

Disabilities and Mental Health

Background

During the social housing workshop held on 14 September 2001 the disability sector representatives present identified a number of key housing issues for the sector, including the need for:

- More and better housing options
- A continuum of more responsive, flexible services to support independent living
- Design innovations
- Choice and voice
- Housing partnership with consumers
- Tenant participation, and
- Tackling discrimination in the housing sector

They identified the need to improve access to suitable, sustainable and affordable independent living.

The Social Housing Strategy Process May 2002

The social housing strategy working party (disabilities including mental health) formed and met on 7 and 14 May 2002.

Participants were selected on the basis of their expertise and experience of the various disability sectors including the physical, intellectual, sensory and mental health sectors. The Chair of the group was Mary O'Hagan of the Mental Health Commission, Mary was fully involved in selecting the participants in the group and emphasis was placed on consumer representation. The aim was to bring together a diverse group representing consumers and service providers to work together to develop the strategy.

Individuals unable to attend the meetings of the workgroup were consulted by email and members of the workgroup consulted with other members of their sector between sessions and during the development of draft documentation of the work of the group.

A process was adopted that provided participants the opportunity to examine the current housing issues affecting the disability sector. The workgroup then began the process of developing a vision, goals and actions to bring together the vision and to inform the social housing strategy to 2010.

Each sector brought its own issues to the work. The physical disability sector placed emphasis on the need for universal design principles to be adopted, the intellectual disability sector raised issues relating to choice and voice while the mental health sector raised issues regarding funding, best practice and the separation of care and housing provision. Although there were differences in emphasis between the various sectors represented there was also a high degree of similarity between them.

The themes that emerged during the first workshop included:

- Resolving discrimination;
- Tailored housing solutions;

- Universal design issues;
- Funding;
- Supply and demand issues;
- Improving government provision;
- Choice and voice for all;
- Advocacy and education;
- The need for support to be flexible;
- Accountability.

The group developed a vision:

“A society that continually enhances the full participation of people with a disability through ensuring their rights to live in housing of their choice.”

The goals and themes that emerged from the first workshop closely mirrored the objectives of the New Zealand Disability Strategy (NZDS). It was decided to develop a modified version of the objectives contained in the NZDS to best capture the themes forthcoming.

Major themes

A recurring theme was a strong need for leadership and co-ordination in regard to housing issues impacting on the disability sector. These concerns were reflected in a call for a clearly identified agency to lead housing and disability issues.

The work group strongly advocated the economic and social benefits of HNZC adopting a policy of total “universal design.” This entails designing all future HNZC houses so that they are either instantly usable by anyone with a physical or sensory disability, or else can be quickly and cheaply converted for such a use.

A call was also made for the social housing sector to take a lead in ensuring that newly built housing is of universal design, and that existing housing is modified. Given that the social housing strategy takes a long-term view to 2010, it was agreed that a target should be set for all new housing to be of universal design by 2010. The group saw this target could be achieved by a mixture of activities including promoting the benefits of universal design, education targeting homeowners, the building industry and others, developing incentives and taking advantage of bulk purchase arrangements.

A strong feeling came through the sessions that discrimination is a major issue for the sector. There was particular focus on the impediments that Territorial Local Authorities have placed on the sector in the application of the Building Act and Resource Management Act. Objectives and actions were developed to address this issue. The group identified the need for leadership and co-ordination of effort in addressing discrimination, highlighting the need for education.

There was a strong call for a more co-ordinated approach to funding and seamless delivery of services, for co-ordination across the health, housing, and disability sectors with inter-sectoral co-operation being led at a high level. Very strong themes were consumer input and participation, and the desire for housing solutions that are flexible while being consistent.

Participants representing the mental health sector were particularly focused on the need for monitoring of housing providers, identifying and ensuring best practice and for the separation of the provision of housing from the provision of care.

The workgroup relied heavily on the work completed in the New Zealand Disability Strategy as the themes emerging from the workgroup were captured so well by adopting and modifying the objectives.

Particular mention has been made by the mental health sector representatives of the report *Mental Health and Independent Housing Need – Summary Research Report* (November 2001) by the Ministry of Social Development. Many of the themes and issues raised by the workgroup mirror raised in this report.

Use of language

Throughout this document the term “disabled people” has been adopted. This is consistent with the terminology adopted by the New Zealand Disability Strategy.

Vision

A society that continually enhances the full participation of people with a disability through ensuring their rights to live in housing of their choice.

Goals

1. Eliminate discrimination and ensure the rights and self-determination of disabled people. Encourage and educate for a non-disabling society. Promote leadership by disabled people in the social housing sector.
2. Provide the most appropriate, flexible, tailored and sustainable housing solution for disabled people.
3. Ensure that government agencies, publicly funded services and publicly accountable bodies are responsive to disabled people and are well led and co-ordinated.
4. Collect, use and disseminate relevant information about disability and housing issues.

