her disability. She has been able to continue her studies and secure a job since moving.*

## **Accessible Housing is Needed for All**

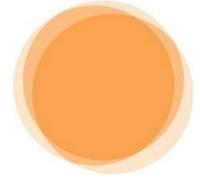
Summer Foundation supports the points made by the Australian Network for Universal Housing Design (ANUHD) in its submission on the need for accessible housing for the broad community as well as particular population cohorts such as people with disability, older people, their carers, as residents and as visitors. As ANUHD states, there is a high probability that that a substantial percentage of houses will be lived in or visited by people with disability over their expected lifetime. Sally’s story illustrates the consequences of being unable to visit family members even at Christmas time.

We also note the evidence that ANUHD’s paper puts forward on the level of unmet demand for accessible housing and the need for regulation given that less than 5% of new housing has been built to meet universal design standards. This is when compared against all the National Dialogue’s aspirational (non-legislated) target that all new homes will be built to this level by 2020.

Summer Foundation endorses ANUHD’s position that the regulation of minimum standards of accessibility can bring significant benefits and is in the public interest.

We believe that minimum standards for accessibility will:

- avoid exclusion and marginalisation of people and denial of social and economic participation by communities
- allow people to “age in place”
- reduce the risk of falls
- reduce the length of hospital stays
- reduce the need for residential aged care amongst both the elderly and younger people with disabilities
- minimise preventable costs for future users of health and support services
- reduce increases in demand for government housing assistance such as SDA, social housing and home modifications
- contribute to the realisation of COAG’s obligations to build globally competitive, productive, sustainable, socially inclusive and future-oriented communities.



## Accessible Housing for People with Disability

Accessible housing is needed for people with disabilities with a range of impairments affecting their ability to move around their home. This can apply for people who are both eligible and non-eligible for participation in the NDIS.

As Sally, Michelle and Rachel's stories demonstrate, the implications of the lack of availability of accessible housing for people with disability who have complex needs can be catastrophic. All too often they are forced to live in nursing homes. Severe social isolation and additional costs often result.

At the end of June 2017, there were 6242 young people in Residential Aged Care (RAC) in Australia.<sup>2</sup> By 30 September 2018, 3128 Young People in Residential Care (YPIRAC) were active NDIS participants.<sup>3</sup>

Young people with disability living in nursing homes are one of the most marginalised and isolated groups of people in our society. Fifty-three per cent of young people in RAC receive a visit from a friend less than once per year and 82% seldom or never visit their friends.<sup>4</sup> They generally lead impoverished lives, characterised by loneliness and boredom. They are effectively excluded from society with 45% seldom or never participating in leisure activities in the community<sup>5</sup>.

Aged Care admissions for young people are reducing in some areas, but increasing in others. Admissions in NDIS trial sites of Hunter and ACT have reduced by 5%. In Barwon however, admissions have risen by 37%. A lack of suitable housing is a likely reason for this increase.

The NDIS provides Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) funding for those participants who meet the Scheme's stringent criteria contained in the SDA Rules 2016. The NDIA estimates that a total of 28,000 of NDIS participants will be found eligible for SDA funding.<sup>6</sup> This number represents 25% of the 110,000 people with disability (under the age of 65 years) estimated to need alternative accommodation. This means that 82,000 people will need accommodation in the mainstream (non-specialised) accommodation market. As at 30 June 2018, only 8,858 people out of the 183,965 active NDIS participants, have SDA funding in their plans.<sup>7</sup> This figure gives one source of data on the current demand for accessible housing.

Only 23 of the young people living in aged care have funding for disability accommodation in their NDIS plans<sup>8</sup>. SDA funding is not expected to cover the needs of the majority of people with disability for accessible housing. An earlier analysis gives a range of 83,000 to 122,000 of NDIS participants who cannot get affordable and accessible housing in the social housing

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<sup>2</sup> George Taleporos, "Five years on, NDIS is getting young people out of aged care, but all too slowly", *The Conversation*, Jun 12, 2018, <https://theconversation.com/five-years-on-ndis-is-getting-young-people-out-of-aged-care-but-all-too-slowly-97851>.

<sup>3</sup> NDIS Disability Reform Council Quarterly Report Q1 September 2018.

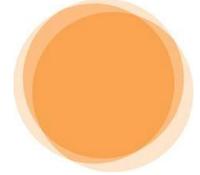
<sup>4</sup> Winkler, D., Sloan, S. & Callaway, L. (2007), *Younger people in residential aged care: Support needs, preferences and future direction*, (Melbourne, Victoria: Summer Foundation). PDF

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> NDIS Market data – Specialist Disability Accommodation <https://www.ndis.gov.au/specialist-disability-accommodation/market-data.html>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> Senate Estimates, Budget Estimates Hearing 18019 Questions on Notice



or private housing (rental or purchase) market and represent the size of unmet housing need nationally.<sup>9</sup>

The lack of accessible housing in the community means that when NDIS participants achieve funding for support to leave residential aged care, hospital or other inappropriate settings, they too often have nowhere to go.

Young people with disability and complex needs are at risk of admission to RAC when their accommodation does not meet their needs. The lack of timely access to accessible housing is one of the many reasons they are forced into an unsatisfactory long-term settings. To fix this problem we need housing to be accessible and in locations that build community connections.

## Recommendations

### **Recommendation 1: That minimum standards for accessible housing are regulated by the NCC.**

As the ABCB Options Paper points out the current voluntary approach has not resulted in the targets for accessible housing being met. Failure to regulate for universal housing standards is likely to result in little progress in transforming Australian housing to meet minimum standards of accessibility in the future. In its response, ANUHD has identified the barriers to industry-generated, policy-driven or market force-led change. Regulation is needed to overcome these varied and complex barriers.

### **Recommendation 2: That an enhanced Option 3 is included in the minimum standards. Option 3+ includes a Platinum level enhancement for shower/bathroom size to ensure safe personal care activities for the occupant and carers/assistants.**

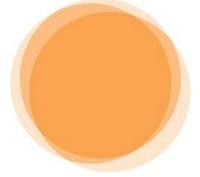
Summer Foundation recommends that gold level housing standard is adopted in minimum standards for all new housing categories with the addition of one Platinum element. *Performance Requirement 5: Bathroom and shower designed for easy and independent access for all home occupants*, is critical to people with impaired mobility and other conditions affecting balance and weight-bearing.

Ease of movement in and out of showers, and manoeuvrability during showering can be unsafe in small spaces. Adequate size spaces are needed for people who are reliant on assistance of support carers and/or family members. In such circumstances more than one person must be able to move around safely in the shower space. It is common for people with disabilities to be unable to find service providers willing to provide them with assistance because of the dimensions of their bathroom. *The Platinum level 5 Performance Requirement: Increase shower recess area to a minimum length of 1160mm and 1100 width, and increase the clear space in front of the shower to a width of 1600 and a length of 1400*, will ensure a safe minimum area for occupants and, where required, their carers/personal assistants.

It is important to recognise that the need for assistance in the shower space applies to the almost 100% of people who experience temporary disability, injury or illness in their lifetime.

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<sup>9</sup> Bonyhady, B. (2016) Presentation: The National Disability Insurance Scheme: A catalyst for scalable, affordable and accessible housing for people with disability.



We note that the indicative cost differentials included in the ABCB Options Paper suggest that retro-fitting for Option 3 would be around ten times the cost impact for new buildings. On the basis of cost implications, incorporating universal design in new builds is far more cost effective than retrofitting.