



## **National Disability Services – ACT Supported Accommodation for People with Disability Futures Paper**

### **Purpose**

This paper seeks to identify options for the accommodation of people with disability in the Canberra region and seek government support for future development on this basis.

### **Background**

Many people with disability are among the poorest in the community, relying only on a pension. 80% of people live in subsidised public housing. Some people live alone; others share with as one or two housemates of their choosing. In some cases, people are sharing with as many as five others – not an ideal arrangement. The remainder live with their family, in their own homes or in homes provided by family members.

During much of the Twentieth Century, people with disability lived in large, segregated institutional settings where they were provided with whole of life services. Over more than 30 years, the process of deinstitutionalisation (movement of people from an institutional setting to a community setting) occurred at the urging of individuals and families and was one of the leading policy and structural transformations in health and community services and is now supported by all the major political parties.

- Accommodation has been identified as an issue for further work by Disability ACT, which hosted a forum on 24 February 2009 to discuss issues and options. This paper seeks to inform the work arising from that forum.

### **Principles**

‘All people with disabilities achieve what they want to achieve, live how they want to live, and are valued as full and equal members of the ACT community.’

*Vision and Values Statement (The Disability Reform Group, endorsed by the ACT Government)*

The Australian Disability Service Standards

*The Disability Services ACT 1986*

The ACT Disability Service Standards  
*The ACT Disability services ACT 1991*

Principles of Good Housing for People with a Disability  
*The Housing and Tenancy Reform Housing Group 2005*

## **Issues and Approaches**

### Understanding Need - Who Are We Trying to Support?

A client-centric approach is essential to any supported accommodation framework. Any strategy needs to have the welfare of the individual at the fore – before funding, existing services and other influences are considered.

- Supported accommodation is a long term commitment over the lifetime of the individual. Their needs may change during that time, but the individual themselves must remain the central consideration.

A feasibility study to map out current and future needs is also important if we are to ensure that demand and supply can be appropriately aligned. NDS ACT considers there to be an urgent need for planning around the needs of the following client groups:

- people who will be leaving school;
- people with pronounced medical needs, such as people on pathways from hospital or other health care;
- people with changing needs; and
- the ageing population of people already in supported accommodation.

The current supported accommodation network does not have capacity to support people as they age and options for people with high need are very limited. Further, much of current debate around supported accommodation relates to the needs and choices of young people. However, consideration of the needs of people already accessing services is critical, too.

- Australia's population with disability is growing older. Supporting people ageing with disability requires cooperative action across governments and across departments because administrative responsibility for aged care and disability services is split.
- Additional support is required when people retire from employment or when their medical needs become more pronounced. Ageing in place is only possible where additional supports can be provided so people with disability are not placed at risk in their own homes.
- Parent carers who are older themselves are uncertain about whether or not there will be adequate support for their family member in the future.

Unmet need is an area which needs some degree of improved understanding, with a focus on identifying vulnerable people, including those people who are kept in hospital for inappropriate lengths of time as no other options exist. Linked to the concept of unmet need is the expected changes in need as parent carers age and seek to find options for their adult children.

- As a key component of the National Disability Agreement reform agenda, NDS ACT understands that work is underway in the ACT government to progress research and analysis around unmet need and projected population changes.

Supported accommodation must be viewed in the context of the end to end interaction of an individual with the service providers and government. Understanding how a person becomes a supported accommodation client in the first place is a key component to understanding how needs are identified and matched with available solutions. Similarly, as a person's needs change over time, their transitional experience if the services and/or accommodation they access and from which providers is also important. Any supported accommodation strategy developed must aim to facilitate access for individuals to the support which best suits their needs.

- Extensive work has been done by disability service providers to understand client needs. There is a wealth of experience as well as a passionate commitment to inform development of a supported accommodation strategy.

