

Research Paper

A review of the integration of State and Territory housing and disability policies in Australia: August 2006

**National Research Venture 2: 21st
Century housing careers and Australia's
housing future**

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ACRONYMS

ABSC	Accommodation Blueprint Steering Committee (WA)
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
AFV	A Fairer Victoria
AHS	Affordable Housing Strategy (Tas.)
AHURI	Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
CSHA	Commonwealth State Housing Agreement
CS/TDA	Commonwealth State/Territory Disability Agreement
DADHC	Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care (NSW)
DDHCS	Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services (ACT)
DFC	Department for Families and Communities (SA)
DHCS	Department of Health and Community Services (NT)
DHS	Department of Human Services (Vic.)
DHW	Department of Housing and Works (WA)
DoH	Department of Housing (Qld)
DPC	Department of Premier and Cabinet (Tas.)
DSC	Disability Services Commission (WA)
DSD	Disability Services Division (Vic.)
DSQ	Disability Services Queensland
FaCSIA	(Department of) Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (Cwlth)
HASI	Housing and Supported Accommodation Initiative (NSW)
MHS	Mental Health Services (Tas.)
NPY	Ngannytjarra, Pitjantjatjarra and Yankunytjatjarra (Lands)
NSW	New South Wales
NT	Northern Territory
OoH	Office of Housing (Vic.)
Qld	Queensland
SA	South Australia
SATG	Supported Accommodation Task Group (SA)
SDWP	Sector Development Working Party (WA)
SRC	Southern Research Centre (AHURI)
Tas.	Tasmania
Vic.	Victoria
WA	Western Australia

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report investigates the extent of integration of state and territory housing and disability policies in Australia to August 2006. It does this in order to understand how and to what extent relevant state and territory policies and plans address the housing and assistance needs of people with disabilities, and what strategies are in place in each jurisdiction to address growing housing assistance demand from people with disabilities. Importantly, the report also provides a policy background and context for current empirical research being undertaken by the Southern Research Centre (SRC) of the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) into the housing careers of people with disabilities in Victoria, as part of AHURI's National Research Venture 2, *21st Century Housing Careers and Australia's Housing Future*.

The report reviews key (internet available) state and territory disability and housing policies and plans, including:

- general (mainstream) and specialist policies and plans where in place (i.e. those specifically for people with disabilities); and
- policies guiding relevant government departments and agencies, i.e. state/territory housing and/or disability departments/agencies.

The report also briefly investigates the main thrust of both the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement (CSHA) and the Commonwealth State/Territory Disability Agreement (CS/TDA) and the implications of these Agreements for state and territory housing and disability policies.

Table 1 summarises the key housing and disability policies reviewed in the report. It identifies the year of publication of key policies (and, where applicable, relevant legislation) and whether the policies make reference to certain groups in the community (Indigenous people, people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds and of different genders).

The review shows that increasing and improving housing options and assistance for people with disabilities and people with mental illness is a clear objective of all Australian state governments and the ACT Government. Accordingly, strategies and actions to increase and improve housing assistance and housing options for people with disabilities and people with mental illnesses are emphasised and included in the current disability policies and housing policies in these jurisdictions; albeit in slightly different ways and to different extents between policies and between jurisdictions.¹

All Australian state governments and the ACT Government have developed comprehensive disability policies to support people with disabilities. The policies show the need for, and commitment of, governments to invest in and facilitate the increased and improved provision and integration of person-centred support services for people with disabilities. This is an area of on-going policy concern with important initiatives – such as the *Accessible Place, Accessible State 2020* report – in train and in prospect (DACV 2005). Central to the disability policies is increasing and improving housing assistance and accommodation options for people with disabilities. This focus is

¹ This is particularly the case with the Northern Territory (NT). As the NT section of this report shows, the Territory is not at the same stage in the development of disability policy as other jurisdictions in Australia. For a number of reasons – primarily related to demographics and geography, and the poorer health of the Indigenous population – the NT Government has focused on improving primary health care services. Strategies to support people with disabilities in the NT form part of general NT health policies. This said, the NT Government announced a review of its disability services system in December 2005 and a report on this review is anticipated in the coming months.

clearly motivated by widespread understanding of the importance of affordable, secure, stable and appropriate housing for the health, well-being and financial security of people with disabilities and people with mental illness (and for the general population).

Table 1: Summary of key state and territory housing and disability policies and their reference to specific groups

	<i>Housing Policy</i>						<i>Disability Policy</i>					
	<i>Key Policies</i>	<i>Year of Key Policy</i>	<i>Reference to Indigenous People</i>	<i>Reference to people of CALD Back-grounds</i>	<i>Reference to Gender</i>	<i>Key Legislation</i>	<i>Key Policies</i>	<i>Year of Key Policy</i>	<i>Reference to Indigenous People</i>	<i>Reference to people of CALD Back-grounds</i>	<i>Reference to Gender</i>	<i>Key Legislation</i>
New South Wales	NSW Government's Plan for Reshaping Public Housing	2005	✓ ¹	×	×		Stronger Together: A new direction for disability services in NSW 2006–2016	2006	✓	✓	×	<i>Disability Services Act 1993 (NSW)</i>
	A New Direction for NSW, State Plan, Draft for Consultation (August 2006) ³	2006	✓	×	×		NSW: A New Direction for Mental Health	2006	✓	×	×	
Queensland	5 Year Strategic Plan for People with a Disability (Housing)	c. 2001	✓	✓	×	<i>Housing Act 2003 (Qld) (Amended August 2005)</i>	Queensland Government Strategic Framework for Disability 2002–2005 ⁴	c. 2002	×	×	×	<i>Disability Services Act 2006 (Qld)</i>
	Improving Peoples Lives Through Housing, An Integrated Approach to Housing for People and Communities	2000	✓	✓	✓							
South Australia	Housing Plan for SA	2005	✓	×	✓ ⁵	Proposed new <i>Accommodation Legislation</i> for people with disabilities living in supported accommodation	Promoting Independence: Disability Actions Plans for SA	2000	✓ ⁶	✓ ⁶	✓ ⁷	<i>Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (SA)</i>
							Accommodation and Personal Support for People with Disabilities in SA Consultation Paper – outlines proposed new Accommodation and Personal Support Services Policy and Plan	2006				
Tasmania	Affordable Housing Strategy Tasmania 2004–2008: Framework	2003	✓	✓ ⁸	×		Disability Framework for Action 2005–2010	2005	×	×	×	<i>Disability Services Act 1992 (Tas)</i>

	<i>Housing Policy</i>						<i>Disability Policy</i>					
	<i>Key Policies</i>	<i>Year of Key Policy</i>	<i>Reference to Indigenous People</i>	<i>Reference to people of CALD Back-grounds</i>	<i>Reference to Gender</i>	<i>Key Legislation</i>	<i>Key Policies</i>	<i>Year of Key Policy</i>	<i>Reference to Indigenous People</i>	<i>Reference to people of CALD Back-grounds</i>	<i>Reference to Gender</i>	<i>Key Legislation</i>
Victoria	(State Social Policy addresses housing for disadvantaged groups)	2005	✓	✓	✓ ⁹		Victorian State Disability Plan 2002–2012	2002	✓	✓	✓ ¹⁰	<i>Disability Act 2006 (Vic)</i>
	A Fairer Victoria, Creating Opportunity and Addressing Disadvantage	2006	✓	✓	✓		New Directions for Victoria's Mental Health Services: The Next Five Years	2002	✓	✓	✓ ¹¹	
	A Fairer Victoria, Progress and Next Steps (June 2006)	2006	✓	✓	✓							
	Shaping the future of social housing	2006	✗	✗	✗							
Western Australia	Strategic Housing Policy for People with Disabilities	2004	✓ ¹²	✓ ¹²	✗	<i>Housing Act 1980 (WA)</i>	See Housing Policy section					<i>Disability Services Act 1993 (WA)</i>
	Housing Strategy WA Discussion Draft	c. 2006	✓	✗	✓ ¹³							
Australian Capital Territory	Housing People Building Communities	2004	✓	✗	✓ ¹⁴		Challenge 2014, A ten year vision for disability in the ACT	2004	✓	✓	✗	<i>Disability Services Act 1991 (ACT)</i>
	ACT Social Policy also deals with housing: Building Our Community, the Canberra Social Plan	2004	✓ ¹⁵	✓	✓							
Northern Territory	Home Territory 2010	2004	✓	✗	✗		Disability services in the NT, background paper	2006	✓	✗	✗	<i>Disability Services Act 1993 (NT)</i> <i>Mental Health and Related Services Act 1998 (NT)</i>

Notes for Table 1:

- ¹ Only briefly, as the reforms outlined in the policy also relate to the NSW DoH's Aboriginal Housing Office.
- ² Briefly mentions the NSW Government's achievements in housing and assisting women escaping domestic violence.
- ³ The NSW State Plan draft discusses the NSW Government's commitment to implementing the state's disability policy (Stronger Together) and includes a focus on improving services and support for people with disabilities and people with mental illness as part of the strategies outlined in the State Plan (under theme 3: improving services).
- ⁴ No specific reference to actions/strategies for Indigenous people, people from CALD backgrounds or based on gender, but reference is made to ensuring that people with disabilities receive services that are responsive to their individual needs, age, gender and culture.
- ⁵ Brief mention of the need to address housing for women escaping domestic violence and women leaving prison.
- ⁶ Specifically mentions the need to improve access to, and information about, services for people from CALD and for Indigenous people.
- ⁷ The policy only refers to gender in terms of reducing discrimination against people with disabilities based on gender, age, sexuality, race, ethnicity, religion, language and culture.
- ⁸ Passing reference made to people from CALD backgrounds in terms of potential increasing demand for affordable housing from people in this group.
- ⁹ Specific reference to improving access to private rental market for women escaping domestic violence and to assist women with mental illness, particularly women suffering from post natal depression.
- ¹⁰ Specific reference to assisting women with disabilities, i.e. to improve their health and wellbeing through the Women's Health and Well-being Strategy, improving access to mainstream health services for women with disabilities (e.g. sexual and reproductive health services). The Victorian Government has also begun a demonstration project for supporting women with disabilities experiencing violence.
- ¹¹ Brief reference to gender in terms of the Victorian Government's Women's Health and Wellbeing Strategy and its initiatives to assist women with mental illness and disadvantaged women.
- ¹² Reference to the need to improve access to Department of Housing and Works' programs and services and to ensure that information about such programs and services is in an appropriate and accessible form for people from CALD backgrounds and Indigenous people.
- ¹³ Passing reference to women's and men's refugees as part of the Crisis Accommodation Program.
- ¹⁴ Specifically supported accommodation programs to assist homeless men and women and young Indigenous women.
- ¹⁵ In terms of improving the capacity of mainstream services to meet the needs of Indigenous people and improving primary health care outcomes for Indigenous people.

The disability policies in place in each Australian state and the ACT outline a range of strategies and actions being undertaken by state and territory governments to improve and increase housing assistance for people with disabilities. For the most part the strategies outlined in these policies focus on a common series of actions to improve and increase the range and quality of support services for people with disabilities and people with mental illness. These include:

- increasing the *capacity* of new and existing support services for people with disabilities and people with mental illness, including housing assistance and supported accommodation options;
- increasing the number, range and quality of in-home support services and *community-based* supported accommodation options for people with disabilities and people with mental illness, including for people with disabilities and/or mental illness living in large institutional care facilities;
- closing large institutions for people with disabilities;
- ensuring that people with disabilities and people with mental illness are able to access both mainstream and specialised (disability-specific) support services and housing assistance, and have access to information about these services;
- researching, developing and trialling *new models* of accommodation and housing for people with disabilities, especially community-based accommodation options;
- building, strengthening and ensuring the sustainability of the social housing sector in each jurisdiction as a viable and appropriate housing option for people with disabilities and/or mental illness – primarily by increasing private sector provided and/or managed community housing; and
- increasing affordable housing options for people with disabilities and people with mental illness.

The policies also highlight the need for state and territory governments to better integrate the housing assistance provided to people with disabilities and/or mental illness with the health, community and social support services needed by them. In order to achieve this, the disability policies strongly emphasise inter-departmental and cross-agency collaboration; collaboration within and between the government and non-government agencies involved in providing mainstream and specialist services for people with disabilities and for people with mental illness. These strategies and actions are unsurprising given the foci of both the current Commonwealth State/Territory Disability Agreement (CS/TDA) (Commonwealth of Australia 2003a) and the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement (CSHA) (Commonwealth of Australia 2003b, see especially pp. 2–4 & 17). They are also consistent with the general (and brief) focus on housing assistance specifically for people with disabilities and people with mental illnesses outlined in state/territory housing policies (especially departmental social housing policies) and in whole-of-state and whole-of-government strategies and housing plans in those jurisdictions that have such plans. For example, in SA in the *Housing Plan for SA and South Australian Strategic Plan*, in Victoria (in the *A Fairer Victoria* social policy), WA (*Housing Strategy WA Discussion Draft*) and ACT (*The Canberra Social Plan*).

It is clear from the review that social housing is being developed as an important option for people with disabilities and people with mental illness across Australia, and especially for people with more severe, profound or restrictive disabilities and mental health conditions. Because of this, housing policies, and especially social housing policies, are clearly focussed on ensuring that people with disabilities can be appropriately housed in social housing dwellings. This has seen increasing activity by

governments to attract non-Government investment in community housing and to ensure that social housing properties are appropriate and accessible; that is, in terms of their location or proximity to services, employment, education and recreation opportunities and their physical design, particularly for people with mobility difficulties. These factors are also consistent with the requirements of the current CSHA (see Commonwealth of Australia 2003b, p. 17 & 22).

