**Transcript**

Home Modifications Panel Discussion

(Lunchtime Conversation #003)

8 June 2023

Home Modifications Panel Discussion, the third in a series of lunchtime conversations held on 8th June 2023 through the Opening the Door Project.

Acknowledgement of Australia's First Nations People.

We believe that everyone in the community is valued.

This includes all people from different cultures, abilities, beliefs and more.

We acknowledge the deep relationship that Australia's First Nations people have with their traditional lands and water.

Furthermore, we recognise their rights and responsibilities as custodians, caring for the land and waters.

We also recognise the harm done to their communities through and since colonisation.

We will include, listen, empower and support First Nations communities as we work towards more respect and reconciliation between us.

An overview of this forum.

The challenges in accessing home modifications are ever present for people with disability, from obtaining funding through to making sure that they are properly provided.

For people in private rental, this can be even more difficult.

In this forum, we talked about how to access home modifications here in Australia.

We compared this with home modifications in the United Kingdom.

We also talked about the need for reforms in the private rental market.

The panel participants included the following.

Paul Smith, Director of Foundations, a United Kingdom based organisation.

Emily Hunter, the Business Support Manager for Foundations.

Nader Zoljalali, Principal of National Disability Building Services and a board member of Home Modifications Australia.

Leo Patterson Ross, the Chief Executive Officer of the Tenants' Union of New South Wales.

John Engeler, the Chief Executive Officer of Shelter New South Wales and also the chair of National Shelter.

And Mel Harrison, Peer Network Engagement Officer with Rights & Inclusion Australia, as well as being a director of organisation Sitting Low, Reaching High.

The facilitator for this forum was Michael Bleasdale, the Executive Officer of Rights & Inclusion Australia, as well as being the Company Secretary of Home Modifications Australia.

All right, welcome, everybody.

My name's Michael Bleasdale.

I'm the Executive Officer of Rights & Inclusion Australia.

And I'd like to begin this session, which is Home Modifications Panel Discussion, by acknowledging the traditional custodians on the lands on which we're meeting here today.

Rights & Inclusion Australia acknowledges the deep relationship that Australia's First Nations people have with their tradition lands and waters and their rights and responsibilities as custodians of these lands whose sovereignty was never ceded.

And I'd like to pay my respects to elders past and present and to First Nations people who may be joining us here today.

For the most part, we are coming to you from the land of the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, but I do know that there are people from all across many different lands across the country present here today.

And I'd like to acknowledge my colleagues, David Havercroft, who is coming to you from Ngunnawal land in the ACT, and Mel Harrison, who's coming from Gadigal land also here in Sydney.

The forum today is the first of the lunchtime forums that we're doing as part of the Opening The Door Project.

This project has been funded through an information linkages and capacity building grant from the Department of Social Services.

And I'd like to acknowledge our partners, National Shelter, and their state and territory affiliates, and Enliven Community.

So, today's format.

It's a panel discussion.

We've managed to get some excellent guests to talk about home modifications in Australia and from overseas, to provide you with information that can assist you, and also to discuss how we can do better to make sure more people get access to home modifications.

Our panellists will provide some information and then we will ask questions of them individually and as a group.

I will facilitate the questions, with some prepared already, to ensure we convey as much information as possible.

But I will be taking questions from the audience, as well.

I'd just like to briefly introduce all of the panellists before we go on.

I have with me Paul Smith, who's the Director of Foundations UK.

And I'll explain a little bit more about Foundations later.

And also Emily Hunter, who's the Business Development Manager at Foundations UK.

On-screen, we have Leo Patterson Ross, who's the CEO of the Tenants' Union of New South Wales.

And we also have John Engeler, who's the CEO of Shelter New South Wales and the Chair of National Shelter.

We have Nader Zoljalali, who's the owner and Principal of National Disability Building Services.

And we have Mel Harrison, who is working for Rights & Inclusion Australia on the Opening The Door Project and who is also Director of her own business, Sitting Low, Reaching High.

I'd like to just also, at this point, identify that, as well as the role that I hold here in Rights & Inclusion Australia, I am on the board as Company Secretary of Home Modifications Australia, known as Moda, as was its previous CEO between 2014 and 2017.

So, we've got a lot to cover.

And what I thought I would do right at the beginning is just sort of put home modifications in context and explain a bit, and then we'll go into a bit more detail before we get into question and answer.

So, at a time when huge reforms are taking place in the disability and age care sectors, more and more of the focus is upon the home and housing as the place in which all people want to live in our community.

Rights & Inclusion Australia has been very much involved in the push for universal housing design in the National Construction Code to make more housing of all types more available to people with diverse requirements.

Now that we've made some headway on that, we need to focus on the here and now, upon ensuring that increasingly we make the existing housing stock accessible and available to those who need it now.

The discussion today will look at what modifications are, how they need to be done and done well, their benefits and the cost of not doing them, but its primary focus is upon providing information to you watching about how to go about getting them and working with landlords and housing providers and funding bodies and professionals to get approvals for them to be done and to make sure they're done well.

Unfortunately, there still remain a good many barriers to accessing modifications in the first place and too many examples of poor practice.

The stories about the consequences of getting modifications done badly or by providers who do not know what they're doing should alert people to the need to choose providers wisely, and we'll look at some ways to do that, as well as what to do to make sure work is progressing as it should be and where to turn if it is not.

I just wanted to start with a definition which is straight out of Wikipedia, and I think David's gonna put that link up in the chat.

A definition of home modifications.

Home modifications are defined as environmental interventions aiming to support activity performance in the home.

More specifically, home modifications often are changes made to the home environment to help people with functional disability or impairment to be more independent and safe in their own homes and reduce any risk of injury to themselves or their caregivers.

Examples of home modifications include installing ramps and rails, altering kitchen and bathroom areas, such as relocating switches and lowering bench heights, and installing emergency alarms.

Now, you can find as many definitions of home modifications as you wish by going on Google, but that's a fairly good one, I think, one that we can all agree on.

So I think we all know broadly what they are.

But it's important to note that there are no Australian or other standards which apply to home modifications.

There's no one standard way to do a home modification.

An important component is that a home modification is a customised intervention, which takes account of the person and what they need to function with maximum independence in the place in which they live.

This is why, in some instances, it's necessary to have a trained professional undertake an assessment, even for a relatively straightforward modification, such as the installation of a grab rail in the bathroom.

That said, doing the building and the trades work for a modification does require adherence to Australian and other international standards, for example in the slope of a ramp, which cannot be of a gradient of more than 1 in 14, and slip resistance for tiles, which have to enable people not to slip in wet or outdoor areas, but at the same time not to be too sticky to prevent people from moving across surfaces.

