



Innovation in accessible housing

Lived experience insights from co-design workshops

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Better homes, better lives for people with disability.

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Executive summary

The Disability Royal Commission and the NDIS Review have emphasised the pressing need for more accessible and innovative housing solutions in Australia. Although the NDIS was designed to offer choice, control, and effective support for people with disability requiring 24/7 support, it has fallen short of these promises. To achieve the goals of the NDIS and enhance quality of life for people with disability, it is vital to address these shortcomings and increase the availability of high-quality housing and support options, especially in remote and regional areas.

With this in mind, a co-design project was undertaken by the Summer Foundation, to inform the design of contemporary specialist disability accommodation (SDA) for thin markets. The aim of this project was to partner with people with disability and the building and design sectors, to co-design innovative models of housing that foster a user driven SDA market.

The purpose of this report is to share the learnings obtained from this co-design work, as well as the co-design process used. Fifteen people with lived experience of disability (lived experience partners) living in regional areas were employed by the Summer Foundation to engage in four co-design workshops over a three month period. In total, 12 online workshops were delivered, audio-recorded and transcribed. The availability of workshop transcripts enabled a researcher-led qualitative analysis of the lived experience content shared within the co-design workshops.

This report outlines recommendations informed by the thematic analysis, as summarised below.

Theme 1: Systemic factors. Lived experience partners identified a lack of genuine choice in existing SDA. Separation of support and housing providers, alongside the diversification of SDA options, will underpin a future of genuine choice and control for residents. This theme also stresses the need for access to affordable land, prioritising locations near essential amenities.

Theme 2: Key considerations for housing and support includes several key recommendations, including ensuring universal accessibility in home design, maximising functional space, and incorporating modifiable features that can adapt over time. It emphasises the need to build homes that will support later integration of advanced assistive technologies, with effective storage solutions for equipment, and that use homelike materials. Additionally, it highlights the importance of optimising sensory environments, considering both onsite and offsite support options, and choosing safe, accessible community locations with a focus on sustainability.

Theme 3: Quality of life identifies the need for SDA designs that enhance autonomy, security, and facilitate daily living and social interaction.

Theme 4: Reflecting on the co-design approach underscores the value of genuine co-design processes that are inclusive and responsive to the needs of individuals with disability. It calls for open communication and appropriate remuneration for lived experience partners to appropriately acknowledge and award their contribution. Lastly, it provides

recommendations around planning for smooth transitions, by adapting processes based on feedback for the benefit of those transitioning into new housing options in the future.

By addressing these recommendations, SDA can better align with the needs and preferences of people with disability. Well designed housing and supports that diversify the SDA market will present genuine choice to people with disability, and will ultimately uphold their human rights and promote quality of life.



Introduction

Adequate and secure housing is a fundamental human right¹ that significantly impacts individuals' quality of life. The availability of various housing options that are accessible and modifiable, or specifically designed to meet a person's needs, is crucial to promoting independence and facilitating the integration of people with disability into the community. Australia's current approach to housing and living supports for people with disability is at a critical juncture, with investment in the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) having the potential to transform disability housing. The NDIS was established to revolutionise disability support by fostering innovation in service delivery and housing solutions.² Under the NDIS, people with disability who have an 'extreme functional impairment and/or very high support needs' may be eligible for Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) funding. SDA is housing (i.e., the bricks and mortar) that is specifically designed to help people with disability to maximise their independence and allows for more efficient delivery of support.³ The SDA model of funding was designed to create a user-driven market, where eligible NDIS participants can use their SDA funding to choose a dwelling from a registered provider that suits their needs and preferences.

Despite the significant investment in the NDIS, the scheme has struggled to innovate and expand the range of housing and support options required for people with disability who need access to 24/7 support. Currently, many of the 43,500 people with disability who require access to 24/7 support continue to reside in group homes.⁴ These group homes frequently offer substandard support, are costly, and pose heightened risks of violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation.⁵ The group home model, often functioning as a mini-institution, revolves around staff needs rather than the preferences and needs of residents, and there is limited evidence that this approach is both cost-effective and supportive.⁶ Supporting these individuals costs at least \$15 billion annually, with nearly 40% of NDIS expenditures allocated to just 7% of its participants.⁷

The lack of innovation in the SDA market is further compounded by the inadequate development of housing options in regional settings. Many NDIS participants prefer to live in their local communities or near family and friends, but the SDA market has predominantly

¹ Kavanagh, A. M., Aitken, Z., Baker, E., LaMontagne, A. D., Milner, A., & Bentley, R. (2016). Housing tenure and affordability and mental health following disability acquisition in adulthood. *Social Science & Medicine*, 151, 225–232.

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0277953616300107?via%3Dihub>

² NDIA (2016). NDIS Market Approach: Statement of Opportunity and Intent.

<https://www.ndis.gov.au/media/448/download?attachment>

³ NDIA (2022). Specialist Disability Accommodation: Operational guidelines. National Disability Insurance Agency.

<https://ourguidelines.ndis.gov.au/supports-you-can-access-menu/home-and-living-supports/specialist-disability-accommodation>

⁴ NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission (2023). Inquiry Report: Own Motion Inquiry into Aspects of Supported Accommodation.

<https://www.ndiscommission.gov.au/resources/reports-policies-and-frameworks/inquiries-and-reviews/own-motion-inquiry-aspects>

⁵ Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability. (2023). Inclusive education, employment and housing. Final report, Volume 7.

<https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/final-report-volume-7-inclusive-education-employment-and-housing>

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Bennett, S., & Orban, H. (2024). Better, safer, more sustainable: How to reform NDIS housing and support. Grattan Institute.

<https://grattan.edu.au/report/better-safer-more-sustainable-how-to-reform-ndis-housing-and-support/>

focused on urban areas. This lack of regional development not only limits choice but also creates additional barriers for individuals seeking to live independently in their preferred locations. The absence of contemporary, accessible housing in these areas forces many participants to relocate to cities, which can disrupt their lives and diminish their quality of life.