The WA and Queensland Governments' comprehensive strategic housing policies specifically for people with disabilities in their states stand out in this review as the leading examples of the integration of disability and housing policies in Australia. Clearly, other state and territory governments in Australia could learn a great deal from these plans. This said, it is also the case that much work has been done and is being done by state and territory governments to investigate, develop and increase housing options for people with disabilities and/or mental illness, and to integrate the provision of housing/accommodation assistance for people in these groups with the support services they need. Many state governments and the ACT Government have recently reviewed or are reviewing accommodation options for people with disabilities, and especially community-based accommodation options. The NSW and SA Government housing and disability agencies, for example, have recently released discussion papers on supported accommodation for people with disabilities and the integration of accommodation and personal support services for people with disabilities respectively. These governments have undertaken extensive community consultations on these respective issues to gauge the opinions of key stakeholders in the disability sector on new and existing models of accommodation for people with disabilities.

It is evident from this review that the disability and housing policies in place in Australia's states and the ACT are largely complementary. Importantly, they are clearly headed in the same direction in each jurisdiction, i.e. in terms of both the need to increase and improve housing options and housing assistance for people with disabilities and people with mental illness and the integration of support services needed by individuals in these groups. Fundamentally, this is because state and territory governments recognise that stable, affordable, secure and appropriate housing is crucial in shaping and improving the health, wellbeing and financial security of people with disabilities. As such, this is a guiding principle of both disability and housing policies in place in each jurisdiction.

The report finds strong congruence across Australia's states and territories in terms of housing and disability policies and their strategic direction. Given this congruence, it is evident that the results of the research currently being undertaken on the housing careers of people with disabilities and people with mental illness (and their carers) in Victoria as part of AHURI's National Research Venture 2 is important for, and could equally apply to, most jurisdictions in Australia. The possible exception here is the Northern Territory where for a range of place-specific and population-specific reasons the focus of housing and health policies (including those related to disability) is clearly on improving primary health care outcomes for Territorians, especially Indigenous Territorians.

INTRODUCTION

This report investigates the extent of integration of state and territory housing and disability policies in Australia to August 2006. It does this in order to understand how and to what extent relevant state and territory policies and plans address the housing and assistance needs of people with disabilities, and what strategies are in place in each jurisdiction to address growing housing assistance demand from people with disabilities. Importantly, the report also provides a policy background and context for current empirical research being undertaken by the Southern Research Centre (SRC) of the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) into the housing careers of people with disabilities in Victoria, as part of AHURI's National Research Venture 2, *21st Century Housing Careers and Australia's Housing Future*.

The first and main section of the report reviews the disability and housing policies and plans in place in each state and territory in Australia. It provides a summary of the aims of these documents and briefly outlines the strategies in place to meet the stated aims of the policies. The discussion in this section also outlines the cross-over or integration of the policies, i.e. how and to what extent state/territory disability policies integrate housing policy or emphasise housing assistance measures to achieve better (housing and support) outcomes for people with disabilities. The key policies and plans reviewed in this section include:

- general (mainstream) and specialist policies and plans where in place (i.e. those specifically for people with disabilities); and
- policies guiding relevant government departments and agencies, i.e. state/territory housing and/or disability departments/agencies.

The report also briefly investigates the main thrust of both the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement (CSHA) and the Commonwealth State/Territory Disability Agreement (CS/TDA) and the implications (and influence) of these Agreements for state and territory housing and disability policies.

The final section of the report summarises the findings of the research.

It is important to place a caveat here: this review relied on identifying the key state and territory disability and housing policies and plans as they are available on the websites of relevant governments and government departments. Accordingly, it may be the case that this review has not identified all relevant documents. The report is therefore a brief review of policies as publicly available over the internet, as at the beginning of August 2006.

STATES

New South Wales

The New South Wales (NSW) Government released a comprehensive long-term strategic plan for disability services in NSW in May 2006 (NSW Government 2006c). The document, *Stronger together: A new direction for disability services in NSW 2006–2016*, sets out the NSW Government's priorities in terms of the planning, design and provision of disability services in the state. While the plan is a new direction for *all* disability services in NSW, it focuses heavily on housing and accommodation assistance for people with disabilities.

Through *Stronger Together*, the NSW Government aims to (a) increase assistance for people with disabilities to enable them to live at home² and participate in the community, and (b) increase the range of specialist accommodation services available, especially for people with disabilities living in large residential facilities (NSW Government 2006c, p. 2). To meet these overriding objectives the plan emphasises

- *fair and more transparent access to services* for people with disabilities, i.e. making access to government services predictable, clarifying the types of support available to people with disabilities, and their families; and standardising the eligibility and assessment criteria for government assistance (p. 3);
- *helping people with disabilities to remain in their own home* (p. 3);
- *matching services to need*: including emphasising services that allow people with disabilities to remain in their homes and ensuring that services are appropriate to their needs and can and do alter to meet their changing/fluctuating needs over time (p. 4);
- *increasing the range of accommodation options for people in specialist support services*, i.e. developing and trialling new (less intensive) and more flexible specialist accommodation models, beyond large residential centres and group homes (p. 4); and
- *building a sustainable support system for people with disabilities*, i.e. recognising that government alone is not in a position to provide all the services necessary for people with disabilities, fostering partnerships with the private and community sectors is therefore crucial to the sustainability of the support system for people with disabilities. In addition, ensuring that services purchased from, or provided by, the non-government sector are cost-effective and efficient and that government and non-government services are high quality, responsive to need and regularly monitored is also considered central to the sustainability of the system (pp. 5 & 28).

Stronger Together is guided by three strategic priorities, described in the document as 'areas of effort'. These are:

1. *strengthening families* – enabling children and young people with disabilities to grow up in a family and participate in the community.³

² The government's focus on providing and increasing assistance to enable people with disabilities to remain in their homes is in recognition of the fact that most people with disabilities do not live in supported accommodation facilities and are cared for at home by their family and/or friends.

³ The NSW Government's focus on enabling children and young people with disabilities to grow up in a family and participate in the community is not surprising given that in July 2002 the government released

2. *count me in...promoting community inclusion* – assisting and supporting adults with disabilities to live and participate in the community.
3. *improving the capacity and accountability of the support system* for people with disabilities – ensuring fair and clear access to services, greater accountability in service provision and more opportunities for innovation.

(NSW Government 2006c, pp. 6–7)

In terms of housing and accommodation for people with disabilities, the specific strategies and actions outlined and proposed in the document include:

- *increasing the number of specialist accommodation support places available by redeveloping large residential centres into contemporary village style accommodation, provision of innovative accommodation places (eg drop-in support, clustered villas, shared equity) as well as options for young people leaving the care of the Minister of Community Services, options for people leaving the criminal justice system and the development of alternate options to residential aged care* (p. 7 & 21).
- increasing the range of respite, therapy and in-home support for people with disabilities and their families (including intensive in-home support); to reduce demand on high intensity accommodation services (pp. 18–21).
- progressive closure of large residential centres (institutions) in line with the NSW Government's program for closing such facilities (p. 22).
- identifying technologies that can assist people with disabilities to live independently and/or reduce the number of hours paid support workers spend assisting a person with a disability to live in the community (p. 23).
- continuing the NSW Government's refurbishment program for supported accommodation facilities (p. 28).

The NSW Government, through the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care (DADHC), has undertaken extensive work over the past two years on models of supported accommodation for people with disabilities in NSW.⁴ The DADHC's research and its extensive consultations with people with disabilities, their families and carers and disability service providers and advocates on this issue have clearly informed *Stronger Together* and the principles and strategic directions of the plan (see DADHC 2004b; NSW Government 2005a, 2006a). The DADHC's work on this area has identified a number of potential models of supported accommodation, i.e.

- group homes or community residential units – owned by DADHC or rented from the private rental market, DoH or a community housing organisation. Group homes may be large homes with a number of bedrooms or groups of co-located detached or semidetached dwellings with rostered support staff;
- village style living, where tenants individually lease their units and an on-site manager provides and coordinates outside support for residents;
- government or privately managed community housing with outreach services, i.e. for people with complex support needs, behavioural issues or transitioning from crisis accommodation;

a specific 'policy for supporting children and young people with a disability and their families in NSW: *Living in the Community, Putting Children First* (DADHC 2002).

⁴ See the Models of Supported Accommodation for People with a Disability section of the DADHC's website (<http://www.dadhc.nsw.gov.au/dadhc/People+with+a+disability/Models+of+Supported+Accommodation+for+People+with+a+Disability.htm>) for full details of DADHC's activities in this area.

- tenant managed cooperative (community) housing, with tenants arranging their own support;
- private rental accommodation head leased by housing associations.

(DADHC 2004b)

The draft NSW *State Plan (A New Direction for NSW)* released in August 2006 also addresses support for people with disabilities and the most vulnerable groups in NSW generally. Unsurprisingly, the strategies outlined in the document for people with disabilities (see NSW Government 2006b, p. 29) are the same as the main objectives guiding *Stronger Together*, as these two documents, along with the *Sydney Metropolitan Strategy* and state mental health plan (*NSW: A New Direction for Mental Health*), are the main documents directing the actions of the NSW Government over the next five to ten years.

The DADHC's most recent strategy document, *Future Directions*, released in August 2004 emphasises the same sorts of strategies and directions as the documents discussed above. It focuses on the need for the NSW Government to work with other government agencies and the non-government sector to increase and develop services and options (including housing) for people with disabilities⁵ (and people who are ageing), and to increase the capacity and sustainability of the disability and ageing support system as a whole. In addition, *Future Directions* stresses the importance of investing in early intervention and prevention strategies, primarily to reduce the need for intensive and high cost support services and accommodation (DADHC 2004a, pp. 3–8).

The NSW Government's mental health plan, *NSW: A New Direction for Mental Health*, is also focused on increasing community care options for people with mental illness and emphasises early intervention, prevention and mental health promotion strategies to reduce the need for acute care and hospitalisation of people with mental illness across their life span (NSW Department of Health 2006, p. 5). Central to the plan, and meeting the above objectives, is investing in, strengthening and increasing stable accommodation options for people with mental illnesses and integrating accommodation with the health, clinical, social and community support services needed by individuals with a mental illness. This includes both government and non-government provided services.

Moreover, like the *Stronger Together* vision for disability services generally, *NSW: A New Direction for Mental Health* aims to facilitate the increased participation of people with mental illness in the community, primarily by investing in stable accommodation options and building employment and education opportunities for such individuals (NSW Department of Health 2006, pp. 13–14). The plan feeds into the draft state strategic plan (see particularly p. 25) and builds upon other general and specific mental health strategies, plans and policies already in place in NSW that specifically address housing assistance and support services for people with mental illness. These policies and plans include the NSW Health Department's *Framework for Housing and Accommodation Support for People with Mental Health Problems and Disorders* (2002), *Joint Guarantee of Service for People with Mental Health Problems and Disorders Living in Aboriginal, Community and Public Housing* (NSW Department

⁵ Joint planning on accommodation and support for people with disabilities in NSW (both within and between government and non-government mainstream and disability services providers) was flagged as a priority area by the then Ageing and Disability Department in the NSW Government Disability Policy Framework released in 1998 (Ageing and Disability Department 1998, p. 6 & pp. 7–8).

of Health 2003) and the *NSW Government's Plan for Mental Health Services* (NSW Government 2005b).

A key program of the NSW Government in terms of the integration of accommodation and support services for people with mental illness in NSW is the Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative (HASI). HASI is a partnership between the NSW Department of Health, Department of Housing (DoH)⁶ and non-government providers of mental health services, jointly funded by the NSW Department of Health and DoH. It aims to improve the quality life of people with mental illness and decrease hospitalisations (Morris et al 2005, p. 2) and is singled out in the current mental health plan for expansion (into Stage Three) because of its success in improving the wellbeing of people with mental illnesses and their health outcomes (see NSW Government 2006, pp. 5, 13 & 19). For more information on HASI and the outcomes of the program see Morris et al (2005).

The NSW Government's current public housing policy, the *NSW Government's Plan for Reshaping Public Housing* (NSW Government 2005c), is also important in terms of this review and has specific implications for assistance for people with disabilities in the state.⁷ The reforms introduced more tightly targeted eligibility criteria for allocating public housing in NSW; targeted on the principle of 'strongest housing need' and income. Public housing in NSW is now targeted at 'assisting people on low incomes who *need support services* to help them live independently; and households on low incomes who have problems finding affordable housing in the private market that is suited to their needs' (NSW Government 2005, p. 6, emphasis added). The policy identifies the frail elderly and aged pensioners, *people with a disability*, families with children, young people aged under 20 and without family support, homeless people and unemployed and low waged adults as the key groups to be assisted by public housing. The reforms also include a commitment from the NSW Government to continue the DoH's program of modifying public housing dwellings to meet the needs of people with disabilities (NSW Government 2005c, pp. 5 & 8).

The *NSW Housing and Human Services Accord* developed as part of the 'Reshaping Public Housing' reforms is an important step forward in integrating social housing and support services for people with disabilities in NSW. The Accord is a formal agreement between the NSW DoH (on behalf of a range of social housing providers) and human service agencies to assist their mutual clients, i.e. to

- assist social housing clients with their support needs; and
- assist clients of human services agencies with their housing needs.

(NSW DoH and NSW Human Services Agencies 2006, p.1)

The Accord also aims to reduce social disadvantage in larger public housing estates.

The purpose of the Accord '...is to improve the planning, coordination and delivery of services to assist social housing tenants to sustain their tenancies, as well as to facilitate community building and to reduce social disadvantage in the larger public

⁶ The NSW DoH and community housing providers supply the housing for all people in the program.