And the National Construction Code has to be followed when significant work is done at home.

Understanding these codes and standards and also working with occupational therapists and with participants is one of the characteristics of a home modifications provider.

Finally, modifications are, by their nature, expensive often, and the majority of them in Australia are done using government funding of some description.

Whilst it's not the only funding stream, the NDIS is the most obvious stream used to fund modifications for people with disability under the age of 65.

And so definitions and information about how to access home modifications from this point will reflect the advice that's provided by the National Disability Insurance Agency on what they will fund and how people can apply.

So with that, I now want to just introduce Nader.

Nader Zoljalali is the owner and Principal Director of National Building Development Services, operating as an independent project management consultant in Adelaide, assisting NDIS participants and their allied health professionals to navigate the NDIS home modifications processes.

He's a chartered professional engineer who's led multi-disciplinary teams in Australia, as well as many other countries, and has established project management offices for government and private organisations, delivering highly-complex projects and programs.

And Nader, you're going to give a very brief overview of minor modifications in a single slide, just to provide that definition...

a bit more clarity to the definition that I provided earlier.

- In this part of the discussion, Nader Zoljalali presents a single PowerPoint slide entitled Minor Home Modifications.

This provides an overview of the two levels of minor home modifications, level one, basic modifications, and level two, standard modifications.

Accompanying those notes are a series of images showing items such as grab rails and simply modifications to be undertaken in the home.

- The National Disability Insurance Scheme have two classes of home modifications, namely minor home modifications and complex home modifications.

Michael gave us an oversight of complex home modifications, which we'll get to.

The minor home modifications are in general spread over two categories, which are the very basic ones that a handyman can perform, and there are the more complex minor modifications which need planning and which need a more thorough consideration.

The simple and straightforward changes, that can provide ease, accessibility and convenience, such as grab rails, hand rails, lever doors and lever taps, and magnetic door catches of this sort are in the basic modifications category.

And NDIS participants can usually use their core funding to procure this type of modification.

The standard ones encompass a much broader range and they're slightly more complex.

They'll involve minor alterations to the physical environment to improve accessibility and convenience, such as ramps, such as mixer taps, closing... openings, or widening door openings, which they require, as I said earlier, planning and some coordination to ensure that they meet the specific needs.

In both categories, or subcategories, it's highly recommended that an occupational therapist is involved and oversees the choice and the performance of these minor modifications.

Again, with the standard minor modifications, participants may use their core or capital funding to procure these.

So that's a general wrap-up of minor modifications.

- Thanks, Nader.

So, just to ask a question of you, the categories are distinguished for the NDIS by cost?

- Yes, that's correct, Michael.

It's cost and complexity, generally.

- Yeah.

- They have recently revised the thresholds of what separates minor modifications from major modifications.

With the minor modifications category, the cost has been increased to $20,000, which requires just straight quotations from suppliers.

And with complex home modifications, which is a totally different process, the cost can go...

is upwards of $20,000, and I have had projects running into hundreds of thousands of dollars.

So it's horses for courses, as they say.

But generally, the cost threshold is $20,000.

That's what separates a minor from a major.

- OK. Thank you. And even with some of these minor modifications, it is advisable to...

and a requirement to have an occupational therapist's assessment?

- Absolutely. It's to follow best practices model.

Within minor modifications, there may...

..difficulties be encountered during installation, such as potential asbestos or structural support for a grab rail, so if a participant elects to procure the minor modification directly, then that participant lacks the professional support that could identify or flag those difficulties, those potential difficulties, and find or suggest solutions.

A professional, an occupational therapist, is well aware of those potential issues and can certainly be very helpful if any of those obstacles are encountered in the course of providing the minor modification.

- Thanks, Nader.

I just wanted to assure the audience, we will be able to come back and look at any questions people might have around minor modifications as we progress through the discussion today.

But I wanted to gradually introduce all of the panellists.

So thanks, Nader.

I have with me, as I said before, on my left, or right on your screen, I think, Paul Smith, who's the Director of Foundations in the UK since 2015.

And he spent, after 25 years in local government managing and commissioning a range of housing services.

He's one of the authors of the independent review of the funding mechanism in the UK, which is called the Disabled Facilities Grant, in 2018 and the subsequent guidance, published in 2022, both of which emphasise the importance of good design alongside function.

And Emily Hunter joined Foundations back in 2017 and now heads up their central services, with direct oversight in incoming calls from elderly people with disability and vulnerable people living in the UK.

So I'll be bringing Paul and Emily into the conversation as we go through.

But I just wanted to... The definition there of minor modifications, I know you call them adaptations in the UK, does that kind of... ring bells for you?

Do you have a similar distinction there between minor and major modifications when you do these adaptations?

- Yeah, so the legislation in the UK is split between things that are funded through Social Services and things that are funded through Housing.

So minor modifications are usually under 1,000, funded through Social Services, and major is over 1,000, funded through the housing teams.

- OK.

- But that's generally the distinction.

- It's quite an interesting distinction.

We'll probably come back to that.

So in Australian terms, that would be that NDIS and Age Care would be only for the minor modifications, and more structural major modifications would actually be handled by a team that's actually dedicated to housing.

- Yes.

- Yeah, all right. That's really interesting. We might come back to that.

So, what I'd like to do now, though, and because we have another couple of panellists to introduce, I'd like to introduce Leo Patterson Ross, who's the CEO of Tenants' Rights Service New South Wales, which is the main resourcing body for tenants' advice and advocacy services and the community legal centre, specialising in New South Wales residential tenancies law.

And also John Engeler, who's the CEO of Shelter New South Wales, which is the state's peak body in the housing policy and advocacy space, and chair of National Shelter's Executive Committee.

John's been involved in the formation, development and operation of social, affordable and specialist housing for most of his professional life, having spent a number of years in the private, public and community sectors.

And I want to look initially at an area which I think has been problematic for a long period of time, which is the issue of providing home modifications to people who need them but who are living in rental accommodation.

And I'll go straight to you, Leo, for some comments from you, and then we can throw it open to questions.

- Thank you. And thanks so much for having me here.

So, not to add in another definition of minor modifications, but the Tenancy Act really does make a second distinction when we talk about minor modifications.

There's slightly different systems in different states.

Most states have been moving towards a...

..a way of allowing tenants, generally, not specifically with disability, but generally to make small modifications to the property, that either they don't have to seek consent for or the landlord is restricted from withholding consent when they do seek it.

And these things, some of them have come from particular issues, so a particularly famous, or infamous, case was a child was harmed in Western Australia by falling furniture.

And so a reasonable modification that cannot be refused is securing furniture in that way.