The urgent need for more accessible and innovative SDA solutions in Australia has been underscored by both the Disability Royal Commission⁸ and the NDIS Review.⁹ Although the NDIS was designed to offer choice, control, and innovative solutions for those requiring access to 24/7 support, it has yet to fully deliver on these promises. Bridging these gaps and increasing the availability of high-quality SDA and other innovative housing options—especially in remote and regional areas—remains essential for fulfilling the NDIS’s goals and enhancing quality of life for people with disability.

The purpose of this project was to partner with people with disability, whilst engaging with the building and design sectors, to co-design innovative models of housing that foster a user driven SDA market. The project aimed to develop design principles, informed by the knowledge of those with lived experience, and direct collaboration with a consultant architect. This report presents key recommendations to support innovation in accessible housing based on the co-design work undertaken in this project.



⁸ Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability. (2023). Inclusive education, employment and housing. Final report, Volume 7. <https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/final-report-volume-7-inclusive-education-employment-and-housing>

⁹ Commonwealth of Australia, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. (2023). Working together to deliver the NDIS. NDIS Review: Final report: Supporting analysis. <https://www.ndisreview.gov.au/sites/default/files/resource/download/NDIS-Review-Supporting-Analysis.pdf>

Method

Fourteen NDIS participants and one family member were invited to engage as lived experience partners in a series of co-design workshops between July and October 2023. These lived experience partners were identified as having an unmet housing need in a regional setting across New South Wales or Victoria via an accessible housing organisation database. All lived experience partners were employed casually with the Summer Foundation and received remuneration for their time spent contributing to the co-design workshops, in line with the Social, Community, Home Care and Disability Services Industry Award (Level 2). As the primary purpose of this work was to co-design innovative models of housing, institutional ethics approval was not sought for this project. Lived experience partners consented to participate in recorded workshops, with data generated to be de-identified, analysed and reported to achieve the stated aim of the co-design approach.

Workshop design

Four workshop rounds were delivered, with the same workshop structure repeated three times each round to enable small group attendance at each workshop (i.e. up to five lived experience partners per workshop). The workshops were designed and delivered by experienced co-design facilitators, with expertise working with people with disability with a range of cognitive and communication needs. Accessibility considerations included use of written, visual and video information, summaries of session content, structured session outlines, and active facilitation with prompting, encouragement and support. Each workshop session involved one facilitator and one scribe, with a maximum of five lived experience partners to enable tailored support. Lived experience partners were contacted after each session, to identify any concerns, or unmet accessibility needs, and plan for attendance at the next workshop session. All workshops were conducted online.

The focus of each workshop round is summarised below.

Workshop Round One explored experiences and perspectives on what ideal SDA in a regional setting looks like, considering physical design and accessibility, how people like to live in their home, and how people are supported in their home. Participants were asked to consider what works well and what does not work well in relation to their current homes.

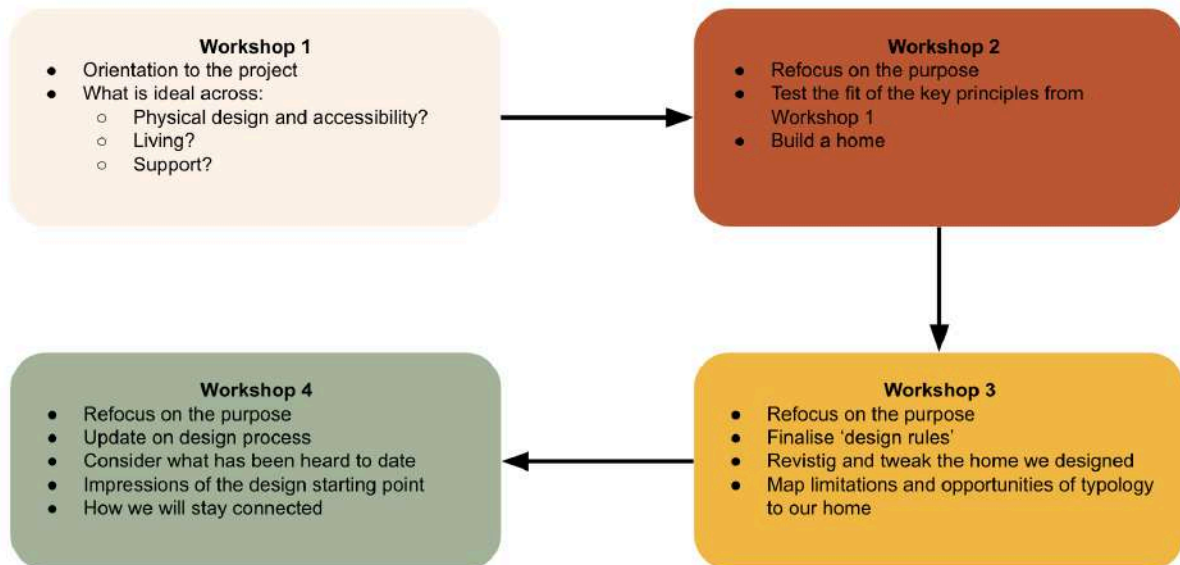
Workshop Round Two presented the 'design rules' formulated based on the Round One workshop discussion, to elicit feedback regarding any gaps in the design rules or clarification required. Participants were then asked to collaborate in designing indoor and outdoor home environments that would meet their needs and preferences, which led to further discussion around key elements of SDA design

Workshop Round Three involved further feedback on the design rules being sought. In addition, feedback was gathered on the guidelines provided to the consultant architect as part of the Summer Foundation's preliminary project brief. Participants were also asked to reflect on how their lives would look different if they had moved into the type of home they had collectively designed in Round Two.

Workshop Round Four provided feedback to workshop participants regarding the progress of the project, including an opportunity for the project architect to feedback learnings to-date. Co-design activities were not completed in this workshop; however, a plan for future contact was discussed.

The figure below provides a visual representation of the workshop structure.

