

HOUSING JUSTICE: DELIVERING THE RIGHT TO HOME

Recommendation: The next NSW Government should require all new homes comply with silver level accessibility standards, in line with the National Construction Code.

THE ISSUE

Everyone needs a safe, comfortable and appropriate place to call home in order to realise their potential and live a full, enriching life. Home provides us with a place of rest, a place to carry out essential tasks, and to socialise with friends and loved ones. Yet, many people are not able to find a place to live that meets their needs because a large majority of existing homes are inaccessible.

Approximately 18% of people in Australia live with disability, while another 22% have a long-term health condition.¹ In addition, our population is ageing and by 2031, one in three people in NSW will be aged 50 years or older.²

People with limited mobility have less choice about where they live due to the lack of accessible homes. This means they may be forced to live apart from their families or communities, pay more for their housing, or live in homes that are unsafe or unsuitable. People shouldn't have to forego showering properly, for example, or be forced to sleep in their living areas because bedrooms and bathrooms are not accessible, and modifications are not possible.³

Over 80% of Australians aged over 55 want to live in their own home as they age.⁴ Yet without more accessible housing, demand will continue to exceed supply, resulting in a growing number of people who will be unable to safely age at home.

The lack of accessible housing also impacts people's ability to make and maintain social connections. Many people whose mobility is limited by age, disability, or injury are at higher risk of social isolation, with opportunities to visit friends and family limited simply because they can't get through the front door. With over 90% of homes expected to require access by someone with limited mobility⁵, upfront investment in universal design would reduce the number of missed social and economic opportunities for people with accessibility requirements.

THE SOLUTION

Recognising the need to boost the supply of accessible homes most jurisdictions across Australia have now committed to implement new minimum accessibility standards included in the National Construction Code in 2022. Yet the NSW Government has opted out of mandating accessibility standards for new homes. With only 5-10% of new homes meeting voluntary standards, this is an enormous missed

¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2022) Prevalence of disability, *Reports and Data*, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/disability/people-with-disability-in-australia/contents/people-with-disability/prevalence-of-disability>

² NSW Ageing Strategy 2016-2020

³ Ovens, S as cited by Heagney, M (2022) Jacob is looking for his next home, but worries he'll have to compromise more than most, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 July 2022

⁴ Building Better Homes (2022) Background: Mission, <https://www.buildingbetterhomes.org.au/mission.html>

⁵ Australian Network for Universal Housing Design, Submission by Australian Network for Universal Housing Design to the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (2019), <https://aduhdblog.files.wordpress.com/2019/12/anuhdsubmission-to-the-disability-royalcommission.final1nen.pdf>

HOUSING JUSTICE: DELIVERING THE RIGHT TO HOME

opportunity to ensure the 42,000 new homes forecast to be delivered each year⁶ contribute to a more inclusive housing system that meets everyone's needs.

Practically, increasing the number of accessible homes would improve quality of life for everyone in our communities, either directly or indirectly. Older people and people living with disability or injury would have greater scope to live independently in homes they choose, and that meet their health and safety needs. It would promote increased economic and social participation⁷, allowing those with accessibility needs to visit friends and family more easily, and assisting those who want to engage in employment or education. And it would mean our housing stock can better accommodate each of us as our needs change across life's many stages.

While the NSW Government has cited concerns about the cost impacts of implementing new accessibility standards, investing in upfront universal design is far less costly than retrofits and modifications in homes not designed for universal access. Further, this change would result in wider social and economic benefits for people facing exclusion in our communities ultimately benefiting us all.



A 2020 survey of people with mobility impairment found that 73.6% of respondents were living in housing that didn't meet their needs⁸

60%

60% of homes will be occupied by a person with disability or injury at some point⁹



Only 5% of new home builds comply with voluntary Liveable Housing Guidelines¹⁰

HOW NSW COMPARES

- Unlike Queensland, Northern Territory, South Australia, Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory, Western Australia and New South Wales have not committed to adopting the new mandatory minimum accessibility standards in the National Construction Code

Read our full NSW 2023 Election Statement and recommendations at: <https://bit.ly/VinniesHousingJustice>

⁶ NSW Government (2021) 2021-22 Intergenerational Report: Towards 2061 – Planning for the Future

⁷ Australian Human Rights Commission (2022) Accessible Housing Project, <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/disability-rights/projects/accessible-housing-project>

⁸ Building Better Homes (2022) Background: Mission, <https://www.buildingbetterhomes.org.au/mission.html>

⁹ Australian Network for Universal Housing Design, Submission by Australian Network for Universal Housing Design to the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (2019), <https://aduhdblog.files.wordpress.com/2019/12/anuhdsubmission-to-the-disability-royalcommission.finalnen.pdf>

¹⁰ Building Better Homes (2022) Background: Mission, <https://www.buildingbetterhomes.org.au/mission.html>