



RI Australia Network

Taking the Roof off Housing

RI Australia Housing Forum

University of Canberra

27 November 2012

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1. Recommendations

Based on the Forum presentations, feedback and commentary, RI Australia recommends:

1. As Australia has an ageing population and has ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), a stronger national strategy for more accessible and livable housing is urgently required.

Whilst voluntary codes may assist governments and some developers, the general building industry requires a mandatory, regulatory process to ensure implementation.

2. The recommended mandatory, regulatory process should combine available existing resources including Livable Housing Australia Guidelines, relevant Australian Standards and the Building Code of Australia.
3. A mandatory process should also regulate to ensure visitability and accessibility of the surrounding built environments.
4. Housing in remote and First People's communities must be based on effective consultations with all stakeholders at all stages of the housing process.
5. Comprehensive consultation methods being used in Indigenous communities must undergo further study with a view to adapting the methodologies for application to consultation with people with disabilities on their housing requirements.
6. The Energy Efficiency Reform of the Building Code of Australia (National Construction Code Volume 1 & 2¹) needs to be extended so that all residential buildings (Class 1 – 4) incorporate sustainable design criteria in addition to energy efficiency requirements.
7. Additional resources are needed to support further research and development of smart housing and assistive technology applications which will enable people with disabilities and the aged to maintain their lives in existing residences.

¹ <http://www.abcb.gov.au/major-initiatives/energy-efficiency/residential-housing>

2. Background

The RI Australia Network (RI Australia) was established in 2009 and uniquely provides opportunities for all stakeholders to work together to advance the rights and inclusion of people with disabilities.

RI Australia is an Associate Member Organisation of RI Global, a 90 year old global network of government and non-government organisations, service providers, people with disabilities, advocates, consumer groups and individuals promoting, advancing and implementing the rights and inclusion of people with disabilities worldwide. RI comprises over 1,000 member organisations and individual members in 100 countries worldwide.

The RI Australia focus is the Asia Pacific region and rural, Indigenous and remote Australian communities – through programs relating to information exchange, capacity building and effective transition from education to employment and social inclusion. Our objectives and activities include:

- Organise, co-ordinate, sanction and promote initiatives that protect and advance the rights, inclusion, rehabilitation and crucial service for people with disabilities
- Organise and promote international collaboration, policies and legislation that recognise the rights of people with disabilities and their families, including the aims and activities of RI and implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)
- Coordinate and liaise with organisations sharing a common purpose with RI Australia to pursue these rights and inclusion objectives.

The inaugural RI Australia annual forum, *'Making the CRPD work'*, was held in 2010, and provided an introductory information session on the CRPD. Professor Ron McCallum, chair of the UN CRPD Committee was the keynote speaker.

'Clever Business – smart thinking for everyone' was the second annual RI Australia forum. Held at James Cook University in Townsville in 2011 the workshop discussed transition from education to employment with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disabilities in Northern Australia.

3. Introduction

The 2012 RI Australia third annual forum, 'Taking the Roof off Housing', was held in Canberra on 27 November and attended by approximately 50 delegates and 16 presenters. The participants included representatives from State, Territory and Commonwealth government departments concerned with housing and disability, non-government organisations for affordable and accessible housing, disability service providers, Indigenous organisations, access auditors, architects, builders, town planners and designers.

The Forum was designed to bring together a range of stakeholders in order to stimulate discussion about the diverse factors which need to be considered by policy makers and planners in order that housing accessibility and affordability is maximized for both people with disabilities and for our ageing population.

Commencing with a Welcome to Country by Ngunnawal elder, Aunty Agnes Shea, the Forum was officially opened by Senator Jan McLucas, Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Carers, and Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister. Arriving direct from Parliament House, Senator McLucas made the historic announcement that the Parliamentary Caucus had that morning approved the tabling of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) legislation. Senator McLucas announced a grant to Forum presenters, Livable Housing Australia (LHA), for development of a smart phone application to assist in assessment of applications for accessibility accreditation.

4. Forum Themes

The Housing Forum was organised on 4 main themes:

- i. Liveable Housing, Building Codes & Access to Premises Standards
- ii. Indigenous Housing needs
- iii. Sustainability, Community & Inclusion
- iv. Technology including Environmental Control Units & Smart homes

A forum program is at Appendix 1

4.1 *Livable Housing, building Codes & Access to Premises Standards*

The Panel members were: Andrew Aitken, Executive Director of Livable Housing Australia (LHA); Michael Small, Director of Michael Small Consulting and formerly with the Australian Human Rights Commission; Wilhelm Harnisch, CEO of the Master Builders Association (MBA); and David Hallett General Manager of Archicentre.

