

Committee Secretary  
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

28 April 2017

## **Delivery of outcomes under the National Disability Strategy 2010-2020 to build inclusive and accessible communities**

The Property Council of Australia is pleased to provide a submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs' inquiry and report on the delivery of outcomes under the National Disability Strategy 2010-2020 (the Strategy) to build inclusive and accessible communities.

The Property Council is the peak body representing the country's largest property developers and investors, providing powerful advocacy on behalf of the industry that drives Australia's economy. Our members are respected for the work they do to develop great cities and housing that is both accessible and inclusive- particularly for people with a disability, their families and carers.

The following comments are provided on the objectives identified in the strategy:

### **Research**

***Develop a national research agenda on disability issues to inform research priorities across both mainstream and disability issues to inform research priorities across both mainstream and disability- specific areas.***

The Property Council strongly supports the Strategy's commitment to identify gaps in data, and inconsistent data definitions, collections and reporting. A challenge cannot be fully understood, and the delivery of outcomes cannot be measured, in the absence of data.

It is important to recognise that the 2012 ABS Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers provided that 51% of men and 54% of women aged 65 years and older had some form of disability. Around 4 in 5 people aged 85 years and older (80% of men and 82% of women) experienced disability.

The Retirement Living sector particularly has a significant role to play in delivering inclusive and accessible communities for senior Australians.

The Property Council recommends that any research be undertaken should record whether research participants/subjects with a disability live in a retirement village or other forms of seniors' accommodation.

Retirement villages are an ideal place for senior Australians to age in place independently within a community of their peers. Villages are especially designed for older people and include design elements to enable independent living such as grab bars in bathrooms, wider corridors and emergency call systems. Many villages have visiting rooms for health professionals, and health and well-being facilities that encourage healthy living such as swimming pools, bowling greens, and group activities.

Better understanding whether research participants/subjects with a disability live in a retirement village or other forms of seniors' accommodation will better inform the design and management of these communities to support their needs.

To do so, data collection must differentiate between accommodation types should be separate options/data fields, rather than one combined option of "seniors' accommodation". We note that ABS Census collectors record whether a household is in a retirement village and recommend this continue to enable us to learn more about village residents.

### **Inclusive and Accessible Communities**

*People with disability live in accessible and well-designed communities with opportunity for full inclusion in social, economic, sporting and cultural life*

The Property Council strongly supports the need for people with disability, including older Australians, to be able to live in accessible and well-designed communities with opportunity for full inclusion in social, economic, sporting and cultural life.

The planning, design, and management of the built environment, including commercial premises, housing, public space and amenities to support accessible communities is strictly regulated at a state and local government level.

A proposal was submitted to the Building Construction Code in 2016 seeking to include adaptable housing design guidelines as a Deemed-to-Satisfy solution to increase private sector provision of accessible housing. The proposal presented six core design elements to be applicable to Class 1, 2, 3 and 4 dwellings. The proposal was not agreed or endorsed by the BCC as they viewed it as a government policy matter. At their April 2017 meeting, the Building Ministers' Forum have agreed to propose to COAG that a national Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) be undertaken to consider applying a minimum accessibility standard for private dwellings in Australia. The Property Council and its members will

engage in this process as it potentially could have a large impact on residential class 2 and 3 buildings, with implications for housing supply, diversity of choice and affordability.

Importantly, the property industry has proactively developed Liveable Housing Guidelines, in partnership with the community, to provide assurance that a home is easier to access, navigate and live in, as well as more cost effective to adapt when circumstances change.

The property industry works with Livable Housing Australia to increase the adoption of the livable housing design principles in all new homes built in Australia to ensure that people with a disability and their families have better housing choices.

The Guidelines describe livable design elements. Each element provides guidance on what performance is expected to achieve either silver, gold or platinum level accreditation. Performance levels are assigned upon being judged against 16 different criteria. A minimum of eight criteria must be satisfied to achieve the minimum level and be awarded a silver accreditation.

All qualified industry professionals such as architects, builders, builder designers, access consultants, occupational therapists and building surveyors that are registered and have professional insurance coverage can assess a home as meeting the LHA silver, gold or platinum level.