Disability modifications are often mentioned in these systems.

Frequently, as people have mentioned, because they are potentially more extensive, they often don't fall into the category of the minor alterations and they generally are in the more major modifications.

But in Victoria, for instance, it is not permitted for a landlord to withhold consent for disability modifications that have been recommended by an occupational therapist and meet a particular list in the Equal Opportunities Act there.

But in New South Wales, we don't have that.

If it doesn't fit within quite a discrete list of types of changes, then the owner can withhold consent.

Disability discrimination law does have a factor here.

There is the reasonable adjustments idea in discrimination law that technically applies, but the barrier has mostly been that owners also have a defence against discrimination breaches that if it causes them unjustifiable hardship to facilitate the adjustment, they're not required to make changes.

For people in social housing, so in public housing, government owned and managed or community housing, there is a greater obligation to meet the discrimination laws, and that has made it a lot easier.

And in both sectors, there's generally, actually, a commitment to fund the modifications separately to NDIS funding, although NDIS funding has certainly made it easier for some people to get things approved.

But I did attach, I think we can put it in the link, that there are still problems in those sectors where the process of gaining...

..approval for the modification is often taking a lot longer, and the ombudsman report talks about people who've had to wait more than a year, living in a property that was not suitable for their needs, when the guideline was 30 days, that that would be determined and acted on.

So in the private renting sector, really, the biggest barriers are that, like everybody, private renting is insecure, you don't get to stay in a home for very long, and you don't have a lot of power in the relationship as a consumer.

And so the length of tenure has meant that, for a lot of people, it's already difficult enough to find a home that may be suitable, that doesn't have too many stairs or stairs at all, or other features, but even once you're in, you have no real guarantee that you're gonna be there more than 6 or 12 months, and so if you're having to fund modifications yourself, even out of something like NDIS funding, if you're having to do that every 6, 12 months, that really can eat into the plan and eat into your capacity.

That's the really basic problem that, in different ways, affects many renters, but this is a particular way that it affects people with disability.

I might leave it there and we can come back to more detail as we go.

- Thanks, Leo. Is there anything you wanted to add to that, John, before I ask some specific questions?

- Just to top and tail with what Leo said...

And thank you very much for this opportunity.

I hope you can hear me OK.

Greetings to everyone.

Great to have this opportunity to really talk about such an important issue.

Just one thing, Leo's absolutely right, when we otherwise would reasonably expect that the social housing provider, whether it's community housing or the government's, in our case, Department of Communities and Justice, the figures I got yesterday indicate that, despite the need, and it's demonstrable what the need would otherwise be, I think in the last four years, they've averaged about 11.6 million per year doing modifications, and in a good year, managed to do about 2,500 properties.

So given the general correlation between people who might otherwise reside in properties that are social housing properties and the need for modification, it's not a big number.

And we might be able to explain it away to do with COVID and all sorts of things, but even over four years, it's more like 2,500 properties per year, an average spend of under 5K, and a total spend of about 11.6 million each year for the last four years.

What that indicates is that it's modest.

It's less than about 2% of the stock that you would think.

And I think the big challenge for all of us, you touched on it, Michael, the further you go back, the older the stock, the greater the challenge.

So if they're the numbers, that's probably something we would argue is just nowhere near the rate you would reasonably need it to be.

And these aren't people who might otherwise be covered by NDIS.

There's a lot of people here for whom this will be the only opportunity to have their property modified.

So that's just an interesting take.

Even the 150,000-odd properties that are owned by the state in its various guises aren't really keeping up with the demand that you would expect for modifications, even of the modest type.

- Thanks, John. And just to clarify, you're talking about New South Wales?

- Sorry, yeah, that's wearing my New South Wales hat, yep.

Yeah, not nationally.

We could extrapolate out the figures, but I dare say, apart from a couple of outliers, that's possibly pretty typical.

- Just to clarify, also, something you said there, Leo, about the unacceptable delays, sometimes over a year, is that a delay within the mechanisms of the housing department or is it related to the potential funder of the home modification or a combination of both?

- No, pretty directly on the processes of gaining the approval from the housing provider.

So that ombudsman report is specifically about public housing...

- Right.

- ..and some of the delays that were flagged was conversations between the management of the property, so a different government department, and the actual owner of the property, so communication there, but also just responding.

So when the OT put in a report, that it took several weeks, several months sometimes, to respond to the new input from the consumer.

So very much on the conversation about what was needed and gaining the approval for it.

Not really about the funding itself.

Much more about the conversation about what was even needed, which, as I said, should be within 30 days, according to their own time limits.

And that was something that the ombudsman was very clear was achievable.

You know, it's a reasonable timeframe to expect, the 30 days.

- Thank you. Look, at this point, I might just go to Paul again and just see what you've heard there about how difficult it is, even in public and community housing, to get it.

What are the sort of comparable stats in England?

Is it easier, you know, to get a home adaptation if you're in a rental property there?

- Erm, the property profiles look a bit different in England, where 60% of properties are owned, are public housing of some sort.

Most adaptations go into unoccupied properties, but the proportion of people living in social housing, or public housing, that do need an adaptation is considerably higher than the other tenures.

And there can be difficulties in terms of there's a shortage of stock, so landlords want to make the best use of that stock.

They don't always think that it's necessarily right to put adaptations or modifications into what they would otherwise see as a general needs family home.

So in those cases, they, on more than one occasion, would refuse permission and potentially expect the person to move, which I think we've heard is probably similar here.

- Yeah.

David, sorry.

- I just literally put my hand up, Michael.

Just thought I'd relay one comment that was put into the chat feed by one of the people attending from the Northern Territory.

They noted that the NDIS should also provide an accessible standard for supported independent living housing.

Up here in the NT, owners use the client's funding to upgrade the house, while in the meantime charging exorbitant rent, which is clearly unacceptable.

So just a comment there.

- Yeah. And this gets into who actually provides the funding to do the modification. We are very reliant, aren't we, in this country upon people's individualised funds, to the extent that it becomes probably difficult for people who don't have access to those kinds of social care funds to be able to get access to home mods.

In terms of... Back to New South Wales, back to Australia, are there any sort of ideas that we could implement to make it easier for tenants of social and/or community housing to push the case for home modifications when they require it?

I mean, are there any good examples of good practice that you're aware of that will be of use to anybody online at the moment about how they would approach their housing provider to push the case for having a home modification installed?

- So, I think one thing to say is that, to their credit, the government received that ombudsman's report and are reviewing their processes in response, and we know that there is quite a lot of work there.

It also came about seven months before an election and one of the commitments in the election from the now Labour government was to merge the two departments that had been separated.

So that may help.