⁷ The NSW Government's Plan for Reshaping Public Housing is also the key policy guiding the actions of the DoH at this time. The NSW DoH does not have many current departmental documents on their website; unsurprising given the recent reform of public housing in the state. For example, the current available Corporate Plan (Working Together) covers the period 2002–2004 (NSW DoH c. 2002). The most recent and comprehensive NSW DoH Disability Action Plan on their website is for 2000–2002 (NSW DoH 2001) with a brief two page update for 2003–2004 (including a strategy stating the Department's intention to commence the development of a revised Disability Action Plan in 2004). It is also the case that the DoH website itself is currently being upgraded.

housing estates' (p. 3). The Accord supports initiatives and services that promote cross-agency collaboration and continuity in the provision of integrated housing assistance and support services, and that assist low income people to establish and sustain a social housing tenancy or move into other affordable housing options where able. In addition, it aims to promote the development of new cross-agency services and agreements to improve outcomes for the mutual clients of agencies. The outcomes of the Accord are to be met within the existing resources of agencies as it is not resourced and does not commit agencies to any additional expenditure to meet either their role in the Accord or its outcomes. Implementation of the Accord is a strategic priority in the *NSW State Plan* (NSW Government 2006b, p. 29).

The *NSW Housing and Human Services Accord* also provides an overarching framework for the development and implementation of new and existing schedules between signatory agencies, and between such agencies and other government or non-government providers of social housing and/or support services. Currently the only schedule included in the Accord is the *Joint Guarantee of Service for People with Mental Health Problems and Disorders Living in Aboriginal, Community and Public Housing* (JGOS). The JGOS is a partnership (and Memorandum of Understanding) between NSW Health,⁸ the NSW DoH,⁹ NSW Aboriginal Housing Office, Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council of NSW and the NSW Department of Community Services¹⁰ to guide the coordinated delivery of mental health services, housing assistance and support services for people with mental illnesses living in social housing or who are homeless or at risk of homelessness (NSW Department of Health 2003, p. 3). Like the *NSW Housing and Human Services Accord* generally, the aim of the JGOS is to coordinate service delivery across agencies (and with other government and non-government service providers at the local level) to improve the housing outcomes and wellbeing of people with mental illness.

The Accord, JGOS and reshaping of public housing in NSW are clearly all intended to work towards meeting the main aims of disability policy in the state. That is, improving the wellbeing and quality of life of people with disabilities and people with mental illness in NSW (and the other special needs groups identified above); primarily by strengthening the social housing sector as an appropriate housing option for individuals in these groups and supporting people with disabilities/mental illness to live independently by integrating their housing assistance with necessary support services.

Queensland

The Queensland Government, through their Department of Housing (DoH), has had a formal housing strategy specifically for people with a disability for around a decade. The current strategy, the *5 Year Strategic Plan for People with a Disability 2001-2006 (Housing)*, builds on the first strategy – *Housing Strategy for People with a Disability 1997-2000*, 'A House to Come Home To' (DoH c. 2001, p. 1). It is the DoH's response to the *Queensland Government's Strategic Framework for Disability 2000–2005* and meets the Queensland Government's requirement that all government departments develop a five year strategic plan for people with a disability (DoH c. 2001, p. 3). The Plan is structured around the seven strategic directions set out in the *Queensland*

⁸ Including the Department of Health and NSW Area Health Services.

⁹ For public housing and on behalf of the NSW Office of Community Housing.

¹⁰ On behalf of the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program.

Government Strategic Framework for Disability 2002–2005 to guide government departments to achieve better outcomes for people with disabilities.¹¹ That is,

1. *strengthening individuals, families and communities*
2. *improving access to services*
3. *developing and reforming services*
4. *improving the quality of services*
5. *increasing service provision*
6. *working collaboratively*
7. *increasing safeguards and advocacy.*

The strategic directions aim to meet the Queensland Government's vision for people with a disability:

A society that values people with a disability; upholds their rights; and supports their equitable participation in everyday life (DSQ c. 2002, p. 7).

In brief, the strategic directions aim to do this by

- supporting people with disabilities, increasing and improving their capacity to participate in everyday life and make choices about their lives and lifestyles and increasing community acceptance and awareness of people with disabilities (SD 1);
- building the capacity of local communities to devise and manage solutions to meet the needs of people with disabilities (SD 1);
- ensuring that people with disabilities have equitable access to services and facilities and are involved in the planning and design of services/facilities, particularly mainstream services (SD 2 & 6);
- addressing the needs of people with disabilities experiencing the greatest disadvantage and need for assistance, including for housing and/or personal support services (SD 2);
- reviewing the effectiveness of service delivery and developing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating other (responsive and coordinated) models of service delivery. Addressing gaps in service provision/delivery (SD 3 & 6);
- creating individualised supports and service options, including options that balance prevention with on-going support (SD 3);
- improving the coordination of government and non-government services for people with disabilities and the coordination of services within government agencies and within the non-government sector (SD 3 & 6);
- increasing the number of people with disabilities accommodated according to their preferences (SD 3);
- providing (and creating) quality services for people with disabilities and facilitating their involvement in the design, delivery and planning of quality services (SD 4);

¹¹ Working to improve the lives of people with a disability and that of their families and carers is one of six actions specified under the 'improving health care and strengthening services to the community' Priority that makes up the current key directional statement of government (see Department of the Premier and Cabinet 2005: Government Priorities).

- increasing the number of services provided for people with disabilities within the limits of available resources, i.e. in order to meet increased demand for support services (SD 5); and
- developing and implementing safeguards to protect people with disabilities and increasing the range of advocacy services available for people with disabilities (SD 7).

(DSQ c. 2002, pp. 9–15)

The *5 Year Strategic Plan for People with a Disability 2001–2006 (Housing)* emphasises the need for people with disabilities to have choice in their housing, including where and how they live. The document identifies the particular housing issues facing people with a disability and the related challenges for the DoH. These issues and challenges are largely the same as those identified by the other state and territory government housing and disability agencies in their disability service documents and/or housing strategies/plans, i.e.

- *affordability*: particularly given that people with disabilities generally have lower incomes, higher rates of unemployment and may have higher than average living expenses than people who do not have a disability.
- *discrimination*: primarily from private landlords and for Indigenous people with a disability.
- *suitability*: location of housing and its design.
- *access to housing services*: some people with a disability have difficulty finding out about the services available for them (including mainstream services), explaining their needs or formulating an appeal when the services they receive do not meet their needs or expectations.
- *sustaining tenancy*: some people with a disability can not sustain a tenancy without assistance, i.e. from a carer, their family or advocate and/or support agency.
- *security of tenure*: particularly in the private rental market.

(DoH c. 2001, p. 7)

The challenges for the DoH are summarised as providing more, flexible and effective housing assistance for people with disabilities given increasing demand, more complex needs and limited resources. Meeting housing assistance needs with a limited stock of appropriate housing (i.e. proximity to services, housing design et cetera) is also a challenge. The department also points to the need to improve the skills and capacities of DoH staff in finding individualised housing assistance solutions for people with complex needs, particular types of disabilities (including mental illness, psychiatric disability and acquired brain injury), Indigenous people with disabilities and people with disabilities from CALD backgrounds (DoH c. 2001, p. 8).

The specific strategies outlined in the *5 Year Strategic Plan (Housing)* mirror many of the strategies outlined in the *Queensland Government Strategic Framework for Disability 2002–2005* discussed above. Of course, this is unsurprising given that the *5 Year Strategic Plan (Housing)* is guided by the same seven strategic directions in the *Strategic Framework for Disability*. The strategies in the *5 Year Strategic Plan (Housing)* include (among others):

- developing ways to allow people with disabilities to remain in and/or sustain privately owned or rented housing (SD 1);

- working collaboratively with other government agencies (i.e. DSQ and Queensland Health) to assist people with a disability and their families to plan their housing future (SD 1 & 6);
- raising the quality and number of private sector accommodation options for people with a disability, i.e. by DoH sharing its knowledge about housing with the broader housing industry (SD 4);
- increasing social housing options for people with a disability and the appropriateness of stock (location, design) (SD 5)¹²;
- targeting housing assistance to people with disabilities in most need (SD 5);
- investigating and researching alternative housing/accommodation models (SD 5);
- linking housing assistance for people with disabilities to their support services and vice-versa (SD 6); and
- developing ways of knowing (and notifying) when housing assistance does not meet the needs and expectations of people with disabilities, their families and carers and methods for rectifying these circumstances (SD 7).

The *5 Year Strategic Plan for People with a Disability 2001–2006 (Housing)* strongly emphasises working collaboratively with other government agencies to improve the services and assistance available to people with disabilities. The DoH has committed itself to working with other government and non-government agencies, mainstream and disability service providers to integrate the support and assistance being provided to people with disabilities (see DoH c. 2001, p. 4 & 16). The DoH emphasises this approach as it believes that ‘Housing solutions for people with a disability should take account of the person’s support needs’ (p. 20) as ‘...a secure, affordable and appropriate home is central to the health, wellbeing and financial security of a person’ and ‘good housing practice allows and encourages people with a disability to be connected with family and friends and to participate in their local communities’ (p. 9).

While the DoH’s *5 Year Strategic Plan for People with a Disability 2001–2006 (Housing)* is obviously the guiding document for housing assistance (and integrating housing assistance and support services) for people with a disability, it would be remiss not to mention here that other DoH documents also highlight the commitment of the Queensland Government to housing for people with a disability. The DoH’s current *Strategic Plan 2006–2011*, for example, states that the department is building more dwellings to adaptable standards for people with disabilities and older people. It also emphasises the DoH’s continuing focus on: working with community housing providers to develop a coordinated social housing system and expand community managed housing for people with disabilities; and collaborating with other government agencies such as Queensland Health and the DSQ to integrate housing assistance and support services for people with disabilities. These actions aim to assist the increasing number of DoH clients that have support needs that extend beyond affordable housing (DoH 2006, p. 4).

The DoH’s general housing policy document – *Improving People’s Lives Through Housing, An Integrated Approach to Housing for People and Communities* – also

¹² In July 2005 the DoH introduced a new policy (Tenancies in Reviewable Properties) to regularly review the circumstances of tenants in large public housing dwellings (five or more bedrooms) and dwellings suitable for people in wheelchairs (DoH 2005). This policy requires that people in these properties demonstrate that they still need the property they reside in, i.e. for people in properties suitable for people in a wheelchair, they must show that someone living in or regularly visiting the dwelling needs a wheelchair accessible dwelling. Tenants who can not show that they need the dwelling will be relocated so that a tenant who does need the dwelling can live in it.

addresses the provision of housing and services for people with disabilities, albeit briefly (DoH 2000).¹³ Like the documents discussed above, and particularly the *5 Year Strategic Plan for People with a Disability 2001–2006 (Housing)*, the DoH's housing policy emphasises improving outcomes for vulnerable and special needs clients (including people with disabilities) by providing more, better quality and integrated housing assistance services within available government resources. The policy emphasises cross-agency and cross-department collaboration to meet the housing and support needs of people with disabilities, improve their choices and to 'contribute to the health and sustainability of the community' (DoH 2000, p. 2).

Disability Services Queensland's *Strategic Plan 2005–2009* and its overlapping draft update – the *Strategic Plan 2006–2010* – also discuss the issue of housing for people with disabilities. The documents both point to the need to purchase more housing and accommodation services for people with disabilities (DSQ c. 2005 & c. 2006b, p. 10). They aim to facilitate and achieve a whole-of-government approach to increasing access to mainstream services for people with disabilities. Implementing Memorandums of Understanding between DSQ and the Queensland Department of Health, Department of Child Safety, Department of Communities and DoH are put forward as one strategy to achieve better cross-department and cross-agency collaboration on services (DSQ c. 2006, p. 11). Details of the Queensland Government's priorities in terms of funding disability services for adults and children generally and some services and programs specifically (including limited housing and accommodation services), are given in the budget document *Future Directions for Disability Services* (see DSQ 2003). This document also acknowledges that:

Disability is a complex and challenging field, where there is no one size fits all solution. There is need for a broader range of service models and funding approaches that promote cost-effective, flexible, timely and person-centred support (DSQ 2003, p. 18).

The new Queensland *Disability Service Act 2006* (passed in March 2006) guides and informs the aforementioned documents and the actions and activities of the Queensland Government, disability sector and service providers. The new Act includes safeguards to protect the rights of people with a disability and measures to ensure that people with a disability have access to the same services available to the mainstream community and that these services are safe and accessible for people with a disability. It also aims to encourage all service providers to consider the needs of people with a disability in the design, delivery and planning of their services (DSQ 2006a).

South Australia

The Government of South Australia (SA) has recently commenced a review of accommodation and support services for people with disabilities. It began this review in order to meet a target set out in the *South Australian Strategic Plan Creating Opportunity: T6.5* – 'to increase the number of community-based options' available for accommodating people with a disability (Government of SA 2004, p. 54).

The Supported Accommodation Task Group (SATG) was formed by the SA Government in December 2005 to oversee the development and implementation of

¹³ A new housing policy document is due to be developed for Queensland sometime in the next five years. The development and implementation of this policy is one of the key deliverables identified in the DoH's *Strategic Plan 2006–2011* (see DoH c. 2006, p. 2).

three new and important proposals developed as part of the review of accommodation and support services for people with disabilities. These are:

- an *Accommodation and Personal Support Services Policy* – to ‘drive’ the accommodation and support services system for South Australians with a disability.
- an *Accommodation and Personal Support Services Plan* – setting out the actions, timelines and investment required to improve and increase the supply of accommodation and support services for people with disabilities.
- a new *Accommodation Legislation* – to protect people with disabilities living in out-of-home accommodation such as supported rental accommodation.

(SATG 2006, pp. 3 & 14)

The SATG released a consultation paper regarding these proposals in June 2006 – *Accommodation and Personal Support for People with Disabilities in SA* (see SATG 2006). It also undertook community consultations across metropolitan Adelaide and non-metropolitan SA during July and accepted written submissions on the proposals until mid-August 2006.

The SATG’s proposed new Policy, Plan and Legislation represent a significant step forward for the integration of housing and disability policy and plans in SA. The proposals aim to assist the integration of the services and supports provided by agencies of government (and particularly the Department for Families and Communities) for people with disabilities. For these reasons the SATG’s consultation paper and proposals are worthy of further discussion here. The consultation paper highlights the SA Government’s current thinking around accommodation and personal support services and outlines the questions they are asking the disability sector, people with disabilities, their carers and families about the proposals and what these groups want and expect of government. Moreover, the consultation paper also outlines a number of changes in the delivery of disability services in SA that are important to the sector and affect the integration of services for people with disability, including housing and accommodation options.