Figure 1. A visual representation of the workshop structure and co-design process



Data collection

Twelve online workshops were conducted and recorded via the Zoom. Three workshops (Workshop Round Two) were automatically transcribed with the cloud recording setting enabled on Zoom, while a further seven workshops (Workshop Round One, Three and one Round Four session) were transcribed with Artificial Intelligence (AI) transcription. Based on the content of Workshop 4 being primarily feedback without further co-design activities and discussion, key quotes from the remaining two Workshop Round Four recordings were transcribed verbatim upon review of the audio-recording.

Prior to commencement of data analysis, all transcripts were reviewed for accuracy by a researcher listening to each recording. For the most part, the Zoom and AI transcript content were highly accurate, with only minor corrections required. Whilst it is possible to attribute individual speaker names to transcripts, the AI had difficulty differentiating between speakers, given the workshop context. Zoom transcripts available for this analysis were timestamped and did not have speaker names attributed. Therefore, quotes extracted during coding do not have speaker names attributed to them, contributing to the anonymity of the data.

Data analysis

Workshop transcripts were thematically analysed using the reflexive six-phase procedure outlined by Braun and Clarke.¹⁰ Listening to the audio-recordings and correcting the AI produced transcripts supported the researcher to become familiar with the data (phase 1), which was then coded (phase 2). Codes were collated to enable the generation of initial themes (phase 3). Data relating to initial themes were extracted and collated to support phase 4, development and review of themes. At this time, the input of co-authors was sought to assist in further developing the themes, ensuring these aligned with the aims of the co-design approach. Phase 5 involved thematic refinement by determining the scope and focus of each theme, finalising clear labels for each. Finally phase 6 entailed the write-up of the findings, including selection of key quotations.



¹⁰ Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp0630a>; Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 11(4), 589–597. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806>.

Results

Key themes and valuable quotes

Four key themes and associated sub-themes were developed from the analysis. The themes are clustered within the broader topics of:

1. Systemic Factors (Subthemes: Existing models, Land availability)
2. Key consideration for housing and support (Subthemes: Access, Space, Modifiable Environment, Equipment & Assistive Technology, Aesthetics, Sensory environment, Proximal support, Community location, Sustainability)
3. What a well designed home and support means to me (Subtheme: Quality of life)
4. Reflecting on the co-design approach (Subthemes: Importance of co-design, Transition reflections)

The following section describes the four key themes and subthemes. A brief paragraph summarises each theme, and where relevant, a figure is provided to illustrate the relationship between themes and subthemes.

Theme 1: Systemic factors

Subtheme 1: Existing models - genuine choice

Lived experience partners spoke about concerns and experiences of lacking genuine choice related to their housing and support. The separation of housing and support was identified as a positive aspect of some existing SDA models. However, it is common practice in the disability sector for a single organisation to be both the landlord and the support provider. Many other SDA providers have a contract with a support provider that forces the tenant to use the support provider chosen by the landlord. In consumer law this is called 'third line forcing' and is not an acceptable practice in other sectors.¹¹ One lived experience partner recalled having "no choice, so I had to go with that company... I had to leave my old company, and go with the new company to get this accommodation... I had to change to a whole new company because the company owns the house". In practice it means that if a tenant is not happy with their support provider, they need to move home.

Subtheme 2: Land affordability/availability

Lived experience partners raised concerns about locating a site that would be available, affordable and suitable for this project and its end-users, with one lived experience partner reflecting "...We have been, especially in the last session, been saying it's got to be close to amenities, it's gotta be flat, not too much of a slope. Etcetera", while another discussed how "Everyone seems to go into regional bigger centres. Not these little towns that need the help a lot, and of course I have to back my own little town." These lived experience partners had remaining questions, such as "where do we find land that we can afford to build these

¹¹ Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (2024). Exclusive dealing.
<https://www.accc.gov.au/business/competition-and-exemptions/exclusive-dealing>

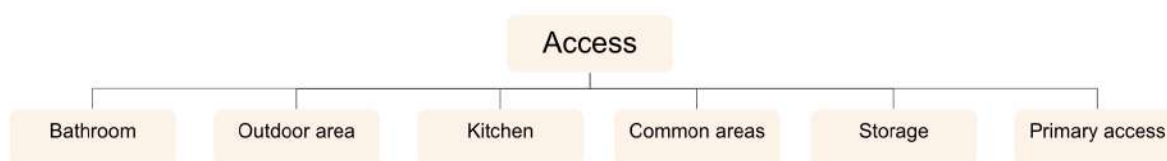
houses?” and “Have you thought about knocking down an old building and demolishing something and rebuilding... To be able to find the land properly?”

Theme 2: Key considerations for housing and support

Subtheme 1: Access

This theme includes access to, from and within the home, and access that enables meaningful occupation. Lived experience partners identified the importance of accessibility both as an overarching concept, and within specific areas of the home, as illustrated in the figure below.

Figure 2. Key areas to consider access within and around the home environment



Lived experience partners named access a key consideration for housing and support. Positive experiences of accessibility were described, including “It’s a fully accessible room, so the benches are lowered. I can make a cup of tea, I can fry a chop. I can do the washing up. The bathroom is fully accessible. I have my own hi-lo bed in here... The only real issue when I moved in was the door was too heavy to open.” Others described challenges they had encountered related to accessibility, such as “... [the developers] didn’t take into consideration that a person in a wheelchair has only got a certain reach capacity, and they obviously, you know, there must be a prescription. ‘Let’s put in an accessible bathroom, lowered benches, and let’s call that accessibility’... without really understanding what accessibility means. I can’t open or close the windows, because they put the window up too high.”

Lived experience partners also discussed what an accessible environment would mean to them. One lived experience partner described how “I wouldn’t have to rely on other people so much, like in the kitchen or getting outside and having some green time...” Another described their current dependence on others due to their inaccessible bathroom “... once I am in there on the shower chair - I am reliant on somebody to bring across the commode so I can actually get out of the ensuite.”

Lived experience partners identified that homes should be universally accessible, with one lived experience partner stating “I just think that you’ve got to build to the highest standard, which is high physical.” The need for universal accessibility was further emphasised when considering the various sizes of mobility devices available

“I think we need to... put some definitions around when we say maximum accessibility for a wheelchair, that we actually talk about the different types, or point them in the direction of looking at the different types of wheelchairs so that they look at bariatric wheelchairs, but also that they look at people that, um, are having to recline constantly because that takes up a whole host of additional space

that. Yeah, whereas if you're tilted in just a sit position, it's a lot less space than if you're tilted."