We can never trust bureaucracy completely to get things right, but it may help with some of that communication.

But it also gives a new opportunity to set some of the standards, to set some of the expectations anew.

So I think that putting the case to them firmly that this is clearly...

their obligations to assist to make sure a property's modified is very clearly an obligation that they hold.

They have been quite firmly...

..spoken to by the ombudsman.

So it's very clear that this was an unacceptable state of play and they need to show how they're doing better.

So I think there's gonna be a lot of pressure if modifications aren't being addressed quite quickly, quite reasonably.

More broadly, I think that having a...

As I said, public housing and the NDIS principles make clear that where they are able to fund it, they should be doing that.

It shouldn't be coming out of the NDIS funding initially.

But having those additional resources, if they're available, can help.

Having very clear OT reports that are not...

Sorry, sometimes in casework, we've found that reports have given a range of options that sort of speak to the principle of what the person needs and not made very specific, clear recommendations, and that has allowed for some equivocation around how to meet that principle.

It's much more useful for the OT to be very clear about, "This is the solution I recommend." And so sometimes you have to go back to them to say that.

But that's been a feature in some of the debates.

So that would be a very practical thing to do.

Ultimately, I think we do just need stronger regulatory... structures to say these things need to be allowed.

And particularly if the owner is not funding it, then the cost of doing the work is with the tenant and the work should generally be allowed.

But there are, I think, some concerns that owners have around, "Will it be removed at the end of the tenancy?" "Will it affect the ability to rent out the place into the future?" And actually, generally, I think that the answer will be that, in fact, modifications generally would improve the value of a property.

It opens up the number of people who can move in and so on.

And if they're done well, they look good.

You know, no-one hates a ramp, for instance.

It's convenient for everyone in that accessibility, inclusivity route. So, yeah.

I think there's more education, though, perhaps in the sector.

- Just to be clear, though, a tenant of public housing and/or community housing would have some rights to have a home modification installed, by your understanding, and therefore if they were facing obstacles with that, they could come to yourself at the Tenants' Union and seek some assistance?

- Yes, ourselves or disability advocates.

Often because of the need to also consider some of those technical, you know, considerations, disability advocates are also very powerful and very capable at these kind of discussions.

- Yeah. All right.

- Michael, can I just quickly jump in there?

Again, really lovely, practical topping out there from what Leo's just said.

So when it comes to social housing, of whatever ilk, we've made the recommendation to government, when they were in opposition, that one of the really breakthrough things they could do is there are just some certain things that tend to fit into the category of good for modifications, that are not quite universal, but are certainly broad in their application.

So, for example, if there's a property that's become vacant, there's no reason why, as part of the normal upgrade of that property as it gets ready for its next tenant, it can't just have a grab rail, a hand rail, checking for thresholds.

If that stuff can be done pretty routinely, there's no reason to wait for the tenant to move in, then to get the OT assessment, then to wait three months.

As part of good maintenance, this could be done pre-emptively.

That's not to suggest that everyone has the same experience of what they need.

But there's enough commonality where we could get in early, do it while the property's vacant, whilst it's waiting. Don't wait for it to be tied to the specific tenant.

And the other thing to Leo's point, if these things are done well and they're done with a bit of a nod and an eye to the design, somebody should be able to walk into a property, in the same way that we go, "Wow, it's got fly screens, wow, it's got a security door," it's got this, "Wow, it's got grab rails." We almost need to turn the culture around to, "This is a positive thing.

Isn't this great?" That's something that we all probably need to work on and I'm hoping that sort of flipping of the dial is something that we can look forward to seeing happening more and more with existing social stock as well as new stock.

It's certainly loudly trumpeted when hobless showers are a matter of course for new stock.

We should be able to say, "And look how many old properties that we converted no longer have hobless showers..." - Thanks, John. I think something you mentioned there, cos we've covered, then, social and community housing, but one thing that's become evident to me in the course of this project is that, actually, the majority of people with disability who rent are renting in private rental.

And that is, of course, a much harder nut to crack, I think.

But I don't suppose we're going to crack it today, to be honest, but I'm thinking about some of those issues of aesthetics, better design, and making that appealing.

But I'm just wondering if there was any thoughts that you had, and chime in at any time, Paul and Emily, as well, that anyone has about what we can do to encourage those who own private rental properties to pre-emptively, as you've described, John, do some of those accessible modifications, but also to be more accepting of doing those modifications upon request.

Because my understanding is that people in private rental properties who require modifications find them very difficult to get them, and they're also struggling because the NDIA knows that landlords are reluctant.

They're also reluctant to fund them in the first place because it's seen as a poor investment.

So without going into too much detail, we don't have too much time, but are there any sort of examples that you know of that could help somebody in that situation get the modification they need if they're living in a private rental situation?

- Sorry, I'm blanking a little bit.

It is difficult.

It's a very difficult area. Erm...

I think that the...

One of the big problems we have in addressing this is the profile of the owners.

And so because we have 70% of owners own one property, they don't have a huge cash flow behind them, that they're very resistant to treating their investment as an essential service, that it adapts to people's needs, that is responsive to community needs.

And often it comes from a worry about their own financial position, now or in 20 years.

And that can sometimes be difficult because if you do own property, you are generally significantly more well off than other people.

But that doesn't mean that you're able to fund the kind of modifications, the kind of...

So there needs to be funding from elsewhere.

And there needs to be reassurance, I think.

But longer-term, you know, as design standards improve the construction...

..you know, that's about a systemic change.

A similar systemic change is about how people are investing in property and putting them into better sort of situations, maybe encouraging quite a lot of people not to be individually responsible for the properties.

Because in the short-term, it is very difficult.

It basically does mean pouring money in from outside.

That's what helps, although even then, we still get quite a lot of resistance because of perceived future maintenance needs or perceived future issues with the property.

So I don't, unfortunately, have a magic wand yet.

- I didn't think there would be one, to be honest.

But I think, at this point, what it's pointing to is, because it's a big systemic issue, it really is unfortunately down to individuals and their ability to negotiate with their individual landlords or property managers around this stuff.

And I think it's probably beholden on us and others in this space to be, I think, promoting examples where that's happened and happened well.

I think there is some issues around good design.

I think some property owners baulk at...

..their perception of what a home modification is, that it renders their home looking like a hospital or something like that.

Whereas you've already talked, John, about hobless showers and things.

There are elements of really fine design that's in there.

So it's actually then beholden on the NDIA also to recognise what they want to achieve, which is they want to have a legacy of accessible homes in private and other rental markets, and therefore they should be mindful of the quality of the finish so that it encourages landlords, in the first instance, to put them in, and then to retain them, even if the person moves on.