The consultation paper outlines the government’s aims to connect people with disabilities to a better future. It asks the community, including people with a disability, their families and carers, whether the current accommodation and personal support system in SA passes the test in terms of ‘being there for people with disabilities’ and ‘making a difference’ in and to their lives?

The government’s plans to target their funds and assistance to areas of highest need, strengthen the links between people with a disability, their carers and the community (i.e. through improved employment and post-school options) and to ensure that people with disabilities have access to support services and information that improves and maintains their independence to the best possible extent are highlighted in the paper. Access to an adequate supply of appropriate, ‘affordable, stable and secure accommodation options’ is acknowledged as central to this (see SATG 2006, pp. 5–6 & 13).

The proposed *Accommodation and Personal Support Services Policy* acknowledges the right of people with a disability, their carers and families to have as much choice about their living environments and daily life as possible. The Policy will set out the SA Government’s directions in terms of planning accommodation and personal support services for people with disabilities, as well as the principles guiding the provision of these services and the roles of providers – government and non-government. It will also ‘...describe the range of acceptable accommodation models and types and the

involvement of people with disabilities in determining the services they require' (SATG 2006, p. 14). This said, as clearly emphasised in the consultation paper, the accommodation and personal support services needs and wants of people with disabilities are to be balanced against government's need to use resources effectively and efficiently to 'make every dollar count' (SATG 2006, p. 10).

The principles underpinning the new Policy are:

1. *maximising the independence and development of people with a disability*. This includes: focusing accommodation and personal support services to help develop and maximise the community living skills and capacities of people with disabilities and accommodating them in the least restrictive environment possible.
2. *taking a life-long perspective*, i.e. ensuring that disability services are responsive to people's needs and can change according to their needs and circumstances, and people with a disability and their carers and families are aware of the services available, know how to access them and what assistance is available over time.
3. *equity and fairness in the provision of services*: matching people with a disability to the accommodation and support services they require and ensuring that most help is targeted to the people in most need, including people with multiple disabilities, multi-faceted and complex needs.
4. *ensuring that the voices of people with a disability and their carers are heard*, i.e. people with a disability have choice in their living arrangements (how and where they live) and in how they manage their life. This principle also stipulates that carers are considered as partners in the planning and delivery of accommodation and support services.
5. *service planning is based on sound evidence of need and resource requirements*. This principle looks at the current and forward planning of accommodation and personal support services for people with a disability. That is, that housing stock meets the needs of people with a disability, the workforce skills of those involved in providing services matches need, and government systems can provide up-to-date data regarding current and future service needs, service provision and costs for accommodation and support services.
6. *service provision is efficient and effective*: resources are expended in an efficient and effective way, reducing duplication and resource under-utilisation and maximising outcomes for people with a disability.

(SATG 2006, pp. 15–16)

The proposed *Accommodation and Personal Support Services Plan* is less developed than the Policy discussed above. As mentioned previously the Plan will set out the government's actions and timelines to *increase* the supply of accommodation and personal support services for people with disabilities. At this stage, consultations regarding the development of the Plan highlight the need for government and the disability sector to determine the types of accommodation and support services the government should focus on and develop, as well as how they should be delivered and funded. The SA Government does flag a number of possible options for increasing accommodation, including: involving the private sector more in providing accommodation, and increasing opportunities for people with disabilities to enter into homeownership. Other models of accommodation put forward for consideration include: client contribution and core and cluster models, villages, specialist units, co-tenancies and circles of support (see pp. 19–20 of the Plan for further details).

Like the *Accommodation and Personal Support Services Plan* discussed above, the focus of the proposed new *Accommodation Legislation* is a little unclear at this point in time, largely because the government is seeking community input into its development. What is clear, however, is that the Legislation aims to ensure that people with a disability living in out-of-home care arrangements are protected from exploitation and harm and that accommodation and personal support services for people with a disability meet government-determined standards for quality, amenity and physical condition. Whether the new Legislation will apply to all out-of-home care arrangements is unclear at this stage and the government is seeking the opinion of the disability sector on this issue.

It is important to note here that the review of accommodation and personal support services for people with disabilities in SA has coincided with a number of changes in the delivery and structure of the SA Government's disability services delivered through the Department for Families and Communities (DFC). Reforms of DFC's disability services were announced in May 2006 and implemented from July 2006. They include creating a single agency responsible for disability services within DFC: Disability Services SA. Disability Services SA has been given the task of being the first point of contact for assistance for people with a disability and is now responsible for providing and/or ensuring that every person with a disability in SA has access to the services 'they need when they need them' (SATG 2006, p. 11).

Disability Services SA is charged with pulling together the supports and services necessary for people with disabilities. Specifically, this includes accommodation support (through the SA Government agency Housing SA) and personal support services, developmental and education services and other specialised services – all to be coordinated and/or delivered through Disability Services SA. The agency is also responsible for promoting and ensuring cross-agency and cross-service provider links are facilitated when and where needed to improve the delivery of services and support for people with disabilities.

Reforms around Disability Services SA also include specific changes to the delivery of housing services for people with disabilities. The government is creating a single disability housing program so that people with disabilities no longer have to apply to multiple agencies (including the SA Government's social housing agencies) or housing providers to gain access to housing. As is summarised in the SATG's consultation paper:

Housing SA – the Government's new housing service – will link a person with disabilities to the right accommodation response, whether that is provided by Housing SA, a community housing agency or another provider (p. 13).

The consultation paper also discusses the SA Government's intention to better link accommodation/housing and personal support options. That is,

Regardless of type of disability, a person with a disability will be able to access personal support services that are linked to housing options provided by the housing system (SATG 2006, p. 13).

The SA Government's reform of disability services also includes a 'service commitment'. This commitment is designed to ensure that people with disabilities, their families and carers have clear expectations and information about the availability of government funded and provided disability services, eligibility requirements for such services and ways to access them. The 'service commitment' also aims to guarantee that the 'voice' of people with disabilities (their carers, families and/or advocates) is heard when determining and providing the services they need (SATG 2006, p. 9).

While the review of accommodation and personal support services is clearly the key process in the integration of housing and disability policy in SA, it is important to discuss here the SA Government's strategies for housing and disability: the *Housing Plan for South Australia* and *Promoting Independence: Disability Action Plans for SA*. Along with the state *Strategic Plan*, the *Housing Plan* sets the context for the current review of accommodation and personal support services in SA, and, to a limited extent, addresses and works towards integrating housing and other support services for people with disabilities. *Promoting Independence* is the SA Government's disability strategy.

The *Housing Plan for South Australia* released in March 2005 provides a comprehensive overarching framework for making housing affordable to more South Australians; providing quality housing for people in the community with greatest need and renewing and reinvigorating neighbourhoods (Government of SA 2005, p. 1). It has five objectives:

- affordable housing and strong communities;
- high need housing;
- housing and services for Aboriginal South Australians;
- strong management and service coordination; and
- environmental sustainability.

Many of the key objectives of the *Housing Plan* and actions associated with each objective specifically relate to people with a disability and/or integrating their housing/accommodation with disability support services. For example, Objective 1.4, Community based housing, stipulates expanding the community housing stock for high needs households and low income earners. Key actions under objective 4.2 (Transparency and sustainability) point to ensuring that state government rent and subsidy arrangements are targeted to greatest need and social housing dwellings are redeveloped '...to more appropriate standards of amenity, location and design'.

Objective 2 of the *Housing Plan* relates wholly to high need housing. This section of the plan primarily relates to social housing provision and delivery. Key actions under this objective include:

- developing the role of the South Australian Housing Trust and Aboriginal Housing Authority as providers of high need housing (Objective 2.1);
- promoting access to housing based on need (Objective 2.1);
- implementing a target for social housing agencies of 75 per cent of new build houses to meet accessible design criteria that comply with disability access principles (Objective 2.2);
- supporting the de-institutionalisation of large residential institutions providing care for people with disabilities and/or mental illness (Objective 2.4); and
- developing early intervention strategies for community-based supported accommodation for people with disabilities and/or mental illness (Objective 2.4).

Under Objective 2.4 the *Housing Plan* also emphasises: (a) 'promot[ing] independence by ensuring a coordinated and comprehensive range of high quality, client focused, integrated accommodation support services', and (b) 'develop[ing] innovative accommodation and support for people requiring assistance to maintain successful independent living in the community' (Government of SA 2005, p. 23). No specific actions are given in the document to show how the government intends to do this. However, it is clear that the review of accommodation and personal support

services discussed above is a key way the government is working towards many of the outcomes set out in the *Housing Plan* for people with disability, as well as to increase community-based accommodation options.

It should be mentioned here that the *Housing Plan for South Australia* also sets two key targets for all significant new housing developments in SA that are important for people with a disability: a minimum of 10 per cent affordable housing and five per cent high need housing. The SA Government is working with industry, local government and the community to achieve these targets, which they describe as the 'centrepiece' of the Plan (pp. 1 & 17).

The final document to be discussed here is the SA Government's whole-of-government disability strategy, *Promoting Independence* (Government of SA 2000). This strategy is the overarching framework guiding government agencies in the provision of services to people with disabilities. It builds upon and guides government portfolios and agencies to address the requirements of the *Disability Discrimination Act 1993* (SA) and eliminate discrimination against people with disabilities. The strategy's focus is on ensuring access to appropriate mainstream services and that people with disabilities have input into the planning, development and delivery of such services. It makes limited mention of the need to integrate services for people with a disability and does not mention housing and/or accommodation for people with a disability to any major extent. This is not surprising given that the role of the strategy is clearly about the state government leading the way in addressing discrimination against people with disabilities, fostering their inclusion in the community, acknowledging their right to choice and to be valued as citizens of SA and to have their needs recognised, heard and met (where practicable) in the planning and development of government provided and funded services for them and the mainstream population.

Tasmania

The Tasmanian Government released its whole-of-government framework for Tasmanians with a disability in December 2005. The document, *Disability Framework for Action 2005–2010*, sits within and complements Tasmania Together 2020, the 20 year social, economic and environmental plan for Tasmania.

The *Disability Framework for Action* sets out the Tasmanian Government's vision for people with disabilities in Tasmania:

...achieving a fully inclusive society in which the lives of people with a disability are valued and they are respected as equal members of our community (Department of Premier and Cabinet 2005, p. 7).

The Framework applies to all government departments and agencies and outlines the actions the Tasmanian Government is proposing, undertaking and facilitating in order to meet its vision for people with disabilities. The focus of the document is government creating partnerships and working together with people with disabilities (and their carers and families), the community and the disability sector to achieve better outcomes for people with disabilities. That is, in terms of increasing the choices and opportunities available to people with disabilities, their independence, participation and inclusion in society, and access to and provision of high quality support services and accommodation/ housing.

The key strategies outlined in the Framework to achieve the Tasmanian Government's vision are structured under four priority outcome areas:

1. *fostering human rights*, by

- promoting independence by increasing the capacity of people to live independently and work within the broader community, including by improving technologies to assist people with disabilities.
- increasing the physical accessibility of government buildings and facilities and developing standards for accessibility.
- improving the accessibility (and responsiveness) of both specialist disability services and mainstream services and information about such services, i.e. for housing and accommodation services, personal support services, educational and post-school options, transport and employment, recreational and cultural opportunities.
- supporting young and ageing people with disabilities and their carers and families.
- valuing, supporting and promoting the important role of carers and families in the lives of people with disabilities and for the general community.

2. *providing access to high quality services, i.e.*

- developing more flexible (individual focused), responsive and appropriate mainstream services, service models and specialist services for people with disabilities.
- undertaking long-term planning and data collection processes to identify unmet service and support needs for people with disabilities and especially for those who are ageing or who have complex needs.
- addressing the coverage of mental health services across Tasmania and the quality of such services.
- increasing community-based care and accommodation options for people with mental illness.

3. *increasing safeguards and advocacy*

- improving the effectiveness of protections and advocacy for people with disabilities.
- fostering an inclusive society in Tasmania by reducing discrimination against people with disabilities.
- ensuring transparency and accountability for specialist disability services.

4. *working collaboratively*

- promoting collaboration within government agencies involved in providing services and support for people with disabilities (including mainstream services).
- developing partnerships between government and non-government disability service providers to assist in implementing the strategies in the *Disability Action Framework* and achieving the desired outcomes in it.

(Department of Premier and Cabinet 2005, pp. 8–27)

Under the first priority outcome (*fostering human rights*), the *Disability Framework for Action* includes the key strategy of 'providing greater choice in housing options' for people with a disability (DPC 2005, p. 11). This key strategy recognises that

Sustainable housing is a fundamental factor in everyone's life and together with the necessary support it is crucial to the concept of independent living. Without these basic necessities disabled people will be unable to take

advantage of employment, training, education and leisure opportunities (Department of Premier and Cabinet 2005, p. 11).

The Framework points to a range of actions to improve the housing outcomes of people with disabilities and increase their housing choices and options. These include:

- expanding community-managed housing;
- increasing the supply of Housing Tasmania's social housing appropriate for people with disabilities, i.e. modified for people with mobility difficulties; and
- supporting people with disabilities to remain in their own homes by providing assistance to modify their homes where necessary.

Under this strategy the government has also stated its intention to increase the involvement of people with disabilities in the design and planning of housing and accommodation options at the local level. They aim to do this by regularly putting housing and accommodation for people with disabilities on the Premier's Disability Advisory Council¹⁴ agenda and ensuring that Housing Tasmania and Disability Services (Tasmania's disability agency) collaborate to identify the individual housing and support needs of people with disabilities (DPC, p 11). The strategy also discusses the role of the Tasmanian Government's *Affordable Housing Strategy (AHS)* in guiding housing options for people with a disability.

