

**Submission
No 129**

INQUIRY INTO SOCIAL, PUBLIC AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Organisation: Institute for Family Advocacy

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Introduction

Family Advocacy is a state-wide advocacy organisation which promotes and protects the rights and interests of children and adults with developmental disability. The organisation has a high presence and profile across the State:

- building the capacity of families of people with disability to undertake an advocacy role;
- developing leadership skills in families;
- making representations to Government regarding legislation, policy, funding, monitoring and practice and the extent to which they reflect the needs of people with developmental disability;
- providing advocacy related information and advice.

While Family Advocacy does not have particular knowledge in the area of housing economics, we do speak on behalf of many families of people with disability who have difficulties reconciling housing needs with their needs as people with disability. For this reason our submission aims to highlight material about the connection between disability and access to affordable housing.

Around 45 per cent of people with disability in Australia live near or below the poverty line (PWC 2011). This economic disadvantage is particularly felt by people with disability in the area of housing, given the shortage of affordable and appropriate housing in NSW and Australia.

Family Advocacy provides the following comments on the terms of reference below:

(b) Data regarding the link between the lack of appropriate social, public and affordable housing in New South Wales and indicators of social disadvantage

Studies have shown that housing is a pivotal issue for people with disability. A 2011 study from the Australian Housing and Research Institute (AHURI) into housing assistance, social inclusion and people living with a disability found that “[t]he overwhelming majority of people with disabilities live in the community and rely upon mainstream housing markets and housing market processes to meet their accommodation needs” (Tually, Beer and McLoughlin p.32). When those housing markets are unaffordable and failing to meet need, people with disability are inevitably pushed further out of areas close to their support services and networks, and/ or are pushed further into housing stress as housing takes up a greater portion of their income.

Another AHURI study from 2009 shows that “many households where one or more persons had a disability were confronted by unaffordable housing, with more than 15 per cent of such households paying in excess of 50 per cent of income for housing” (Beer and Faulkner cited in Tually, Beer and McLoughlin, 2011 p. 31). For people with disability this can mean the choice between housing and other necessary supports such as health care.

Family Advocacy recommends both these studies to the Committee. They are listed and summarised under ‘key readings’ on the final page of this submission.

(c) Housing design approaches and social service integration necessary to support tenant livelihoods and wellbeing

Key issues in housing design include **houses being built to universal design** and the **recognition that livable housing does not equal accessible housing** and that requirements for each are different.

The importance of building according to the principles of universal design is well documented. It is an approach that enables products, services and environments to be usable by everyone, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design. Homes built according to principles of universal design meet

the needs of home occupants regardless of age or ability, are capable of meeting the changing needs of home occupants, can be economically adapted to respond to the current and future needs of home occupants, and are well integrated within the community.

Family Advocacy recommends that all new social housing must be built according to principles of universal design and housing projects must be monitored to enable sign off of universal design at the completion stage. Additionally, we recommend that a minimum of 10 per cent of new social housing is built to meet access standards for wheelchair users in order to reduce the severe shortfall in accessible stock, and that a program of retrofitting social housing is developed to ensure that accessible housing is available in all locations.

It is critical to understand that universal design is a necessary but not sufficient requirement for accessible housing suitable for people who use wheelchairs. There is a severe shortage of accessible accommodation in both social and private rental markets. People requiring accessible social housing are forced to wait much longer for social housing than people who do not need accessible housing.

Key issues in relation to social service integration include the importance of mixed social housing, separation of housing and support, and adjustment to rental policy to recognize the value of a person with disability being able to offer reduced (or free) rent to a home sharer who provides informal support

The importance of locating people with disability in mixed social housing

People with disability are more likely to have good lives included in the community when they are able to develop and draw on informal support from friends, neighbours and people in their communities. Many people with disability have reduced mobility and so when forced by circumstance to live only with other people with disability or with others who face significant disadvantage and challenges, they have less opportunities open to them.

Research from the Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion of the London School of Economics provides insights into disadvantaged social groups. The research found that disadvantaged people who live in mixed rather than congregate social housing feel a strong link into their local area and their homes, valuing:

- regular 'eyes on the street' where people looked out for the safety of others;
- the availability of good services and facilities nearby;
- support networks generated by local services (Bates, Lane Power and Serle, 2013).

Housing located in a mixed environment enabled and strengthened the networks so critical for people with disability.

Separation of housing and support

The past decade has provided important new developments in supported accommodation for people with disability. Traditional grouped approaches in which housing and support are unbreakably bound together by government funding models have forced people with disability to adjust their aspirations and goals to the constraints and routines developed for the group. People have been forced to live with strangers with whom their only commonality is disability and where they have no control over who visits, who provides support and in what way.