The panel outlined the rationale for development of the Livable Housing Australia guidelines, giving an overview of their current status and the role that MBA, Archicentre and others play in the implementation of the 3-tiered accessibility accreditation system. The consensus view advocates a grace period to enable the guidelines to be better known and adopted.

The Forum acknowledged that the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) and others, including RI Australia, consider a mandatory regulatory approach should be anticipated in the longer term.

4.2 *Indigenous Housing needs*

The Panel members were: Sylvia Price, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Liaison Officer with Cootharinga North Queensland Ability First; Geoff Barker, PM+D Architects, with experience working in Indigenous communities in WA to provide more appropriate housing, and Jefa Greenaway, architect and educator, founder of Indigenous Architects Victoria with experience consulting in Indigenous communities.

The panel described a number of Indigenous housing initiatives, highlighting the strong positive outcomes which can result when an effective consultation process is conducted in the community with all stakeholders, and when the planning extends to positioning of houses and use of surrounding areas.

Appropriate housing design takes into account both traditional and emerging cultural needs. Use of fixtures suited to location, environment and climatic conditions significantly lower the maintenance needs for occupants.

4.3 Sustainability, Community & Inclusion

The panel members were: Derek Wrigley, a Canberra architect with extensive experience in design of low energy housing and Professor Tony Capon, Head of Discipline, Public Health & Occupational Therapy in the Faculty of Health at the University of Canberra.

The session highlighted the importance of planning and design in minimising energy costs, reducing the impact on the environment, and promoting community coherence through improved visitability and accessibility, all factors which ultimately improve occupants' overall health and wellbeing.

4.4 Technology including Environmental Control Units & Smart Homes

This theme was covered in two segments. In the first part, an overview was given of assistive technologies being installed in housing under development through the 'Growing Older – Living Well' project of the Swedish Institute of Assistive Technology (SIAT). The presentation was provided by Tomas Lagerwall, Senior Advisor to SIAT, and presented by Sue Salthouse in his absence.

This was followed by a demonstration of smart housing technologies jointly presented by Sean Fitzgerald, electronics engineer and chin-controlled wheelchair user, and Dr. Graeme Smith, Executive Director of Ability Technology, participating by Skype video-link from Sydney.

The session demonstrated some of the potential for remote control single-click operation of a range of devices, including Environmental Control Units (ECUs), using wireless and infra-red technology.

5 Discussion

The urgent need for reform of accessibility requirements for all classes of dwelling is brought about by two main drivers. Firstly, Australia has an ageing population.

By 2050 it is estimated that 25% of the Australian population will be age 65 years or older². The Australian Bureau of Statistics Life Tables released in November 2012³ indicate that a man who is 50 today can expect to live another 32 years, with women expected to live to 84. A decade ago the figure was 29.9 years for men. Men who are 65 can expect to live an additional 19 years, and women an additional 22 years⁴. Indigenous Australians are more than twice as likely to die at any age as non-indigenous individuals⁵. The cost of building and maintaining institutions is greater than the cost of enabling people to age in place, with health and wellbeing enhanced where relative independence and existing networks can be maintained.

Secondly, the CRPD and its Optional Protocol were ratified by Australia in 2008 and 2009 respectively, so that Australia now has an obligation to implement all Articles of the Convention. Accessibility, in its fullest interpretation, is identified as a General Principle of the Convention (Article 3) with States Parties having a General Obligation to: *take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to modify or abolish existing laws, regulations, customs and practices that constitute discrimination against persons with disabilities* (Article 4). Article 9 (Accessibility) specifies the identification and elimination of obstacles and barriers to accessibility that apply to: *buildings, roads, transportation and other indoor and outdoor facilities, including schools, housing, medical facilities and workplaces*. The DDA (Clause 23) only requires *access to premises that the public is entitled or allowed to enter or use*, and so is now an incomplete tool for driving the level of accessibility required by the CRPD.

5.1 Livable Housing, building Codes & Access to Premises Standards

The 2010 Access to Premises Standard (APS) incorporated into the Building Code of Australia (BCA) mandates access to public buildings.

² Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS]. (2008). Population projections: Examining population ageing, cited in Centre for Population and Ageing Research (CEPAR), *Neighbourhood Characteristics: Shaping the wellbeing of older Australians*, Research Monograph 2 (July 2012)

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] (2012), *Life Tables*, Cat. No. 3302.0.55.001 - Life Tables, States, Territories and Australia, 2009-2011

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Martin P., Sydney Morning Herald, 9 November 2012, *Catch 82: We're all living longer But can we afford to?*, Professor Michael Sherris, UNSW, accessed online 9 November 2012 at: <http://www.smh.com.au/money/super-and-funds/catch-82-were-all-living-longer-8230-but-can-we-afford-to-20121108-290yl.html>

Class 1b (small boarding/guest houses etc.); Class 2 (residential flat buildings with 2 or more units) and Class 3 (larger guest houses/hotels etc.) are required to have accessible common areas and access to at least one floor.

The DDA and APS do not mandate providing access to and within Class 1a buildings, i.e. single dwellings. Current provisions for accessible or adaptable housing rely on specific control plans or access policies at the various government levels and are different from jurisdiction to jurisdiction.

Adaptable Housing 1995 Standard AS4299 was adopted for the Sydney 2000 Games and provides Class A, B & C adaptable features. AS4299 is called up by governments and is currently under review by Standards Australia. Application of the Standard varies between jurisdictions, e.g. the State Environment Planning Policy [SEPP] (Seniors Living) NSW 2004, as amended, provides a range of housing requirements including AS1428.1, AS28990 & AS4299.

The LHA Guideline was launched in September 2012 as a voluntary code with Silver, Gold & Platinum accessibility accreditation levels and a goal of 100% livable housing in Australia by 2020.

In early November 2012 the Association of Consultants in Access Australia (ACAA) convened a workshop to undertake a comparative review of AS4299 and the LHA Guidelines, and identified a number of anomalies between these two sets of requirements.

RI Australia considers a number of key issues need to be addressed including:

- A reasonable level of adaptable/livable housing should be a mandatory national requirement (in the United Kingdom Building Regulations for Livable Homes mandate a minimum standard of 16 accessibility features which makes housing more accessible for visitors. The features are similar to those in the LHA voluntary code)
- The ageing demographic makes it imperative that this change to mandatory accessibility requirements is commenced within the next review cycle of the Access to Premises Standards
- Increasing the stock of accessible homes will reduce the need for construction of aged care facilities.

RECOMMENDATION 1: *As Australia has an ageing population and has ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), a stronger national strategy for more accessible and livable housing is urgently required.*

Whilst voluntary codes may assist governments and some developers, the general building industry requires a mandatory, regulatory process to ensure implementation.

RECOMMENDATION 2: *The recommended mandatory, regulatory process should combine available existing resources including Livable Housing Australia Guidelines, relevant Australian Standards and the Building Code of Australia.*

RECOMMENDATION 3: *A mandatory process should also regulate to ensure visitability and accessibility of the surrounding built environments.*

5.2 **Indigenous Housing needs**

In remote communities, and especially in First People's communities it is essential that good community consultation processes are undertaken during the planning and construction of housing.

Skilled consultants with planning, design and building expertise may not be available. Where good planning is undertaken, there are positive outcomes for the community, costs are lowered, and maintenance is minimised.

RI Australia considers a number of key issues need to be addressed including:

- The National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing, delivered through the Strategic Indigenous Housing & Infrastructure Program (SIHIP)⁶ is a joint program of the Australian & NT Governments, investing \$672 million 2008 to 2013 in 73 Indigenous communities. Commendably it addresses overcrowding, homelessness, poor housing conditions and the severe housing shortage, but does not include accessibility as a requirement.

⁶ Refer <http://www.sihip.icn.org.au>

- Consistent and enforceable outcomes indicators are needed for all new housing projects in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (both National and State/Territory funded) to ensure consistent delivery of culturally appropriate housing which is also wheelchair accessible.
- In Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, a high level of visitability in the environment around houses should be developed so that wheelchair users have greater access to neighbourhoods.
- Housing contracts need to stipulate use of fixtures appropriate to location so that maintenance needs can be minimised. Current conceptions of high levels of vandalism are incorrect. Property deterioration arises from lack of access to appropriate tradesmen or tools (60%) and poor initial construction (25%). Wilful damage accounts for only 8% of problems⁷.
- Government policy needs to evolve to support and promote economic advancement in remote communities rather than perpetuate the current mentality of protectionism⁸.