The AHS was launched by the Tasmanian Government in December 2003.¹⁵ It is the primary government document guiding the provision of housing for low income Tasmanians. The AHS is a two stage four-year \$45 million framework to assist Housing Tasmania address the high proportion of Tasmanians in housing stress, and the increasing demand being placed on the agency for housing assistance from low income earners and special needs groups. These special needs groups include people with disabilities and people with mental illness (Housing Tasmania 2003a, p. 3).

As Gabriel and Jacobs (c. 2005, p. 7) assert, the AHS '...framework represents a break from Housing Tasmania's former focus on maintaining public housing stock, towards a more expanded agenda that promotes partnership arrangements with community housing agencies, private sector house-builders and landlords'.

The AHS is underpinned by four principles (Housing Tasmania 2003b, p. 2).

- access to safe, secure, affordable and appropriate housing is central to health and wellbeing;
- housing provides the foundation from which individuals and families are linked with employment, education, health and other services, and it facilitates participation in the wider community;
- housing stress is a complex problem that requires a whole-of-government and community-wide approach; and
- affordable housing should be part of an integrated and equitable housing system that promotes choice across all housing tenures.

These principles guide the four objectives set out in the strategy for social housing, private rental housing and home ownership. These objectives are:

¹⁴ The Premier's Disability Advisory Council was established to assist the Tasmanian Premier and Government with the implementation of the *Disability Action Framework 2005–2010*.

¹⁵ The AHS was developed after community consultations across Tasmania in early to mid 2003 and was one of the Bacon Government's 2002 re-election platforms (Housing Tasmania 2003c).

1. a sustainable social housing system;
2. the capacity to expand the supply of social and affordable housing in response to the community's immediate and longer-term housing needs;
3. a range of effective and responsive housing models that meet a diverse range of housing needs, including special needs and the particular requirements of local areas; and
4. a housing market that underpins economic growth, area vitality and strong, safe and resilient communities.

(Housing Tasmania 2003a, p. 7)

It should be noted here that the *AHS Tasmania 2004–2008* is comprised of two documents. The main document, the *AHS Framework*, is the more comprehensive of the two (Housing Tasmania 2003a). It sets out the background for the AHS and provides more general strategies to '...ensure safe, adequate and affordable housing for Tasmanians who receive low incomes' (p. 7). The second document (*AHS Tasmania 2004–2008 Stage 1 Summary, Sharing the Rewards*) on the other hand, is unlike the more broad brush housing and/or disability strategies and plans in place in other Australian states and territories (including the *AHS Framework*). It sets out both general *and* specific (quantifiable) strategies to meet the four outcomes set out under each tenure choice (see Housing Tasmania 2003c).

The strategies and actions set out in the AHS documents to meet the housing (and support services) needs of people with disabilities and people with mental illness, include:

- upgrading and reconfiguring Housing Tasmania's existing dwellings and build new dwellings to meet the changing needs of clients, including people with mobility difficulties;
- replacing or upgrading six disability group homes (*AHS* stage 1 and 2) and acquiring new groups homes if resources permit (stage 2);
- setting up four new supported residential accommodation facilities across Tasmania for up to 80 people with disabilities/mental illness;
- allowing people with special needs to access a support worker to assist them with establishing/maintaining private rental accommodation; and
- developing a home assessment and renovation loan program for up to 200 people with disabilities and older people to assist them to live independently in their own home.

(Housing Tasmania 2003a, pp. 8–14; 2003c, pp. 3–5)

Other general strategies outlined in the AHS to assist low income earners generally are also relevant to people with disabilities and mental illness; albeit to varying extents. These include such strategies/actions as:

- maintaining a core stock of public housing, targeted to those in most need;
- making 150 public housing properties available for home ownership for eligible low income Tasmanians;
- providing intensive financial assistance and counselling for low income earners with high needs who are housed in the private rental market; and

- offering financial incentives and expanding Housing Tasmania's existing programs to increase home ownership among low income people.

(Housing Tasmania 2003a, pp. 8–14; 2003c, pp. 3–5)

A review of the progress of the AHS was undertaken in August 2005. The report resulting from this review (Wise Lord & Ferguson 2005) outlines some interesting stakeholder perspectives on the future needs and future directions of the AHS. Stakeholders generally wanted further investigation and piloting of community sector managed and provided housing (including small housing associations), 'cluster' housing models and other successful housing models being used to house people with disabilities overseas (p. 19). They also generally pointed to the need for better integration of services and programs for people with special needs and especially mental illness, i.e. across government agencies and between agencies and the non-government sector, and the linking of shelter and non-shelter outcomes (p. 10 & pp. 19–20). Some stakeholders emphasised the need for Housing Tasmania to progress more quickly with upgrading and modifying dwellings to suit client needs and incorporating universal design features in homes (pp. 18-19).

Tasmania's mental health agency, Mental Health Services (MHS), also has a range of plans and other documents that address accommodation for people with mental illness. These documents include the *Supported Accommodation for People with Mental Health Illness Strategic Framework* (2004), *Bridging the Gap Review of Mental Health Services Tasmania* (2004) and the current *Mental Health Services Strategic Plan 2006–2011*. All of these documents primarily point to the need to increase the number and range of supported residential accommodation options for people with mental illness. They also strongly emphasise the importance of stable and appropriate housing for people with mental illness to their health, wellbeing and successful participation and inclusion in the community. As the *MHS Strategic Framework* (2004b) succinctly asserts:

For many people living with mental illness, the ability to choose, access and maintain safe and affordable housing provides the cornerstone to stabilising their lives and illness and improves their quality of life in the longer term (p. 3).

The documents highlight the need to integrate housing for people with a mental illness with their clinical and other support services and build partnerships and collaboration between the providers of services for people with mental illness.¹⁶ For all of the strategies directing MHS and accommodation and support services for people with mental illness in Tasmania see the *Mental Health Services Strategic Plan 2006–2011* page 5 (summary) and pages 17–29; *Supported Accommodation for People with Mental Health Illness Strategic Framework* (2004) pages 11-12; and the recommendations in the *Bridging the Gap* report (MHS 2004a) pages 2–7.

Victoria

The Victorian Government introduced its ten-year *Victorian State Disability Plan* in 2002 (Disability Services Division 2002). The Plan outlines the Victorian Government's whole-of-government and whole-of-community approach '...to enable people with a disability in Victoria to participate more fully and equally in the life of the community' (p. 1).

¹⁶ The Department of Housing and Human Services agencies including MHS, Housing Tasmania and Disability Services (Tasmania), SAAP services, Alcohol and Drug Services, Youth Justice and Correctional Health Services (see MHS 2004b, pp. 11–12).

It is guided by three goals:

1. enabling people with disabilities in Victoria to *pursue individual lifestyles*, i.e. by safeguarding the rights of people with disabilities, strengthening the disability support system and tailoring support and services to their individual needs;
2. *building inclusive communities*: ensuring that the Victorian community is accepting of people with disabilities and that people with disabilities have access to the same opportunities as all Victorians, including the right to participate in the community – socially, culturally, economically, politically and spiritually; and
3. *leading the way*, i.e. the Victorian Government leading by example and building an inclusive community for people with disabilities by improving the accessibility and responsiveness of publicly provided (and funded) services and making public services more inclusive of people with disabilities.

(DSD 2002, p. 11)

The Plan emphasises developing and strengthening partnerships between and within government and with the non-government sector, community and people with disabilities, their families and carers to meet five strategic priorities. That is,

- Priority Strategy 1 – *reorienting disability supports* so that they are targeted to meet and respond to the individual and changing needs of people with a disability across the different stages of their life (p. 17). This priority strategy includes ensuring that people with disabilities have more choice about their housing (p. 18);
- Priority Strategy 2 – *developing strong foundations for disability supports*, i.e. ensuring that the Victorian Government's focus on individualised support and planning for disability services is balanced with the development of support services that are sustainable, of high quality and integrated with other mainstream health and community services to meet the needs of people with disabilities (pp. 23–24);
- Priority Strategy 3 – *promoting and protecting people's rights*, i.e. safeguarding, respecting and promoting the rights of people with disabilities as set down in law, strengthening and encouraging advocacy programs, and developing complaints mechanisms to improve the accountability of support services (pp. 29–32);
- Priority Strategy 4 – *strengthening local communities*: fostering the participation and inclusion of people with disabilities in the community and planning for their increased participation and inclusion in the community, i.e. in such areas as recreation, cultural and leisure activities (pp. 35–39); and
- Priority Strategy 5 – *making public services accessible* to, and for, people with disabilities, i.e. by improving the accessibility of specialist and mainstream health services, education and employment opportunities (including in the public service) and information about these services, and improving the accessibility of the built environment, including government buildings and facilities and public transport. Ensuring that Victorian Government departments develop and implement disability action plans¹⁷ is a major strategy under this priority (pp. 41–44).

The *Victorian State Disability Plan* is underlined by the need to develop stronger links between disability and mainstream support services (including housing assistance), and to develop strategies and actions to meet increasing demand for disability supports, especially for the future (DSD 2002, p. 19).

¹⁷ See, for example, the Department of Human Services' *Disability action plan 2005–2008* (Victorian Government DHS 2005).

A wide range of broad and specific key actions are outlined in the Plan to advance and meet the priority strategies, these include:

- introducing an individualised planning and support framework for people with disabilities, i.e. tailored to the needs of people with disabilities and reflective of their life choices (Priority Strategy 1, p. 18);
- developing an Industry Plan as the blueprint for reorienting disability supports in Victoria and better integrating mainstream and disability supports (PS 2, p. 24);
- reviewing Victoria's disability legislation (PS 2, p. 25);
- developing community transport options for people with disabilities, especially in regional Victoria (PS 4, p. 38);
- ensuring that government information and services are accessible for people with disabilities (PS 5, p. 44); and
- improving access to public infrastructure and mainstream health services for people with disabilities (PS 5, p. 44).

While the *State Disability Plan* only really discusses 'supports' for people with disabilities generally, it briefly mentions the Victorian Government's intentions in terms of housing for people with disabilities.

The Government will develop more housing options, so that people with a disability can exercise more choice. This will involve more emphasis on public housing, private rentals, supported accommodation, and support to enable people with a disability to live independently in the community, if they choose to do so. The Government is also committed to supporting people with a disability to live in settings that are best suited to their individual needs and wishes (DSD 2002, p. 18).

In addition, the Plan also outlines the government's aim to reduce the number of people with disabilities living in institutions with over 30 beds, to develop plans to close older and larger residential centres for people with disabilities and increase respite options to support families and carers.

The Victorian Government's social policy action plan, *A Fairer Victoria, Creating Opportunity and Addressing Disadvantage* (DPC 2005), picks up on and extends the key objectives and strategies in the state's disability policy, particularly in terms of housing and accommodation for people with a disability. Strategy 10 of *A Fairer Victoria* aims to create new opportunities for people with a disability in Victoria by giving them 'maximum choice and opportunity in the way they live their lives' (p. 42). In line with the *State Disability Plan* this strategy emphasises the state government's commitment to delivering more flexible support services and 'packages' tailored to the individual needs of people with disabilities; that is, rather than the past 'one-size-fits-all' approach to the provision of support services.

Unsurprisingly, the sub-strategies outlined in *A Fairer Victoria* (pp. 42–46) and in the *Progress and Next Steps June 2006* update of the first document (State Government of Victoria 2006, pp. 62–65) largely reiterate and/or show the government's progress on those outlined in the *Disability Plan*, i.e.

- developing and implementing the new *Disability Act 2006* (Vic);

- increasing the number of flexible support packages tailored to the needs of people with disability, i.e. individualised planning and support packages – to use on in-home support, accommodation and/or other support services as needed (for example, through the Victorian Government's Support and Choice Initiative);¹⁸
- providing more respite for people with disabilities, their families and carers;
- making Victoria more accessible to people with disabilities and ensuring disability action plans are developed for all government departments;
- promoting employment opportunities for people with disabilities, including in the Victorian public service;
- refurbishing 20 shared supported residential facilities for people with disabilities and building 27 new facilities to ensure they are appropriate and meet modern standards of amenity and accessibility;
- allocating \$5 million for the redevelopment of community facilities for people with disabilities, i.e. for day options programs; and
- providing additional resources for the Office of the Public Advocate, to meet increasing demand for its advocacy services.

Other strategies outlined in the *A Fairer Victoria* documents are specifically aimed at increasing and improving housing options for people with disabilities, primarily by building partnerships with the private sector, i.e.

- allocating \$10 million to establishing a (charitable) Disability Housing Trust as a vehicle for attracting investment in housing for people with disabilities from commercial, philanthropic, community and family sources and to initially build 100 homes state-wide; and
- working with the housing industry to develop best practice industry guidelines for builders and developers on incorporating accessible and adaptable features in new dwellings.

The Victorian Government's current mental health plan centres on the same general themes as the state's disability policy. The plan, *New Directions for Victoria's Mental Health Services, The Next Five Years* (Metropolitan Health and Aged Care Services Division 2002), emphasises six key directions:

- *expanding service capacity*, i.e. the capacity and responsiveness of acute and non-acute services for people with mental illness, and increasing community-based accommodation and support for people with disabilities to reduce demand on acute inpatient services and limit 'bed blockage' or people occupying acute inpatient beds who could actually be appropriately supported in community-based accommodation (p. 17);
- *creating new service options*, i.e. trialling new sub-acute models of support and more intensive models of in-home support, particularly for people with high-level health and social needs (pp. 22–23);
- *strengthening the participation of people with mental illness* in their own treatment and care, as well as in future service planning and service reviews (pp. 37–38);

¹⁸ For more information on the Support and Choice initiative see http://hnb.dhs.vic.gov.au/ds/disabilitysite.nsf/sectionfour/support_choice?open.

- *encouraging carer participation* in the treatment and planning of services for people with mental illness and *improving support for carers*, primarily by improving access to supported accommodation to give carers more choice and support in their caring role (pp. 39–40);
- *extending prevention and early intervention*, i.e. programs for specific mental health disorders, particularly for preventing depression in children and young people, and by improving the integration of support services for people with mental illness such as the integration of supported accommodation with mental health and other health and community services (pp. 20–32); and
- *building a strong and skilled workforce*, including specialist mental health workers (nurses, doctors and support workers) and developing and implementing strategies to retain and attract professional mental health workers (pp. 33–36).

