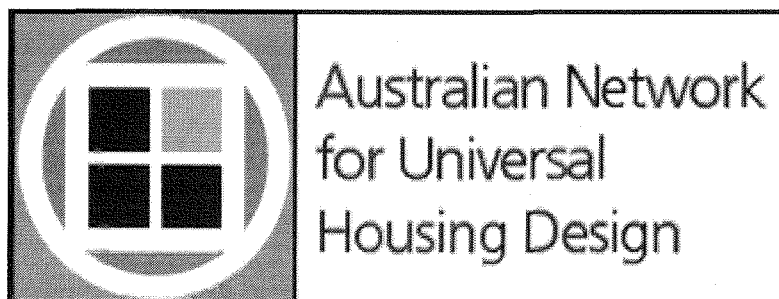


Submission No 95



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Submission to the Inquiry on the Draft
Disability (Access to Premises – Buildings)
Standards.

Submission by the Australia Network for Universal Housing
Design

Prepared for: House Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs
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Housing Design

Submitted: 18 March 2009

The Australian Network for Universal Housing Design (ANUHD) is a network of housing industry bodies, housing professionals, government professionals, designers, builders, researchers and home occupants who believe that the homes we build for today's Australia should be fit for all of tomorrow's Australians.

The ANUHD Network is:

- An information sharing portal committed to highlighting best practice initiatives both in Australia and Internationally that promote universal housing design.
- An active advocate for the adoption of universal design principles and standards in housing in Australia.

Our Vision

The Network's vision is for all new and largely renovated homes to be built to accommodate universal and lifecycle sensitive design features. We believe that a universal design approach to housing will ensure that that homes we build are capable of accommodating our changing needs across the lifespan.

The Network supports this vision by:

- Actively encouraging all levels of Government to consider universal housing design in the development of new policies and initiatives which are aimed at promoting lifecycle sensitive, livable communities.
- Supporting nationwide housing initiatives which promote and incorporate universal design principles.
- Promoting universal housing design principles and practices to home occupants.
- Encouraging the housing design, development and construction industry to incorporate universal design to enhance the marketability of new home developments.
- Building networks and alliances with key housing industry bodies and professional associations;
- Collaborating on housing initiatives which are focused on promoting socially sustainable housing design.

The Network maintains active representation in each State and Territory around Australia and is aligned with universal design initiatives internationally.

What is a universally designed home?

A universally designed home is not a particular type of house.

It is an approach to building homes using a range of planning, design, construction and attitudinal refinements to create living spaces which:

1. Meet the needs of people across a range of abilities and ages.
2. Are capable of adaptation to meet the changing needs of its owners over time (i.e. age, disability, family changes, caring for ageing parents).
3. Are well integrated within the community.
4. Can be economically adapted in the future as life circumstances and abilities change.
5. Include functional features which are aesthetically compatible with housing expectations.
6. Incorporate features which add quality, marketable features to a home.

Universal design supports a housing outcome whereby the design of the living environment should be useable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for significant adaptation or customisation.

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Executive Summary

The Australian Network for Universal Housing Design welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft Disability (Access to Premises – Buildings) Standards. Of particular interest to the Network is the influence of the proposed Standards on the accessibility of the residential environments hence our response specifically addresses this issue.

It is well documented that the majority of both existing and newly built housing in Australia is not designed with accessibility in mind or to meet the changing needs of home occupants across the lifespan. We are therefore particularly concerned that Class 2 buildings have been omitted from the draft Premises Standards as apartment blocks and the like are often a more accessible housing option for people with a disability and older people who wish to downsize.

The omission of Class 2 buildings from the Premises Standards will be particularly felt by older Australians and people with a disability who are often excluded from the housing market due to the proliferation of inaccessible housing design practices. We believe that a responsible Premises Standards should seek to ensure that, at a minimum, accessibility is incorporated into the common areas of all newly built Class 2 buildings.

The Network is however aware that local Government's in many State's and Territories already enforce a level of accessibility for both the common areas and the units/apartments of new Class 2 building developments. In most cases the accessibility requirements would exceed what could be stipulated in the Premises Standards. This is most evident in the accessibility requirements which may be applied to a percentage of sole-occupancy units in a Class 2 development. It is therefore important that the provisions in the Premises Standards do not result in a roll-back of existing State and Territory requirements which may, in fact, be an enhancement on what is codified in the Premises Standards.