So I think a lot of work to do, but there may be some clues there as to how people can, you know, argue for that in their plan.

Did you have something to add to that?

- We were in Brisbane yesterday and we saw two amazing homes that had been purpose-built for wheelchair users, but you couldn't really tell.

If you were going in, you couldn't really tell that they had been.

And that kind of level of universal design, if we can make that mainstream, would go a long way to reduce the need to modify subsequently.

- So that gets down to that quality of design and build, as well.

And, sorry, Mel, you're coming in and then...

- Yeah, I was just gonna add something.

So, one of the things that I always come back to, being someone with a disability and working in the disability sector, that it's just the importance of that awareness around universal design and how important that is.

And when often we talk about the NDIS, people will often go, "Well, I'm using it," or, "I don't need to know about it because I don't use it," et cetera, but when we think about we're an aging population in Australia which essentially means that we've got 4.4 million people across the country with disability, and 11.5%, or eight years of our lives, everyone's gonna live with some form of disability.

So that essentially shows that universal design is important for everybody, either for themselves directly or for family members or their friends, whoever.

So I just think that's important.

And when we talk about, like, making places, like, looking good, I think often when we think about home modifications, people's minds go directly to clinical, hospital-looking, disability, et cetera.

And, like myself, I've got modifications to my house, but you wouldn't know.

It's a disability modification to the house, why should it look clinical?

And, you know, people with disability are still humans forefront and they want to live like everybody else, as well.

- Yeah. Thanks for that, Mel.

Yeah, so I think there's lots more to be done in this space, including... we haven't really started, I don't believe, in trying to educate the private landlords and what have you.

We did, in the course of this project, have some useful feedback from people at real estate institutes.

They're wanting to at least begin to market homes that are accessible.

I think people are beginning to realise that there is some utility to having knowledge about the quality of a design of a home, especially to be able to age in.

So small steps, but hopefully something big can grow from it.

David, your hand was up first, and then Nader's.

- Thanks, Michael.

I just thought I'd relay a comment from the chat feed.

And for those who didn't spot it, I did put some links through that Leo had provided previously, both the Tenants' Union of New South Wales, but also for other like organisations around Australia.

So please reach out to those.

There was a mention there that disability advocacy, sorry, disability advocates are mostly at capacity already at present, and I think many of us would know that, and that there is real difficulty in finding the right people who can actually support people in need.

So there's...

And appreciating that, I'm assuming, Leo, that the Tenants' Unions themselves are also always typically verging on being at capacity if they're not already there, so there's clearly some funding issues to be dealt with by government, I suspect.

And just further to your point, Michael, about...

Well, we've been hearing this messaging around difficulties for people in private rentals for some time and clearly, this is a comment from me, really, there's a need for the NDIS to go in to bat, I think, for participants that it's funded to support...

..around the systemic issues around the private rental market and, actually, a bit of a marketing campaign, really, to those private landlords that we haven't seen any signs of yet.

Anyway, that's my two bob.

- Thanks, David.

So, I'll come to you, Nader, and then after you've spoken, I'm actually gonna throw to you anyway to give us a bit of information about major mods. So go ahead and then feel free to launch into your presentation afterwards.

- Sure. Thanks, Michael.

Just wanted to mention that the issues with accessibility in the new stock is a work in progress.

With the introduction of the new National Construction Code and the universal design standards being implemented across the country, you know, each state has its own bite at it, but over a reasonably short period of time, the new stock will be more adaptable and more desirable for people with special needs.

So that's one thing to look forward to.

In terms of old stock, you know, the grind continues, and I suppose Leo and David and everybody else who's a stakeholder in this area will continue to advocate for funding and for, you know, for provision of modifications to exist in the old stock.

Having said that, if I may, I'll just quickly go over the complex home modification process.

I will do this very briefly and...

..will take questions later, if there are any.

So I'm gonna share my screen.

- In this part of the discussion, Nader Zoljalali presents six PowerPoint slides to provide an overview of NDIS-funded complex home modifications.

The five key slides detail each of these stages.

Stage one is Assessment and Planning.

Stage two is Design and Documentation.

Stage three is Approvals and Funding.

Stage four is Construction and Installation.

And the final slide is for stage five, Completion and Evaluation of the home modification works.

- This is based around the funding by the NDIS, but it generally does apply to other sorts of funding, different from state to state.

There are five stages, as you can see on the slide.

Assessment and Planning, Design and Documentation, Approvals and Funding, Construction and Installation, and Completion and Evaluation.

The first stage involves...

..an assessment of the participant's needs in terms of mobility, accessibility and daily living activities and challenges.

The...

The work is done usually through a joint scoping visit on-site with the occupational therapist and the building project manager, who will look at the building, develop a concept, design floor plans for the areas and discuss the needs and discuss also the possible modifications that can be provided in terms of structural...

..structural needs and structural requirements for those modifications and also suitability to provide the accessibility and independence within the environment.

Once this joint scoping visit is carried out and the assessment is done, then the Design and Documentation stage kicks in, which involves...

which is basically a professional technical area of the process, and it involves creating floor plans, architectural drawings and specifications, and in some instances, This is all to ensure that the modifications are clearly communicable and understandable to contractors and all stakeholders, which is the platform or the basis for a smooth implementation of the planned modifications.

Once this is done, then the Approvals and Funding stage comes in.

As you may guess from the photo on the slide, it's a pretty intense stage where, based on the Design and Documentation, permits and approvals need to be obtained from authorities.

And then once those are secured, then funding through NDIS is applied.

The funding can also be explored through other government and initiatives through various forms that may be available to the participant.

I've underlined the bottom paragraph there, that it's crucial to navigate the administrative process efficiently to ensure the necessary and timely financial support for the project.

And I heard a mention of long periods of time taken for the approvals.

With regards to NDIS home modifications, those delays are usually caused by not giving the care and attention to the administrative process that is due.

And those delays are pretty much preventable, you know, if done properly in the first place.

Once the approvals are obtained and secured, then the tendering process commences, where qualified contractors are invited to submit their bids.

They all provide their schedule of rates and prices based on the design documentation and specifications that the project manager has created.

The project manager awards the contract to the best value for money, not necessarily the cheapest price, and makes a recommendation to the...

sorry, we've already gone past that stage, but awards the contract to the contractor and the work begins.

The project manager's job is to closely supervise and ensure that the quality assurance is there and time schedules are complied with and the installation process goes according to the plan.

Once the work is completed, an evaluation is carried out, where the participant actually tries out the modifications and assesses them.

The occupational therapist, along with other professionals and stakeholders, carers, and the project manager and the occupational therapist, as well, look at the modifications.

