

**Submission
No 11**

INQUIRY INTO THE MANAGEMENT OF NSW PUBLIC HOUSING MAINTENANCE CONTRACTS

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MANAGING NSW PUBLIC HOUSING MAINTENANCE CONTRACTS

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About National Disability Services

National Disability Services is the peak body for non-government disability services. Its purpose is to promote quality service provision and life opportunities for people with disability. NDS's Australia-wide membership includes more than 1050 non-government organisations, which support people with all forms of disability. NDS provides information and networking opportunities to its members and policy advice to state, territory and federal governments. This submission is informed by the experience and views of NDS membership.

Inquiry into the Management of NSW Public Housing Maintenance Contracts

Overview

In the context of the NSW Government's commitment to the transition to, and ongoing operation of, the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) National Disability Services (NDS) welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission to the Legislative Assembly Public Accounts Committee Inquiry into The Management of Public Housing Maintenance Contracts in New South Wales. The home environment will be critical to the success of the NDIS of which one aim is to provide individuals with independent living within the community. It will also operate as a place where home based assistance, training and support to attain goals are delivered. Housing will have a significant impact on the cost of support (access to informal supports, independent mobility and self-care)¹. This maximises the responsibility of both public and private housing to deliver a well-maintained and well-functioning environment for people with disability to live in.²

Currently more than 35% of social housing tenants are living with a disability.³ Research indicates there will be a spike in new social housing allocations to NDIS participants who will be seeking to live more independently.⁴ These include four new subgroups of participants who are most likely to access social housing through priority access including: People moving from institutions, boarding houses or other congregate care facilities; people forced to leave their parents' home in situations of crisis (such as illness or death of a carer); people moving from private housing due to financial stress, inappropriate housing due to financial stress, or tenancy risks; and people moving from situations of homelessness.⁵ It is estimated that in 2021 over 50% of all social housing need will be from

¹ Shelter NSW, NDIS could leave a 53,000 home gap over the next 10 years, Around the House: A Newsletter of Shelter NSW, no.103, at 14

² Community Care Review, 2016, Opinion: Housing is the missing piece in the reform puzzle; <http://www.australianageingagenda.com.au/2016/01/14/opinion-housing-missing-piece-reform-puzzle/>

³ NSW Auditor General Report, 2013, Making the best use of public housing, at 44; https://www.audit.nsw.gov.au/ArticleDocuments/280/01_Public_Housing_Full_Report.pdf.aspx%3FEmbed%3DY%20p.12

⁴ Shelter NSW, above n1 at 14

⁵ Shelter NSW, above n1 at 15

older people and people with significant disability.⁶ With the NSW Government's 10 year plan⁷ to grow stock it is safe to say that social housing will be required to play a greater role in housing people with disabilities into the future.

In this context, and with reference to the Terms of Reference of this Inquiry, this submission focusses on addressing two areas:

1. The maintenance requirements of tenants with disability; and
2. Recommendations around measures to better meet these needs and enhance life goals for people with disability living in public housing.

Recommendation 1 – Implement localised maintenance delivery contracts

A centralised maintenance delivery system is not suited to the unique needs of future or current tenants with disability in public housing due to the complexity of issues they experience. These issues can include communication or linguistic barriers and social isolation making it difficult or overwhelming for tenants with disability to understand the process for seeking repairs. In some cases, the person with disability may experience behavioural issues or dual-diagnosis bringing about family stress or carer burn-out, in turn making it difficult or unsafe for a contractor to enter the home. Members of NDS' NSW Accommodation Sub-committee have noted the above experiences. At these meetings, members have reported a number of accessibility concerns in public housing, including long delays and inefficient processes in seeking repairs often felt more deeply by tenants with disability and their families.

