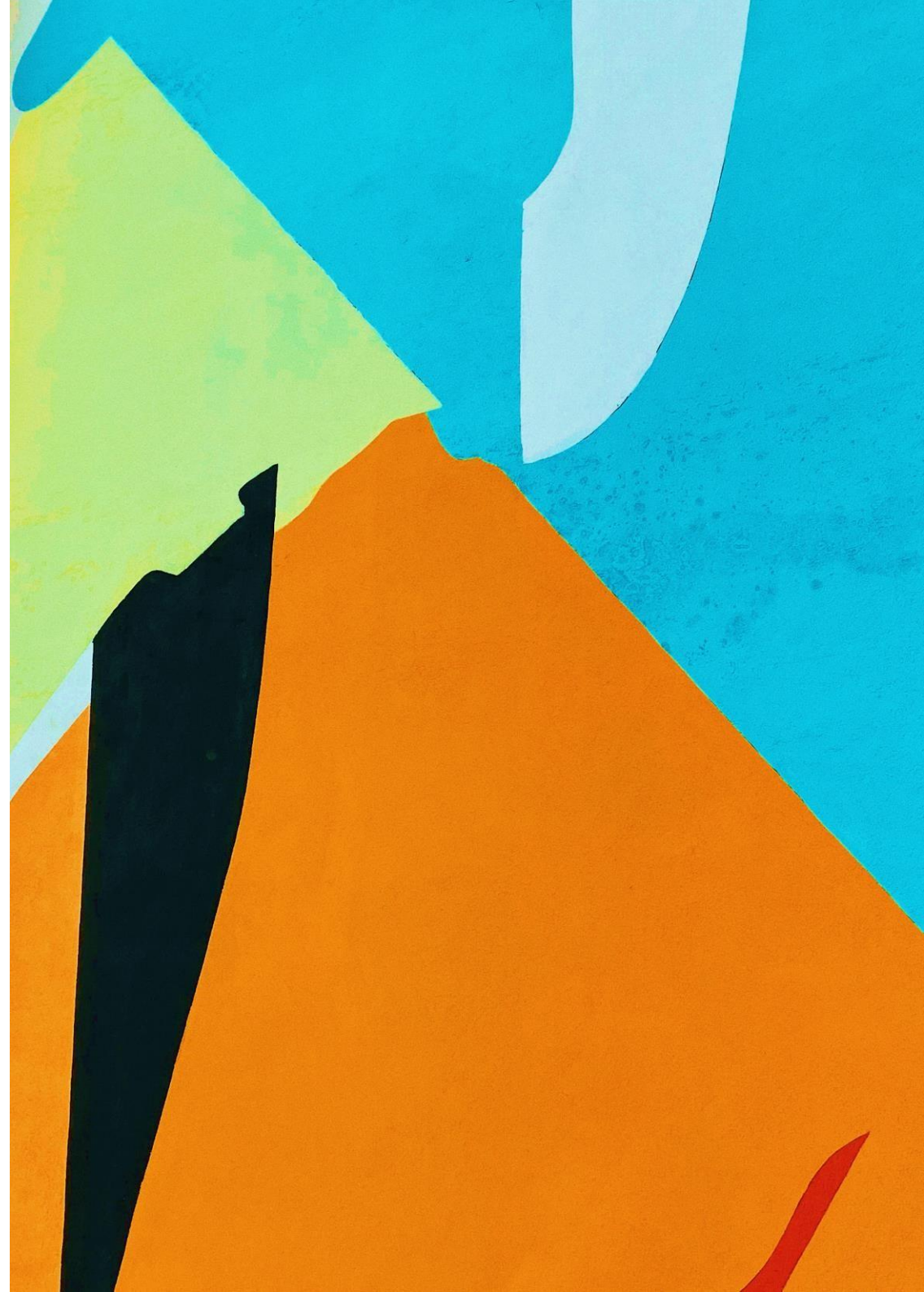




Advocating for the future of accessible housing in the ACT

Submission by the ACT Inclusion Council –
December 2023



Introduction



Advocating for the future of accessible housing in the ACT

The ACT Inclusion Council is excited for the opportunity to include a submission for the 2024-25 ACT Budget.

The ACT Inclusion Council is a Canberra group of business, government and community leaders that work in partnership with the community to develop initiatives that value and engage people with disability as customers, suppliers, employees and employers in business. It is the conduit between business and government, supporting new and innovative projects and events that showcase business opportunities in the disability sector and create employment opportunities for people with disability.

