



**QLD DISABILITY HOUSING  
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**RESPONSE TO 'FIRST HOME OWNERSHIP'**

**Productivity Commission Discussion Draft**

Notwithstanding the Discussion Draft's acknowledgement of Australia's aging population and the wider effects that home ownership has on people's health and wellbeing, there is little reference to the type of housing the Australian population will require in the future.

Within the Productivity Commission's task to:

- *Identify and analyse all components of the cost and price of housing, including new and existing housing for those endeavouring to become first home owners;*
- *Identify mechanisms to improve the efficiency of the supply of housing and associated infrastructure; and*
- *Identify any impediments to first home ownership, and assess the feasibility and implications of reducing or removing such impediments.*

**The report has not covered the particular needs of older people and people with disabilities.**

This cohort is increasing in size, is typically on a fixed income and if disability has inhibited working history, has little capacity to create wealth.

There is no reference in the report to the importance of appropriate housing design to meet anticipated need and the significant contribution it can make towards sustainable communities in the future.

In addition, the Productivity Commission's response to the requirement to consider:

- *the effect of standards, specifications, approval and title requirements on costs and choice in new dwelling construction; and*
- *the operation of the total housing market, with specific reference to the availability of a range of public and private housing types, the demand for housing, and the efficiency of use of the existing residential housing stock*

does not address the needs of this cohort.

## **UNIVERSAL HOUSING DESIGN:**

**Universal housing design is the design of housing which can be used by all people to the greatest extent possible without the need for adaptation or specialised design.**

This typically means:

1. There is a continuous accessible path of travel from the front boundary or car park and throughout the entry level of dwelling.
2. The entry is on the main level that has a living and food preparation area, an accessible shower, handbasin, toilet and bedroom.
3. Living areas and bedrooms, when furnished, allow for adequate circulation space for a person using a wheelchair.
4. Doorways and corridors are wide enough to allow wheelchair users to maneuver into and out of rooms.
5. Door furniture, switches, controls and outlets are within reach of and can be used by all.
6. There is potential for future adaptation to dwellings with two or more levels for vertical access by wheelchair users.
7. Walls in toilet and bathrooms are reinforced to enable future fixing of grab rails.

**If included at design stage, features of Universal Design are cost-neutral**

The outcomes however are significant, namely:

- The housing is likely to meet the needs of people of most ages and ability, so they may participate in their community throughout their life;
- A diverse range of households can occupy a dwelling cost-effectively and equitably over its lifetime;
- People, regardless of their age and ability are able to visit and stay in others' homes for an extended period at short notice;
- The dwelling is safe both to work in and to inhabit;
- Usability and aesthetics are mutually compatible and can achieve broad market appeal.

**Universal housing design is a major contributor, with environmental efficiency and affordability, to making communities more sustainable in the future.**

## **CONCLUSION:**

In our original submission, we recommended

**Amendments to the Building Code of Australia to ensure that all new and extensively modified housing, in both the public and the private sector, is built to Universal Design.**

The lack of any national access requirements had precipitated a plethora of guidelines and incentives across state and local governments. While the housing sector is likely to resist any additional regulation of the industry based on a number of issues including cost, the alternative confusion is also expensive and unpalatable.

The Australian Building Codes Board is aware of this impending problem and is already considering the issue.

Other initiatives to increase the supply of accessible housing can be incorporated in the conditions of the First Home Owners Grant.

1. For new housing, a condition of the \$7,000 grant could be the inclusion of accessible design features (listed above).
2. A further \$3,500 could be offered to applicants who purchase existing housing, if the dwelling is modified to include agreed access features.

These initiatives would act as an incentive to the housing industry to include cost-neutral access features to both newly constructed and renovated housing.

**We therefore request that within the development of the final report the housing needs of older people and people with a disability be given particular consideration.**

**We also request that consideration be given to the recommendations that**

- 1. There are amendments to the Building Code of Australia to ensure that all new and extensively modified housing, in both the public and private sector, is built to Universal Design.**
- 2. For new housing, a condition of the \$7,000 First Home Owner's Grant is the inclusion of agreed accessible design features.**
- 3. For existing housing, a further \$3,500 is offered to applicants whose dwelling is modified to include agreed access features.**

**QDHC thanks you once again for this further opportunity to contribute to the deliberations of the Productivity Commission on this crucial issue.**