



Joint Statement on the NDIA's Specialist Disability Accommodation Provider and Investor Brief

The National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) presented its latest policy position for Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) in a statement to the provider and investor market on 24 April.

People with disabilities and developers of innovative housing for people with disabilities are pleased the NDIA has reiterated the government's commitment to SDA in its SDA Provider and Investor Brief. The NDIA has confirmed that the SDA funding model is here to stay with a broad approach to reviewing prices in the future.

However, the NDIA's SDA Brief expresses a vision for SDA housing with a clear bias toward shared models of housing for people with disability, presumably to reduce support costs. The NDIA brief also indicates only a "very small number...of a very small percentage" of NDIS participants will be funded to live alone in SDA.

The SDA Brief suggests the NDIA will, in most cases, require people with disability to live in group-home style accommodation settings, even if it is not their preference.

Forcing participants into shared accommodation arrangements, in order for the NDIA to reduce costs, is a position out of step with the expressed preferences and goals of people with disability, let alone Australia's human rights obligations, the NDIS Act, NDIA's Independent Advisory Council advice on an ordinary life, the COAG vision for SDA and findings of international and Australian research.

It is also significant risk to the safety of people with disabilities as evidenced by inquiries into abuse and neglect, which have shown that people living in group homes are at high risk of violence and abuse.

NDIA's decision to force people with disability to share their accommodation is a poor policy and practice from the past. It shouldn't be carried over into the NDIS. The Federal Government's commitment on NDIS and SDA is that people with disability would have choice.

The vision for SDA in the NDIS, which enables people with disability to live an ordinary life, is one that is shared by people with disability, providers and investors and institutions providing funds to build high-quality SDA housing.

Working with the SDA funding policy since 2016, investors and providers of SDA have been listening to people with disability and pioneering new asset classes that enable people with high and complex support needs to live in their own home while also sharing supports with others if they choose to.

SDA providers and investors have, to date, committed tens of millions to the development of new accessible housing. Significant increased investment is poised to enter the market in coming months to create hundreds of new high-quality, modern homes that can provide ordinary lives for people with disability.

Government support is clearly needed for this market – housing for people with higher and complex disability support needs costs more to produce than conventional housing, is leased to tenants who cannot afford to pay market rental and is valued less in the market than its cost of production.

The SDA Brief has created immediate uncertainty. Providers are pausing projects and reconsidering future investment in the market. The Brief has changed the goalposts for providers and investors. Millions of dollars in investment in SDA is directly and immediately affected.

Immediate reassurance and certainty is needed on how the SDA market is expected to grow and operate. The NDIA's SDA Brief of 24 April has not provided this.

To achieve greater certainty for the development of SDA we are asking governments and the NDIA to:

- Confirm that where participants have a goal of living alone, the NDIA will not force people with disability into shared living arrangements;
- Confirm that participants will have choice and control to live in a single resident dwelling, as considered reasonable and necessary to achieve their goals
- Establish a SDA working group with participants, providers and other stakeholders to develop a shared vision for housing in the NDIS and consider what factors should contribute to “reasonable and necessary” considerations in SDA
- Immediately improve processes and timeframes around SDA funding decisions by the NDIA, including a 28-day turn around for decisions on SDA where the participant has identified an immediate SDA option and already requested SDA funding in their plan;
- Ensure the Supported Independent Living Pricing framework enables flexible individual support arrangements to provide innovative and individual support solutions in SDA and other housing arrangements; and
- Publish quarterly SDA data held by the NDIA to support market development – including data on number, SDA type and funding level of SDA approvals for participants and enrolled SDA dwellings by dwelling type, design category and by state, commencing by quarter 2, 2018-19.

Background

This statement is issued jointly by the organisations listed below. We are all committed to enabling people with disability to live an independent life and be in control of where they live and who they live with.

Affordable and appropriate housing is fundamental to participant goals, and choice and control for participants' housing decisions must be central to the operation of SDA funding.

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