



Human Services
Housing NSW

Housing NSW

Disability Action Plan 2009–2013: Summary

February 2010

The Housing NSW Disability Action Plan 2009–2013

What is the Disability Action Plan?

Housing NSW recognises that providing housing that is accessible for people with a disability is about much more than bricks and mortar. It's about housing that is affordable, designed to suit individual needs, well located, allows people to interact and is linked to support services, when these services are needed.

The Disability Action Plan 2009-2013 (the Plan) provides the framework for achieving Housing NSW's commitments to people with a disability. It sets out the priorities and strategies for the next five years through which Housing NSW will deliver this commitment. The Plan is guided by the following principles:

- Housing NSW's services should respond fairly to the diverse needs of clients
- Housing NSW's clients can expect to have access to quality information and are involved in decision making
- Housing NSW's client networks and relationships are valued and supported
- Housing NSW works collaboratively with other agencies to develop and deliver housing services linked to support when needed
- Housing NSW strives to maintain a high standard of service to clients with diverse needs.

Why do we need a Disability Action Plan?

At 30 June 2009, just over a third (34 per cent) of public housing households included a member living with a significant disability. Of the number of new tenants housed during 2008-09, 36 per cent had a significant disability. This is an increase of eight per cent since 2001. The proportion of Housing NSW tenants with a disability has increased on average by one per cent per year since 2001, which means that an additional 1,000 tenants with a disability have been newly housed each year. It is expected that by the end of 2013, an additional 5,200 public housing households will include a person with a disability.

At 30 June 2009, 25 per cent of all community housing households included a person with a disability. During 2008/09, 29 per cent of all community housing dwellings allocated included a person with a disability.

Some people with a disability live entirely independent lives and actively participate in the community, while others have complex needs and require support to sustain their tenancies and connect with their community. The purpose of the Disability Action Plan is to guide Housing NSW in providing the most appropriate services to people with a disability, according to their needs.

How does Housing NSW assist people with a disability?

Housing NSW offers a range of products and services for people with a disability including:

- **subsidised housing** with special income eligibility provisions that consider expenses related to a medical condition, disability or injury
- tenants with a disability may be entitled to an **extra bedroom** if they need an extra room to accommodate a family member or carer, to store medical equipment, or if they are a couple and the disability requires them to sleep separately
- **disability modifications** such as handrails, ramps, and other modifications ensure that tenants with a disability are allocated social housing suited to their needs.
- the **Special Assistance Subsidy** provides eligible clients who have a mental or physical disability with a rental subsidy so they can rent in the private market.
- the **Private Rental Brokerage Service (PBR)** assists homeless people with complex needs, including intellectual or physical disability, mental or physical illness, to find and keep tenancies in the private market.
- **Tenancy Guarantees** are provided to private landlords for clients who have experienced difficulties securing a private tenancy.

- **formal housing and support partnerships** with support agencies provide coordinated accommodation with support for people with a disability. Examples of these include the Joint Guarantee of Service for people with mental health problems and disorders living in Aboriginal, community and public housing; the Disability Housing and Support Initiative, which provides housing linked to support for people with an intellectual disability, and the Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative, which provides housing linked with support to people with a psychiatric disability
- **tenant participation** initiatives allow social housing tenants to have a say in decisions that affect their homes and neighbourhoods, with provisions to ensure that people with a disability have equal opportunities to participate
- the **Isolated Carers Outreach Project** aims to improve services for isolated carers (including carers who support people with a disability) living in social housing
- the **Disability Reference Group**, drawn from Housing NSW staff who have a disability, assists Housing NSW to increase employment opportunities for people with a disability, improve service delivery for people with a disability, and assist implementation of the Disability Action Plan

Housing NSW regulates and sometimes funds **community housing providers** to provide social housing, including to people with a disability. Community housing providers are independent, autonomous non-government providers that organisations that use government assistance and private investment to provide housing for people on very low to moderate incomes and those with complex needs. Housing NSW works closely with the sector to provide guidance on implementing strategies that support clients with complex needs, including those with a disability. Many community housing providers have a long history of innovative housing, support and tenant participation approaches for people with a disability.

What has Housing NSW committed to do under the Disability Action Plan?

Housing NSW assists people with a disability who are most in need to access and maintain social housing tenancies and private rent assistance.

Housing NSW works with government and non-government stakeholders to understand future demand for housing assistance and identify strategies to bridge the gap between supply and demand.

Housing NSW promotes tenant participation and engagement, and works in partnership with other agencies to ensure that people with a disability who need support to sustain their tenancies are able to access the support services they need.

