

The positive impact of Specialist Disability Accommodation

New study finds that SDA improves the lives of NDIS participants and may reduce support costs

La Trobe University and the Summer Foundation are investigating the link between housing and outcomes in the lives of people with disability.¹ A study of the experiences of 15 people who have moved into single-occupant SDA apartments found that compared to their previous housing:

- **60% had higher overall health**
- **66% had improved wellbeing**
- **73% had greater community integration**
- **21% no longer required overnight support**
- **Required 2.4 hours less support per day**

What is the context?

By 2025, 30,000 people are expected to be receiving SDA payments through the NDIS. SDA dwellings are financed by private capital, with investors looking for a financial return alongside a positive social impact.

Group homes are the predominant type of SDA in Australia, but housing for people with disability is moving away from congregated living towards individualised housing. Existing studies find a positive link between individualised housing and positive outcomes for residents.²

The future SDA market will feature more individualised housing, including single-occupant apartments.³ Therefore, building an evidence-base to inform the future supply of SDA is needed.

What is the problem?

Innovative solutions for housing and support are needed to reduce the financial pressure on the NDIS while meeting the needs of people with disability. Likewise, the complex interplay of factors influencing positive housing outcomes means that we know little about the impact that moving into SDA has on people with disability.

SDA that does not foster positive outcomes is likely to remain vacant for longer, causing financial stress to providers and investors. Equally, SDA that is poorly designed or located and with limited access to support will not help tenants live as independently as possible.

Poor SDA = poor tenant outcomes

SDA needs to meet the specific needs of people with disability. But without evidence there is a risk that poorly designed SDA will be built, generating little or no positive impact.

To address this evidence gap, there is a need for ongoing evaluation of outcomes for SDA tenants. Understanding these outcomes will underpin evidence-based innovation in future SDA, benefiting all stakeholders.

High-quality and fit-for-purpose SDA will result in improved tenant outcomes. In turn this may mean less vacancies and lower support costs.



What are the main findings?

This study found that well located and appropriately designed SDA was associated with significantly improved outcomes for tenants. After moving into SDA:

- Overall health improved for 60% of tenants
- Wellbeing ratings for 66% of tenants improved
- Community integration scores improved for 73% of tenants
- Average daily support hours fell by 2.4 hours
- Only 66% of tenants required overnight support, dropping from 87% pre-move.

What did the researchers do?

Researchers interviewed 15 people living in single-occupant SDA apartments and collected data on self-reported outcomes measures across two-timepoints (pre-move, and 6-24 months post-move into SDA).

The standardised measures assessed:

- **Overall health** – measured using a component of the EuroQol-5-dimension descriptive system (EQ-5D).
- **Wellbeing** – measured using the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS).
- **Community integration** – measured using the Community Integration Questionnaire - Revised (CIQ-R).
- **Support needs** – measured using the Care and Needs Scale (CANS).

This national study will continue to provide this evidence by evaluating individual experiences and outcomes of moving into and living in a newly built SDA over a 3-year period. While the findings of this study relate to single-occupant SDA apartments, ongoing evaluation of tenant outcomes is needed across a range of SDA types.

What are the policy implications?

Better outcomes will benefit people with disability, providers, and investors, but also the federal government as it addresses the rising costs of the NDIS.

A person living in single-occupant SDA needing 2.4-hours less support per day could save the NDIA over **\$60,000** per person annually.⁴ Given the hundreds of single-occupant SDA apartments currently in the market or under development, the potential savings are considerable. Equally, the savings accrued through improved health, wellbeing, and community integration must also be significant and need quantifying.

Furthermore, SDA that is fit-for-purpose will attract more tenants and minimise the vacancy risk for investors and providers. This will help stabilise the SDA market, by improving the experiences of participants and helping secure the ongoing flow of private capital needed to finance new SDA.

Building good SDA based on rigorous evidence is essential for enabling people with disability to exercise their right to live a good life.

Notes

1. Douglas et al. (2022). 'Moving into housing designed for people with disability: Preliminary evaluation of outcomes.' *Disability and Rehabilitation*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09638288.2022.2060343>
2. Oliver et al (2020). 'The outcomes of individualised housing for people with disability and complex needs: A scoping review.' *Disability and Rehabilitation*. [10.1080/09638288.2020.1785023](https://doi.org/10.1080/09638288.2020.1785023)
3. Aimers et al. (2021). 'Specialist Disability Accommodation Supply in Australia: November 2021.' <https://apo.org.au/node/314855>
4. Estimate based on an approximate Supported Independent Living (SIL) hourly rate of \$70.