The ACT Inclusion Council held a Housing Forum Workshop on the 15th of November 2023. This workshop brought together key stakeholders to discuss challenges and formulate recommendations for the future of accessible housing in the ACT.

What is accessible housing?

Accessible housing refers to residences designed and equipped to accommodate individuals with disability, ensuring they can navigate and use the space comfortably and independently. The goal of accessible housing is to eliminate barriers and create an inclusive environment enabling people with disability to live with dignity and autonomy.

Our submission includes a series of eight initiatives for your consideration, as follows:

1. Housing accessibility standardised terminology
2. Grants or subsidies for home modifications
3. ACT government as Specialist Disability Accommodation provider
4. Research and data gathering on accessibility needs
5. Getting the right land to the right person
6. Integrated services hub for accessible housing
7. Training for tradies in accessible housing needs
8. Accessibility rental report

This submission outlines a holistic approach to promoting accessible housing in the ACT, aligning with the ACT Wellbeing Framework.

By combining regulatory measures, financial incentives, and educational initiatives, we aim to create an environment where everyone, regardless of ability, can enjoy a safe and inclusive living space.

Looking to the future of accessible housing in the ACT is critical in fostering choice, inclusivity and equal opportunities for individuals of all abilities. and ensure they can participate fully in the community.

We are looking forward to discussing this submission with you.

ACT Inclusion Council

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Context



Current challenges and opportunities

The Australian Capital Territory (ACT) grapples with significant challenges in ensuring an adequate supply of accessible housing for individuals with diverse mobility and disability needs.

The scarcity of appropriate land, hindered by factors such as steep terrain, contributes to a lack of available options. Unfortunately, there is no regulatory framework mandating the provision of suitable land to those in need.

The Suburban Land Agency (SLA), bound by specific regulations and market value requirements, faces challenges in aligning its activities with the need for accessible housing.

The high cost of land in the ACT adds financial barriers to the development of accessible housing, further limiting supply. Significant red tape in the development process for accessible housing in the ACT compared to other states also has the potential to reduce development opportunities in the ACT.

Inadequate coordination across government and the private sector, as well as insufficient data collection on accessibility needs and housing gaps prevents a comprehensive understanding of the current state, hindering effective policy formulation.

The market fails to meet the demand for accessible housing, leaving a shortage of options for those with specific accessibility requirements. The absence of standardised accessibility labels or advertising practices makes it challenging for potential occupants to identify suitable housing options to buy or rent.

Only a small percentage (6%) of individuals qualify for specialist disability accommodation, and the approval process is prolonged, hampering the timely delivery of accessible housing.

People with accessibility needs desire choice in their living arrangements, but the current state context often limits their options, impacting autonomy and quality of life.

Accessible housing is not always situated near amenities, transportation options, social support networks, or family, reducing overall accessibility and convenience for occupants.

Limited information, awareness, and knowledge about available supports, can also hinder individuals from accessing the resources they need to secure suitable housing.

The initiatives have the potential to greatly improve the quality of life for older Canberrans and those with disability, aligning strongly with the ACT Wellbeing Frameworks' Wellbeing Domains.

Our initiatives primarily focus on the domains of:

- **Housing and home** – Accessible housing can provide a stable and supportive environment for people with disability, contributing to a sense of permanence and security. This stability is vital for mental wellbeing and overall life satisfaction.
- **Access and connectivity** – Accessible housing goes beyond the residence itself, but also includes getting around to places people value and accessing the services they need.
- **Identity and belonging** – Accessible housing ensures people with disability and mobility needs can express their identity, feel a sense of belonging, and participate fully in society.
- **Social connection** – Accessible housing in the right places ensure people with disability and mobility needs are connected with family, friends and the community.
- **Environment and climate** – Encouraging the consideration of accessibility features in new homes could lead to a broader adoption of sustainable and universal design principles, contributing to environmentally friendly construction and renovation practices.

Addressing these broad challenges requires a multi-faceted approach with a focus on personal wellbeing, involving collaboration between government and the private sector, regulatory adjustments, and new innovative approaches to address accessible housing requirements in the ACT.

Overview of initiatives

The ACT Inclusion council would like to submit the following recommendations for the future of accessible housing in the ACT. We have included more information on each initiative on the next pages.