To ameliorate some of these issues, tenants with disability should have the opportunity to lodge their maintenance requests locally with a selected community organisation. This organisation could arrange the contractor's visit to the property in consultation with the tenant and in appropriate cases the repairs could be delivered by the local and suitably qualified organisation e.g. community housing or specialist disability accommodation providers whom have demonstrated asset maintenance capability. This outsourced model is based on current arrangements for properties managed by Housing NSW used for crisis

⁶ NSW Auditor General , above n3, at 12

⁷ Family and Community Services, 2016, Future Directions for Social Housing in NSW at 5; <http://www.socialhousing.nsw.gov.au/?a=348442>

and transitional accommodation⁸. Such an approach would strengthen local responses, taking advantage of quicker resolution at a local level. Localised planning for public housing would have the advantage of being streamlined alongside other FACS initiatives, NSW Health and other whole-of-government collaborations that focus on the social wellbeing of tenants with disability.⁹

Recommendation 2 – Increase Social procurement opportunities for people with disability

NDS welcomes the introduction of FACS' Tenant Participation Plans and the commitment by the NSW Government to provide employment opportunities for tenants through the new maintenance contract.¹⁰ NDS submits that maintenance contracts should seek to build the capacity of, or employ, public housing tenants with disability to undertake small repairs themselves as much as possible. Again, this approach supports the aims of the NDIS in supporting people with disabilities to achieve employment or work opportunities that will also eventually lead to their moving on from public housing.

Recommendation 3 – Broaden the scope of asset surveys and inspections with respect to tenants with disability

As the basis of making its decisions around what maintenance needs to be planned and undertaken at two-yearly inspections, Housing NSW uses surveys calibrated against the Asset Performance Standards (ASP). However, the APS only set benchmarks which measure the condition (safety, function and appearance) of components of the property using a standardised schedule.¹¹ A more person-centred and localised approach to maintenance work would enable a more meaningful assessment of the needs of tenants with disability to take place. NDS recommends that the APS should prioritise and include broad considerations around accessibility and mobility of the tenant with disability. To give

⁸ Family and Community Services, Outsourcing Maintenance of Crisis and Transitional Accommodation Properties;
http://www.housing.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/333426/Outsourcingmaintenancecrisisandtransitionalprojectdescription.pdf

⁹ FACS, above n7, at 13 and 18

¹⁰ *Ibid*, at 14

¹¹ Family and Community Services, 2009, Asset Performance Standards for Existing Dwellings at 5,
http://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/330221/AssetStandards62i.pdf

an example, taking into account whether switches and power points are located at heights easy to reach for people using wheelchairs. The survey should also look at whether maintenance work could contribute to savings in lifetime support costs for that individual, to give another example, having at least one level step free entrance into the shower facility so that supervision is minimal or not required. Some of these examples are outlined in the Liveable Housing Design Standards (LHDS). There are 16 LHDS core design elements which could be incorporated within the APS to guide planned maintenance in the properties of tenants with disability.

Currently, the LHDS need only be met in the creation of *new* public housing builds or major refurbishments¹² of public housing. While NDS notes that new public housing stock will grow under the NSW Government's social housing plan, only 9,000 additional dwellings will be built over the next 10 years under the strategy¹³. Therefore, the need for leadership and strategies to retrofit and upgrade existing housing for tenants with disability requires action. Many NDIS participants in NSW will begin accessing the scheme from July 2016 and need to be able to take advantage of person-centred supports and assistive technology which will enable them to enjoy living in their house and working towards their NDIS goals.

Conclusion: It has long been established that for people with disability the design and construction of housing represents a significant barrier to their participation in community life.¹⁴ Localisation and integration of housing processes with other support services assist in further removing these barriers. The essential challenge of growing public housing in accordance with the demand from the NDIS still remains a priority. However, the corresponding need to maintain existing dwellings that house people with disability and ensure that they are fit for purpose is of equal importance.

¹² Family and Community Services NSW Land and Housing Corporation, 2014 Design standards at 26;
http://www.housing.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/328537/DesignStandards2014Revision1.pdf (Refurbishments are to address more than just maintenance - they are intended to extend the useful life of the building, improve the amenity of the grounds and facilities and integrate with tenant directed service provision).

¹³ National Disability Services, 10 year social housing strategy released for NSW, 2016,
<http://www.nds.org.au/news/article/4097>

¹⁴ Community Care Review, above n2