– Lived experience partner

Lived experience partners emphasised the safety implications associated with reduced accessibility, with first-hand experiences communicated including "... the ensuite is very small. I can't put my shower chair in there and safely have a shower. I am trying to get it fixed up so I can do that, but until then, I'm (a) high falls risk."

Lived experience partners described how their participation in meaningful occupation had been directly impacted by access within the home environment, with one lived experience partner relaying their positive experience "I do the barbecuing and I do like to be outside. They've got a nice backyard here." Another discussed how they had been limited by lack of access within the kitchen, stating "[I would] like the stove, a little bit lower. I used to love cooking, and (I've) done a certificate 3 in commercial cooking, and now I can't even cook myself a piece of toast." When considering how accessible outdoor environments could enable participation in gardening, a lived experience partner identified "[it needs] to have raised garden beds so I can easily slide my wheelchair underneath, without, you know, hurting myself. And do what I want in the garden bed." Shared amenities could also enable participation in gardening, with another lived experience partner describing their mixed experience of access in their current home

"We have a garden club and some of the beds are raised and I've been enjoying planting and digging with the garden club, but some of the beds are inaccessible to me. So when it comes to some garden days I just can't join. But other garden days I am able to join... So I need a garden. That's what I want."

– Lived experience partner

Lived experience partners also identified important accessibility considerations within the immediate environment, such as lift reliability and shared amenities.

"the biggest thing I would like in this SDA would be two lifts because I have [had] three breakdowns. One was a long weekend and it was a holiday Monday. And guess what? We were going to go out, weren't we? And it didn't happen. And then one other time, we came [home]. The lifts were down. So we ended up, because I needed to go to the toilet - They didn't even have an accessible toilet [on the ground floor] where I could use, so - We actually ended up going to [a shopping centre] just so I could use the toilet... And as I said one other time, it broke down too. So I think these houses really have to have two lifts or something. If one breaks down, you've got the other one to rely on."

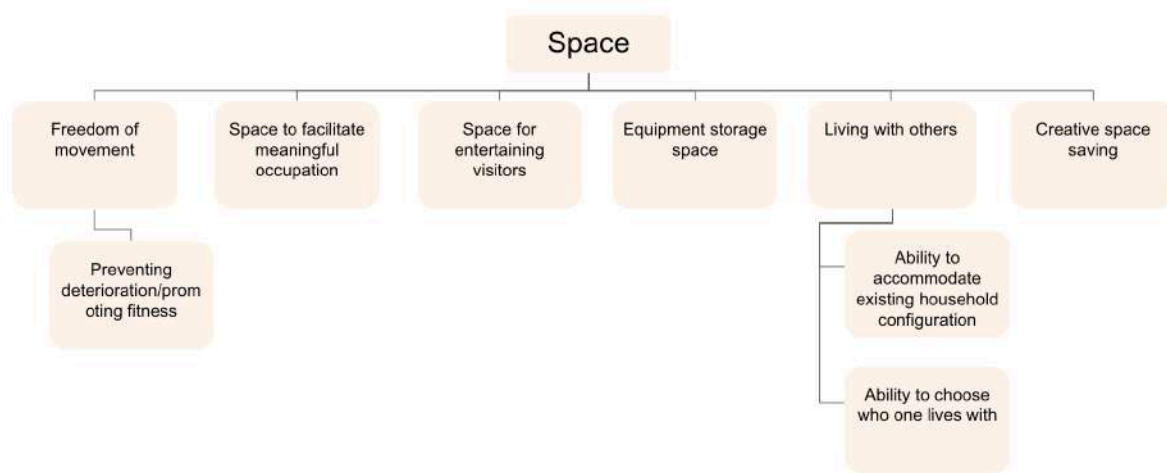
– Lived experience partner

Subtheme 2: Space

Space promotes quality of life by facilitating participation in meaningful activities, enabling freedom of movement, energy conservation and providing privacy. This subtheme includes space for living with others of any ability, and entertaining visitors. The space should accommodate a range of users, including the resident(s) themselves, and their support

workers. Creative solutions can be used to enhance available space. Maintenance of space is a consideration for some, with participants identifying that larger spaces may require greater efforts to maintain.

Figure 3. Space subtheme



Freedom of movement

The freedom of movement component of the space subtheme includes being able to achieve safe, efficient movement around the home. The home’s layout should enable freedom of movement and transitions across all areas, both indoors and outdoors, whilst enabling the user to conserve energy (e.g. by not requiring movement through long corridors). One lived experience partner identified this as important when selecting housing, stating “I picked the one where I am now because... among other things, [it has] a very large lounge room. It’s about five by nine meters, a lounge dining area, and it becomes an L shape over behind me into the kitchen. So, for the purposes of utilising a wheelchair in here so that you’re removing, um, some furniture that might get in the way. It’s really good for that.” Another lived experience partner identified the importance of adequate turning space, particularly in concreted outdoor spaces, suggesting “you need more space than you do in a manual wheelchair.”

When space does not effectively facilitate freedom of movement, lived experience partners indicated that this can lead to fatigue and increased reliance on others, as illustrated by one lived experience partner - “Doing the 20 point turns in a manual wheelchair gets a bit tiring.”

Preventing deterioration / promoting fitness

Space that enables freedom of movement promotes physical fitness. Lived experience partners described how available space, or a lack thereof, can either prevent or exacerbate deterioration. One lived experience partner described how their disabilities had significantly deteriorated due to mistakes made in their bathroom’s build. Another described how “luxurious [open] space” would ensure that “I’m able to maintain the mobility I’ve got left for longer.”

Space to facilitate meaningful occupation

The availability of space has a direct impact on the resident's ability to participate in meaningful occupation at home. As an Aboriginal painter, one lived experience partner had been unable to do any painting in their current home environment, with all of their painting equipment stored in the lounge room. Another lived experience partner described wanting more space for her hobbies, "... Like room to do my sewing in a safe way where it's not going to get in anyone else's way, like my girls... because I don't do them now. I do go out once a week and do my craft, but not at home."