RECOMMENDATION 4: *Housing in remote and First People’s communities must be based on effective consultations with all stakeholders at all stages of the housing process.*

RECOMMENDATION 5: *Comprehensive consultation methods being used in Indigenous communities must undergo further study with a view to adapting the methodologies for application to consultation with people with disabilities on their housing requirements.*

5.3 Sustainability, Community & Inclusion

RI Australia considers a number of key issues need to be addressed including:

⁷ 'Aboriginal housing', Insight program, SBS One, 27/10/2009 7.30pm, accessed online at “Creative Spirits” resource: <http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/land/aboriginal-houses>

⁸ Marcia Langton, Boyer Lecture 2, *From Protectionism to Economic Advancement*, 25 November 2012, <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/boyerlectures/new-document/4381992>

- There is an urgent need to build environmentally appropriate housing, with generally north facing orientation, wide eaves or verandas, high ceilings and design to allow cross ventilation. Traditional ways of building in Australia formerly incorporated these features.
- A range of tax or other incentives are needed to stimulate investment in renewable energy adaptations for all classes of dwellings.

RECOMMENDATION 6: *The Energy Efficiency Reform of the Building Code of Australia (National Construction Code Volume 1 & 2⁹) needs to be extended so that all residential buildings (Class 1 – 4) incorporate sustainable design criteria in addition to energy efficiency requirements.*

5.4 **Technology including Environmental Control Units & Smart Homes**

RI Australia considers a number of key issues need to be addressed including:

- Governments need to be responsive to requirements of individuals with high support needs, to provide and maintain higher levels of independence in purpose-built smart houses with remote control assistive technology features.
- Both DisabilityCare Australia and State/Territory Traffic Accident Commissions need to develop expertise in state-of-the-art assistive technologies for housing, and recognise the long-term cost-effectiveness of making such features available to high support needs individuals.
- Funding needs to be made available for research and development of assistive technologies, including improving the availability, reliability and cost effectiveness of Environmental Control Units.
- Smart Homes¹⁰ remote control features should be incorporated to lower and monitor house running costs, and to become a viable tool in improving the environmental sustainability of a house.

⁹ <http://www.abcb.gov.au/major-initiatives/energy-efficiency/residential-housing>

¹⁰ Refer: Smart Home Solutions at <http://www.smarthomes.com.au>

RECOMMENDATION 7: *Additional resources are needed to support further research and development of smart housing and assistive technology applications which will enable people with disabilities and the aged to maintain their lives in existing residences.*

6 RI Australia Inclusion Policy

RI Australia policy is that all events should maximize inclusion for people with disabilities. All publicity and invitations for the event requested notification of individuals' participation requirements at time of registration. The Inspire Centre and location provided wheelchair access and facilities, and an in-built audio induction loop to augment sound for hearing aid users.

Real time captioning, via Skype from Adelaide, enabled Deaf and hearing impaired participants to have more complete access to proceedings. The captioning also provided a transcript of panel presentations and discussion.

The real-time captioning connection was down occasionally, resulting in some gaps in the transcript. A final session presenter was using a Skype feed from Sydney, simultaneous with a PowerPoint presentation and an on-site presenter, and the system requirements could not also support the captioning. Accordingly seamless accessible technology is essential.

7 Forum Participant Feedback

With a full program of presenters, there was limited time for discussion after each panel's presentations. However, there was extensive discussion conducted during the breaks between the sessions. At the close of the day, Evaluation Forms were distributed with feedback received from approximately one third of participants.

A summary of feedback is contained in Appendix 2.

8 Acknowledgements

RI Australia thanks all presenters for their participation in the Forum, many of whom self-funded to participate. RI Australia thanks all participants for constructive involvement in the Forum – and our sponsors, the University of Canberra (UC), House With No Steps (HWNS) and Northcott Disability Services. RI Australia also thanks A/Professor Michele Fleming, UC Dean of Students for hosting the post-forum drinks, provided a further opportunity for networking.

Appendix 1: “Taking the Roof off Housing” Program



RI Australia

“Taking the roof off housing!”