These directions also guide Strategy 11 of *A Fairer Victoria* (increasing support for mental health services). Implementation of *New Directions* is a key strategy under the social policy (see DPC 2005, pp. 46–48; see also State Government of Victoria 2006, pp. 66–69).¹⁹

The *A Fairer Victoria* documents are also important in terms of this review as they give a broad brush overview of the key direction of housing policy in Victoria, and especially the Victorian Government's actions to boost access to affordable housing for low income and disadvantaged groups *collectively* (see Strategy Seven in DPC 2005, pp. 34–36 and in State Government of Victoria 2006, pp. 46–50). These actions include:

- *increasing the supply of social housing*, i.e. by increasing government funding to build new dwellings, by facilitating partnerships and joint ventures with the private sector to build community housing properties (especially through registered housing associations) and using government investment to leverage community and non-government investment in social housing.²⁰ The primary aim of this action is to build 100 more social housing dwellings by 2007;
- working through VicUrban (the government's public development agency) to establish partnerships between the public and private sectors to *increase the supply of affordable housing*, i.e. by investigating ways to ensure that a proportion of new dwellings in VicUrban estates are targeted to low to moderate incomes and running a competition to build a sustainable, energy efficient and affordable dwelling;
- ensuring that Victoria's planning system (including local government regulations) supports the construction of affordable housing;

¹⁹ The report *Improving Mental Health Outcomes in Victoria, The Next Wave of Reform, July 2006* – commissioned by the Victorian Government to outline a future vision for the mental health sector in the state and as input into the development of a national mental health plan – also emphasises the same objectives and actions as the disability policy and mental health plan. That is, ensuring access to (clinical) services; improving the *connectedness*, capacity and client-focus of government and non-government services, including specific mental health services and mainstream support services (such as housing); increasing investment in *prevention and early intervention* programs; and promoting *local partnerships* and *accountability* (Boston Consulting Group 2006, pp. 6–7 & Chapter Three). This report notes that funding alone is not the solution to improving the capacity and effectiveness of the mental health system and strongly emphasises the need for the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments to work together (and with the private sector) to share responsibility for providing and planning necessary support for people with mental illnesses (p. 8).

²⁰ This action fits with the main thrust of the Strategy for Growth in Housing for Low Income Victorians (see Gapp Consulting 2004), i.e. building strategic partnerships with (registered) rental housing agencies and the private sector to deliver social housing for specific target groups, including people with disabilities.

- pursuing development of the *National Affordable Housing Agreement* with state and territory Housing Ministers and the Commonwealth Government, including investigating financial and taxation levers to improve the affordability of housing and exploring new ways to increase the supply of social housing;
- *making home ownership more affordable* for low income Victorians by investigating new models to promote home ownership for low income Victorians, for example, by shared equity models. From May 30 2006 the Victorian Government raised the conveyancing duty concession for eligible pensioners and concession card holders to make home ownership more affordable for some people in these groups;
- developing a comprehensive *whole-of-government framework for affordable housing* in Victoria, i.e. to better integrate housing policy developments across government; and
- continuing with implementation of the *Victorian Homeless Strategy* and *Youth Homelessness Action Plan* to improve the delivery and integration of services (including housing) and support for people who are homeless and people who are at risk of homelessness, including people with mental illness (for further details, see Housing and Community Building Division 2002).

While these actions and sub-strategies are clearly aimed at boosting affordable housing for disadvantaged people *collectively*, many of them will also assist people with disabilities, albeit to varying extents and depending on the type and level of disability people have. Expanding the supply of social housing, for example, is obviously important for people with disabilities and mental illness as this is a key housing tenure for these groups. Similarly, improving housing and support options for homeless people and people at risk of homelessness will also improve housing outcomes for some people with disabilities and especially the people with mental illnesses who are overrepresented in these groups.

The actions outlined above are a brief summary of the key strategies in three of the policies directing the provision of housing assistance in Victoria at the current time. That is, the *Victorian Homelessness Strategy* (Housing and Community Building Division 2002), the *Strategy for Growth in Housing for Low Income Victorians* (Gapp Consulting 2004) and the Office of Housing's current reform agenda for social housing outlined in the document *Shaping the future of social housing* (OoH 2006). While these housing assistance strategies do not *specifically* discuss housing for people with disabilities to any great extent, they do (like the *State Disability Plan* and *A Fairer Victoria*) highlight the Victorian Government's commitment to increasing affordable and appropriate housing options for low income and disadvantaged groups in Victoria, including for people with disabilities and mental illnesses (on low incomes). The social housing reform agenda aims to build and strengthen the social housing sector in the state and improve its viability by attracting greater private sector investment in social housing and by progressing the Victorian Government's new system of regulation for the sector. It includes the introduction of a registration process, performance standards and intervention guidelines for non-government non-profit housing agencies managing properties on behalf of the Victorian Government's Director of Housing in order to improve agency performance and sustainability and the quality of outcomes for tenants (OoH 2006, p. 3; see also Office of the Registrar of Housing Agencies website: www.dhs.vic.gov.au/housing/orha).

Western Australia

The Western Australian (WA) Government has seemingly taken the lead in Australia in integrating its state housing and disability policies. The Department of Housing and Works (DHW) has had a housing policy specifically for people with disabilities in place since 1991 (DHW c. 2004b). The DHW's current policy – the *Strategic Housing Policy for People with Disabilities* – was released in April 2004. It is subtitled as 'a framework of principles to respond to the housing needs of people with a range of disabilities, now and into the future' (DHW 2004).

The *Strategic Housing Policy for People with Disabilities* is the DHW's framework for meeting new, changing and increased (individualised) demands, needs and expectations for government provided and funded housing (and associated support services) for and from people with disabilities. The Policy recognises the contribution of safe, secure and appropriate housing to improving the quality of life of people with a disability and/or mental illness and their families. It emphasises 'the social and economic benefits of providing support services to enable people to remain in their homes in their local communities' (DHW 2004c, p. 2).

The Policy discusses and aims to address

- increasing demand for social housing and supports from people with age-related disability: a problem that will continue to increase as the population ages and the 'baby-boomers' enter into older age cohorts.
- the expectations of younger people with a disability who have grown up being encouraged to be as independent as possible and have come to expect a certain level of services to maintain their independence and choices.
- pressure from people with a disability who have always/previously lived with a carer who is now ageing and who may want or need to retire from their caring role.
- increasing demand for community-based accommodation options rather than the institutional options that were dominant in the past and are now accepted as an inappropriate accommodation model for most people with a disability and/or mental illness.
- the sale of group homes for people with a disability/mental illness (boarding houses, hostels et cetera) to realise the increased value of this land, which is often in prime and valuable locations.
- how to acquire property in suitable locations for people with a disability (i.e. near health and support services) when this property is generally in the most expensive areas of cities and towns and has generally increased significantly in cost over the last five years.
- the physical appropriateness and accessibility of the DHW's public housing stock and suitability of its location for people with disabilities, i.e. proximity to necessary health and support services, support networks (friends, families et cetera), employment and education options.
- coordinating and integrating the provision of housing and support services for people with disabilities/mental illness.

(DHW 2004c)

The Policy emphasises the need to balance increasing and changing demands for government provided and funded housing services for/from people with disabilities with limited government resources, and against increasing demands from other groups in the community, such as low income earners generally, Indigenous people

and immigrants. Building and strengthening partnerships between the public and private sectors is put forward as the main strategy to balance demands for services and increase the resources available for providing housing and support services to people with disabilities and mental health issues, i.e. through joint venture arrangements and private sector-provided, -managed and/or -funded housing options, including social housing.

Some of the specific strategies set out in the Policy for housing people with disabilities and integrating their housing with support services include (where possible)

- spot purchasing properties that are appropriate for people with disabilities, i.e. that are physically accessible or in a location near necessary support/health services, shopping, transport, education, recreation and/or employment services and opportunities;
- modifying existing DHW properties where necessary to meet the needs of people with physical, sensory or age-related disabilities;
- ensuring that all newly built DHW dwellings from 2004–2005 are built to a 'visitable' standard, i.e. a visitor/resident in a wheelchair can access all facilities in the house;
- increasing the asset and income limits and space requirements for people with disabilities applying for social housing;
- facilitating the development of community housing options specifically for people with disabilities, i.e. through the Community Disability Housing Program (see DHW 2001);
- building group homes or cluster housing;
- retaining dwellings that have been modified for a person with a disability for housing another person with a disability in the future;
- providing loans to people with a disability, their carers and/or families to make modifications to their home or build a new private home; and
- providing home maintenance or DHW loans to people with newly acquired disabilities to assist them to meet the costs of sustaining their housing (to meet mortgage repayments et cetera).

(DHW 2004c)

In the longer-term the DHW also aims to increase the number of people with disabilities entering into and sustaining home ownership.

The DHW's current *Disability Service Plan 2004-2008* – the guiding framework for the *Strategic Housing Policy for People with Disabilities* and developed concurrently with the *Policy* – also acknowledges the DHW's intention to develop home ownership products for people with disabilities, i.e. through DHW's Access Home Loan Scheme (DHW 2004a). Outcomes Area 1 of the *Disability Service Plan 2004-2008* emphasises strategies to meet the individual needs of people with disabilities, build joint ventures and partnerships with housing providers, and develop and undertake research into innovative housing models for people with disabilities. Like the *Strategic Housing Policy for People with Disabilities*, the DHW's *Disability Service Plan* has continuous improvement as a guiding principle and recognises the importance of monitoring and evaluating existing (and new) housing models for people with a disability.

The *Housing Strategy WA Discussion Draft* released recently by the DHW also specifically addresses the issue of housing for people with a disability in WA. Strategic Area 5 of the Strategy (Supporting Priority Need) includes an objective to 'increase

the suitability of housing for people with disabilities' (DHW c. 2006, Objective 15). This objective stipulates the need for people with disabilities to have access '...to a range of quality affordable and accessible housing' options in both the public and private sectors and relevant to their needs. Importantly in terms of this review of the integration of housing and disability policies, Objective 15 further adds that:

A crucial aspect of housing provision for people with disabilities with high support needs is the smooth functioning of the interface between the provision of housing stock and the delivery of appropriate support services. The latter may come from a complex variety of Government departments and programs at both the national and state levels – each with their own unique eligibility requirements and funding parameters – along with non-Government and private sources. There is a need for better integration between the various housing and support systems for people with disabilities, including high level policy development and specific research to address the most complex interface issues (DHW c. 2006. p. 31).

The individual strategies set out under Strategic Area 5 to increase number, range and suitability of housing options for people with a disability in the *Housing Strategy Draft* are:

- investigating and developing innovative funding models that tap into additional funding sources to increase housing options (particularly in regional WA);
- government developing a state Housing and Disability Funding and Services Plan to determine the capital and recurrent funding needed to meet projected demand for housing and support services;
- building a stock of housing suitable for people with disabilities and aim to see this housing available for people with disabilities into the future;
- DHW continuing to construct new dwellings to meet a minimum standard of accessibility, visitability and adaptability as per the Australian Standard on Adaptable Housing, and influencing the housing industry to meet the same standards, i.e. to minimise the need for people with disabilities (and ageing people) to relocate as they age or if their disability worsens; and
- developing community housing for people with disabilities. DHW proposes establishing a Housing Trust Fund within the community housing sector to assist in securing equity investment from non-government sources, i.e. individuals, ethical investors and corporations.

(DHW c. 2006, pp. 34–35)

Strategic Area 4 of the *Housing Strategy WA Discussion Draft* (government supported housing) discusses government provided and funded housing, including for people with disabilities. This section of the *Housing Strategy* outlines many of the same broad challenges for housing people with disabilities that are discussed in the *Strategic Housing Policy for People with Disabilities*. The strategies in this section of the document unsurprisingly relate to the continued targeting of government provided and funded housing to people in greatest need, including people with disabilities. It stresses the need to find alternative ways to fund and deliver sustainable social housing and involve the private sector more in the provision and funding of housing options for people with a disability, i.e. by facilitating private sector investment in community housing and rental accommodation for people with disabilities (see DHW C. 2006, pp. 24–25). Like the *Strategic Housing Policy*, the *Housing Strategy WA Discussion Draft* recognises that 'housing has a direct relationship to health, education, employment and wellbeing'.

The state Affordable Housing Policy to be developed following the adoption of the *Housing Strategy WA* is also anticipated to include a focus on ensuring that special needs groups such as people with disabilities are able to access affordable housing now and into the future (see DHW c. 2006, pp. 14–15).

Before moving on to the next jurisdiction (the ACT) it is important to mention one last document, the WA Government's *Accommodation Blueprint 2003–2008* (Accommodation Blueprint Steering Committee 2003). This document and the recommendations outlined in it, along with the key WA Government policies discussed above, show the focus and current direction of housing and accommodation supports for people with disabilities in WA. They also reveal the comprehensiveness and extent of policies and strategies in place in WA to integrate support and accommodation services for people with disabilities and to address increasing demand for accommodation and support services from people with disabilities.

The *Accommodation Blueprint 2003–2008* discusses and aims to address both unmet accommodation need for people with disabilities in WA and expected future demand for accommodation services. The Blueprint gives specific information about the extent of unmet need, projected demand for accommodation services, particularly for community-based supported accommodation, and discusses contemporary approaches and key trends in accommodation support for people with disabilities. It outlines 60 short, medium and long-term recommendations,²¹ primarily to:

- develop a model to project future demand for accommodation support for people with disabilities, including people with complex needs, people with disabilities who are ageing and those with high support needs;
- increase the capacity of existing accommodation services and options to address unmet need and meet expected future demand for services, (especially of community-based supported accommodation);²² and
- develop new and more flexible person-centred accommodation services, options and partnerships to meet the individual needs of people with disabilities now and into the future.