Overseas and Australian research has found that the separation of housing and support enables a better quality of life for people with disability and a lower cost for government. Research into the *Effectiveness of Supported Living in Relation to Shared Accommodation* for people requiring 24 hour care found a range of approaches effective in terms of quality of life of people with disability and cost (Social Policy Research Centre 2007). All approaches had moved away from providing 24 hour care because when the right elements of formal and informal supports were put into place, it was not needed.

Key elements of the most effective models are:

- separation of housing and support;
- support tailored to each person with a notional budget upon which they could call;
- support provided through a mix of formal and informal support with an investment in developing informal support.

When housing is separated from support, housing is owned and managed by a housing provider and support is provided by a support provider (often a disability service). If people are unhappy with the support provider they do not have to move homes, they can negotiate for another service to provide them with support. If people want to move location, they do not necessarily have to change support providers. However, separation of housing and support does not occur in the vast majority of grouped accommodation in NSW at this time, leaving people with disability as captives of disability service providers.

The *NSW NDIS Enabling Act 2013* provides for the transfer of government services to the non government sector in preparation for the NDIS. This provides a unique opportunity to relieve supported accommodation residents of additional control created by vesting ownership of property with the service provider. The support can be provided by a non government service provider but the housing must be provided by a housing provider, thereby providing a clear message that service providers cannot take residents for granted.

Adjustment to rental policy so that a person with disability can offer reduced or free rent to a home sharer who provides informal support

Many people with disability use reduced or free rent as an incentive to attract a home sharer, a person(s) without disability who receives the benefit of reduced (or free) rent for providing negotiated informal support in the home.

For this approach to work, **it is critical the income of the home sharer is not taken into account in determining the rent of the tenant with disability.** This is because any rent calculated on behalf of the home sharer is paid by the person with disability.

There are **many benefits to home sharer support**, the first of which is that **it is cost effective.** Home sharers stay over a minimum number of nights per week and offer support and contribution in daily living tasks like shopping, cooking and cleaning, saving money that would be spent on overnight and drop-in paid support. Home sharers are often instrumental in widening the networks and friendships of people with disability, saving costs associated with providing paid support to undertake this work. Finally, if and when home sharers decide to move out they can often find a replacement through their networks, who in many cases will have already met the person socially. This reduces expenses and time associated with sourcing and familiarising with potential home sharers.

Case study

David is a 28 year old man who moved from a group home to live in his own home close to family, friends and his community. David shares his home with Jason who provides the pivotal support role. David's family have been very clear in crafting out Jason's role because they don't want paid support to dominate David's life. David's family used their friends and networks to connect with Jason who for the past 12 months has lived rent free with David assisting him to experience the ordinary life of a young man. In this context, Jason is there overnight and provides 12 hours of active support in the morning and a couple of evenings. In addition, Jason helps David to solve problems, to learn and do housework, to take medication and have good personal hygiene.

Paid staff and friends and family assist David at specified times. All know that supporting a good relationship between David and Jason is a key priority.

Another benefit of home sharer support is that it **improves quality of life** outcomes for people with disability. People with disability expand their relationships, friendships and opportunities through the relationships they develop with home sharers. In turn this increases people's safety and security in their community and their valued status as housemate. Home sharers often go above and beyond what was originally expected once a relationship has been developed with the person with disability. Home sharers reduce a person's dependence on paid people in their life. While home sharers receive an incentive to take up the arrangement, this is not comparable to the costs and differing dimensions of the relationship associated with paid support workers.

Directly paying a home sharer for the support they provide is likely to transform their role from 'house mate' into 'employee' or 'support worker', and the person with disability from 'housemate' to 'recipient of paid support'. **Home sharing lends itself to natural, freely given relations** that are typical of more informal arrangements between people sharing accommodation in the community. This could be inhibited when people are in a paid role, as they are likely to do the tasks that they are being paid for (in the 'job description') and go no further. The social activities and friendships that so often blossom between housemates are far less likely to occur in paid, professionalised relationships when people with disability are associated with 'work'.

Family Advocacy recommends that housing provision take account of the needs of people with disability by increasing supply of mixed social housing in recognition of the challenge of ghettos of disadvantage for people with disability; ensuring that the provision of social housing is separated from the provision of support; and adjusting rental policy so that a person with disability can offer reduced or free rent to a home sharer who provides informal support.

(e) Criteria for selecting and prioritising residential areas for affordable and social housing development

The 2011 AHURI study found that housing assistance has a very substantial positive impact on the social inclusion of people with a disability in Australia. For this impact to be maximized, the researchers found that:

- "Housing assistance for people with a disability should focus on **providing accommodation in places with good access to public transport...**
- "...Social housing provision for people with a disability should **avoid creating areas of concentration of people with a disability...**" (Tually, Beer and McLoughlin 2011).

These two findings support the experience people with disability. People with disability often live in areas with inadequate public transport, and this has flow on costs to employment maintenance and prospects, and to access to social, familial and medical support. Additionally, those who make it onto public housing waitlists and into public housing then face congregation of disadvantage and concentration of people with disability. This is largely due to insufficient supply of social housing stock to meet need. As priority is given to greatest need, people with disability are again finding themselves subject to congregation, a practice which the NSW government has rejected. As such, **Family Advocacy recommends** an increase in public housing stock and in particular, an increase in mixed social housing.

