

4 March 2016

Hon Bruce Billson MP
Chair
Joint Standing Committee on the National Disability Insurance Scheme
NDIS.Sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Sir,

RE: Submission to Housing Roundtable

Home Modifications Australia (MOD.A) is the peak industry body for the provision of home modifications. The Home Modification Information Clearinghouse (HMinfo) is a research centre within the Faculty of the Built Environment at the University of NSW, and hosts a website (www.homemods.info) which provides free universally accessible evidence-based design resources. Home modifications are defined as:

... changes to the home environment to help people to be more independent and safe in their own home and reduce any risk of injury to their carers and careworkers. Modifications to the home include changes to the structure of the dwelling e.g. widening doors, adding ramps, providing better accessibility etc, and the installation of assistive devices inside or outside the dwelling, e.g. grabrails, handrails, lifts etc.¹

Members of MOD.A are committed to working to adapt and modify housing so that people with mobility impairment can remain in their homes. The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) promises to provide support to people with disability which will enable them to live inclusive lives of participation in the community. Having choice about where one lives and with whom, and exercising control within the home is fundamental to inclusion. In general people want to live in ordinary housing available in the community of their choice, rather than in specialist, managed accommodation.

The challenge

The challenge of housing in the NDIS raises the longstanding issue of the unsuitability of much of the housing stock, due to inaccessible design, unaffordability and lack of availability across all but particularly within certain tenure types (eg private rental). Recent AHURI research (2015) has indicated that there will be a demand for around 51,000 dwellings to meet the need that support to individuals from the NDIS will generate. This represents the tip of the iceberg. It does not take into account, for example, the need for a much wider variety of housing types, at varying costs, to accommodate the many other people with mobility, sensory or other disability who may not be eligible

¹ McNamara NK; Adams T; Bridge C; Carnemolla P; Quinn J, 2014, Consumer Factsheet: Arranging Home Modifications, Home Modification Information Clearinghouse, Sydney, University of New South Wales, www.homemods.info/publications-by-hminfo/consumer/consumer-factsheet-arranging-home-modifications#main-content

for NDIS funding, and who have struggled constantly to find property which is designed to meet even basic access requirements. Housing has long been identified as one of the most significant barriers to people living inclusive lives, and the NDIS by itself cannot solve the issue of inaccessible design and under-supply.

Significant demands for suitable housing will also come from those who wish to age in place. Because the current rate of home ownership in Australia is relatively high in line with other OECD countries² and this is the case too for many older people, the issue has been able to be addressed through the delivery of home modifications through the Home and Community Care (HACC) program delivered nationally, and through some allocations from Home Care Packages (HCP). The increased focus of the *Living Longer Living Better*³ aged care reforms upon delivery of services within the family home means that the quality of the house in which a person lives will need to come under much more scrutiny. Not only are there concerns about the person's safety and the avoidance of accidents such as falls⁴, as more and more people become older and less mobile with an expanding range of conditions, when services are increasingly delivered in the home its suitability as a work environment comes into consideration⁵.

Whilst the main focus has been upon the quality of the housing and its impact upon the individual, declining rates of home ownership⁶ amongst older people require us to look at expanding the availability of suitably accessible homes across the housing spectrum. Strategies to ensure accessible homes are available as options within the private rental, community housing and public housing markets must be in place, as well as well targeted schemes to assist home owners to appropriately renovate and modify their houses.

Ways forward

The housing needs of people with disability who will benefit from support packages, but who will need accessible housing in order to live within the community, need to be addressed within the broader context of ensuring there is suitable housing in Australia to meet the policy requirements of both aged care and disability reform. MOD.A is supportive of the position taken by the Australian Network for Universal Housing Design, to push for regulation of minimum access features in new housing in the National Construction Code (NCC)⁷, and of the need to closely monitor the outcomes relative to

² See <http://www.aph.gov.au/binaries/library/pubs/rp/2008-09/09rp21.pdf>

³ See https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/06_2014/a_-_aged_care_in_australia_is_changing.pdf

⁴ See various articles at the Home Modification Information Clearinghouse, www.homemods.info

⁵ There is little national data available on the state of the private housing stock, but work done by Archicentre in Victoria to assess the hazards and other needs of the homes of people on government benefits in that State has led to the publications of reports which indicate around 39% of homes will need work in order to make them safe for their inhabitants (find reference)

⁶ There are predictions of a significant decline in home ownership amongst the over-65s, from 81% to 55% by 2050, see http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Economics/Affordable_housing_2013/~/_media/Committees/economics_ctte/Affordable_housing_2013/report.pdf pp 189-191.

⁷ See <http://www.anuhd.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/ANUHD-Position-Statement-2016.pdf>

housing projected in the National Disability Strategy. In addition, MOD.A and HMinfo emphasise the need to renovate and modify existing housing stock, with the minimum access features being incorporated into structural home renovations.

The application of accessible design to new properties will address some of the immediate need and mitigate problems and expense for both individuals and governments in later years. The relatively quick pace of reform requires that suitable housing is available now for people with disability and people who wish to age in place. For this reason a broad housing strategy, coordinated by the Commonwealth Government, needs to be initiated as soon as possible. In relation to modifying the existing housing stock the strategy would look at where programs and grants can be best targeted to renovate to the minimum access design requirements, and how these are best applied. It would also look at ways to incentivise home owners and private investors to ensure that renovations are done to these standards, with a view to increasing the availability of accessible housing stock across all housing types. This may be done through grants or tax concessions. In addition the strategy should ensure that tenants of all housing which is either provided or funded by government, in the community and public housing sectors, are in properties which are either already accessible or they have access to properly constructed home modifications.

Summary

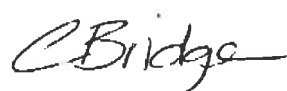
Given the above MOD.A and HMinfo propose the following:

- **The issue of providing housing to meet the needs generated by the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and the aged-care reforms must be viewed as part of a larger housing issue. All people in Australia, regardless of age, ability, ethnicity or medical condition should have access to secure, affordable and accessible housing which enhances people's inclusion and participation in family and community life, and addresses the problem of homelessness.**
- **The Commonwealth Government should take a leadership role in addressing the housing needs of people with disability and older people, to ensure that their national health, disability and aged-care reforms are both economically and socially sustainable.**
- **This includes overseeing the housing commitments within COAG's 2010-2020 National Disability Strategy; in particular, ensuring that all new housing is built to the agreed minimum universal design standard by 2020.**
- **Strategies aimed at addressing suitable housing for people with disability and older people must take into account the need to renovate and modify existing housing to complement the increased supply of affordable and accessible new housing.**

Yours sincerely,



Michael Bleasdale



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