Outer Suburban/Interface Services and Development Committee

Parliament of Victoria

Inquiry into Growing the Suburbs: Infrastructure and Business Development in Outer Suburban Melbourne

Submission by: Housing Resource and Support Services
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Parliament of Victoria
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Housing Resource and Support Service, HR&SS, is a disability support agency that operates from a model of consumer empowerment and believes in housing options that are equally accessible for everyone in the community. The HR&SS Board is comprised only by people with disabilities and operates from a model of consumer empowerment and a right-based approach to service delivery. As such, HR&SS is a strong supporter that tenant rights and outcomes are a central and driving consideration in the development of new regulatory systems and that these are enshrined in future regulations.

Australia has considerable unmet need for universal and modified housing but the most pressing need comes from people with disabilities and Victoria’s ageing population. As a disability support agency, HR&SS has experienced an increasing demand for modified housing on a daily basis. Many people with disabilities and older people live in unsuitable housing where they are unsafe and cannot function with (the maximum) independence, dignity and ease. According to Victorian Government projections, by 2031 almost one quarter of Victorians will be over 65 years. Many of these people will acquire some sort of mobility impairment, as the likelihood of this, increases with age.

The Outer Suburban Interface Services and Development Committee, OSISDC, is a crucial body responding to growing housing demands caused by growing population, an increase in the ageing population, the demand for universal housing by people with disabilities and growing homelessness. Under current State regulation, the majority of homes built today have standards that are voluntary and as such are not an effective vehicle to guarantee protection of tenant’s rights.

As new homes will account for just 15 percent of Australia’s housing stock by 2020\(^1\), there is a need to develop housing that is accessible, sustainable and integrated. This needs to occur particularly in outer suburban Melbourne where people are more likely to experience social isolation. Outer suburbs generally have less support services, affordable transportation and community supports that allow people with disabilities to live independently and feel - and be - part of their community.

\(^1\) Based on ABS Population projections Series II, household projection for 2020 compared to 2008.
Improving building standards for new homes must be complemented by a concerted program to upgrade accessibility levels, support services and community participation of the existing housing stock. This needs to occur in such a way to provide incentives and supports for housing providers and disability agencies that construct and provide modified and accessible housing that is affordable and sustainable for people with disabilities.

Universal design is a prerequisite to upholding tenant rights and achieving positive tenant outcomes and for new dwellings to provide for a financially sustainable capacity to alter dwellings for people with disabilities. Housing and living environment options are both one of the most pressing problems for the elderly, people with disabilities and the community as a whole as well as an unavoidable policy subject for public administrators.

To enhance residents’ liveability, the provision of universal housing needs to be complemented by community options that are accessible and supportive of people with disabilities. These include mandatory universal housing standards, physical accessibility that enables community participation and full modification without penalising housing providers, adequate tenancy management and adequate personal support.

Modified housing and universal accessibility must not act as a supplement to communities, but must be integrated seamlessly into new and existing developments. This will enable participation of everyone, including the 25 per cent of the population that have a disability.

The Disability Commonwealth Athletes building in Parkville, which HR&SS contributed to the development, is a prime example of how universal housing is a key contributor to a successful integrated community. Access to public transportation, community supports, green spaces, shops and the greater community has enabled the Disability Commonwealth Athletes buildings to increase the affordability of purchasing and living in a home. Accessibility costs savings far outweigh the slightly increased up-front construction cost developers included in the design of the building.

Housing case management and maintenance of tenancy is also an essential component of sustainable housing. HR&SS housing model provides case management and tenancy support for tenants with disabilities. This includes:

- Assisting in and monitoring the implementation of ISP and other care plans to ensure independent living and the integrity of the tenancy is maintained
- Develop and monitor Housing Exit Plan for consumers in Transitional housing
• Search and refer to other community services for support and support gaps (ie. Council services, HACC etc.)
• Provide DSR upgrades where required
• Participate in the consumer’s ISP review
• Tenancy advocacy

With the Victorian Universal Housing Alliance, VUHA, HR&SS has been actively advocating the Government to maintain a pro-active position and include these recommendations into existing and resulting legislation.

Having universal housing, community access and the provision of community supports met will simultaneously enable the housing stock to provide a housing model that increases the affordability of purchasing and living in a home. It also outlines further benefits of higher building standards including further job creation in building industries.

Representing all Victorians, in particular the 25 per cent of our population whom live with disability and those who are aging will adhere to the Victorian Charter of Rights, Victorian Disability Act and the UN Charter of Rights.