

Submission to: Inquiries into the Provision of Supported Accommodation for Victorians with a Disability or Mental Illness

One of the great successes and future challenges of building an inclusive society is securing the participation of people with a disability within our community. After a century of relying on institutions we have, over the last decade or so, succeeded in Victoria in supporting people in the community. Integral to this success has been the social housing system: state and federal, homeless and long term. Without such a comprehensive approach many with a disability will fall back into institutions or worse, homelessness.

The development of the national housing agreements, the biggest restructure of housing assistance in more than half a century, provides a unique opportunity for the Government to make inclusion for people with a disability a reality through the provision of secure, affordable and appropriate housing with adequate support. A three part strategy is proposed deliver this reality: a stocktake of current housing provision, the quarantining of a proportion of housing assistance and the development of individual state/territory disability housing plans.

A person with a disability seeking to establish and/or maintain their housing is confronted by three types of barriers, any one of which can be insurmountable:

- **Accessibility** including both wheelchair accessibility and location which is important given many people with disability have a limited capacity to travel to services, education and employment;
- **Cost** in terms of both capital for home purchase but, more commonly, recurrent in the form of rental. As many people with a disability are low income and single person households, they have little capacity to compete in the private and social housing rental markets; and
- **Cognitive capacity** to manage the relationship required to establish and maintain housing including with neighbors, co-tenants, support providers and landlords.

The targeting of housing assistance to this constituency is complex because of the large numbers involved and the varying levels of need. A comparison of recent statistical data and disability funding (via the Commonwealth State Territory Disability Agreement – CSTDA) reporting reveals that:

- There are approximately 4 million people with a disability in Australia¹;
- Of these, 1.7 million were over 60 years old;
- 1.2 million had severe and profound disabilities;
- Approximately 217,000 people, predominantly less than 65 years old, received CSTDA disability services;
- 14% of CSTDA services are people with a psychiatric disability; and

¹ Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (2003), ABS, Canberra.

- Very few, approximately 3% live in group homes or other institutions.

Consequently it is important the disability housing strategy include a focus on those people eligible for CSTDA services rather than all people with a disability. The broader measure may be useful but, by itself, will not identify the extent to which housing assistance to people with the highest levels of need who are clients of the Government funded support system are housed. A focus on those only on a particular waiting list will not give a clear overview of the issue involved.

An examination of the current housing circumstances for people eligible for CSTDA funded services reveals a complex and varying set of arrangements. Often the only consistency is government, as funder and/or regulator, at one end and the people with the disability at the other.

It also reveals a number of concerning issues and trends:

- There are a number of **service streams** (disability, mental health, housing and homelessness) that operate with different frameworks and with limited co-operation;
- Many accommodation options are **unsustainable** such as the large numbers living with ageing carers and those in privately run supported housing options such as the Supported Residential Services in Victoria;
- There has been **limited growth** of long term housing options particularly for those existing crisis and transitional housing;
- Where **better practice** exists, it is largely undocumented, unevaluated and unpromoted;
- The **targeting** of social housing has been a success for deinstitutionalisation but has been a failure of social housing management, particularly of place management;
- Government **regulation** and **funding** is inconsistent within and across service streams; and
- There is no agreement about **service models** of either physical stock or support models across the service streams.

The way forward is to understand what exists, reserve resources for future growth and develop an agreed approach. Specifically it is proposed that a three part, state based strategy be pursued.

1. Undertake a **stocktake** of Government funded housing to identify where and how people eligible for CSTDA funded services live. The stocktake will identify the key components of the housing and support development and provision processes.
2. **Quarantine** a proportion of the growth from new housing initiatives for people with a disability who are eligible for CSTDA funded services. Without such targeting people with a disability will find it difficult to secure housing in the current competitive environment and those that are housed are likely to be those with less significant disabilities.
3. Develop a **state disability housing plan** to cover all funding streams for both housing and support development and delivery. Such plans are needed to

secure a common understanding and long term commitment across housing, homelessness, mental, aged care and disability service streams.

The provision of housing of people with a disability, particularly those most in need, is central to the delivery of an inclusive society. To achieve this, it will be necessary to draw together a number of service streams both within Government (both state and Federal) and the community sector. The proposed three part strategy consists of a stocktake of existing Government funded housing for people with a disability, the quarantining of a portion of housing growth funds and the development of a state disability housing plan.

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