If there are any adjustments to be made, they're decided on the spot.

And this is all to ensure that everything is...

..performs as planned and as designed and satisfies all the needs.

This stage also involves documentation and closing out the project.

The contractors' payment schedules will be finalised and payments will be certified and the defects liability period will actually be kicked off, and this is all to ensure that everybody is happy with the modifications.

And the maintenance and the defects liability periods are also clarified and put into place.

And that, basically, takes care of the process.

There are subsets to each one of those processes...

..which are unique to each case and dealt with as they arise.

- That's terrific. Thank you, Nader.

And what I'm going to do, because we're a bit pushed for time, I'm gonna move on shortly to talk about some experiences that some people have had with complex modifications, and that might be an opportunity for you to make some comment on that.

But before I did, I just wanted to ask whether or not...

..you knew from your own experience, and you are a person who provides this level of project management to complex home modifications, is there a difference in experiencing home modifications if you're living in a region, rural and remote area to those living in metropolitan areas?

Because we did note at the beginning, there are people online today who are from some of those regional areas, and I just wondered if it was a differential experience for people living in those areas.

- My experience has been of a lack of resources in regional areas.

Getting an occupational therapist and sourcing builders are mainly the issues.

The services that we provide, project management, doesn't really happen on site.

So we're quite accessible and available to oversee the process.

And the challenge is to find builders, tradespeople and occupational therapists that are local and that are familiar with the participants' needs and stay with the participant.

There's a high level of turnover within the occupational therapy profession.

And also the prices and the cost of building is quite substantially higher than metropolitan areas.

So these are a few challenges that regional areas face.

But having said that, we do provide...

..we do look after them, or cover them, for complex home modifications.

- Yeah, so there's no denial of access to it, it's just the practicalities of getting the professions there. So thank you.

There was a mention in the chat there, David, about whether or not there is access to sort of a very orderly checklist, if you like, around what's involved in complex home modifications.

I am aware of NDIA publications that would list that, but maybe we can provide...

do a bit more research into that and provide people with the best resources after the meeting is over.

I'd now like to introduce again Mel Harrison, who, as I said at the beginning, is working with us at Rights & Inclusion Australia as our project officer on the Opening The Door Project, and who has worked for many years in the disability and community sectors, and has now taken the brave step to branch out on her own as the owner and proprietor of a business called Sitting Low, Reaching High.

And, Mel, just briefly, you did indicate earlier on that you were in receipt of home modifications for your own apartment.

What were the sort of good things and bad things about the experience you had in terms of that modification?

- Thanks for that, Michael.

And I'm mindful of the time and I could probably be here all day talking about this.

So I'll just talk about a few parts to it.

So, I have had modifications to my unit and that was a bathroom, the laundry essentially being modified to make it easier because I do require the use of a wheelchair.

And I guess some of the complications was around, like, time, and when people were doing the modifications, the builders and all the people that were...

..like, you know, the electricians, the plumbers, et cetera, not necessarily understanding what accessibility means.

So whilst the reports were really clearly stated, what I needed from the OT reports, et cetera, they didn't necessarily follow that because they were just following what's the normal standard, but it's not necessarily what the accessible standard was for myself.

So that was an issue that I had to contend with.

But also being in a unit, there's the element of Strata.

So when you modify a unit, you've gotta get Strata approval when it comes to things like waterproofing the bathroom floor, for example, so then that takes time.

And then you get all the quotes to modify your place, but usually those quotes only last for a period of time.

But then the NDIS wasn't going to approve it until they had the Strata approval.

So then that can kind of throw things off.

So there's a lot of components that, if you've got a disability and you're going for a funding stream, and then you've got an OT involved, then that can be quite challenging.

And I was always aware, or acutely aware, that I've worked in the sector for a long time and I have a very good understanding on how the processes work, but I was quite frustrated by how things were happening.

And I was mindful of people that don't necessarily have the cognitive ability or they might have a sensory disability or an intellectual disability, how much harder processes can be.

So I think, when it comes to home mods, the biggest thing that I always get challenged by is the lack of understanding of what accessibility means and people not willing to understand what they mean, where it's the person with the disability that often has to compromise when they shouldn't be compromising because it's a safety issue as well as a comfort issue.

And I think that's really important to highlight.

- Thanks, Mel.

You also mentioned to me, didn't you, that at the same time as you were having your bathroom modified, your sister was having her bathroom renovated and the cost of yours was more than double hers.

I mean, the work involved in modifying a bathroom usually means stripping out the old bathroom, replacing the waterproof membrane, and then adding in features.

But those features are showers and toilets and tiles and grab rails and what have you.

There may be some instances there, unfortunately, of some price gouging because of you being on the NDIS, which is unfortunate and something we need to keep an eye on.

- Yeah, that was absolutely true.

And it was just interesting because there was not really any difference through what I was needing to what my sister was needing in her bathroom.

And another issue was when they did put the basin in my bathroom, once it was completed, the bathroom basin was too high.

And that was not from the measurements on the actual plan.

And basically trying to get me to pay or go back to the NDIS to get more money to change it when it was just simply that they didn't actually look at the plan, because they were just going from the basis of what the normal height might be.

- Yeah. Thanks, Mel.

It's frustrating, isn't it?

David, you've got your hand up.

- Thanks, Michael. I just thought I'd pick up on a couple of things once again in the comments, but one of these will lead to my own question.

So, firstly, we had someone who's online from the Pilbara in Western Australia.

Note that the department of housing up there actually often makes modifications as it's easier for the participant then using the NDIS.

And apparently that's quite a frequent thing.

Just to kind of cover off that remote setting kind of aspect of things.

And then there was a question by one of our attendees in the NT, and I think this is a similar one that I had, as well.

It was a query raised whether you needed to be an access consultant to become a registered NDIS complex home modifications project manager.

And the other question which, in a sense, could be one that we take on notice for ourselves to contend with, is what allowances are actually made for people, NDIS participants, to have funding for a project manager to help them with this process and oversee the building works?

And, Michael, you and I obviously know of a couple of instances where the lack of a project manager has caused things to come unstuck.

- I'll talk about that in a minute, but I'm eager to hear what Nader has to say.

- Yes, thanks, Michael.

I had a question to Mel whether she did have a project manager, and if you did enter into a building contract with the builder before the builder started asking for more money to change things.

- Yeah, so, I had an occupational therapist that was helping me throughout the whole process, and we did sign a building contract before the work was done.

- There is a misconception that I think is quite prevalent and that's taking the occupational therapist as a project manager.

Project manager is a building specialist or construction specialist.

An occupational therapist is an allied clinician.