INSPIRE Centre

University of Canberra, Pantowora Rd, Bruce ACT

Tuesday 27 November, 10 am to 5 pm

		Speakers
1000	Welcome delegates	RI Australia Chair Michael Fox
1015	Official Welcome to country	Aunty Agnes Shea
1030	Topic 1: Liveable Housing, Building Codes & Access to Premises Standards Bringing together Human Rights experts who advocated for the Standards, the team who developed the voluntary Livable Housing Design code, Master Builders, and Building Codes Board. Where to from here?	Michael Fox – Facilitator Andrew Aitken (A/CEO Livable Housing Australia) David Hallett (Archicentre) Wilhelm Harnisch (CEO MBA) Michael Small (Small Consulting)
1130 - 1200	Official Opening Jan McLucas & Morning Tea	
1200 - 1300	Topic 2: Indigenous Housing needs Bringing together Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders, designers, environmentalists & researchers to talk over the pluses and minuses of the housing currently being erected in the NT. Are appropriate codes being applied?	Sue Salthouse – Facilitator Geoff Barker (PMDWA) Jefa Greenaway (Greenaway Architects/Indigenous Architects Victoria) Sylvia Price (Cootharinga)
1300 - 1330	Lunch – Catering by Retro Café (University of Canberra)	
1330	Topic 3: Sustainability, Community & Inclusion Why are the external environment and sustainability important for people with disabilities in remote areas and in the suburbs? Who influences construction of truly affordable, accessible housing? Bringing together town planners, sustainability experts, & architects.	Emilia Dellatorre – Facilitator Tony Capon (UC) Derek Wrigley (Research, Solar Architecture)
1430	Sweden’s Technology perspective Handicap Institute of Sweden	Tomas Lagerwall Presented by Sue Salthouse
1445	Topic 4: Technology (Environmental Control Units/Smart homes) For many people with disabilities houses have to be SMART inside too! Technical solutions experts talk to builders about Livable Housing Design on steroids. Environmental Control Units and how they work with users telling their stories.	Steve Williamson – Facilitator Sean Fitzgerald (IT Accessibility Consultant) Dr Graeme Smith (via Skype) (Ability Technology)
1545	Summing up	Michael Fox & Sue Salthouse
1600	Drinks & Networking (hosted by Michele Fleming, Dean of Students, University of Canberra)	



Appendix 2: Forum Participant Feedback

Participant feedback included the following comments and suggestions:

i. Livable Housing Australia Guidelines

The Livable Housing Australia Guidelines would benefit from extending their scope to include visitability and accessibility of the surrounding built environments. The advisability of engaging an access consultant to ensure compliance is built in at house design stage was acknowledged.

It was acknowledged that although the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) spells out the right to accessible housing in Article 9, compliance is limited because the Access to Premises Standards under the Disability Discrimination Act (1992) apply only to public buildings and public areas of accommodation complexes, and that a regulatory approach is necessary to achieve desired outcomes in private housing. The diversity of the disability population is such that economies of scale in quantity modular production would be unfeasible. 'Universal' design thus provides an effective way of providing for the widest range of accessibility needs.

ii. Indigenous Housing needs

This panel highlighted the importance of effective consultation in all situations, irrespective of the location or cultural background of stakeholders. Participation was seen as a key factor in successful design. In Indigenous communities the importance of respect and economic empowerment in contrast to a former paternalistic approach was recognised through the Forum.

Forum participants were keen to have further opportunities to learn about the work being done on housing in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Panelists Greenaway and Barker came to grips with the forum title (as did Fitzgerald in the Technology panel).

It was acknowledged that, in general, Indigenous housing is typically designed for a nuclear family and not suitable for extended families.

iii. Sustainability, Community & Inclusion

Taking a holistic approach to design can minimise social isolation and disconnectedness. Although livable and sustainable housing can be achieved with simple design solutions, it was noted that some technologies require increased initial capital investment to gain the long term benefits of low running costs, and this sometimes has to be balanced by reducing building size.

iv. Forum Structure

Although the forum linked the diverse but multiple unified themes, the program was crowded and participants wanted both more discussion time at the conclusion of panel presentations, plus better rehearsal of the technology used to minimize outages. However, for some participants, their introduction to real-time captioning was a positive experience.

v. Pre- and Post-forum information

More detailed information could have been provided to participants prior to the event. A request was made for conference presentations and proceedings to be made available on the website. More information is needed on private householders/homeowners who need to change/modify/build homes to suit a family member with a disability.

vi. General

The day was professionally organized, smoothly run and beneficial. All speakers were viewed as excellent presenters, giving their perspectives on policy, design, community, culture, health and wellbeing. This enabled both an integrated 'big picture' view as well as extensive detail in many areas.

Michael Fox
RI Australia Chair & Director

Sue Salthouse
RI Australia Treasurer & Director