Space for entertaining visitors

Available space also determines whether the resident can entertain visitors at home, with lack of space restricting the resident's ability to accommodate close others. One lived experience partner described the "major, major difference" having a spare room to host her sons would have made to her life if this had been available. Common areas presented one option for entertaining visitors. However, these lack privacy compared with being able to entertain visitors within the home environment.

Equipment storage space

Lived experience partners identified that space is required to store multiple items of equipment, with a lived experience partner highlighting "Storage is definitely what we need when in [a] wheelchair because we've always got our second wheelchair to store and like all of my exercise bike, my walking frame and other bits and pieces, and there are more than I'm able to think of right now."

Living with others

Lived experience partners identified that people with disability should have the same opportunity to choose where and with whom they live, in line with the wider population. Some people may prefer to live alone. Others are partnered, whilst some live with dependents, other family or pets. Therefore, extracted quotes are organised by two components 1) ability to accommodate existing household configurations, including people with disability living together, and 2) ability to choose who one lives with.

Ability to accommodate existing household configurations

Lived experience partners described prevailing assumptions that they perceived to impact the housing options available to them, including "... the idea that people with disabilities are just only themselves and [that] they don't come with anyone else...", describing these assumptions as "dreadful", and "horrifying to think of" the potential consequences, such as forced separation of families. Another lived experience partner relayed the challenges she was experiencing securing a three bedroom apartment for her and her teenage children, stating "even though there's lots around, they won't accept me, unfortunately [because they are group homes]." Lived experience partners identified the range of household configurations beyond "the stereotypical norm" including couples, families with children, pet-owners, and individuals who are happy to share housing.

Lived experience partners directly addressed their experiences of space in relation to accommodating existing household configurations, including the space taken up when there are two mobility device users within the household. One lived experience partner identified the deleterious impact a previous living environment had had on their relationship, stating "... if I had moved into something like what you're showing on the screen... my former partner and I would probably still be together. Living in that, living in that house, and the stresses that it caused, destroyed my relationship with him."

Ability to choose who one lives with

Lived experience partners emphasised the importance of being able to choose who one lives with, associating feeling safe with "knowing that I didn't have to have a housemate who I didn't really get along with... knowing that I can have... the option of having who I want in my house when I want them in my house." Others described the generational differences that impacted their desire to share housing with others, with one lived experience partner stating "us oldies want to be left alone in our own home, and the young ones want to socialise". Another was grateful for the home she had for her and her family, describing some of the benefits and challenges associated with sharing in her current home.

"For me just to have a home for me and [my children]. That's a good thing... I don't mind sharing with the [person] that I [do] Because [they're] only young. [They're] capable of doing more things than I can... I've been having barbecues with [them], so we've been getting social together... I think it's pretty good. Sometimes the noise situation can get a bit - because I have got a young [child] who can yell and scream and carry on, and the [person] out the back loves football and can yell and scream so we can hear each other sometimes... So that's probably the only downfall of that, but I don't mind sharing with [them] out the back."

– Lived experience partner

Creative space saving

Lived experience partners identified opportunities to adopt creative space saving solutions to maximise the available space within their homes, including slide-out ironing boards and under-bench bins, foldaway desks and drop-down wall cabinets.

Subtheme 3: Modifiable environment

Ideally, the home environment should be modifiable and customisable, to best meet the needs and preferences of the end user. Lived experience partners identified the importance of defining key attributes that could be applied across developments, but could be configured in various ways to suit the end-user. Lived experience partners agreed that a certain fraction of design elements could be universal, with the opportunity to customise others to individual needs.

Progressive conditions

Modifiable environments support the changing needs of people with progressive conditions over time. Balancing current and future needs was described by lived experience partners. Construction elements such as reinforced ceilings and walls should be considered within the

initial build to enable retrofit of assistive technology, including grab rails and ceiling track hoists. One lived experience partner recounted how a mistake made during construction limited the assistive technology options available to them. "I have to have rails of course, to you know, hoist, - get in the shower and toilet, but they couldn't do one rail because there's no beams, they forgot some of the beams. For future, you might as well put them in now, even if you don't use them, because future on you might."

Subtheme 4: Equipment and assistive technology

Lived experience partners described four areas where equipment and assistive technology (AT) can be applied. 1) AT to access support, 2) AT for environmental control, 3) AT for access, 4) AT to enhance security.

AT to access support

AT can be used to access ad hoc support, with a lived experience partner expressing their high regard for this technology: "I love the intercom because all you [have] to do is utilise the intercom and it can get down to the staff room and say, hey, look, I need some assistance immediately. And someone will be up here within two minutes."

AT for environmental control

Lived experience partners described instances where they were and were not able to control aspects of the home environment. Environmental control can be successfully achieved when appropriate AT is applied. However, lived experience partners described instances of AT not meeting their needs, such as light switches inaccessible from bed, and windows that were not automated. One lived experience partner explained "if I don't have support [the windows] just stay open." Another lived experience partner reported that they are placing emphasis on "making sure that the house is able to be controlled... to keep up with [my] needs as they change - hour by hour really..." in the build of their new home.

AT for access

Lived experience partners identified that AT can also enable access within and around the home environment. An automated wardrobe lifting system was identified as "absolutely wonderful", enabling a lived experience partner's friend to select the clothing she wants to wear, despite requiring assistance to dress. Another lived experience partner described how she had had doors automated "to make them easily accessible and controllable with a remote."

AT to enhance security

Lived experience partners identified how AT can be applied to enhance a resident's sense of security, suggesting security cameras could become "a built in feature for... all of the properties. Because, it's becoming a really common issue that - People with disabilities get broken into and they feel more secure if there's security cameras... and if it's done at the build stage, it's so much cheaper."

Subtheme 5: Aesthetics

Lived experience partners identified the importance of a home-like aesthetic, and how other domains, such as space, can help maintain the aesthetic by reducing opportunities for damage. For example, "... that little bit of extra width [means] you're not constantly worried about scraping the paint off [the walls with your wheelchair]." Participants described wanting a homelike aesthetic, and "something not hospital-like."