- 1 Housing accessibility standardised terminology** – A defined set of terms for properties for sale or rent to evaluate and advertise accessibility features through a standardised list of features (e.g. similar to the criteria outlined in Livable Housing Australia livable housing design elements).
- 2 Grants or subsidies for home modifications** – Supporting individuals who need home modifications through grants or subsidies.
- 3 ACT government as specialist disability accommodation (SDA) provider** – ACT government taking on the role of a specialist disability accommodation provider.
- 4 Research and data gathering on accessibility needs** – Conduct research and data gathering activities to understand the needs and availability of accessible housing in the ACT to better target services and programs.

- 5 Getting the right land to the right person** – Remove legislative and regulatory barriers to ensure suitable land for accessible housing is available to those who need it.
- 6 Integrated services hub for accessible housing** – Create an integrated services hub to provide end-to end support for both individuals and industry to build accessible housing or make home modifications.
- 7 Training for tradies in accessible housing needs** – Provide training for new tradies and horticulture students at CIT to better understand disability within the housing context and develop skills on building and maintaining accessible housing and outdoor areas.
- 8 Accessibility rental report** – Real estate agents who do routine inspections on rental properties provide help identifying if these properties have accessibility features through a disability rental report.

1. Housing accessibility rating system

A defined set of terms for properties for sale or rent to evaluate and advertise accessibility features through a standardised list of features and corresponding terms (e.g. similar to the criteria outlined in Livable Housing Australia livable housing design elements).

A standardised list of terms of accessibility features for homes and rental properties involves assessing various aspects that impact the ability of individuals with diverse needs to navigate, live comfortably, and fully participate in their living environment. Covering key categories such as entrance and exterior features, interior layout, bathroom and kitchen accessibility, flooring, lighting, technology integration, outdoor spaces, emergency evacuation plans, and community accessibility, the standardised terms employs consistent simplified language. The use of standardised terms to outline accessibility features empowers prospective buyers or renters to make informed decisions aligned with their unique accessibility requirements. The standardised terms may need different categories for different types of disability.

The standardised terms will promote visibility of accessible housing, ensures accessible properties are easily identifiable, and may improve the value of accessible properties.

The scheme could include an incentive, a reduction on rates, or a reduction on capital gains or land tax through achieving this measure (e.g. If you can demonstrate you have done modifications, you might get a tax incentive).

Impact description

Individual wellbeing:

- The list of standardised accessibility terms empowers individuals with diverse needs to make informed decisions about their living environment. This leads to increased independence and an enhanced quality of life.
- Accessible features contribute to the physical and mental well-being of individuals. For instance, accessible bathrooms and kitchens can enhance safety and ease of use, reducing the risk of accidents and promoting better health.

Community wellbeing:

- By promoting accessible housing options, this proposal contributes to a sense of belonging and community well-being for individuals with diverse accessibility needs.

- By considering diverse needs in housing options, the proposal addresses social equity concerns, reducing disparities in access to suitable living spaces.
- The list of standardised accessibility terms places value on accessibility and promotes public awareness.

Environmental wellbeing:

- Encouraging the consideration of accessibility features may lead to a broader adoption of sustainable and universal design principles, contributing to environmentally friendly construction and renovation practices.

Who is affected?

- People with disability – The list of standardised accessibility terms empowers people with disability by providing them with crucial information about the accessibility features of properties. This enables them to make informed decisions and choose living spaces that align with their specific needs.
- Older Canberrans – Older Canberrans may prefer to age in place, and the availability of accessible properties allows them to do so comfortably, supporting their desire for independent living.
- Carers – Accessible homes reduce the caregiving responsibilities by providing a living environment that accommodates the needs of individuals with disability or older family members.

Wellbeing domains

- Housing and home
- Access and connectivity
- Identity and belonging
- Social connection
- Environment and climate

Collaboration and engagement

- The proposal will need collaboration between the ACT government, the private sector (real estate community and training) and the Canberra community, including homeowners and renters.

2. Grants or subsidies for home modifications

Supporting individuals who need home modifications through grants or subsidies.

Options could include providing an incentive, a reduction on rates, a reduction on capital gains or land tax, or low interest rate loans for individuals who require home modifications or can demonstrate they have already made modifications to their home.

Impact description

Individual wellbeing:

- Home modifications can create a safer living environment, reducing the risk of accidents and injuries, thereby positively impacting the wellbeing of the residents.
- The proposal captures individuals who require home modifications who may not be eligible for other programs, including people with disability, older Canberrans, or those recovering from injuries.
- Landlords and developers will benefit from supporting home modifications by increasing property value through enhanced accessibility, appealing to a broader tenant pool, and differentiating their properties in the market.

