
*RESPONSE SOCIAL SERVICES LEGISLATION
AMENDMENT (HOUSING AFFORDABILITY) BILL 2017.*

QDN

QUEENSLANDERS WITH DISABILITY NETWORK
NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US

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About Queenslanders with Disability Network (QDN)

QDN is an organisation of, for, and with people with disability and the organisation's motto is "nothing about us without us." QDN operates a state-wide network of members who provide information, feedback and views from a consumer perspective to inform systemic policy feedback to Government and peak bodies. QDN also provides information and referral support to people with disability.

QDN has over 700 members across Queensland. All of QDN's voting members are people with disability.

Value Statement on People with Disability

QDN's work in providing feedback and input into systemic policy issues is based upon the organisation's core values and the place of people with disability in an inclusive, Australian society.

QDN believes that:

- All people with disability have a right to a place in the community and have contributions to make to community. This is as empowered, free citizens who are as valued, present, participating and welcomed as members of any dynamic and diverse society.
- The place of people with disability in the community is not just about people with disability having a house in the community. Core to this is that they are welcomed in the community as ordinary citizens where they are genuinely given opportunities to contribute and actively participate. People with disability need to be in communities where their individuality, their talents, and their lived experiences of disability are recognised and acknowledged.
- Culturally and historically, people with disability are not afforded the same value, opportunities or access to community life.
- Any inclusion in community for people with disability is conditional and vulnerable to withdrawal.
- Many people with disability in Queensland are excluded from the most basic experiences of ordinary lives.
- Current exclusionary practices are unacceptable and must be challenged.
- These issues affect not only people with disability but the whole community.
- The responsibility is shared. It lies within government (federal, state and local) and the community at large, to ensure that people with disability have a place and are resourced to belong in community.

QDN Guiding Housing Principles

Rights

People with disability have the same rights to housing assistance as other people and should be supported to exercise those rights. This means:

- › Housing is designed to enable family and friends with disability to visit.

Choice

People with disability choose where, how and with whom they live. This

- › means: People can afford to live in housing suitable to their needs.
- › People are able to make informed decisions about their housing choices.

Inclusion

Housing enhances the independence and social and economic participation of people in family and community life. This means:

- › Housing is non-congregate and encourage a mix of occupants with and without disability in housing developments.
- › Housing is located within communities close to amenities and services.
- › Housing is designed to meet the principles of universal housing design as developed in the Livable Housing Design Guidelines and incorporates assistive technology as needed.
- › Queenslanders are educated and aware of benefits of universal housing design and the need to include people with disability in local communities.

Control

The provision and management of housing is separate from the provision and management of paid support. This means:

- › Housing is primarily a person's home, not someone else's workplace.
- › A person can change their housing without affecting their support arrangements.

QDN Response

Queenslanders with Disability Network (QDN) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee's Social Services Legislation Amendment (Housing Affordability) Bill 2017.

These changes would amend the Social Security (Administration) Act 1999 and A New Tax System (Family Assistance) (Administration) Act 1999 to provide that lessors of social housing may request the secretary to deduct payments of rent and certain other costs from the social security or family tax benefit payments of tenants and certain other adult household members; Social Security Act 1991 to make consequential amendments.

One of QDN's key principles centres around people with disability having choices regarding their housing options.

Consequently Queenslanders with Disability opposes compulsory deduction of rents in principle because it removes the ability of tenants with a disability to make their own budgets, which may sometimes include delaying a rent payment to meet urgent medical and health needs, repairs to white goods, cars or other essential household items. However, are we also putting alternate options forward for example that amounts are negotiated with the person or the percentage that government dictates also allows for variation to meet urgent medical, family emergency needs. Social housing tenants already overwhelmingly use Centrepay to voluntarily deduct rent from their payment, but which also allows them to defer or cease a Centrepay arrangement enabling them to have discretion over household budget priorities.

We are also concerned for leaseholders in households where only a single tenant is named on the lease but rents are calculated on fluctuating household incomes depending on the comings and goings of transient household members/visitors. In this scenario the lease holder may have the household rent compulsorily deducted from their Centrelink payment leaving them with the responsibility to recover rent from other household members and threatening their ability to have sufficient money left for food and essential items.

Compulsion may mean that household members who should contribute to rent avoid doing so leaving the named tenant with disability at greater vulnerability for exploitation. Increased provisions must exist to ensure that the person with disability has access to advocacy so the likelihood of exploitation is lessened.

Conclusion

QDN welcomes the opportunity to provide further comment on this matter.