"I need a garden. I need a backyard... I need a tree - I just need a home that looks like a home that regular people would have. But with accommodations for what I need."

-Lived experience partner

Materials used

Lived experience partners identified materials used as an important component of achieving a home-like aesthetic. Materials used could also minimise potential wear and tear, as described by one lived experience partner: "It's not such a stupid thing to make the bottom metre more sturdy. Chipboard or plasterboard. Because you do run into walls." The opportunity to choose colours was also valued by lived experience partners.

Subtheme 6: Sensory environment

Three key sensory elements, including temperature, light and noise, were highlighted by lived experience partners.

Temperature

Lived experience partners pointed to energy efficient features that would support economical and comfortable heating. For a lived experience partner from Tasmania: "it's got to be warm and the heating has to be economical... it has to be double glazed - and comfortable." Lived experience partners identified that people with disability may experience difficulties with temperature regulation, and that housing should be "energy efficient so that they can control the temperature to suit their body temperature."

Light

Light was another sensory feature identified by lived experience partners, with some preferring "a light, bright, and breezy house..." Lived experience partners were conscious of their home's orientation "I made sure that the facing of the new house [has] got the morning light coming across the corner of the house..." Another lived experience partner experienced light sensitivity stating "I wouldn't exactly need the large windows"; however, it was identified that this could be addressed via block out blinds. Adequate lighting can also enhance the end-users safety when entering and exiting the home, with a lived experience partner stating "I like to know that there's enough lighting outside. So when I pull up in the cab, there's sufficient lighting around... So the taxi pulls up, the sensor light comes on, and I'm able to access - to go inside without feeling... afraid."

Noise

Lived experience partners identified the impact of noise on personal health and wellbeing, with one partner supplying an anecdote of no longer requiring psychiatric medication after moving to a quieter area.

Subtheme 7: Support - maximising choice

Support available within proximity to the home environment was important to lived experience partners; however, these supports did not necessarily need to be onsite. People wanted a choice in how their support was delivered. Some felt that co-located supports would impact their privacy, indicating they “would not like my support workers co-located with me. I want to be able to shut the door.” Others voiced a preference for proximal offsite support, with a lived experience partner expressing “Having somebody in an adjoining house doesn't - It's not my idea of, um, privacy for myself or for the support people for that matter.”

Others reflected on the positives related to accessing proximal onsite supports, and the ability to choose when and how to engage them, with a lived experience partner contributing “If I need help, I can call on them. And if I don't, I don't have to see them. Which works for me because I want to be as independent as possible.”

Others highlighted the importance of maintaining regular one-to-one supports, with one lived experience partner describing how they had benefited from supports that extended beyond personal care and domestic activities, stating “... not only do they support me with like maybe dressing, cooking and all that stuff. I have found like in the 12 months ago [since] my partner died [they] also [provide] my emotional support as well.”

Subtheme 8: Community location

Four key components of the community location were identified including 1) co-location with other SDA participants, 2) proximity to amenities, 3) safety, privacy and security and 4) topography of the area.

Co-location with other SDA participants

Lived experience partners had mixed views on living in a home that was co-located with other SDA participants, however generally agreed that efficiencies gained (i.e. being able to share incidental supports, including “swapping over [if] someone's sick”) were beneficial, as long as their privacy was able to be maintained within indoor and outdoor areas of the home, as summarised by one lived experience partner who expressed “it would be really nice to have, like, my own home, my own garden, that sort of thing, but then have the ability to socialise with the other houses in some sort of communal thing, like, [others] are saying, but like to not have. Like to have maybe a fence, or just to have a separation or boundary where you're not going to have your neighbors walking, you know, up to your back door...” When considering the presence of other SDA participants, one lived experience partner spoke about the “community” that this could present “Like we [would] have a barbecue together... It's just nice to have people around. It's a good, positive thing to have people around.”

Proximity to amenities

Proximity and availability of local amenities were emphasised as important components of a suitable community location. Lived experience partners described the types of community activities they engaged in including paid employment, volunteering, leisure and other community engagement activities. Being centrally located in a regional town reduced reliance on taxis. In this regard, lived experience partners highlighted the importance of access to public transport, with one lived experience partner stating “It’s got to be on the bus route... so that I can leave my front door independently on my scooter and get on a bus and go wherever I want.” Lived experience partners also discussed their concerns associated with SDA developments in decentralised community locations:

“... That’s the other problem with SDAs in [rural town], is they’re all like 5 or 6 K’s [kilometres] out of town, not near shops, not near anything. And you’ve got to get a taxi to even just go get a pint of milk... which defeats the whole purpose of being independent. Like. Yeah, that’s fine. When I get my car back and can drive... but yeah, it’s not. It’s not good for anyone that doesn’t drive”

-Lived experience partner

Safety, privacy and security

Safety and privacy implications of community locations were also discussed by lived experience partners. One lived experience partner identified risks related to the lack of street infrastructure after “Council sold their end of the bargain... four years down the track, they still haven’t put the street lighting in. They were funded for it and now funded for a pathway along the front of the street. Four years down the track, the pathway is still not there...” Other lived experience partners emphasised the importance of developing housing “in a safe area”, with a lived experience partner identifying “... a lot of builders and developers buy cheap land out in the, you know, the not so savory suburbs and try and build out there. I don’t want to live out there.”

Topography of area

Lived experience partners identified that the topography of the area should be fit for purpose, it should either be “flat” or “a very gentle slope so that the water can drain easily”, to avoid water pooling. When considering travel to and from the property, one lived experience partner suggested “It has to be flat. So surroundings need to be so that I don’t have to go up a hill to get into my front door, or I don’t have to go down a hill to get to the shops. The area around the property has to be flat.

Subtheme 9: Sustainability considerations

Lived experience partners raised sustainability considerations, including “Double glazed windows, solar panels, water tanks”, and “plants that don’t need a lot of water”, some of which can also be considered as supporting systems and infrastructure that ensure consistent access and comfort within the home.