The eight core design feature elements in the silver level are;

- A safe continuous and step free path of travel from the street entrance and/ or parking area to dwelling entrance that is level.
- At least one, level (step-free) entrance into the dwelling.
- Internal doors and corridors that facilitate comfortable and unimpeded movement between spaces.
- A toilet on ground (or entry) level that provides easy access.
- A bathroom that contains a hobless (step-free) shower recess.
- Reinforced walls around the toilet, shower and bath to support the safe installation of grab rails at a later date.
- A continuous handrail on one side of any stairway where there is a rise of more than one meter.
- Staircases are designed to reduce the likelihood of injury and also enable future adaption.

As recognised in the Strategy, this is a sound approach as it assists everyone- including families with young children that require space to manoeuvre prams, people who sustain temporary injury and ageing baby boomers that can make simple changes to make their lives easier and safer.

Building accessible and well-designed communities that integrate social, economic, sporting and cultural life is part of a broader conversation on the need for good strategic planning and robust infrastructure investment to underpin the growth, productivity and liveability of our cities. Focusing on the development of our cities to support population growth will ensure that the built environment services the needs of the whole community, particularly those with a disability.

It is important to acknowledge that Australia has a shortage of housing stock built specifically to meet older people's needs. Senior Australians should have suitable housing options within their own communities, close to their family and friends and their usual service and health providers.

Together with ThomsonAdsett Architects, the Property Council is also developing a set of voluntary design guidelines for retirement villages to ensure the village community is appropriate for older residents. We would welcome the opportunity to meet with the Senate Standing Committee once the guidelines have been finalised later this year.

Better outcomes could be achieved for senior Australians with a disability if more proactive planning policies by state and local governments encourage greater development of retirement villages in areas where they are needed, and which support older people to remain in their communities.

### **Economic Security**

*People with disability, their families and carers have economic security, enabling them to plan for the future and exercise choice and control over their lives.*

The Property Council agrees that people with disability, their families and carers should have economic security to enable them to plan for the future and exercise choice and control over their lives.

The Property Council will not provide comment on the outcomes of the Strategy on this objective. However, the following general observations are made on the Strategy's policy direction to ensure that tax systems provide an adequate standard of living and the need to improve access to housing options for people with disabilities: high transaction costs currently discourage the efficient use of housing stock and people are locked into housing that does not meet their needs.

With the transaction costs of selling being more than \$74,000 in Sydney and \$64,000 in Melbourne, we can assume there are tens of thousands of family homes not in the market simply because of the transaction costs- including people with disabilities and their families.

Stamp duty is the biggest cost of moving, which has to be paid whether upsizing or downsizing into housing that meets their needs- a 2015 report by National Seniors

found that 'while some older Australians need to downsize, they are discouraged by the lack of appropriate housing stock and the high costs involved', such as stamp duty, capital gains tax and impacts on the age pension.

Furthermore, the 2013 McCrindle Baynes Villages Census found that over 80% of retirement village residents receive a full or part age pension. The Property Council supports a targeted change to the age pension assets test to allow older homeowners to sell their family home and purchase a smaller, age appropriate home (such as a retirement village unit), and quarantine a portion of the excess sale proceeds. Research indicates that living in a retirement village delays a person's entry into a residential aged care facility by five years on average. This delay saves the federal government aged care budget, which may offset the cost of additional pension payments.

Given these observations, the Property Council supports the identified areas for future actions to develop innovative options to improve housing affordability and ensure that the National Affordable Housing Agreement addresses the housing needs of people with a disability.

## **Conclusion**

The property industry actively works to building inclusive and accessible communities for those with a disability and are supportive of the inquiry and report on the delivery of outcomes under the National Disability Strategy 2010-2020.

If you would like to discuss the comments raised in this submission further, please contact Rebecca Douthwaite, Policy Manager, Housing & Planning, on 02 9033 1936.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G Byres', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Glenn Byres

**Chief of Policy and Housing  
Property Council of Australia**