Housing NSW works with community housing providers to ensure community housing continues to assist those who are most in need, including people with a disability

Housing NSW aims to increase the proportion of staff with a disability in its workforce. Housing NSW will ensure staff with a disability work in an environment free from discrimination, in which staff members with a disability are supported with the workplace adjustments required to enable them to perform their duties

What are the Plan's priorities?

The Disability Action Plan focuses on seven priority action areas, with key strategies that Housing NSW will use to implement its commitments.

| Priority Action Area | Key Strategies |
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| 1. Ensuring people with a disability are able to access housing services and products | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the number of social housing homes (public and community housing) that meet universal design principles • Increase the number of public housing homes that are modified to meet the needs of people with a disability • Improve Housing NSW data collection and analysis systems in relation to disability • Review and improve training for Housing NSW staff and community housing providers on working with people with a disability • Continue to exempt the disability allowance when assessing income eligibility • Improve matching of modified properties to people with a disability • Investigate approaches to improving access for people with a disability to the private rental market |
| 2. Providing information in a range of accessible formats for people with a disability. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop information on public housing services and products in a range of appropriate formats for people with a range of disabilities • Ensure information about Housing NSW services and products is available through other government agencies and non-government organisations • Continue to ensure compliance with best practice Web Content Accessibility guidelines • Ensure Housing NSW Service Delivery channels respond to the needs and capacities of people with a range of disabilities |
| 3. Improving physical accessibility of buildings and facilities for people with a disability | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to develop office accommodation strategies to comply with national standards |
| 4. Assisting the participation of people with a disability in public consultations and on Housing NSW advisory boards and committees | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure tenant participation program guidelines encourage diverse participation including people with a disability • Monitor and encourage participation of people with a disability in social housing tenant participation and consultation structures |
| 5. Increasing employment participation of people with a disability in Housing NSW | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve Housing NSW management practices in relation to staff with a disability through workplace adjustment including flexible work practices and job design, and disability awareness training • Ensure Housing NSW recruitment and employment policies are appropriate to attracting employment participation of people with a disability • Ensure Housing NSW employees with a disability are well-informed of their rights and are supported in their roles |
| 6. Influencing other agencies to improve community participation and quality of life for people with a disability in social housing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigate approaches to improving access to occupational therapists' assessment and reporting for disability modifications • Review existing housing and support partnerships for people with a disability and identify opportunities for replicating or expanding these |

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| 7. Providing quality specialist and adapted services to meet the needs of people with a disability | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • Review asset design responses for people with a disability • Explore financial products to assist people with a disability to gain access to low cost housing • Implement the Housing NSW Isolated and Hidden Carers Outreach Project |
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Integration into planning

To make sure that a consistent policy approach to people with a disability occurs, the priorities and strategies of the Disability Action Plan will be integrated into existing Housing NSW planning processes, such as:

- Corporate Plan
- Housing Service Divisions' business plans and related area action plans
- other relevant client strategies
- other service improvement plans developed for other client groups.

The background to the Plan: The housing needs of people with a disability

People with a disability face greater challenges than the general population in meeting their housing needs. People with a disability are likely to experience greater financial disadvantage and therefore to be more likely to need housing assistance. For example, in 2005, people with a disability represented 19 per cent of all Australians but only 12 per cent of home purchasers, according to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare report, *Australia's Welfare 2007 – Disability and Disability Services*. A number of factors contribute towards the financial disadvantage of people with a disability:

- the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) *2003 Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers* found 54 per cent of Australians with a disability participate in the workforce, compared with 81 per cent of the general population, meaning people with a disability are more likely to be reliant on welfare payments, and more vulnerable to decreases in housing affordability
- higher than average living costs, combined with deteriorating housing affordability, leads to more people with a disability experiencing financial difficulty
- with the changes to the Disability Support Pension eligibility in 2006, some people have been placed on alternative, lower benefits such as Newstart, further reducing their capacity to afford suitable accommodation
- there is currently limited funding to assist people in the private rental market who wish to maintain their independence, meaning social housing often becomes a long term rental option
- people with a disability frequently face discrimination and are excluded from the private rental market, with many private properties also inaccessible.

Demand for disability related housing services is expected to increase further due to the ageing population. The ABS *Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (2003)* also noted:

- there is a demographic shift towards an ageing population and an increase in the number of people with complex needs requiring support
- the number of individuals in NSW with a severe or profound core activity limitation is expected to increase by eight per cent between 2006-2010. As expected, based on an ageing population, growth is predominantly in the age category of 65 years and over (12 per cent); and
- life expectancy of people with a disability is becoming increasingly closer to the general population as advancements are made in the provision of care and medical treatment.

Formal reporting and monitoring

Housing NSW will publish progress against performance in Housing NSW's Annual Report. Progress on employment goals will also be reported through the Annual Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) report. Housing NSW will review and update the Disability Action Plan at the end of 2013.