"We have unfortunately a lot of power cuts here in [town] and where I was living before in [another town]. And unfortunately, power cuts aside from their regularity. Don't lend themselves to things like making sure that wheelchairs and all sorts of other, or innumerable other devices remain charged and accessible. So I'm making sure there's extra solar on the roof, which will in turn back up a backup battery so that the house will always be, uh, living - it will always be at life... and I won't be for the want of not being able to access any of the devices that I'll need to control. Virtually everything in that house... not just now. But as time moves on and as things - continue to deteriorate."

-Lived experience partner

Theme 3: What a well-designed home and support means to me

Subtheme 1: Quality of life

When considering what a well-designed home could mean for them, lived experience partners discussed impacts on their quality of life. Sentiments relating to *secure tenancy* were expressed, including "peace of mind of not having to move out..." and "... I wouldn't have to move all the time". Lived experience partners also described a *sense of security* offered by well designed housing. Describing the positive aspects of their current housing, a lived experience partner explained "I love that I can see out the window. So we know who's coming..." Sense of security was further emphasised by lived experience partners describing "peace of mind" related to knowing and being in control of people coming and going from the home, indicating that they did not currently have this control where they lived.

"At the moment, living in this particular house. Support workers, maintenance people - even the guys who check the fire alarms and the smoke alarms and everything, they just come in and they have the lock box key and they just keep coming in and doing whatever... So I would be more secure knowing that I don't have to have that sort of thing happen"

-Lived experience partner

Increased opportunities to *balance life roles* with *spontaneity* in daily life, including "doing a lot more together and just spur of the moment", were positive outcomes for one lived experience partner and her husband. Another lived experience partner identified that they could see themselves being happy due to the *autonomy* offered, in being able to "make my own rules". Accessibility of the home was linked to its resident's *dignity*, with a lived experience partner conveying the impact on one's pride "like [if] you're in a wheelchair, [you] don't have [to] make an arse of yourself just to get in [the front door]. *Wellbeing*, including positive impacts on mental health related to increased independence and reduced fatigue were also identified, and were directly linked to the layout and space available within the home.

"I've [only got a] certain amount of spoons in my bucket or whatever you want to call it, in a day of energy. So walking down the corridor of home, I've only got so many of those in a day. Um, whereas if it's more central, then I can do more things and be more independent, which then, you know, improves your self-esteem"

because you're being more independent and less of a burden on the state and less funding you need out of the NDIS"

-Lived experience partner

Theme 4: Reflecting on the co-design approach

Subtheme 1: Importance of accessible co-design

Lived experience partners articulated the importance of genuine, accessible co-design. They emphasised that co-design should never be tokenistic, and that the data collected via these workshops should be used, "otherwise the houses aren't going to work [and] these meetings are pointless." Lived experience partners identified that co-design could include a range of perspectives, such as "the extended group of people that's around someone [who's nonverbal]." A desire to "get it right the first time" was expressed, with lived experience partners identifying real-world SDA developments where co-design with people with disability had not been prioritised:

"There's a brand new development that was finished in [regional town 4 months ago]... and it is still vacant. A two bedroom unit and a three bedroom house. Wow. And not one resident in it. And that's purely because they didn't talk to a disabled person whatsoever before they built. They'd gone and talked to service providers. And the service providers thought they knew what we needed locally. And they're just sitting vacant."

-Lived experience partner

End-user should be "kept in the loop" - Communication lines are open and maintained

A component of genuine, non-tokenistic co-design, end-users should be kept informed throughout the process via open and accessible communication pathways. One lived experience partner explained how "the builder who built my house involved me by listening to me." Where decisions need to be made, end-users should be given information to make an informed choice.

"I'm still quite blown away that the consultative process with the developer is that I'm kept in the loop... I didn't have it with [my] current house, but with the [new] property, I get copied into emails between the builder, the developer, the architect... With everything that's going on around the design, around the preparedness to be able to tweak designs within the house as we're going along in the build, to some extent. We tried to iron all those things out before the build got started, and did so, but there have been a couple little tweaks as we've been going along as well. So that's been really good to visit and revisit... as well as to keep in the loop as to the progress along the way to make sure that we're still all on the same page."

-Lived experience partner

When the project architect provided feedback regarding her learnings so far, a lived experience partner expressed "I'm actually happy, She's actually heard what we've been saying." This lived experience partner wanted to emphasise the importance of communication between end-users and developers, stating "I would like to have a say, I would push that point... as long as the communication is there, then the end product should be quite nice." Given the many stakeholders involved in SDA development, lived experience

partners wanted to ensure that developers centred the end-user with disability as the client they are working to deliver housing for, with one lived experience partner stating “The disabled person is their client, not the NDIS or anyone else. It is actually the person that's going to live in the house is still their client.”

Subtheme 2: Transition considerations / reflections

A number of reflections on the transition experience were offered by lived experience partners, including that there are often initial issues “wherever you live... but you just have to get them under control.” Others felt that previous transitions had been too rushed, with a lived experience partner describing feeling “trapped in my own house” since external ramps had not been completed to enable safe egress from the property.

“I remember talking to one of the bosses here and she said, ‘what is your problem?’ I said, ‘listen, I feel like I'm trapped in my own house’ because - I could go downstairs, but I couldn't walk either side to get out of the property. So I was stuck because there's no off ramps as yet and there's still no off ramps. So I'm still waiting for that.

-Lived experience partner



Recommendations

This report presents the lived experience wisdom shared by lived experience partners in relation to the physical design, support and living arrangements in SDA. By utilising a co-design methodology, the project team were able to receive insights that may otherwise not be considered in the team's pursuit to deliver innovative accessible housing. This is particularly evident in 'Theme 3: What a well-designed home and support means to me', where lived experience partners were able to articulate the quality of life impacts that well-designed SDA could have. Recommendations across each of the four themes and their related subthemes are summarised below

Theme 1: Systemic factors

Subtheme 1: Existing models - genuine choice

1. Promote flexibility in support and accommodation models: Ensure the separation of housing and support providers, allowing individuals more genuine choice and control over their living arrangements.
2. Diversify SDA models: Develop and pilot diverse SDA models that cater to varying needs and preferences to provide genuine options for different users.