Community wellbeing:

- The proposal fosters a sense of inclusivity within communities, promoting social inclusion and reducing the isolation often experienced by individuals with disability or those in need of home modifications.
- The proposal has the potential to create economic stimulus to local tradespeople and business.

Institutional wellbeing:

By supporting individuals in modifying their homes to meet their needs, the proposal can contribute to a reduction in the need for institutional care, positively impacting healthcare systems and institutions.

Who is affected?

- People with disability – Home modifications can significantly improve the daily lives of people with disability by enhancing accessibility. This promotes greater independence, allowing individuals to navigate their homes more easily and carry out daily activities with autonomy. They may also experience reduced dependence on external assistance for routine tasks.
- Older Canberrans – Home modifications enable older individuals to age in place, allowing them to remain in familiar surroundings and maintain connections with their communities.
- Carers - Home modifications can alleviate some of the caregiving responsibilities by creating a safer environment.

Wellbeing domains

- Housing and home
- Access and connectivity
- Identity and belonging
- Social connection
- Environment and climate

Collaboration and engagement

This proposal requires collaboration between ACT government, The Department of Social Services, the NDIA and the Real Estate Institute of Australia (REIA).

3. ACT. government as specialist disability accommodation (SDA) provider

ACT government taking on the role of a specialist disability accommodation (SDA) provider.

The ACT Government could take on this role directly or sub-contract it to another provider. The role should be separate from the public housing portfolio.

For this proposal, the ACT government can quarantine initial ACT Housing SDA stock, or other appropriate housing. There may also be an option to source revenue from NDIS to reinvest into housing (e.g. through modifications and development of new stock). Generating revenue from NDIS to reinvest in housing not only benefits people with disability but also makes the initiative financially sustainable, reducing the burden on public funds.

Impact description

Individual wellbeing:

- By taking on the role of a specialist disability accommodation (SDA) provider, the ACT Government can directly influence the living conditions and support services for people with disability.

Community wellbeing:

- Sub-contracting SDA services could create employment opportunities for individuals in the community.
- By sourcing revenue from the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) to reinvest in housing modifications and new developments, the government can contribute to the long-term sustainability of support services, ensuring continued access and quality care for individuals with disability.
- Specialised accommodation dispersed throughout the community promotes the integration of people with disability into various neighbourhoods, fostering inclusivity.

Who is affected?

- People with disability – ACT Government as an SDA provider could lead to improved living conditions tailored to the needs of people with disability.
- Older Canberrans – Older Canberrans may benefit from this proposal if it includes accessibility features and amenities to support aging in place.
- Carers – Well-designed SDA communities could offer shared resources and communal spaces, and creating a support networks.

Wellbeing domains

- Housing and home
- Access and connectivity
- Identity and belonging
- Social connection
- Environment and climate

Collaboration and engagement

The proposal requires a partnership between the ACT Government, the NDIA and the ACT community.

4. Research and data gathering on accessibility needs

Conduct research and data gathering activities to understand the needs and availability of accessible housing in the ACT to better target services and programs.

Research and data gathering will help to define and understand the problem space, as well as the needs of those involved, to support the development of evidence-based programs and services.

This could be in the form of both qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative methods such as interviews and workshops offer an in-depth exploration of individual experiences and perspectives, shedding light on the qualitative aspects of accessibility challenges. On the other hand, quantitative methods like surveys provide a broader overview and allow for the collection of statistical data, enabling a more systematic analysis of trends and patterns related to accessible housing needs.

Impact description

Individual wellbeing:

- Engaging with individuals on accessible housing in the ACT ensures a diverse collection of voices can contribute to the discussion.
- The emphasis on accessible housing will directly enhance the individual wellbeing of those with accessibility challenges.

Community wellbeing:

- The research outcomes can inform the development of evidence-based programs and services that benefit a significant portion of the ACT population.

Who is affected?

- People with disability – By conducting thorough research and gathering data, the proposal aims to identify and address specific challenges faced by this demographic.
- Older Canberrans – By tailoring programs and services based on the research findings, the proposal can contribute to creating age-friendly housing options.
- Carers – If the research outcomes lead to the development of targeted services and programs, carers may be able to access increased support and resources.

Wellbeing domains

- Housing and home
- Access and connectivity
- Identity and belonging
- Social connection
- Environment and climate

Collaboration and engagement

The proposal requires coordination by the ACT government and the involvement of a research organisation.

5. Getting the right land to the right person

Remove legislative and regulatory barriers to ensure suitable land for accessible housing is available to those who need it.