The Network acknowledges that Class 1a (single dwellings) are not covered under the Disability Discrimination Act (1992). We do however wish to emphasise to the Committee that traditional housing design and development models 'design out' rather than 'design in' features that would home more functional, safe and responsive to all home occupants regardless of age or ability. Further, with the ageing of the Australian population, demand for accessible housing will only increase. It is therefore important that we ensure that accessibility provisions for Class 2 buildings are included in the Final Premises Standards.

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation 1

The Committee supports the re-inclusion of Class 2 buildings in the Premises Standard.

Recommendation 2

The Committee requires the common areas of all new Class 2 buildings be made accessible to people with a disability as per the draft Access Code (2004) requirements including but not limited to:

- *From the boundary line to the front entrance,*
- *From a parking area into the building,*
- *(where applicable) to a central lift access,*
- *to the letterbox and garbage disposal area, and to*
- *to common recreational areas (i.e. swimming pools, BBQ areas, common outdoor spaces, gymnasiums etc).*

Recommendation 3

The Committee supports the application of Class 3 sole-occupancy unit access requirements in all newly built Class 2 buildings provided these requirements are not less than what is currently required by State and Territory legislation or Local Government control plans.

Recommendation 4

The Committee supports a phasing in of access improvements for the common areas of existing Class 2 buildings, noting that the unjustifiable hardship provisions would still apply in these instances.

Recommendation 5

Should re-including Class 2 buildings not be possible, ANUHD would welcome the development of a separate Disability (Access to Premises – Residential) Standard. This Standard could solidify the work currently occurring with regards to improving the lifetime accessibility of Class 1a buildings.

Comments on the Draft Disability (Access to Premises – Buildings) Standards

Omission of Class 2 Buildings (Apartments buildings and the like)

ANUHD are deeply concerned by the removal of Class 2 buildings from the current Premises Standard. We believe it is contrary to the access and service provision obligations of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA, 1992) and Articles 4, 9 and 19 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to exclude, at a minimum, the common area of Class 2 apartment blocks from requiring access for people with a disability.

It is interesting to the Network that the draft Access Code for Buildings released in 2004 for public comment included Class 2 buildings. In brief, this provision required access into and around the common areas of Class 2 buildings where one or more sole-occupancy units were made available for short-term rental. We are therefore concerned by the removal of Class 2 buildings from the current Draft Premises Standard.

As stated in the Draft Access Code, the following areas were required to be accessible to people with a disability.

Class 2

Common areas [in buildings where one or more sole-occupancy units are made available for short term rent]

From a pedestrian entrance *required* to be *accessible*, to the entrance doorway of each *sole-occupancy unit* located on not less than one level. To and within not less than 1 of each type of room or space for use in common by the residents, including a cooking facility, sauna, gymnasium, *swimming pool*, common laundry, games room, individual shop, eating area, or the like.

Where a ramp complying with AS 1428.1 or a passenger lift is installed-

- (i) to the entrance doorway of each *sole-occupancy unit*; and
- (ii) to and within rooms or spaces for use in common by the residents located on the levels served by the lift or ramp.

Under the draft Access Code (2004), concerns regarding the cost and technical feasibility of retrofitting an existing Class 2 building to provide access were addressed under the unjustifiable hardship provisions of the Premises Standard. Concessions were also

discussed with regards to small 2 and 3 storey walk-ups where there were no common facilities on the upper floor. In this instance the upper floors were not required to be made accessible.

ANUHD believe that the inclusion of this provision in the draft Access Code (2004) displayed a firm commitment to improving access to residential opportunities for people with a disability whilst similarly protecting individuals and body corporate's from possible discrimination complaints under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA).

Influence of the Disability Discrimination Act (1992) on access provisions in Class 2 buildings

A Class 2 building is most often defined as a place where a number of private individuals have ownership. There are however instances where it could be viewed otherwise. An example is where an apartment is made available to the public for short-term lease or rental (i.e. a holiday apartment). In this instance the building is essentially, 'open to members of the public' and would therefore fall under the provisions of Section 23 of the DDA.

This section states that it is unlawful to discriminate against a person with a disability by refusing to provide access to areas that the public are entitled to use. In the case of a rental apartment therefore both the individual leasing the apartment and the Body Corporate could be held liable in a discrimination claim for failing to make the common areas of the apartment block, i.e. the BBQ area, a common laundry, a gym etc accessible to those leasing the rental apartment. It is therefore imperative that the Premises Standards address the accessibility requirements for the common areas of Class 2 buildings to improve access and reduce the possible risk of a complaint.