Subtheme 2: Land affordability/availability

1. Facilitate access to suitable land: Create incentives or partnerships to make land more affordable and accessible for SDA projects.
2. Consider proximity to amenities: When selecting land, prioritise locations close to community amenities to foster independence, reduce the cost of community access and reduce reliance on taxis and paid workers.

Theme 2: Key considerations for housing and support

Subtheme 1: Access

1. Design for Universal accessibility: Ensure homes are universally accessible, including for bariatric equipment, with features like wide doorways and low thresholds.
2. Prioritise lift and amenity reliability: Include reliable lifts and accessible shared amenities as critical components of home design.

Subtheme 2: Space

1. Maximise functional space: Design homes with ample space for movement, personal activities, and equipment storage. Incorporate flexible layouts to accommodate different household configurations.
2. Creative space solutions: Utilise creative space-saving designs such as foldaway furniture and built-in storage to enhance usability.

Subtheme 3: Modifiable environment

1. Integrate modifiable features: Incorporate features that allow customisation and adaptation over time, such as reinforced walls for future retrofits and adjustable fixtures.
2. Plan for progressive conditions: Ensure the home's design supports easy adaptation for users with progressive conditions, such as installing reinforced structures for future modifications.

Subtheme 4: Equipment and assistive technology

1. Ensure SDA is tech ready: to support the later integration of smart technology for environmental control, access, and security as needed once the occupant(s) are identified.
2. Ensure equipment storage: Design ample storage solutions for various types of assistive equipment to keep living spaces organised and functional.

Subtheme 5: Aesthetics

1. Prioritise homelike materials and design: Use durable, aesthetically pleasing materials that create a homelike environment and reduce wear and tear.
2. Allow customisation: Offer options for residents to choose colours and materials to personalise their living space.

Subtheme 6: Sensory environment

1. Optimise temperature control: Design energy-efficient homes with efficient heating and cooling systems to ensure comfort and accommodate individual temperature preferences.
2. Manage light and noise: Design homes with adjustable lighting and noise reduction features to enhance sensory comfort.

Subtheme 7: Support

1. Maximise choice in supports: Maximise the choice people with disability have in how their supports are provided including through on-site, on-call and other arrangements.

Subtheme 8: Community location

1. Prioritise security and accessible locations: Choose community locations that are safe, have good infrastructure, and are accessible by public transport.
2. Balance co-location with privacy: If co-locating with other SDA participants, ensure that privacy and personal space are maintained within the community.

Subtheme 9: Sustainability considerations

1. Incorporate sustainable features: Use energy-efficient technologies like solar panels, water tanks, and low-water plants to promote sustainability.
2. Ensure long-term environmental efficiency: Consider the long-term environmental impact of SDA designs and materials.

Theme 3: What a well-designed home and support means to me

Subtheme 1: Quality of life

1. Enhance autonomy and security: Design homes that provide residents with a sense of security and control over their environment to enhance their quality of life.
2. Facilitate daily living and social interaction: Ensure that home designs support daily activities, hobbies, and social interactions, contributing to a balanced and fulfilling life.

Theme 4: Reflecting on the co-design approach

Subtheme 1: Importance of accessible co-design

Whilst this project remains ongoing, this report identifies how genuine, accessible co-design can be achieved, with lived experience partners expressing that in Workshop Four that they felt listened to and understood by the project architect. This project involved universally available technologies to conduct online workshops with participants from geographically diverse locations and varying methods of communication. However, as identified by one lived experience partner, ensuring effective co-design with people with little or no effective communication remains an important consideration in these projects.

1. Ensure genuine co-design: Implement a co-design process that is inclusive, transparent, and genuinely responsive to the needs and feedback of people with disability.
2. Maintain open communication: Keep communication channels open throughout the design and build process to ensure end-users are informed and involved.

Remuneration of lived experience partners acknowledges the time and expertise involved in attending and participating in these workshops. It extends beyond commonly applied practices of supplying participants with gift vouchers, or providing compensation for expenses such as travel and parking. Remuneration via a wage enables lived experience partners to choose how they spend their wage earned via the contribution of their expertise and emphasises the value of their contribution to the project.

Subtheme 2: Transition considerations/reflections

1. Plan for smooth transitions: Address potential transition issues proactively, ensuring that all necessary modifications are completed before the move-in date.

2. Reflect and adapt: Use feedback from previous transitions to refine processes and avoid common pitfalls.

By addressing these recommendations, SDA designs can better align with the needs and preferences of people with disability, ultimately improving their quality of life and ensuring that their homes are functional, comfortable, and supportive.

Conclusion

In addition to the lack of innovation in accessible housing and support in Australia there is also a surprising lack of investment in consumer insights. This report provides insights into the lived experience of SDA, from the perspective of people with disability and unmet housing needs. In particular, housing and support needs and preferences for people living in regional and rural locations are outlined. The recommendations, developed from analysis of the information shared by the lived experience partners, outline key considerations for innovative accessible housing solutions.

There is a significant risk that the SDA market is building social infrastructure that will be with us for the next 20-30 years that is not fit for purpose. This SDA stock is likely to have high vacancy rates if it does not meet the contemporary expectations for SDA for people with disability. Delivering high-quality SDA that is adaptable, functional and liveable is so much more than just adhering to the standards required by the NDIA or the advice of access consultants. Contemporary SDA that meets the needs of people with disability fosters independence and autonomy and upholds the tenancy and other rights of people with disability to live like everyone else.

Engaging with people with disability in co-design, is critical to creating effective and sustainable housing and support solutions. The value of co-design lies in its ability to foster genuine collaboration. This authentic process not only empowers individuals, but also creates a space where insights and expertise shape meaningful solutions.

By addressing the recommendations outlined in this report, SDA can better align with the needs and preferences of people with disability. Well designed housing and supports that diversify the SDA market will present genuine choice to people with disability, and will ultimately uphold their human rights and promote quality of life.