Now, as mentioned earlier, a complex home modification is teamwork, and it brings together an array of skills and professions to make sure that what you had to put up with actually doesn't happen.

But as I said, it's unfortunate where a number of...

or, you know, I would say if not the majority, but quite a significant proportion of occupational therapists take it upon themselves to manage a building project and that's where things have a tendency to basically get out of control.

- Yeah, and I'm completely aware of that now.

I think one of the big issues is that participants don't know the process, so they just go by what they're told.

Like, to contact the OT and get an OT report and then that's pretty much...

what they know, yeah.

- Yeah.

- Look, if I may, I'm just gonna come in at that point, cos I wanted to relay a tale from our other project officer, Nick Schumi, who is based in Adelaide.

And the reason he can't be with us today to tell his own story is because he's having terrible problems with his home modification and he's having to attend meetings.

But I did wanna say upfront that, you know, we're promoting the idea of the project manager, I think it is important, but...

and it's quite interesting.

I can't explain the reasons why.

It is suggested and it is often funded in people's plans, especially when they have a complex home modification, but there is quite a lot of evidence that they aren't actually being engaged and utilised.

And as Nader said, having that expertise in the building side of things is perhaps what makes people get unstuck.

Because there are so many things to look out for and, unfortunately, Mel's experience of, you know, "We just put the basin in cos that's where basins go and that's the height they are," is unfortunately too typical of what happens.

You know, "Let's put a step in front of an accessible doorway," that sort of stuff. Anyway, Nick has asked me just to talk very briefly about his experience.

He said it was difficult from the start getting access to modifications in his NDIS plan when moving from one apartment, which had already been modified, to another, which, of course, could not be sourced until he had sold the original apartment.

This was very administratively complicated for the NDIS and took a lot of high-level intervention, I'm talking ministerial-level intervention, for it to even get in the plan.

Once it was in the plan, and Nick was actually quite successful at finding a suitable apartment soon, there was the difficulty of not knowing the timeframe it would take to modify.

So whilst he's dealing with all of that, he also has to find alternative accommodation and have that funded at the same time.

There was some pressure then to get the modification done once it was approved because there's a pressure there about the funding of the medium-term accommodation.

And also the fact that it had taken such a long time for the agency to get it over the line.

And Nick, when I was talking to him yesterday, he said, in hindsight, there were things he wished he had been able to do at the time, but he felt rushed. He didn't do much site inspection, for example, and he would've made some changes, some big, some small.

Small things included he would've had more power points in the laundry, which now he has to pay additional to get put in.

He was, like yourself, Mel, he was helped greatly by his occupational therapist, but there needed, in hindsight, to have been someone with whom to discuss the plans and the quote that's provided by the builder.

He missed the fact that the builder had not quoted tiling on his kitchen floor up to the wall. When you're installing benches that allow him to wheel underneath it, it exposes the floor to the wall in a way that regular kitchen cabinets do not, you know.

So they'd only quoted for regular kitchen cabinets.

So he would've engaged a project manager.

It seems to be a common feature of this.

The wording of the NDIS policy implies that this is a requirement on complex modifications over a certain value, but as far as we can see, the examples that we've seen, there's nothing really, in reality, that requires it, especially if you have a lot of control over your own NDIS plan.

So a project manager would've been helpful at the planning stage, at the stage when quotes were accepted, and also, and this is really important for the situation he's in now, when things go wrong, as they have horribly gone wrong with lots of things installed, probably.

So, so much has gone wrong and Nick is now very much involved in trying to rectify the things that were built and installed wrong.

So it is probably a feature of complex home modifications that there are so many things that could happen, it's probably best to have somebody in place who's got that level of expertise and oversight over the building aspects of it.

And generally speaking, occupational therapists work very well with project managers and builders, especially those who've had a lot of experience in home modification.

It's part of the model of good home modifications is that three-way relationship between the client or the participant, the occupational therapist and the builder, in this case, the project manager, and the trades.

So, I'm just going to ask Paul very quickly, you know, from what you've heard today, do those sorts of issues occur...

You talked about all major modifications being in a different sort of category.

How do you sort of prevent problems and how do you troubleshoot those problems?

- Erm, I think the project manager role is taken by what we call a home improvement agency, and the vast majority of people who have their homes adapted are supported by a home improvement agency, which is part of our role to support and enhance the delivery that they do.

And we're kind of very clear in the guidance that we felt, for the government in the UK, that that role was very key.

I think I've... We saw a house yesterday that was on Grand Designs, I think.

I assume Grand Designs over here is very similar to Grand Designs in the UK, that every week, somebody goes totally over-budget and has significant delays.

And I think, if you're managing your own building project, that's almost likely to happen.

So a project manager or a home improvement agency, as Nader said, I think is a very key element of any complex building process.

- Yes. Yeah. And just to sort of...

You talked there about home improvement agencies.

The original model, if you like, for the home modification providers, under the old Home and Community Care program, was to have that expertise within a single agency.

So you had your builders and managers and your OT, often, in a single service, and then people would be referred to the service.

Now, we've kind of torn that model apart because we're going down the track of individualised funding, and that's got many advantages.

And that's happening for older people, as well as younger people with disability.

But probably what has been missing, I think, has been this acceptance that part of that element of expertise is that knowledge and understanding and experience of being able to bring the various parties together and to anticipate.

And I guess one thing that struck me was that, tell me if I'm overstating this, Mel, but that it's almost like a test for you as a participant to make sure that you've got every detail into your plan, rather than it sort of saying, "Well, you know what?

I think I've got a broad idea of what I need," and then somebody at the other end in receipt saying, "You might wanna thing about this.

You might wanna think about that.

We're not trying to on-sell things here, but you may have missed something here." But it's all a bit of a test, and if it then gets accepted and gets funded and you've missed out something crucial, well, that's on your own head.

I think that's unfortunate. There's something missing in the system there which would be beneficial.

But, look, I'm conscious of time, as well.

David, is there anything in the chat?

- Erm, I just wanted to come back to a couple of things that really kind of, I guess, weren't responded to before.

There was that question previously about whether...

..you need to be an access consultant to become a registered NDIS complex home modifications project manager.

Just because I think that's kind of important to know that because, obviously, a bit like building contractors, anyone and everyone can call themselves a project manager, but do they actually have that access consultant accreditation?

So that's one question.

- I think the answer is no.

But I'm very happy to take that on notice.

Nader, would you...

what's your take on that?

Oh, you're on mute still.

- Sorry. Yeah, the NDIA have published a list of accreditations that do qualify to apply to be a building works project manager, and access consultants is one of those professions.

They, however, list a number of skill sets that a project manager must display, as per David's comment a few minutes ago, that would give the person the wholistic command or knowledge of the ability to bring all stakeholders together and basically conduct the orchestra and be able to manage the contract.