Body Corporate Liability

The Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) have also expressed the view that there is clear liability for complaints against a Body Corporate who refuse to provide access to the common areas used by an owner/occupier under Section 27 of the DDA (Clubs and incorporated associations).

As further detailed by the AHRC, assuming a Body Corporate is covered by the definition of 'club or incorporated association', the Commission believes it would be possible for a person with a disability who is a owner/occupier to make a complaint against the Body Corporate if it acted in a way which denied them access to common areas within the complex (i.e. BBQ area, gymnasiums, etc) which other owner/occupiers were free to enjoy. Interestingly, the Commission is also of the view that this same principle could apply to a situation where a member of the Body Corporate required access be provided through the principle entrance to the complex in order for them to gain access to the door of their unit/apartment.¹

¹ Speech by Commissioner Graeme Innes, National Forum on Universal Housing Design. Nov 06

There is also case precedent specific to claims lodged against Body Corporate's for failing to improve access to the common (i.e. public areas) of apartment blocks and the like. Under Section 24 of the DDA, which covers access to goods, services and facilities, an owner/occupier who had a disability could claim discrimination if the Body Corporate obstructed access improvements or failed to address access issues raised by the individual.

Whilst lodged under anti-discrimination legislation in QLD the decision of Anti-Discrimination Tribunal Queensland in *C v A* [2005] QADT 14 (August 2005) has significance in this decision. The determination indicated that the Body Corporate had a responsibility for improving access to the common areas of the apartment block to enable the complainant, who was an owner/occupier who had a disability, to gain better access. In short, the Body Corporate had an obligation to ensure an accessible path of travel was provided for its member.

ANUHD raises this discussion to highlight the need for the Premises Standard to address, at a minimum, the common areas of Class 2 Buildings to reduce the possibility of litigious action against Body Corporates and individuals.

Need for the Premises Standard to support and unify existing State and Territory requirements for Class 2 buildings

It is also clear that both the Commonwealth and State Government's are committed to supporting people with a disability and older people to live, as independently as possible, in private housing options in the community. Hence developing a Premises Standard that fails to address even the common areas of a Class 2 building could be viewed as contrary to expressed State and Territory Government commitments.

Internationally, countries such as Canada, the USA, the UK and Norway already contain a requirement for the common areas of apartment blocks to be accessible to people with a disability. In most cases the legislation covering these types of buildings requires access:

- *from the boundary line to the front entrance,*
- *from a parking area into the building,*
- *where provided, to a central lift access,*
- *to the letterbox and garbage disposal area, and, where practicable*
- *to common recreational areas (i.e. swimming pools, BBQ areas, common outdoor spaces, gymnasiums etc).*

Nationally, there is strong evidence that many local Council's and Shires also require the common areas of Class 2 buildings to be made accessible. In NSW, for example, access requirements for Class 2 buildings are often enforced via inclusion in a Local Government Development Control Plan's or Local Environment Plan. In addition to access to the common areas, it is common that a certain percentage of units/apartments (between 10 – 25%) are also required to be 'adaptable' and comply with the requirements of AS4299 *Adaptable*

housing. Whilst these requirements are not uniformly applied by Council's and Shires around NSW, evidence of 'accessibility requirements' for Class 2 buildings is apparent.

Requirements in other State's and Territories are as follows:

VICTORIA

- A number of Local Council's have introduced similar accessibility requirements to NSW for Class 2 buildings.

QUEENSLAND

- The QLD Department of Housing informs us that all new Class 2 buildings incorporate access requirements for the common areas of apartment blocks.
- There is evidence also that a number of Local Council's have introduced accessibility requirements for Class 2 buildings similar to those in Victoria and NSW.

WA

- The Disability Services Commission informs us that a number of local Council's require the common areas of Class 2 Buildings to be accessible. The Commission also indicates that nearly all Class 2 public housing developments incorporate accessibility in the common areas and apply universal design features to units and apartments.²

ACT

- The ACT Government currently has a requirement in their Territory Planning Code which requires that all new Class 2 buildings provide access to the common areas.

Need for the Premises Standard to support current Industry initiatives.

