

Minister Rebecca Vassarotti
ACT Legislative Assembly
GPO Box 1020
Canberra ACT 2601
By email to: vassarotti@act.gov.au

Cc Chief Minister Andrew Barr; via email: barr@act.gov.au
Cc Deputy Chief Minister Yvette Berry (Minister for Housing and Suburban Development); via email: berry@act.gov.au
Cc Minister Rachel Stephen-Smith (Minister for Families and Community Services): via email: stephen-smith@act.gov.au
Cc Minister Emma Davidson (Assistant Minister for Families and Community Services, Minister for Disability, Minister for Mental Health): via email: davidson@act.gov.au
Cc Minister Tara Cheyne, Minister for Human Rights: via email: cheyne@act.gov.au

14 April 2021

Dear Minister Vassarotti,

Re: Embedding mandatory accessibility standards in the National Construction Code

I am writing to thank you for your efforts to date in advocating at the federal level for the inclusion of mandatory housing accessibility standards in the National Construction Code (NCC). We know that the inclusion of accessibility standards is being proposed in recognition that the market has repeatedly failed to adequately respond to the ever-growing community need for and interest in accessible housing stock.

We write to ask for the ACT Government's continued leadership, advocacy and lobbying efforts in support of regulation to mandate housing accessibility in advance of the National Building Minister's meeting which we understand is scheduled for later this month. It is our view that all new housing should be designed and built to meet the needs of all community members, including older Australians and others with mobility limitations, or those who use mobility equipment such as wheelchairs.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with a Disability (UNCRPD) (Article 19), recognises the right of people with disability to live independently and to be included in the community, and UNCRPD (Article 28) also recognises the rights of people with disability to have access to adequate standards of living¹. As you are aware, at the present time, only a small percentage of homes available for purchase, or available on the private rental market across Australia are accessible.

The current moment is one where there is a possibility of widespread housing reform, that could positively impact so many people, and the entire Australian community.

As an individual advocacy service working with people with disability, people who experience mental ill health, older people and carers, we at ADACAS work with people who experience ongoing challenges around housing and homelessness.

ADACAS has worked with individuals and families who have found themselves in significant distress as they will be (or actually are) homeless, due to an existing housing arrangement ceasing, and the lack of accessible and / or affordable housing options available in the private rental market. We know that there are people who use wheelchairs who searched for months to find an accessible property to buy in the ACT. People can also be limited in their social connections to visit friends and family due to the inaccessibility of a home. It shouldn't be like this in our current day and age.

ADACAS has worked with people who have other housing accessibility needs related to sensory requirements (i.e. for thicker walls to quieten sound), or due to the interaction of psychosocial disability (mental health) and their environment on their experience.

The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety heard that older people do not want to “live and die in institutions”ⁱ: that it is the strong preference of older people to continue to live at home for as long as possibleⁱⁱ. We know that there are people with disability who found themselves living in residential aged care as a younger person, in no small part due to issues with the availability of suitable alternative housing. ADACAS is also aware of situations where older people would have been able to live at home for much longer, if their home had already been accessible. Building houses today where people can age in place will provide both a social and economic return for the future.

We stand with ANUHD and many others around the country in affirming that - **everyone deserves a safe and secure home that meets their needs**ⁱⁱⁱ. It is only fair and equitable that everyone should be able to access all parts of the community.

Rights and Inclusion Australia wrote to you recently on this topic, and cited research from the Melbourne Disability Institute, and also ANUHD. We endorse the information provided to you by this organisation, and also the request for the ACT Government Cabinet to adopt a position that **accessibility should be mandated for all new housing properties built in the ACT**.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to our office should we be able to provide any additional clarification or advice.

Yours sincerely

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ⁱ <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-2.html>

ⁱⁱ https://agedcare.royalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-03/final-report-volume-1_0.pdf page 36-37

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://anuhd.org/>