The *Accommodation Blueprint* explores a range of accommodation options and solutions to improve the capacity of existing services. It emphasises the need for increased growth funding from government and improved management of accommodation vacancies to address unmet need and future demand (Accommodation Blueprint Steering Committee 2003, p. 10).

The vast majority of recommendations in the Blueprint have been endorsed by the WA Government and subsequently implemented or acted upon by its disability services agency, the Disability Service Commission (DSC), and other relevant agencies. The Blueprint has resulted in the development of such things as a directory of service providers on the DSC website (outlining the services available to people with disabilities and their families and/or carers) and a *Disability Industry Plan* (discussed briefly below). The *Disability Industry Plan of Western Australia 2005–2010* (Sector Development Working Party 2005) was also developed in line with a recommendation 53 of the *Accommodation Blueprint*. The *Industry Plan* has been designed by the disability industry to stimulate best practice in the provision of disability services. This includes ensuring that people with disabilities have access to

²¹ 53 of which have been formally adopted by the DSC (McHale 2003, p. 3).

²² Increasing supported community accommodation (i.e. to reduce demand on acute hospital beds) is also a key initiative in *Western Australia's Mental Health Strategy 2004–2007* (Office of Mental Health 2004, p. 5).

high quality services and the disability sector provides innovative models of assistance that promote choice for people with a disability. The Plan strongly highlights the need for people with disabilities, their families and carers to work collaboratively with the community, government and non-government disability service providers and mainstream service providers (where appropriate) to plan, deliver and provide support and services for people with a disability. It also aims to promote the efficient and effective delivery of disability services, better use of available resources and to generate partnerships and strategies that strengthen the links between and among disability service providers, government and the community.

The *Accommodation Blueprint* has also seen DSC input into, and feedback on, the DHW's *Strategic Housing Policy for People with Disabilities* and the state *Housing Strategy* and the establishment of the 'Western Australian Think Tank on Accommodation Support' to develop and research 'innovative approaches to accommodation support for people with disabilities in Western Australia' (ABSC 2003 (recommendation 54); Quirk c. 2005; see also the think tank website: <http://www.thinktank.net.au/about.cfm>). Progress on the other recommendations adopted by the DSC from the *Accommodation Blueprint* (to August 2005) is summarised in the *Workplan for the Implementation of the Accommodation Blueprint* (see DSC 2005).

TERRITORIES

Australian Capital Territory

The main document directing the planning and delivery of services for people with disabilities in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) is the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services' (DDHCS) *Challenge 2014, A ten year vision for disability in the ACT* (DDHCS 2004a). This document enunciates the vision adopted by the ACT Government (and developed by the Disability Reform Group) for people with disabilities in the ACT, i.e. that:

All people with disabilities achieve what they want to achieve, live how they choose to live, and are valued as full and equal members of the ACT community (DDHCS 2004a, p. 2).

Like the other disability action plans and documents discussed in this review, *Challenge 2014* aims to facilitate the inclusion and participation of people with disabilities in the community, improve their access to mainstream support services (including housing assistance), and monitor the progress of the government and community generally in meeting the long-term visions outlined in the document. It also focuses on developing a range of timely and person-centred specialist support services for people with disabilities; that meet the needs of people with disabilities, rather than (the past government focus on) fitting people with disabilities to available services and programs (Wood in DDHCS 2004a, p. 5). *Challenge 2014* outlines the roles to be played by the ACT Government and broader community, including mainstream and disability services providers and people with disabilities themselves, in meeting the longer-term visions set out in the document.

Challenge 2014 gives a range of visions for people with disabilities, structured from the perspective of people with disabilities and their carers and families, and in terms of their life stage (child, young person, adult, older person). That is, 'as a person with a disability I should be able to...' and 'families and carers should be able to...' (see DDHCS 2004a, pp. 12–18). In line with these headings and in terms of housing and accommodation, *Challenge 2014* aims to ensure that people with a disability can live according to their preferences, can live like other people of their age (to the extent possible), and as adults have a place to call home and range of affordable and high standard housing/accommodation options to choose from (pp. 12 & 16–17). The document emphasises the need for assistance and support services to match the life cycle of people with disabilities and to recognise that people with disabilities can have changing needs and requirements for support as they age (DDHCS 2004a, p. 14).

The DDHCS's own actions to meet the long-term 'aspirations' in *Challenge 2014* are set out in *Future Directions: A Framework for the ACT 2004–2008* (Disability ACT c. 2004). The Framework outlines four strategic directions to meet the ACT Government's vision for people with disabilities (above):

1. influencing policy and culture to promote an inclusive society;
2. strengthening the capacity of people with disabilities, their families and carers to maximise control over their lives;
3. improv[ing] the planning and use of available funding to meet the needs of people requiring ongoing support;
4. [working] in partnership with the community sector to strengthen the sustainability and responsiveness of the service delivery sector.

(Disability ACT c. 2004, p. 3)

Like *Challenge 2014*, *Future Directions* is a general work plan for improving outcomes for people with disabilities and addressing increasing and changing demands for services for and from people with disabilities (including for appropriate housing, post school options et cetera). The Framework places a strong emphasis on the integration of services between and across government agencies and with the non-government sector. It 'acknowledges that improving outcomes for people with disabilities is a shared responsibility between all people affected by disability, the broader community and all areas of government' (Disability ACT c. 2004, p. 4).

The Framework does not outline many specific strategies to address housing and/or accommodation options for people with disabilities. It does however, point to a need to fund projects for developing adaptable and accessible housing for people with disabilities (Strategic Direction 1, Objective 1.2, p. 17) and to increase the housing and accommodation options available in the ACT for people with disabilities, including trialling a range of new supported accommodation options (Strategic Direction 3, Objective 3.2, p. 19).

While the *Future Directions Framework* does not specifically discuss housing for people with disabilities to any great extent, the ACT Government and particularly the DDHCS has very recently undertaken research and consulted with the disability sector on housing for people with disabilities in the ACT. The DDHCS released the *Housing for People with a Disability Discussion Paper* in February 2006 as a background to, and to stimulate discussion at, the (ACT) Minister's Housing Advisory Forum and Housing Summit held at the end of February. The discussion paper represents a big step forward in understanding the importance of stable and appropriate housing for people with disabilities in the ACT (and generally), and especially in considering and developing alternative housing and accommodation models that meet the needs of people with disabilities.

Like the strategic housing policies and most of the housing and disability plans in place in states across Australia, the DDHCS's discussion paper is based on the underlying premise that

Secure housing and tenancy for most people with a disability and their families is the cornerstone to minimising the impact of disability and maximising personal outcomes (DDHCS 2006, p. 3).

Moreover,

The ACT Government acknowledges that for many people with a disability the issue of housing cannot be separated from the issue of their support arrangements (DDHCS 2006, p. 3).

The discussion paper raises four issues of importance in considering housing and accommodation assistance for people with disabilities in the ACT,

1. how to give priority to housing people with disabilities in public and community housing when there is high and increasing demand for social housing properties (i.e. from a range of special needs groups and low income earners); a limited supply of social housing stock generally, and specifically stock that is appropriate for people with disabilities; and disability itself is not a qualification for Housing ACT's category 1 allocation for social housing.
2. acknowledging that for many people with disabilities *independent* living can be, and is, an appropriate and preferred accommodation choice.
3. the group home model for people with disabilities has limitations. The ACT Government recognise that while small group home models have a place in accommodating some people with disabilities, they are not necessarily cost

effective, nor do they necessarily meet the individual needs of all people with disabilities.

4. in moving towards (and proposing) other models of housing and accommodating people with disabilities in the ACT, housing and accommodation providers (including Housing ACT and the ACT Government generally) need to work in partnership with people with disabilities and their families to inform them about new housing models, reassure them about change and allay their fears.

(DDHCS 2006, p. 6)

The housing and accommodation models put forward in the discussion paper include:

- *co-tenanting* in social housing, i.e. a person with a disability co-tenants in a public or community housing dwelling with someone who does not have a disability. The co-tenant provides assistance and companionship to the person with a disability, often in exchange for reduced or waived rent.
- *responsive landlord* model for social housing: landlord provides tenancy support for people with disabilities to ensure they maintain their tenancy, i.e. tenancy management skills (budgeting, finance, maintenance et cetera) and supporting and building living skills.
- *committed public housing stock for people with disabilities*. Committing a fixed number of dwellings for people with disabilities annually. This model would require additional funding for disability modifications and means that people with disabilities are competing with the most disadvantaged group in society (homeless people) for property allocations.
- *homeownership for people with intellectual disabilities*.
- *family-governed* models of housing like the Deohaeko Support Network operating in Canada. This model is a government-rented housing cooperative (of 105 units) set up by the families of people with disabilities to provide homes for their children and members of the public (without disabilities) in a community setting.
- *greater support within family homes*, i.e. providing assistance with life planning, respite, day options and coordinating/providing professional and/or clinical support services.

(DDHCS 2006, pp. 7–10)

The issues of concern for each of the models are also discussed in the paper (see DDHCS 2006, pp. 7–10).

The ACT Government's current affordable housing plan, *Housing People Building Communities*, also addresses housing for people with disabilities; albeit broadly (DDHCS 2004b). As with the strategies outlined under Priority 6 (Housing for a Future Canberra) of *The Canberra Social Plan*,²³ *Housing People Building Communities* (Policy Group, Chief Minister's Department 2004) recognises the ACT Government's need to ensure that government housing assistance is accessible, appropriate and responsive to all special needs groups. Both documents also work to address housing unaffordability in the ACT and thereby ensure that all people on low incomes have access to appropriate and affordable housing. They stress the need for the ACT Government to invest in and build a viable and sustainable social housing sector that

²³ *Building Our Community The Canberra Social Plan* is the social justice focussed plan guiding the ACT Government's decision making over the next decade or so. It is one of three strategic documents guiding the development of Canberra and the ACT; i.e. along with *The Canberra Spatial Plan* and *The Economic White Paper for the Australian Capital Territory* (see <http://www.cmd.act.gov.au/canberraplan/>).

meets the needs of special needs clients, and to expand the community housing sector (see DDHSC 2004b, p. 12; Policy Group, Chief Minister's Department 2004, p. 57).

It should also be noted here that the ACT Government has undertaken significant work and community consultation over the last four years on carers, recognising the important role carers play in improving the lives of people with disabilities (and for the community) and gauging carers' current and future needs and concerns. The ACT Government has released two important documents regarding carers: the *Caring for Carers Policy* (DDHCS 2003) and *Caring for Carers in the ACT – A Plan for Action 2004–2007* (to progress the objectives of the *Carers Policy*) (ACT Government 2004). These documents are important because they focus on housing for people with disabilities from the perspective of the carers involved. Amongst the other strategies in the documents to support carers, they emphasise increasing the housing and accommodation options available for people in caring relationships to improve their choices about their living arrangements (ACT Government 2004, p. 8). They also recognise that 'carers have the right to decide whether to take on or continue the role of care' and to be supported in their choices (ACT Government 2004, p. 4). These documents remind housing and service providers (and policy makers and researchers) of the need to take into account the current and future needs of carers when assisting people with disabilities. This is particularly important when assisting adults with disabilities who are living with ageing carers or people with disabilities being cared for by young carers; situations where the carers may not always be in a position (or be willing) to continue with their caring role.

Northern Territory

The Northern Territory (NT) faces a number of different, additional and somewhat unique challenges in the Australian context because of its geography and demography. As summarised in *Building Healthier Communities*, the NT Government's *Framework for Health and Community Services 2004 – 2009*, the NT faces the major challenge of how to properly resource its health and community services system given that the Territory has a small population spread over a large geographical area and providing services for the population, especially its remote communities, is therefore more expensive than in most other areas of Australia (DHCS 2004, p. 4). The Territory has the additional problem of fewer opportunities for the private sector to provide health and community services because of the wide distribution of the population. As such, the NT Government is responsible for providing the vast majority of health and community services, at least in conjunction with the Commonwealth Government. Moreover, as is the case across Australia, demand for particular (primary) health and community services is increasing, placing increased pressure on already over-stretched services.

The *Building Healthier Communities* Framework identifies mental health and disability services as two of the areas experiencing high levels of demand and need in terms of the provision of health and community services in the NT. The Framework emphasises the need to fill service gaps in these areas and in terms of primary health care, especially for Indigenous people. The document also aims to create better pathways to these services, particularly for younger Territorians with a disability and people with mental illness and mental illness coupled with substance abuse problems.

The large number of Indigenous people living in the NT also has distinct and important implications for the delivery of health, community services and housing in the Territory (see DHCS 2006b; DHCS c. 2004). Indigenous people have poorer health than the non-Indigenous and total populations of the NT and Australia and are widely

acknowledged as over-represented among people with disabilities and mental health issues and under-represented as users of health and community services. They also generally experience disability at an earlier age than the Australian population as a whole (see DHCS 2006b, p. 23). It is not surprising then that the *Building Healthier Communities Framework* includes a significant section dedicated to improving the primary health care outcomes of Indigenous Territorians. This said, the document makes no reference to housing as an important determinant in the health of Territory residents.

The Northern Territory Government's *Rehabilitation Strategy 2006-2010* (that sits within the *Building Healthier Communities Framework*) also addresses the delivery of disability services in the NT. It provides '...the basis for planning of inter-disciplinary rehabilitation services for people with disabilities for the next five years' and highlights the need to improve the delivery of, and access to, rehabilitation services for people with a disability, especially for Indigenous people with a disability in remote communities. The document presents predictions about the prevalence of disability among Indigenous people and the need for improved rehabilitation services to meet growing demand from all Territorians (see pp. 22–23 and 23–27). While the *Rehabilitation Strategy* does not clearly discuss or acknowledge the importance of integrating disability and rehabilitation services and housing for people with disabilities and/or mental health issues, it does refer to housing or more specifically accommodation (and particularly supported accommodation and home and community care) as one of the important elements of care for people with disability needing rehabilitation services. The strategy also makes brief mention of the need to take an inter-sectoral approach to caring for and assisting people in need of rehabilitation services. This includes looking at the housing circumstances of the person receiving rehabilitation services and the housing circumstances of family members providing support for them.