Movement in the design and development sectors towards developing more accessible Class 2 Buildings is also evident. A number of larger scale residential builders including Lend Lease, Meriton and Stocklands have, and continue to, develop Class 2 buildings that feature accessible common areas and a percentage of adaptable units. Evidence of this is clear on the access homes³ website which lists adaptable apartment's in new Class 2 developments around Australia. Many of the listings are located in Class 2 buildings that also feature accessible common areas. The Network believe that a national code that provides consistency in the interpretation of access to, and within, Class 2 buildings would be welcomed as the subtle differences in Council requirements often result in poor design outcomes.

It would therefore be contrary to current residential design practices therefore if the Premises Standard failed to address, at a minimum, access to the common areas of new and extensively renovated Class 2 buildings.

² For details on the top ten Universal Design please refer to the ANUHD website www.anuhd.org.

³ <http://www.accesshomes.com.au/>

It is however relevant to highlight that the lack of consistency in the accessibility requirements between States and Territories and between Local Government's is problematic and often leads to:

- 1) Significant variations in the level of access achieved between Class 2 buildings limiting the predictability of the access features for people with a disability and older people.
- 2) Poor design outcomes, as design, development and certifying professionals are required to continually investigate which access features apply in each situation rather than being able to rely on codified requirements.

The Network believe that including the Class 2 buildings in the Premises Standard would be welcomed by the design, development and certifying authority as there would be a level of consistency and certainty as to what requirements applied. Most importantly, people with a disability would also be assured that any newly built Class 2 buildings would consistently incorporate the same level of access in the common areas and within actual apartments.

Enhancing access in Class 1(a) buildings.

The Network would also like to highlight to the Committee that there is considerable movement in the area of accessible residential design (Class 1a) largely being driven by the broader acceptance of universal design by key housing stakeholders. A universally designed home incorporates a range of low cost accessibility improvements to make the home accessible to all potential home occupants regardless of age or ability.

For example:

- The Commonwealth Department of Health and Aging was the lead agency in the National Speakers Series *A Community for all Ages – Building the Future*. The findings and recommendations from the initiative identified a strong need for better housing choice and adaptable design to support people across the lifespan. The eight recommendations included:
 - Developing the *Your Home Technical Manual* (Australia's guide to environmentally sustainable homes) to include information on adaptable housing design features.
 - Developing industry specific training on adaptable housing design.
 - Encouraging professional bodies to incorporate universal design principles in the undergraduate and continuous professional development courses.
 - Promoting competitions/awards for initiatives with incorporate adaptable housing design.
 - Promoting adaptable housing with consumer groups.
 - Developing national guidelines to help urban planners to design environments for health and wellbeing

- Supporting cost-benefit research into adaptable housing design.
- Supporting mechanisms with promote information to consumers and industry stakeholders.

On the last point, the Department funded the ANUHD Network to create a website for information on ageless and universal housing design. The development of this website was supported by key housing industry stakeholders and includes practical information and case studies on universal design features and adaptable homes. www.anuhd.org

- The Queensland Government’s commitment to enhancing the sustainability and accessibility of housing in Queensland is well documented and showcased in the Smart and Sustainable Homes Program. This initiative was the first in Australia to address the issue of social sustainability in housing design i.e. the accessibility features that support a person in the home environment. The program supports a triple-bottom line approach to housing design and development (economic, environment and social sustainability). <http://www.sustainable-homes.org.au/>
- The Victorian Government has also made a strong commitment to enhancing the accessibility of Class 1b buildings. Recent initiatives include the launch of the Build for Life website which demonstrates low cost/no cost accessibility features which can be incorporated into the design of the home environment. <http://www.buildforlife.com.au/www/html/100-home-page.asp>
- The Housing Industry Association (HIA) has been working closely with ANUHD to incorporate key accessibility features into the GreenSmart Housing Protocol. Under the title ‘Universal Design’ the protocol introduces builders and home occupants to elements which constitute accessible residential design.
- LANDCOM in NSW have recently released a series of design guidelines for residential design and have expressed a commitment to ensuring that 25% of housing in new land release areas will be designed and built to incorporate key accessibility elements. http://www.landcom.com.au/downloads/uploaded/FINAL_Universal%20Housing%20Design%20Guidelines%20Fact%20Sheet_6507_740d.pdf
- Further, at a recent luncheon held by Prime Ministerial wife Ms Therese Rein, the Property Council of Australia indicated that they were in the process of developing a 5-point plan to improve the accessibility of residential design.

