



Submission to the Australian Building Codes Board

**Consultation Regulatory Impact Statement (RIS); Proposal
to include minimum accessibility standards for housing in
the National Construction Code**

August 2020

About Carers WA

Carers WA is the peak body representing the needs and interests of carers in Western Australia and is part of a national network of Carers Associations. Carers provide unpaid care and support to family members and friends who have disability, mental illness, a chronic condition, terminal illness, an alcohol or other drug issue or who are frail aged. The person they care for may be a parent, partner, sibling, child, relative, friend or neighbour. Illness and disability are non-discriminatory and the caring role can be borne by any individual at any given time, regardless of socioeconomic status, age or location. Caring is a significant form of unpaid work in the community and is integral to the maintenance of our aged, disability, health, mental health, and palliative care systems.

Some important facts about carers include:

- There are 2.65 million unpaid carers in Australia. More than 861,000 carers are primary carers.
- There are more than 230,000 family and friends in a caring role in Western Australia or approximately 1 in 9 in the community.

Enquiries

Felicity Mitchell
Systemic Policy Officer

Carers WA
182 Lord Street
PERTH WA 6000
Phone: 1300 227 377
Email: felicity.mitchell@carerswa.asn.au

1.0 Introduction

Carers WA appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Consultation Regulatory Impact Statement (RIS) on the proposal to include minimum accessibility standards for housing in the National Construction Code (NCC).

Inclusion of accessibility standards in the NCC will represent a significant step forward in the important adoption of universal design in Australia. This amendment has the potential to significantly improve the lives of people with disability. The Consultation RIS provides an extensive analysis of the costs and benefits of the complex issues surrounding amending the NCC to include accessibility standards.

2.0 Report into disability housing in Western Australia

Carers WA, in partnership with Foundation Housing, has recently completed a project to identify the systemic barriers people with disability face when seeking accessible, safe, affordable and inclusive homes. The project, funded by the Department of Communities, commenced in March 2019 and aimed to:

- Undertake an in-depth consultation process to determine and detail the experiences of people with disability in accessing housing in WA; and
- Identify opportunities for reform and advocate for systemic change across the community to address the barriers identified.

Research for the project was conducted from March 2019 – February 2020. Information and experiences were collected directly from people with disability and/or their family carers through;

- 73 online surveys (responses were recorded from 26 people with disability, 39 carers of people with disability, 6 service providers and two others)
- Two metropolitan consultations attended by people with disability and/or family carers
- Three regional visits (Geraldton, Esperance and Broome)
- 12 case study interviews
- Individual conversations via email and telephone
- Attendance at various peer to peer support groups and information sessions.

Among the key barriers identified in this research were:

- There is a lack of suitable and affordable accessible homes in WA to purchase.
- There is a lack of suitable accessible homes in WA to rent both in the private market and in social housing.

A key recommendation of the report was to support the inclusion of accessibility standards in the National Construction Code.

A link to the report “Experiences of Western Australians with disability finding a home” is here www.carerswa.asn.au/report-into-housing-for-people-with-disability-in-western-australia-calls-for-change/

The comments in this submission are based on the qualitative information collected from people with disability and their families during the course of the project.

3.0 Comments on the conclusion of the RIS

The estimated net benefits for option 1 (accessibility standard, broadly reflecting LHDG silver standard, in the NCC applying to all new Class 1a and Class 2 buildings) are close to even in all three measurement approaches in the RIS. However, the conclusion presented is that the costs outweigh the benefits.

Break even or a slight net cost may not be the outcome the industry is wanting, the cost to individual people with disability and their families of continuing to ignore this problem cannot be underestimated.

The RIS suggests that the percentage of people with a mobility impairment who have a modified home is 21% if they own the home and 10% if they rent (noting differences in percentages between private and government rentals). This means there is a very large percentage of people with mobility impairments (79% of home owners and 90% of renters) do not have the necessary modifications. The impact on the lives of these people and their families is significant.

4.0 Understanding and quantifying the problem

The problem of lack of accessibility in housing is underestimated in the RIS through use of SDAC statistics. SDAC does not record the satisfaction of people with disability with their current housing arrangements and may miss a group of people who are currently living in homes which do not meet their needs.¹ Adults with disability living in the family home with ageing parents are a group who may not be captured in these statistics. Often the accessibility needs of these people are not recognised until a crisis occurs in their current accommodation such as sickness or death of a carer.

In addition, this section of the RIS does not appear to include people with a disability that do not identify as having a mobility problem but who would also benefit from these design features. The ABS 2018 data includes only those who have “A mobility limitation due to disability”. For example, people with an intellectual disability may not categorise their disability as a mobility one but often have low muscle tone which makes steps, inclines and uneven surfaces much more difficult to traverse. Some people with disability, especially those with Autism Spectrum Disorder experience sensory perception difficulties and would also benefit from accessible homes. SDAC data is available on disability type and a percentage of

¹ The SDAC survey questionnaire is here [https://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/EE4A99CEC062156ECA25849C00174CB8/\\$File/household%20questionnaire.pdf](https://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/EE4A99CEC062156ECA25849C00174CB8/$File/household%20questionnaire.pdf)

people with intellectual disability and autism could be added to the assumptions on those who will benefit from standards in accessible housing.

The RIS also does not adequately take into account the costs to unpaid family carers. There are many ways carers are affected by the lack of accessible housing. They may wish to participate in the workforce but are limited by the care they need to provide to a family member who does not have access to suitable housing. Carers often spend a great deal of time and effort seeking information, assessments and advice on modifications to the family home which could be saved with better availability of accessible housing. The recently released paper by Deloitte Access Economics *“The value of informal care in 2020”*, May 2020, may assist with estimates in this area www.carersaustralia.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/FINAL-Value-of-Informal-Care-2020.pdf.

5.0 Objectives of intervention and options

While option 2 (accessibility standard, broadly reflecting LHDG gold standard, in the NCC applying to all new Class 1a and Class 2 buildings) will provide for a wider range of people with disability, given the broad results of the cost benefit analysis Carers WA and Foundation Housing support option 1 (accessibility standard, broadly reflecting LHDG silver standard, in the NCC applying to all new Class 1a and Class 2 buildings).

6.0 Estimating the costs and benefits of the proposal

As stated in the *“Economic advice prepared to assist with responses to the Consultation Regulation Impact Statement on minimum accessibility standards for housing in the National Construction Code”* by Andrew Dalton and Rob Carter, Carers WA and Foundation Housing agree that the “problem reduction approach’ is unevenly calculated and should include benefits for those other than the immediate target population. Those not in the direct target population include people who may have mobility issues in the future, people with temporary mobility issues or parents of young children as well as the previously mentioned population of people with disability who do not identify as having a mobility issue but would benefit from accessible features.

It should also be noted that cost in time, stress and effort to gain modifications within the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) has not been taken into account in the costing. The cases studies and survey results outlined in the *“Experiences of Western Australians with disability finding a home”* report indicate that the process to investigate, fund and deliver home modifications is complex, frustrating and can result in necessary modifications not being implemented.

Carers WA and Foundation Housing believe that Option 6 (better information provision and promotion of an enhanced regulatory approach) would not be effective in encouraging additional uptake of accessibility features in new dwellings.

6.0 Conclusion

Carers WA and Foundation Housing support the contention in the Dalton/Carter Report that “the economic credentials for all options considered in the RIS are considerably stronger than those presented in the report.”