This proposal ensures people with disability are allocated affordable land with the right typography to build accessible housing.

The main areas to consider include:

- Conducting a review of existing legislation and regulations related to land allocation for housing in the ACT to identify key barriers and where there are existing opportunities to facilitate the right land to the right people.
- Working closely with the ACT Government and developers to review the allocation of suitable plots that consider the topography and other factors crucial for building accessible homes.

Impact description

Individual wellbeing:

- The removal of legislative and regulatory barriers for accessible housing significantly enhances the individual wellness of people with disability, ensuring they can build accessible housing appropriate for their needs.
- Removing legislative and regulatory barriers can contribute to reducing discrimination against people with disability in the housing market.

Community wellbeing:

- Accessible housing promotes social cohesion by breaking down physical barriers that might isolate individuals with disability.

Environmental wellbeing:

- Advocating for accessible housing provides an opportunity to promote sustainable and environmentally friendly design practices. This can include energy-efficient construction, use of eco-friendly materials, and incorporating green spaces.

Who is affected?

- People with disability – People with disability benefit significantly from the proposal, as it aims to remove barriers to gaining access to suitable land for accessible housing.
- Older Canberrans – Older Canberrans benefit significantly from the proposal, as it aims to remove barriers to gaining access to suitable land for accessible housing.
- Carers – Accessible housing can alleviate some caregiving challenges by providing a living environment that is better suited to the needs of individuals with disability.

Wellbeing domains

- Housing and home
- Access and connectivity
- Identity and belonging
- Social connection
- Environment and climate

Collaboration and engagement

The proposal requires collaboration between ACT Government, NDIA, the community and the private sector (land developers).

6. Integrated services hub

Create an integrated services hub to provide end-to-end support for both individuals and industry to build accessible housing or make home modifications.

The integrated services hub would provide a one-stop-shop to support accessible housing in the ACT. Key services could include needs assessments, architectural design, regulatory compliance support, financial guidance, sourcing of building materials and technology and project management services.

By centralising these services, the hub aims to streamline the creation of accessible housing, making it available to both individuals with specific needs and industry professionals.

The hub will ensure easy access to information, improved building standards and therefore improved quality of accessible home in the ACT.

Impact description

Individual wellbeing:

- The hub directly benefits individuals by providing solutions that enhance living conditions and promote independence. This positively influences mental and emotional wellbeing, offering a sense of autonomy and dignity.

Community wellbeing:

- The proposal promotes social inclusivity and challenges stigmas associated with accessibility needs. The creation of accessible housing contributes to a more equitable built environment, fostering a sense of belonging and community cohesion. This positively impacts the overall wellbeing of the community by creating spaces that accommodate diverse needs.

Environmental wellbeing:

- The hub could champion sustainable construction practices, reducing the overall environmental impact of housing projects. The hub could lead to more efficient resource use, minimising waste in the construction process.

Who is affected?

- People with disability – The hub streamlines the process of obtaining accessible housing, reducing the challenges individuals with disability often face in building or modifying homes.
- Older Canberrans – The proposal ensures that housing is designed and modified to cater to the changing needs associated with aging. This promotes aging in place, allowing seniors to maintain their independence and stay within their communities.
- Carers – Carers benefit from the hub by having access to resources and support services that facilitate the building or modification of homes for their loved ones.

Wellbeing domains

- Housing and home
- Access and connectivity
- Identity and belonging
- Social connection
- Environment and climate

Collaboration and engagement

The proposal would require ACT Government funding, with support by industry and the broader community

7 Training for tradies in accessible housing needs

Provide training for new tradespeople and horticulture students at CIT to better understand disability within the housing context and develop skills on building and maintaining accessible housing and outdoor areas.

By integrating modules that focus on understanding the unique challenges faced by individuals with disability, the program aims to foster empathy and awareness among participants. Practical aspects of the training will emphasise the construction and maintenance of accessible housing and outdoor areas, ensuring that the next generation of tradespeople is well-versed in the principles of universal design. Students would gain practical knowledge on accessibility building and design as part of their work experience in the course.

This initiative not only supports inclusion and builds community understanding, but also contributes to the broader goal of creating environments that cater to the diverse needs of individuals with disability.

Impact description

Individual wellbeing:

- Tradespeople and horticulture students expand their knowledge of accessible building and design.
- There would be tradespeople available to build accessible homes or make home modifications benefiting those requiring these services. Clients can more easily access tradespeople with experience in accessible housing and have more choice in who to engage for these services.