The Network acknowledges that including a requirement in the Premises Standard for access to the common areas of Class 2 buildings is a logical step. We would however encourage the Committee to consider how the Premises Standard could also provide base level access improvements in Class 1a buildings. Extending the provision for access to Class 1a buildings would be desirable however we appreciate that the scope of the DDA does not extend to private residences at present.

Recommendation 1

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Recommendation 2

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The Committee supports a phasing in of access improvements for the common areas of existing Class 2 buildings, noting that the unjustifiable hardship provisions would still apply in these instances.

Recommendation 5

Should re-including Class 2 buildings not be possible, ANUHD would welcome the development of a separate Disability (Access to Premises – Residential) Standard. This Standard could solidify the work currently occurring with regards to improving the lifetime accessibility of Class 1a buildings.

A way forward with regards to Class 2 buildings and Class 1a

ANUHD encourages the Committee to embrace the example set by the UK Government in their recently released strategy *Lifetime Homes, Lifetime Neighbourhoods: A National Strategy for Housing an Ageing Society*.

This progressive National Strategy acknowledges that change is needed to ensure that policies positively reflect the aspirations, changing lifestyle and needs of all people living in the community inclusive of people with a disability and older people.

The Strategy speaks of the need to 'future proof' housing to enable everybody, regardless of age, to participate and enjoy their home and community for as long as possible. Most radically, part of the Strategy calls for housing to be built to 'Lifetime Homes Standards' to ensure that the homes of today can accommodate the needs of tomorrow. The Strategy establishes a Government commitment to ensuring that:

1. All public housing will be built to Lifetime Homes Standards by 2011.
2. All new housing to be built to Lifetime Homes Standards by 2013.

The Strategy acknowledges that influencing the private housing market requires incentives and guidance. The Lifetime Homes Standards will therefore be made a mandatory part of the *Code for Sustainable Homes* and Government will work with industry to encourage the take-up on a voluntary basis over the next few years. The level of take-up will be reviewed in 2010 with a view to introducing regulation in 2013 should take-up in the private sector not match market demand or expectation.

This part of the Strategy is aided in the UK as their building regulations (Approved Document M) already contain key housing access requirements, such as a level entrance and access to a toilet facility on the entrance level.

The Australian housing and community context is not dissimilar to the UK. In planning for the needs of our community the Premises Standards should seek to establish requirements which would ensure that homes are built to meet the changing needs of all potential home occupants, regardless of age or ability.

Who benefits from accessible residential design?

It is evident that accessible residential design would benefit a wide variety of potential home occupants and occupational sectors. Accessible residential design would assist in:

1. Providing housing opportunity for young people with disabilities - In NSW alone over 5000 young people live in nursing homes due, in part, to the lack of accessible housing in the community.
2. Addressing the housing need for families who have children affected by disability who often face significant hardship in finding accessible housing in the common market.
3. Meeting the changing needs of older people living in the community with and without disability.
4. Encouraging social inclusion through ensuring our homes are visitable to people with disabilities and their families.
5. Accommodating temporary impairment following injury – workplace, home and sporting injuries often result in long term impairment and disability which often affects mobility and may require additional home-care services to accommodate inaccessible housing features.
6. Supporting safe working environments for Home Care workers - In NSW, Workcover legislation is having a significant impact on home care workers as the clients home has become a work environment.
7. Supporting in-home carers – In 2003, there were 2.6 million carers providing assistance to those who needed help due to disability or age.
8. Support of Government rental assistance programs - rental assistance for people with disabilities and older people is now focused on supporting people in the private rental market as opposed to increasing the supply of public housing. Hence, the demand for accessible rental properties is likely to increase.
9. Diversifying housing opportunities to support nationwide ‘devolution’ policies which seek to re-house people with a disability in the community.

What are the benefits for Government?

Quality of life

The link between housing and well-being is well acknowledged. Not only does housing satisfy our basic human need, but it also fulfils a critical emotional link, which enables us to maintain better health (McDonald & Merlo, 2002).⁴

Accessible residential design has the potential to improve life quality whilst reducing health and care costs. A UK study showed that remodeling resulted in a seven-fold reduction in reported morbidity while two random control studies, one in Australia (Cumming, et al., 1999) and one in the Unites States of America (Mann, Ottenbacher, Fraas, Tomita, & Granger, 1999) both showed health and care savings. For people with disabilities, to participate as equals in the community, the first requirement is a home, which is suited to them.

