

Senator the Hon. Jonathon Duniam
Assistant Minister for Industry Development
Australian Government
The Senate
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Via email: senator.duniam@aph.gov.au

cc. Rebecca Vassarotti MLA
ACT Minister for Sustainable Building and Construction
ACT Legislative Assembly
Via email: vassarotti@act.gov.au

Dear Senator Duniam

Mandatory accessibility standards in Australia's National Building Code

I am writing to urge you to support the inclusion of mandatory accessibility standards in Australia's National Building Code at the upcoming meeting of Building Ministers.

For over ten years, the voluntary Livable Housing Design Guidelines have failed to ensure adequate levels of accessible housing in Australia, with only 5% of new home builds complying with the guidelines since they were introduced in 2010.

As a consequence, according to a 2020 survey, 73.6% of people with disability are currently living in housing that does not meet their needs.¹

This leads to increased costs of modifications, increased need for paid and unpaid care, and a reduction in workforce participation by people with disability and unpaid carers.

As our population ages, the demand for accessible housing is going to increase. Already, nearly 81% of Australians over 55

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¹ Dr Ilan Wiesel, School of Geography, *Living with disability in inaccessible housing: social, health and economic impacts*, The University of Melbourne, 22 October 2020 pg 6, viewed on 21 April 2021 <https://disability.unimelb.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0019/3522007/Accessible-Housing-FINAL-REPORT.pdf>

would prefer to age at home, rather than go into residential aged care.²

In 2018, 19.4% of Canberra people had a disability. This has increased from 16.2% in 2015³.

The rate of disability generally increases with age. The ACT is expected to experience a significant ageing of its population. The number of Canberrans aged 85 years and over is expected to increase by 509%, reaching a total of 22,500 persons in 2056⁴.

A lack of well-designed housing is limiting the real housing choices available to people with disability and is one reason people with disabilities are overrepresented in congregate settings.

We are in the midst of a Royal Commission into Violence, Neglect and Abuse of People with Disability and there is substantial evidence a lack of accessible housing contributes to the over-representation of people with disability in situations of violence.

Research and submissions to the Senate Inquiry into Abuse and Violence of People with Disability showed that congregate settings are places where disability violence and abuse are more likely to occur.

In the ACT a lack of access to housing by people with disability and older Canberrans is experienced through both a lack of affordable housing and a shortfall in the supply of universally designed, accessible or visitable built form.

In our housing advocacy, including through the [Stories of Home](#) collected by ACTCOSS in which low-income and vulnerable people discuss their housing experiences, the lack of accessible housing in the Canberra housing market has been continually highlighted.

² Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, *What Australians Think of Ageing and Aged Care, Research Paper 4*, July 2021, Pg 47, Viewed on 21 April 2021 < https://agedcare.royalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-07/research_paper_4_-_what_australians_think_of_ageing_and_aged_care.pdf >

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics, Disability, Ageing and Carers Australia, Summary of Findings, 24 October 2019 - table via < <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/disability/disability-ageing-and-carers-australia-summary-findings/latest-release> > viewed on 21 April 2021

⁴ ACT Government, Chief Ministers Department, ACT Population Projections 2007-2056, May 2009, Pg 14 viewed on 21 April 2021 < http://www.cmd.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/119719/act-population-projections-2007-2056.pdf >

The ACT population is also getting older and the lack of adaptable and visitable housing is resulting in social isolation and premature entry into nursing care for too many ageing Canberrans as well as people with a disability.

Access to appropriate housing support choice for older Australians will result in substantial savings to the health and welfare sector from reduced injuries and home care, as well as reducing the cost of aged care. It will reduce the experience of violence, abuse and neglect by people placed in institutional settings due to a lack of community alternatives.

Now is the time to ensure we have a National Building Code for all Australians, no matter what stage of life or experience of disability.

Canberra is currently in the middle of rapid dense housing construction. The inclusion of Universal Design requirements into the Building Code will also provide surety and confidence to developers to create housing which is sustainable and liveable well into the future.

I urge you to use your position on the Building Minister's Forum to ensure that mandatory accessibility standards are included in the National Building Code. This reform will make a difference to hundreds of thousands of Australians, including people who are ageing or have a disability in the ACT.

I have also copied this letter to the ACT Minister for Sustainable Building and Construction, and we are in turn urging our territory government to support this important reform.

Yours sincerely,



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Head of Policy

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20 April 2020