

**Rural Access Project
East Gippsland Shire Council
submission to
Family and Community Development Committee
regarding
Inquiry into Supported Accommodation for Victorians with a Disability or Mental Illness**

The East Gippsland Shire Council Rural Access Project presents this submission to highlight the barriers faced by people with a disability or mental illness when accessing supported accommodation in a rural community and suggests possible solutions to specific barriers which are highlighted.

The issue is significant to the Rural Access Project which aims to challenge barriers faced by people with disabilities and promote inclusion in community life. The lack of supported accommodation in East Gippsland at present is one such barrier.

This submission is divided into two sections, firstly the identification of specific barriers associated with supported accommodation and secondly an outline of regional planning, accommodation models and infrastructure which could possibly improve the current status of supported accommodation services in the region. Within this structure question 1, 2, 3 and 7 of the Family and Community Development Committee – Discussion Paper have been addressed.

The limited availability and suitability of supported accommodation in the East Gippsland Shire commonly generates the greatest barriers. The current predicament includes the availability of only four community residential units, no respite houses, a small number of in-home support packages and very limited social housing options. Specific issues which stem and/or contribute to gaps include;

- In East Gippsland the population of 41,361 is dispersed over an area of 20,931 sq km with supported accommodation typically located in larger regional centres, subsequently creating a geographic barrier to services. For example a respite service is not available within East Gippsland the nearest being located in Sale (Wellington), as a result if a person living in Mallacoota requires emergency short-term accommodation they would need to travel 307.4 km to access the service.
- The limited number of supported accommodation including emergency short-term, cluster units and age appropriate accommodation can produce waiting lists years long, this issue is compounded by a lack of in-home support.
- Young people with a disability are not provided with the option of age appropriate accommodation. Often young people are placed in aged residential care, an environment not providing appropriate social networks.
- In East Gippsland many social houses are not within accessible or central locations and are without connections to services or public transport, this situation does not adhere to an accommodation model supporting independence.
- Commonly limited partnerships and communication between supported accommodation services and community planning projects restricts the support base of current and future supported accommodation initiatives.

The Rural Access Project has no direct supported accommodation service, however considers the following examples a starting point for reducing access barriers to supported accommodation in East Gippsland;

- The government investigates funding the construction of accessible supported accommodation houses.

Prepared by
Donna Mraz, Rural Access Project Officer

273 Main St
Bairnsdale Vic 3875

- Family groups supported by government disability services provide care services for residents.
- The high priority construction of an emergency accommodation short-term respite service located within East Gippsland.
- Integrate government, private and family support to construct 4 to 5 cluster units within East Gippsland. Offering independent and age appropriate living within flexible staff/ non-staff service.
- Provision for integrated or coordinated planning and partnerships between supported accommodation services and community planning.