The NT Government's strategy – *Home Territory 2010* – includes a focus on meeting the needs of people with special needs through the integration of their housing/accommodation with other disability and social supports (and vice versa). *Home Territory 2010* is the NT Government's strategy for addressing housing affordability. It aims to '...ensure safe, secure and affordable housing for all Territorians, now and into the future, in particular Territorians on low incomes or with special needs' (DCDSCA 2004, p. 5).

One of the objectives of *Home Territory 2010* is 'increasing the level of support for "special needs groups" in our community through flexible service provision, working across sectors and improved service delivery' (p. 5). The strategies set out in the document to meet this objective and that respond to the needs of people with disabilities are:

- providing a range of supported residential accommodation options for people with disabilities and other special needs groups including people with renal problems and remote community patients being treated in urban areas; and
- undertaking modifications to public housing properties for people with mobility difficulties.

(DCDSCA 2004, p. 14).

It should be noted here that an independent review of the disability services system in the Territory was announced by the NT Government in December 2005 (DHCS 2005). A background paper was developed by the Department of Health and Community Services (DHCS) for the review in January 2006 (see DHCS 2006a). A consultants

report on the review of the disability services system is expected in the coming months.

Furthermore, the NT, WA and SA Governments have recently committed to working together to address the health outcomes of Indigenous people with a disability in the Ngannytjarra, Pitjantjatjarra and Yankunytjatjarra (NPY) Lands that cross the borders of those three jurisdictions. The governments have developed a tri-state strategic framework: *tjulgula* (we are together) the *Tri-State Disability Strategic Framework 2005-2008* (Tri-State Disability Services Group 2005). Through this strategy the multi-jurisdictional Tri-State Disability Service Group²⁴ has committed to working together, within and between governments and service providers to streamline the services available to Indigenous people with a disability in the NPY Lands. The Group aims to build on what already exists in the NPY Lands in terms of successful programs and service approaches and improve people's access to disability services in order to get better health outcomes for people with a disability living in these Lands.

²⁴ This group comprises the NT Government's DHCS, Government of WA's Disability Services Commission and Government of SA's Department for Families and Communities.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

As this review of disability and housing policies in Australia's states and territories shows, increasing and improving housing options and assistance for people with disabilities and people with mental illness is a clear objective of all state governments and the ACT Government. Accordingly, strategies and actions to increase and improve housing assistance and housing options for people with disabilities and people with mental illnesses are emphasised and included in the current disability policies and housing policies in these jurisdictions;²⁵ albeit in slightly different ways and to different extents between policies and between jurisdictions. Non-government disability organisations also play an important role in providing both housing and support to people with a disability.

All Australian state governments and the ACT Government have developed comprehensive disability policies to support people with disabilities and increase their acceptance, inclusion and participation in the community. For a summary of the key policies reviewed in this report, see Table 1. The policies show the need for, and commitment of, governments to invest in and facilitate the increased and improved provision and integration of person-centred support services for people with disabilities. Central to the policies is increasing and improving housing assistance and accommodation options for people with disabilities. This focus is clearly motivated by widespread understanding of the importance of affordable, secure, stable and appropriate housing for the health, wellbeing and financial security of people with disabilities and people with mental illness (and for the general population).

The disability policies in place in each Australian state and the ACT outline a range of strategies and actions being undertaken by state and territory governments to improve and increase housing assistance for people with disabilities. For the most part the strategies outlined in these policies focus on a common range of actions to improve the range and quality of support services for people with disabilities and people with mental illness, and to meet increasing demand for services. These strategies and actions include:

- increasing the *capacity* of new and existing support services for people with disabilities and people with mental illness, including housing assistance and supported accommodation options;
- increasing the number, range and quality of in-home support services and *community-based* supported accommodation options for people with disabilities and people with mental illness, including for people with disabilities and/or mental illness living in large institutional care facilities;
- closing large institutions for people with disabilities;
- ensuring that people with disabilities and people with mental illness are able to access both mainstream and specialised (disability-specific) support services and housing assistance, and have access to information about these services;
- researching, developing and trialling *new models* of accommodation and housing for people with disabilities, especially community-based accommodation options;
- building, strengthening and ensuring the sustainability of the social housing sector in each jurisdiction as a viable and appropriate housing option for people with disabilities and/or mental illness – primarily by increasing private sector provided and/or managed community housing; and

²⁵ And state mental health policies or plans, see for example, the discussion of Victoria in this report.

- increasing affordable housing options for people with disabilities and people with mental illness.

The policies also highlight the need for state and territory governments to better integrate the housing assistance provided to people with disabilities and/or mental illness with the health, community and social support services needed by them. In order to achieve this, the disability policies strongly emphasise inter-departmental and cross-agency collaboration; collaboration within and between the government and non-government agencies involved in providing mainstream and specialist services for people with disabilities and for people with mental illness.

The largely common focus of disability policies across the states and the ACT is not surprising given the five strategic priorities state and territory disability Ministers have agreed to pursue under the current Multilateral Agreement of the CS/TDA – the national framework for the delivery, funding and development of specialist disability services for people with disabilities in Australia (Commonwealth of Australia 2003a). That is,

- strengthening access to mainstream and generic services for people with disabilities;
- strengthening across government linkages;
- strengthening individuals and families;
- improving long-term strategies to respond to, and manage demand for, specialist disability services; and
- improving accountability, performance reporting and the quality of specialist disability services.

The common range of strategies outlined above is also consistent with the general (and brief) focus on housing assistance specifically for people with disabilities and people with mental illnesses outlined in state/territory housing policies, and particularly in social housing policies. They are also consistent with the actions outlined in whole-of-state and whole-of-government strategies and housing plans in those jurisdictions that have such plans, i.e. in the *Housing Plan for SA* and *South Australian Strategic Plan*, the *A Fairer Victoria* social policy, *The Canberra Social Plan* and *WA Government's Housing Strategy WA Discussion Draft*. In saying this, however, it is the case that most state housing policies, and particularly departmental housing policies (i.e. for government housing agencies), outline housing assistance for people with disabilities and people with mental illness as part of a *collective* low income 'special needs' or 'high needs' group. This group includes other vulnerable and 'disadvantaged' individuals and groups such as the frail aged and the elderly, homeless people and those at risk of homelessness, women escaping domestic violence, Indigenous people and low income individuals and families generally. Table 1 indicates whether the key policies reviewed in this report refer to some of these groups – specifically Indigenous people, people from CALD backgrounds and people of different genders. Given the range of people in this group and their different needs, situations and requirements, it is not surprising that the strategies outlined in state and territory housing policies are more general in nature than those in most disability-specific policies. This said, it is clear that social housing is being further developed as an important option for people with disabilities and people with mental illness across Australia, and especially people with more severe, profound or restrictive disabilities and mental health conditions. Because of this, housing policies, and especially social housing policies, are clearly focussed on ensuring that people with disabilities can be appropriately housed in social housing dwellings. This has seen increasing activity by governments to ensure that social housing properties are appropriate and accessible

for people with disabilities; that is, in terms of their location or proximity to services, employment, education and recreation opportunities and their physical design, particularly for people with mobility difficulties.

The largely common direction of disability policies and housing policies with regard to housing (and assistance) for people with disabilities is also consistent with, and reflects, the 11 guiding principles that informed the development of the current CSHA. That is:

1. to maintain a core Social Housing sector to assist people unable to access alternative suitable housing options.
2. to develop and deliver affordable, appropriate, flexible and diverse housing assistance responses that provide people with choice and are tailored to their needs, local conditions and opportunities.
3. to provide assistance in a manner that is non-discriminatory and has regard to consumer rights and responsibilities, including consumer participation.
4. to commit to improving housing outcomes for Indigenous people in urban, rural and remote areas, through specific initiatives that strengthen the Indigenous housing sector and the responsiveness and appropriateness of the full range of mainstream housing options.
5. to ensure housing assistance links effectively with other programs and provides better support for people with complex needs, and has a role in preventing homelessness.
6. to promote innovative approaches to leverage additional resources into Social Housing, through community, private sector and other partnerships.
7. to ensure that housing assistance supports access to employment and promotes social and economic participation.
8. to establish greater consistency between housing assistance provision and outcomes, and other social and economic objectives of government, such as welfare reform, urban regeneration, and community-capacity building.
9. to undertake efficient and cost-effective management which provides best value to governments.
10. to adopt a co-operative partnership approach between levels of government towards creating a sustainable and more certain future for housing assistance.
11. to promote national, strategic, integrated and long-term vision for affordable housing in Australia through a comprehensive approach by all levels of government.

(Commonwealth of Australia 2003b, p. 4)

The focus of the policies on integrating the assistance services needed by people with disabilities and people with mental illness with the other support services needed by them is also consistent with Recital K of the CSHA. That is,

It is also recognised that the Commonwealth and the States must work together to improve housing outcomes for those in need through *better linkages* between programs under this Agreement and other relevant Commonwealth and State programs, including those relating to income support, *health and community services*. In implementing this Agreement, both the Commonwealth and the States will seek opportunities for *coordination of programs within each level of Government and between Governments* in order to improve outcomes for those assisted under this Agreement. In delivering

assistance, *improved linkages with the non-Government sector will also be sought* (Commonwealth of Australia 2003b, pp. 2–3, emphasis added).

Integrating assistance for people with high and complex needs is also directed by, and consistent with, section nine of the CSHA. This section of the Agreement calls for collaboration across jurisdictions and portfolios and better linking of housing programs and services with 'planning, transport, employment services, disability and other health and community programs' to maximise the opportunity for people who are in most need '...to actively participate in the community, socially and economically'. Moreover, strengthening the social housing sector by attracting and leveraging additional investment in social housing, especially from non-government sources, is a key priority of the current CSHA and is a condition of funding under the Bilateral Agreements signed by the states and territories under the Agreement. It is also a performance requirement in relation to five per cent of base funding for jurisdictions, and jurisdictions deemed by the Commonwealth to not be undertaking work to meet this requirement of the Agreement may have some of their base funding allocated to a complying jurisdiction(s).

The WA and Queensland Governments have developed comprehensive strategic housing policies specifically for people with disabilities in their states. These policies outline a range of actions to meet the growing demand for housing assistance and support services for and from people with disabilities. It is clear from this review that these policies are the leading examples of the integration of disability and housing policies in Australia. Moreover, as the WA and Queensland Governments have clearly used these long-standing policies to direct and inform their state-wide housing policies, the integration of disability and housing policy in these states extends to the general housing policies and plans in place (for example, the WA Government's recently released *WA Housing Strategy Discussion Draft*). Other state and territory governments in Australia could learn a great deal from these plans. They could also learn from the WA Government's range of actions to research and develop new housing options for people with disabilities and ensure the sustainability of the disability sector. That is, through the WA Government's *Accommodation Blueprint 2003–2008*, establishment of the 'WA Think Tank on Accommodation Support' and through the *Industry Plan* developed by the WA Government and disability sector to guide the provision and quality of disability services in WA and improve the sustainability of the disability industry.

Importantly, as this review highlights, much work has been, and is being, done by state governments and the ACT Government to investigate, develop and increase housing options for people with disabilities and/or mental illness, and to integrate the provision of housing/accommodation assistance for people in these groups with the support services they need. Most state governments and the ACT Government have recently reviewed or are reviewing accommodation options for people with disabilities, and especially community-based accommodation options. The NSW and SA Government housing and disability agencies, for example, have recently released discussion papers on supported accommodation for people with disabilities and the integration of accommodation and personal support services for people with disabilities respectively. The governments in these states have undertaken extensive community consultations to gauge the opinions of key stakeholders in the disability sector on new and existing models of accommodation for people with disabilities. In NSW the results of the Government's research and consultation on supported accommodation options has clearly informed the development of the *Stronger Together* plan for disability services in that state, as well as both the very recently released draft *NSW State Plan (A New Direction for NSW)* and recent reform of public housing in NSW. The fact that the eligibility criteria for public housing in NSW now

targets people on low incomes who require support services to live independently and/or are having difficulty finding affordable housing in the private market is testament to the NSW Government's commitment to targeting social housing assistance to people with disabilities, as well as other individuals and households with special needs.

The SA Government is also taking steps to better integrate personal support services for people with disabilities with the housing and accommodation assistance they need, by introducing an *Accommodation and Personal Support Services Policy, Plan* and new *Accommodation Legislation*. These documents and the actions outlined in them are aimed at integrating the key priorities in disability policy in the state (as outlined in *Promoting Independence*) with the need to increase community-based accommodation options for people with disabilities – a strategic priority in both the *Housing Plan for SA* and the *South Australian Strategic Plan*.

On the whole then, it is evident from this review that the disability and housing policies in place in Australia's states and the ACT are largely complementary. Importantly, the policies are clearly headed in the same direction in each jurisdiction, i.e. in terms of the need to increase and improve housing options and housing assistance for people with disabilities and people with mental illness and the integration of support services needed by individuals in these groups. Fundamentally, this is because state and territory governments recognise that stable, affordable, secure and appropriate housing is crucial in shaping and improving the health, wellbeing and financial security of people with disabilities. As such, this is a guiding principle of both the disability and housing policies in place in each jurisdiction.

The report finds strong congruence across Australia's states and territories in terms of housing and disability policies and their strategic direction. Given this congruence, it is evident that the results of the research currently being undertaken on the housing careers of people with disabilities and people with mental illness (and their carers) in Victoria as part of AHURI's National Research Venture 2 is important for, and could equally apply to, most jurisdictions in Australia. The possible exception here is the Northern Territory where for a range of place-specific and population-specific reasons the focus of housing and health policies (including those related to disability) is clearly on improving primary health care outcomes for Territorians, especially Indigenous Territorians.

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