Further, many older Australians, are affected by multiple minor impairments, which do not reach the disability statistics, but collectively can pose challenges to living an independent and fulfilling life. Improving the design of housing has the potential to shift the view of ageing as a disabling process of decline to one of vitality, activity and autonomy.

Promoting an accessible housing agenda supports the intent of the Commonwealth State/Territory Disability Agreement, which seeks to ensure all people with disabilities, their families and carers are valued and equal participants in all aspects of life and their community.

Savings in health care

Disability, housing and care are interdependent and complex. Recent research suggests that traditional housing construction in Australia has consistently failed to adequately consider the needs of people with disability, resulting in increased dependency and social inclusion.

Promoting independence in the home environment is a key principle of accessible residential design and is even more important when health costs for older people and people with disabilities are considered. Research indicates that expenditure for the over 65's amounts to around 4 times more per person than those under 65, rising to 6 to 9 times for Australian's aged over 85 years.

Considering Government's commitment to a 'care in the community' agenda, it would appear more cost effective in the longer term to support accessibility provisions in mainstream housing design, whilst encouraging the incorporation of more specialised design in purpose

⁴ McDonald, P., Merlo, R. (2002), Housing and its association with life outcomes. Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute: Australian National Research Centre. Melbourne, VIC.

built housing. The ability of future generations to ‘age in place’ relies on housing design and construction that can be adapted to better support the occupants needs (Bishop, 2000).⁵

Reduced need to move into residential care

Government commitment to an ‘aging in place’ agenda requires a number of attitudinal, cultural and policy changes be implemented if early institutionalisation is to be avoided. Whilst ‘deinstitutionalisation’ is widely recognised as the most viable option for younger people with disabilities, support for policy and planning to enable older people to remain living at home is not as evident (Bridge, Kendig, Quine & Parsons (2002)).⁶

Current housing stock is not designed to meet the changing needs and preferences of older Australians and people with disabilities. As a result, the market for home modifications, new housings and supportive services to enable people to live comfortably in their own homes will continue to grow rapidly over the next decade if we do not address the accessibility of residential design.

Reduced cost of rehousing in the public housing sector

Recent research indicates there are increasing numbers of older people with disabilities, living alone, in public rental accommodation. Almost two-fifths of all public housing tenants are identified as having some form of disability, which has significant ramifications on the stock upgrading, property profiles development of public rental accommodation.

Employing an accessible residential design agenda may assist in addressing the need for greater accessibility public housing developments in response to the increasing numbers of tenants with disabilities.

Reduced cost of rehousing in the private sector

A care minimisation model as proposed within an accessible residential design approach has the potential to enable both ‘ageing in place’ and ‘deinstitutionalisation’ by providing a home environment that can be adapted over the lifespan. Policy initiatives that encourage accessible housing design can reduce formal care costs and the necessity for housing relocation whilst maintaining individual autonomy (Bridge, Kendig, Quine & Parsons, 2002).⁷

⁵ Bishop, B. (2000). The National strategy for an ageing Australia: Attitude, lifestyle and community support (Discussion Paper). Canberra, ACT.

⁶ Bridge, C., Kendig, H., Quine, S., Parsons, A. (2002). Housing and care for younger and older adults with disabilities. Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute: Australian National University Research Centre: Melbourne, VIC.

⁷ *ibid*

Reduced costs associated with home modifications

Recent consultation of older Australians indicated that older people want more flexible, safe, affordable, accessible and innovative housing choices to enhance their capacity to remain in familiar surroundings close to family and established social networks.

The desire to age in place is supported by government policy, which encourages community, home-based care. Support for greater accessibility in housing is evident within government discussion support the belief that ageing in place could be further improved if the structure and design of the home is more accommodating of a person's mobility and independence.

Addressing unmet need

For many people with a disability and their family, finding a home which is capable of meeting their needs is difficult if not near impossible. Despite various initiatives and programs at a State, Territory and local Government level, it is fair to say that there has been little improvement to the suitability and availability of housing in Australia for people with a disability who wish to reside in either the public or private housing market.