So there's contract management skills, building and construction skills, accessibility and assessment skills.

So a lot of the skills cannot be acquired by a certificate or by a qualification.

So there is an element of experience that may play a role.

But that's about as far as I know what the NDIS has put out as their criteria to become a building projects manager.

There were talks of officiating that position a bit earlier on, which I'm kind of monitoring, but I think that's still a work in progress from within the NDIS and we need to wait and see what they present.

- Just... Michael, just further to that, I will... There's a little...

There's probably a little bit of narration to the chat feed and just some of the things that are coming up in our discussion here today that are citing some kind of information that we'll publish later.

So we'll try and put that together in a proper way.

Because I note, for example, someone else in the chat feed noted that, in many instances, none of the people that they're assisting have any allowance for project management.

But I know elsewhere, it's been noted that that should actually be incorporated into the overall funding application to the NDIS. So there's some hoops that people need to be made aware of to know to do those.

And just as a final comment, just in case it's of use to people, in looking at one person with disability's home mods building contract that I've seen recently, the builder had very cutely somehow managed to neglect the fact that there was a whole scope of works that was defined by the National Disability Insurance Agency that they should've been complying to, and they didn't actually mention that document to the contract form that was signed off.

So there's all these potential hurdles that people often wouldn't be aware of.

- Yeah, David, that's right. Thank you.

I mean, it is a complex area by its very nature because you get into contracts and insurances and rules and regulations and those things, and it can bamboozle the best of us.

It's certainly something that I wouldn't be approaching without some assistance.

And I think that's one of the messages that we need to sort of put out there is that my understanding, tell me if I'm wrong, Nader, is that it's there in policy in the NDIA that if you have a complex home modification, you are entitled to a project manager.

So therefore...

But you need to be asking for that as part of your plan.

It doesn't necessarily automatically get included, yeah?

- Further to that, Michael, the NDIS has made it a requirement that any project costing over $30,000 is supervised by a project manager.

I'm not sure why that hasn't been communicated clearly enough and widely enough, but that is a requirement.

So the way to approach it is, once that initial planning stage is carried out, and I didn't reply to a question on chat, that there is usually a modest allowance at the planning stage, where they put the participant's plan together, for a consultation with a builder.

The... The terminology used may be a bit misleading, but a consultation with a builder refers to a consultation with a project manager.

And as I said, it's a modest allowance, but it engages a project manager right at that beginning stage.

And that's where the project manager basically comes in and...

..you know, provides the supervision over the entire process.

Now, when the builders' quotes are procured and put together with the OT's reports and justifications, then the project manager also attaches his cost or her cost to the funding application and submits it.

And invariably, the NDIS approves those costs and adds them to the construction cost.

So, as you said, you need to ask for it, you need to be aware of it and ask for it, and definitely you will get it, because it is a requirement, although not being, you know, forcefully enforced, which, in my opinion, it should be.

- Thanks, Nader. David?

- Michael, I'll just pick up on a couple of things that have also been noted in the chat feed, and there's been a response to this since.

There was a query about home modifications.

Sorry, is this a discussion in reference to home modifications for specialist disability accommodation properties, as well?

- No.

- And there's a note.

One of the other attendees has noted that you need to be an accredited member of the Access Consultants Association of Australia I think that is, ACAA, to be able to provide SDA accreditation.

I was just wondering if there might be any further comments that you or any of the other panellists might have in that regard around SDA?

- Well, the SDA question, I did actually see that in the chat, and my experience is that it's one or the other in a participant's plan.

You know, you're either arguing that you need specialist disability accommodation...

..or you're going down the home modification track, because SDA tends to imply that you're looking for, you know, particular types of accommodation that needs to be created or significantly renovated.

And it's a completely different model.

But I'm not going to say yes or no.

The conversation we're having today is primarily around those people for whom home modifications is the option.

And it's not really focusing on specialist disability accommodation.

Yeah, the...

What were the other issues about ACAA?

You're right, that is the access consultants, but that is, again, I think, specific to specialist disability accommodation.

And as Nader pointed out before, being an access consultant is one of the criteria for being a project manager.

And I think the project manager does cover more than just the contract administration.

It is...

They have specialisations in the building industry and are able to be able to monitor whether things are being done correctly according to spec and also to step in and to be able to troubleshoot and understand the rules and regulations and the various warranties that sit behind building work.

So it is more than just a contract administrator, that role.

Look, we're right at the end of time now, so before we get there, I just want to extend my thanks to the panellists that we've had today, that's Leo Patterson Ross, John Engeler, who unfortunately had to leave a bit earlier, but he did say if there are any questions for him, he would be happy to take them on notice, to Nader Zoljalali, and to Mel Harrison.

And with me, we have Paul Smith and Emily Hunter, as well.

So I'd like to thank them.

I'd like to thank all of you for participating here today.

We probably have raised, as we tend to do in these forums, probably more problems than we've found solutions to, but I think, even in all those different housing and tenure types that we've mentioned, there is gonna be examples of good practice and things happening.

And I was very pleased to hear that comment about...

I mean, pleased on one level, but a sort of frustrating on the other, that clearly in some jurisdictions, the housing department have taken it upon themselves to do the modifications for people, in the knowledge that a lot of their tenants are people who require that level of modification.

I think that really, at the end of the day, is probably the best way to go.

And some of the things we've described here, about people having to get individual funding through programmes such as NDIS, is complicated administratively, by nature.

And the interaction that you have then between the funding and the housing provider and the owner, and, as Mel said, even the Strata, those sorts of things can make life difficult for people.

So we will continue, as part of this project, to provide information about home modifications and other issues that relate to housing for people with disability, and we will be demonstrating good practice wherever we can.

I would, before we go today, just like to ask those of you present if you would please fill out a survey form that David will send around to you in due course for you to fill out.

It's really important for our funding.

We are a project-funded endeavour.

So we need to be providing feedback from those survey sheets.

So thank you again, everybody, for being here today.

I look forward to seeing you on other forums down the track.

And I'll just say a very good day to you. Thank you.

- There were several resources referred to in this forum.

These include the PowerPoint presentation made by Nader Zoljalali from National Disability Building Services.

You can find links to these resources, along with information on the organisations of each of the panel presenters, and also on the Opening The Door Project, at the resources page where you found this video.

If you have any concerns with accessibility with this video, or any other queries, please contact Rights & Inclusion Australia at the e-mail address projectofficer@riaustralia.org The Opening The Door Project partners are Rights & Inclusion Australia, National Shelter, Enliven Community, and the state and territory members of National Shelter.

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