(g) Recommendations on State reform options that may increase social, public and affordable housing supply, improve social service integration and encourage more effective management of existing stock including, but not limited to:

- (i) policy initiatives and legislative change***
Western Australia, South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory currently have shared equity home purchase schemes for low income earners. This means that the security of home ownership is in reach for people who could not otherwise afford to buy, including people with disability. These shared equity schemes effectively allow low income earners to take out a loan

on a portion of the property that they can afford. The loan portion taken out by the low income earner starts at 70 per cent of the market value of the property in the ACT and WA, whereas SA has a monetary limit. The low income earner or mortgagee is then effectively servicing a proportionally smaller mortgage payment rather than paying rent, while the government or a housing provider holds the remaining portion of the asset. **Family Advocacy recommends that a similar scheme be offered to low income earners in NSW.** Further information is available from the respective state government websites, which are listed as key readings on the final page of this submission.

(ii) *planning law changes and reform*

Though Family Advocacy understands that it is possible the current *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* will be replaced by the *Planning Bill 2013*, **we recommend maintaining provisions from the Act that allow for affordable housing conditions to be imposed on development.** Conditions currently in the *Act*, and also proposed by the Legislative Council as an amendment to the *Bill*, mean that development approval can be subject to a dedication of part of the land to affordable housing. These conditions are relevant if the development is likely to reduce available affordable housing, create a need for affordable housing, or depends on amendments to the local plan. Family Advocacy sees this as an important supplement to affordable housing stock.

(v) *ongoing funding partnerships with the Federal Government such as the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA)*

Family Advocacy is in favour of increasing the supply of affordable housing stock overall, so that more housing is available for people with disability. Therefore **we recommend that the NSW Government pursue another round of the National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS) incentives from the Commonwealth government.**

Key readings

Research

1. Tually, Selina, Andrew Beer, and Pauline McLoughlin. *Housing Assistance, Social Inclusion and People Living with a Disability*. AHURI Final Report. Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, November 2011. <http://www.ahuri.edu.au/publications/projects/p40585>.

Synopsis: This report asks **whether housing assistance has an impact** on social inclusion of people with disability, and also **what governments could do** to ensure any **social inclusion benefits from housing assistance are maximized**. It includes a literature and policy review, and primary data from 100 participants living with disability and working in the sector. The participants with disability were mostly living in social housing or were in receipt of Commonwealth Rent Assistance. The main findings are summarized below:

Housing assistance has a significant impact on the social inclusion of people with a disability in Australia. Positive impacts included:

- stable living environments, which help people deal with other difficult circumstances in their lives and add to their resilience and independence;
- reduction in the exposure to housing stress and risk of eviction;
- reduction in vulnerability to homelessness and the experience of (recurrent) homelessness;
- increase in the paid employment of people with disability.

These benefits were found to be maximised when:

- the housing was mixed, i.e. areas of concentration of people with a disability were avoided;
- the housing met the circumstances of the individual and their household as closely as possible;
- accommodation was provided in places with good access to public transport;
- and housing assistance programs were used as a vehicle for delivering training and community development programs (Tually, Beer and McLoughlin 2011 pp. 2-3).

2. Beer, Andrew and Debbie Faulkner. *The Housing Careers of People with a Disability and Carers of People with a Disability*. AHURI Research Paper. Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, May 2009. http://www.ahuri.edu.au/publications/download/ahuri_40427_doc
3. Bates, Katie, Laura Lane, Anne Power, and Nicola Serle. *Divided City? The Value of Mixed Communities in Expensive Neighbourhoods*. LSE Housing and Communities Report to Octavia Housing, July 2013. <http://sticerd.lse.ac.uk/dps/case/cr/casereport77.pdf>
4. Fisher, Karen, and Sarah Parker. *Effectiveness of Supported Living in Relation to Shared Accommodation*. Social Policy Research Centre; Disability Studies and Research Institute, November 2008. https://www.sprc.unsw.edu.au/media/SPRCFile/Report17_08_Effectiveness_of_SupLiving_ShortVersion.pdf

Shared equity schemes

5. Government of South Australia, HomeStart Finance. EquityStart Loan. Accessed 28 February 2014. Available from: <http://www.homestart.com.au/home-loans/boost-your-borrowing-power/equitystart-loan>
6. Government of Western Australia, Department of Housing. Shared Home Ownership. Accessed 28 February 2014. Available from: <http://www.dhw.wa.gov.au/sharedstart/Pages/default.aspx>
7. Australian Capital Territory Government, Department of Community Services. Shared Equity Scheme. Accessed 28 February 2014. Available from: http://www.communityservices.act.gov.au/hcs/buying/shared_equity_scheme