Community wellbeing:

- The creation of a skilled workforce capable of designing and maintaining universally accessible spaces contributes to a more inclusive community. This, in turn, enhances the overall wellbeing of the community by promoting diversity, understanding, and a sense of shared responsibility for accessible housing in the ACT.

Environmental wellbeing:

- The proposal indirectly contributes to sustainability by encouraging the construction of buildings and outdoor spaces that adhere to universal design principles. This can reduce the need for resource-intensive modifications in the future and promote eco-friendly practices.

Wellbeing of institutions:

- By enhancing their educational offerings on the building and maintaining of accessible housing and outdoor spaces, Canberra Institute of Technology will position itself as a leader in fostering inclusivity and diversity within the construction and horticulture sectors, attracting students who seek education aligning with ethical and socially responsible practices.

Who is affected?

- People with disability – The proposal will contribute to more accessible housing options for people with disability.
- Older Canberrans – As the population ages, the need for accessible and age friendly housing becomes increasingly important. The skills developed through this program contribute to creating living spaces that cater to the needs of older individuals.
- Carers – Accessible homes contribute to creating living environments that support the independence of individuals with disability and older family members, easing the caregiving responsibilities.

Wellbeing domains

- Housing and home
- Access and connectivity
- Identity and belonging
- Social connection
- Environment and climate

Collaboration and engagement

The proposal requires collaboration between ACT Government, the Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT), tradespeople and the ACT community.

8 Accessibility rental report

Real estate agents who do routine inspections on rental properties provide help identifying if these properties have accessibility features through a disability rental report.

Every rental property in the ACT needs to be inspected once or twice a year, therefore during this process real estate agents could complete an accessibility audit on the properties they inspect. This could be in the form of an addendum to the inspection report, or via a QR code that leads to a smart form and sent through to the ACT government or a website.

This proposal provides a quick way to capture data on accessible homes within the rental sector (e.g. within 12 months).

This is an opportunity to provide training for real estate agents on how to identify accessibility features on properties, as this initiative will require working with Real Estate Institute ACT (REIACT) to provide training on identifying accessibility features.

Impact description

Individual wellbeing:

- People with disability who will have improved access to suitable rental properties.
- Potential tenants will be better informed about the accessibility features of a property, promoting better decision-making when choosing a place to live.
- Real estate agents will have greater understanding of what constitutes an accessible property and will be better able to support individuals looking for accessible rental properties.

Community wellbeing:

- The proposal could contribute to social inclusion by reducing barriers to renting accessible homes and promoting a sense of community where everyone's needs are considered.

Who is affected?

- People with disability - People with disability will benefit from improved access to rental properties designed or modified to meet their specific needs, promoting inclusivity and removing barriers to independent living. Access to accessibility reports when finding a rental property empowers to make informed decisions about their housing, choosing homes that align with their specific requirements and preferences.
- Older Canberrans - Older Canberrans will benefit from rental properties with accessibility features suited to their needs, contributing to a more comfortable and accessible living environment as they age.
- Carers - Accessible homes contribute to creating living environments that support the independence of individuals with disability and older family members, easing the caregiving responsibilities.

Wellbeing domains

- Housing and home
- Access and connectivity
- Identity and belonging
- Social connection
- Environment and climate

Collaboration and engagement

The proposal requires collaboration between the ACT government and the Real Estate Institute of Australia (REIA).

Thank you



Contributors to this submission

The ACT Inclusion Council held a Housing Forum Workshop on the 15th November 2023. The following individuals contributed to the submission through their participation in the workshop:

Name	Organisation
David Smith	Inclusion Council, Employ for Ability
Andrew Kerec	Inclusion Council, Renaissance Building & Design
Kim Marshall	Inclusion Council, President, Clubs ACT & Vice President, Canberra Southern Cross Club Board
Wendy Prowse	Inclusion Council, ADACAS
Dr Yasmine Gray	Inclusion Council, GetAboutAble
Keith Cantlie	Inclusion Council, Cantlie Recruitment and HR Solutions
Lisa McClelland	Inclusion Council, Office for Disability
Greg Weller	Housing Industry Association
Maria Edwards	Real Estate Institute of the ACT
Emma Greenhalgh	National Shelter
Brooke Yates	Housing and Inclusive Policy
Nicola Vaughan	Housing and Inclusive Policy

“Every single one of us, if we live long enough, are going to need these features, not just people with a disability.”

– Workshop participant

Name	Organisation
Angela Quinn	Suburban Land Agency
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Elizabeth Bond	Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate
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