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's report, *Australia's Welfare*, in 2003 there were close to 4 million people with a disability in Australia. Of these 2.6 million were under the age of 65 years of age.⁸ These figures are set to increase both in the population aged 15 - 64 years and most definitely in the 65 years and over group due to the ageing of the population. Whilst there will always be a small percentage of people with a disability who will always require specialised or extensively modified housing, the majority of people with a disability may only require basic alterations and modifications and require a home which is capable of being adapted if, and when the need arises.

It makes economic sense to support an accessible residential design philosophy when we consider the incidence and affect of disability within the Australian community.

A demographic imperative

The ageing of the Australian population presents us with a demographic imperative to consider whether the homes we are living in and building are capable of supporting the changing abilities and needs of our ageing Australians. Globally, we are facing an aging phenomenon largely motivated by the 'baby boomers' and the increased longevity people over the age of 65 are enjoying due to improved health and living standards. This radical population trend requires Government, providers of services and the community at large to develop new and innovative programs, products and environments to enable successful aging.

Whilst ageing is not necessarily accompanied by disability, 41% of people aged 65 and over reported having a disability, which affected their everyday life. More significantly, disability increases with age, reaching 92% in those aged 90 years and older.⁹

⁸ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Australia's Welfare*, 2007

⁹ *ibid*

Accessible residential design is fundamental to ageing in place; it can directly reduce care costs and enable community productivity and participation. Recent research into the housing trends of older Australians also presents a strong case for the broader adoption of accessible residential design principles as:

1. Aging Australians, have the highest rate of home ownership of any population group with 80% of seniors and 'baby boomers' living in detached housing;
2. Nine out of ten people aged 55 years and over live in conventional detached housing;
4. Less than 3% of older Australians live in retirement communities;¹⁰
5. Retirees are now living 35 years past retirement, nearly twice as long as 25 years ago;
6. 84% of ageing Australians own their own home and wish to remain in their home, even if health deteriorates or disability occurs;
7. During 2002, 95% of the 80,000 movers aged 65 and over, relocated to another private dwelling as opposed to retirement style or care accommodation;¹¹
8. The incidence of disability increases with age and the vast majority of older people are 'aging in the community'.

Recent research into the housing trends of people with a disability and their families provides further weight to the argument for the broader adoption of accessible residential design as:

1. People with disabilities are well represented in the private home ownership market with 84% of those aged under 60 years of age reside in a private dwelling;¹²
2. Virtually the same proportion of people with a disability compared to the rest of the population have the financial benefits and security of owner occupied housing;
3. Younger persons with disabilities are much more likely to reside in private households in the community than older persons;
4. Older people with disabilities are much more likely to own their own home (76%);
5. Public tenancies provide accommodation for only one fifth of people with disabilities living in the community, both younger (18%) and older (21%);
6. Nearly a fifth of persons residing in the community have already undertaken some form of home modification to make their homes more accessible.

Incidence of falls in the home

Most Australian's would believe that the safest place would be their home, however most injuries actually occur in the home environment. In a recent study, 12% of the general population surveyed indicated that they had sustained an injury within their home in the

¹⁰ Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources (DIPNR). (2004), Review of Housing Strategy for Older People and People with a disability, including changes to SEPP 5. Report, NSW.

¹¹ NSW Committee on Ageing. (July 2002), Where to live as we age - Stay put or move. NSW

¹² Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2003), Disability, Ageing and Carers: Summary of Findings: 4430.0. ABS: Canberra, ACT

previous month.¹³ Falls at home outnumber sporting injuries by nearly 2:1 and account for nearly 75,000 individuals every year.¹⁴

Falls are a major public health problem affecting people of all ages and abilities. A Victorian study indicated that children less than 5 years of age had twice as many falls at home as any other age group. The most common reason for falls were steps in split levels homes and stairs. It is not coincidental that many of elements of accessible residential design eliminate the hazards which are the common cause of injury in the home environment.

People over the age of 65 years of age are at greatest risk of sustaining an injury from a fall which will result in a permanent disability. Further, older Australians are more likely to have injured themselves at their home or the homes of others.¹⁵

Dwelling design therefore appears to be casually implicated in the majority of accidents which occur in the home environment.

¹³ Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2002), National Health Survey - Summary of Results, Australia (No. 4364.0). ABS: Canberra, ACT.

¹⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2002), Themes - Disability, Ageing and Carers: Accidents and injuries - Common causes of disability. ABS: Canberra, ACT.

¹⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2003), Australian Social Trends: Health - Mortality and morbidity: Injuries. ABS: Canberra, ACT.