### What Works?

It is difficult to identify a single model of supported accommodation which represents best practice as the needs of individuals are so diverse. That said, it is clear that what works best is always based on careful consideration of the individual needs of the client and matching of those needs against the best services available. This has led to a range of different models ranging from residential, 24 hour a day care to shared housing for people who have lower care needs and who wish to live in the community.

Flexibility is key. Regulatory frameworks can drive perverse outcomes. A review of policies and standards to ensure that supported accommodation is delivered in a way which allows for the practical operational application of these requirements. For example, there is a need to examine the acceptable use of government owned infrastructure to provide a degree of flexibility to support the operational needs of the service provider.

- For example, the requirement that three bedroom houses must have three occupants limits the capacity for the service provider to utilise the space needed to ensure the efficient running of the house.

When dealing with infrastructure, funding based on individuals can be problematic in terms of budgeting for medium to long term improvements to buildings and fit out. A balance of ISP and block funding allows for a focus on individual need and investment in ongoing infrastructure and enhancements to facilities. At present, the

balance is tipped too far in favour of the former with insufficient capacity to manage safe, efficient and effective supported accommodation into the future.

- While ACT Housing will sometimes undertake works on infrastructure but the reality is that any significant enhancements must be budgeted for and funded from other areas of business.

New development of housing for supported accommodation needs to also factor in access to transport, shops and social network opportunities. Social inclusion opportunities for people with disability must remain a priority for ongoing reform in the disability sector.

### Risks and Opportunities

Options should be based on the balanced, flexible responses to principles, people, relationships, choice, needs, capacity and funds. Options should seek to make use of existing infrastructure and organisational capacity as well as seek to establish sustainable management and operational frameworks and not lock people into a model.

- Lack of options can lead to “solutions” and models which do not reflect Disability ACT Principles, such as the Community Living Project.

There is no growth in block funding for supported accommodation. The only funding growth comes through those individuals who have been granted Individual Support Package funding. Where infrastructure fails or needs change, there is currently no funding source. As well as putting quality standards at risk, this also reduces choice significantly as providers are forced to match individuals and related funding to suit what is available, even if this may not be what would be ideal for the individual.

- The current funding model can also lead to competition between providers for scarce funds, destabilising the sector.

Current investment in infrastructure under the stimulus package is welcomed, but the pressure to spend funds quickly risks appropriate commitment to the principles of universal access in social housing development. It is timely to review the expenditure of infrastructure funding announced in 2008 to ensure that it is being invested in housing to support people with disability and not becoming diluted as a part of a wider strategy for affordable housing development.

A full assessment of need provides an opportunity for informed planning. As well as identifying unmet need and allowing for projections of growth to inform future development, such an assessment provides an opportunity to ensure that support provided to individuals already accessing support services is appropriate to their needs. For example, under-met need is a driver of perverse outcomes, with people being retained in or pushed to different types of support services to avoid the reality of no supported accommodation services being available.

- There is evidence that some people with disability are kept in employment beyond the period which is suitable, notably in Koomarri, as retiring would place these people at risk of insufficient access to other care and support.

NDS ACT is keen to see active efforts to engage with the wider community and across government departments to manage the supported accommodation needs of people with disability in an efficient and effective way.

- Planning should include an emphasis on assisting people with disability to plan for their retirement through lifestyle coaching and links with other community organisations.
- There also needs to be a holistic recognition of demand for services, including increased demand for additional community supports such as meals on wheels, home help, transportation services and financial management as people age.

## **Recommendations**

NDS ACT recommends that the ACT government consider this paper in the context of establishing a plan for the future management of supported accommodation in the ACT, specifically that:

- a joint reference group be established, including representatives from Disability ACT, ACT Health, ACT Housing, NDS ACT and the disability service sector, to drive reform;
- research into unmet need and projected levels of demand for services be progressed as a matter of priority;
- the needs of people in supported accommodation who are ageing, people leaving school and people transitioning from hospital be considered in the development of any wider strategy;
- a review of infrastructure funding and Individual Support Package funding be undertaken to ensure that funding models drive appropriate quality standards and efficiency.

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