Principles

‘One size does not fit all’. Disabled people are diverse, both in the nature of their impairments and in the supports they need to find and retain good housing. This requires a flexible, co-ordinated response from services.

‘Disabled people are citizens first’. Disabled people have the same needs, rights and responsibilities as other citizens and their disability should never exclude them from full inclusion into their communities.

‘Nothing about us, without us’. Disabled people must be included as full partners in all legislation, policy and services that impact on their ability to find and retain suitable housing.

Goal One - Eliminate discrimination and ensure the rights and self-determination of disabled people. Encourage and educate for a non-disabling society. Promote leadership by disabled people in the social housing sector.

Issues Overview

Discrimination is a major issue affecting the sector. As identified in the original social housing workshop, there is a call from the sector for work to be done to tackle discrimination particularly in relation to housing. Education was seen as the key.

Educating disabled people regarding their housing rights and educating housing agencies regarding disability issues was also a strong theme. There was also a call for access to independent advocacy services.

There was a strong call to support disabled people to become actively involved in working in and making representation to the social housing sector.

Specific activities or pathways to reach the goal

- 1.1 Develop national and locally based anti-discrimination programmes that are linked into current anti-discrimination programmes.
- 1.2 Encourage ongoing debate on housing issues led by disabled people.
- 1.3 Provide accessible information about the housing rights of disabled people. Educate to ensure that disabled people understand their housing rights, including the Residential Tenancies Act, recognise discrimination and are able to be self-advocates.
- 1.4 Educate agencies responsible for providing housing and housing related services of the rights and abilities of people with disabilities.
- 1.5 Investigate the level of access that disabled people have to independent advocacy, and address any shortfall in service provision.
- 1.6 Ensure housing policy and legislation relevant to housing for people with disability meets the requirements of the Human Rights Act (and amendments), New Zealand Disability Strategy and Residential Tenancies Act.
- 1.7 Promote service user roles and decision making, in the governance, management, delivery, planning and evaluation of all housing services that disabled people access.
- 1.8 Assist self-help initiatives, service provision and advocacy organisations run by disabled people for disabled people.
- 1.9 Support the establishment of a leadership development and mentoring programme for disabled people in the housing sector.
- 1.10 Establish appropriate systems for selecting disabled people for representation in the social housing sector decision-making bodies and negotiate payment for these representatives.

- 1.11 Make housing information easily available to disabled people and their advocacy organisations. Improve the quality of information available, including where to go for more information, the services available and how to access them in formats accessible to all disability groups.

Actions

Create a one-stop shop for accessible information on housing and disability to co-ordinate information and services.

Investigate development of an accessible website.

Goal Two - Provide the most appropriate, flexible, tailored and sustainable housing solution for disabled people

Issues Overview

The mental health sector made particular comment regarding the definition of “most appropriate housing solution” and felt it important to state a series of guiding principles regarding the “best” or “most appropriate housing solution”. The principles are set out below:

- Creating opportunities for self-determination, and providing choice with consumer participation at all levels, including housing provision
- Creating the least restrictive environment where people can live the way they choose
- Following best practice models such as separation of landlord and care roles
- Providing independent proactive advocacy that is independent of the housing provider
- Monitoring of the quality of the housing
- Housing is independent of support, allowing people to access any reasonable level of support, but when this is reduced or withdrawn it does not affect access to housing

An issue identified from the work of the workgroup was that there needed to be a continuum of more responsive services particularly to support independent living, this theme was summed up by the phrase “one size does not fit all”.

There was a strong message that the sectors are seeking flexibility but also consistency in the work of the social housing sector.

A major theme was the need for universal design principles to be promoted and for the social housing sector to take a leading role by ensuring that new housing built is accessible and existing housing stock is modified. The group felt it appropriate to set a target for all new housing in New Zealand to follow universal design principles by 2010.

Specific activities or pathways to reach the goal

- 2.1 Investigate a universal design building programme based on detailed research into the benefits of universal design.
- 2.2 Promote and educate the advantages of universal design to a variety of audiences targeting education toward:
 - trade publications
 - building industry
 - public, tenants, families, landlords.
- 2.3 Monitor demographic trends to establish future demand for houses of universal design.
- 2.4 Develop incentives to promote universal design.
- 2.5 HNZC to immediately implement a programme of universal design for all new build projects.
- 2.6 Establish procedure for identifying, monitoring, and promoting recycling of modified housing for the disability sector.

- 2.7 Ensure the provision of best practice models for providing housing to people with disability are developed by each disability sector.
- 2.8 Create a flexible pool of funding that supports the development of new housing initiatives and continues to support best practice initiatives.
- 2.9 Ensure that overarching processes, eligibility criteria and allocation of resources are nationally consistent, but that individual needs are treated flexibly.
- 2.10 Investigate the development of a holistic approach to assessment and service provision that applies across agencies and funding sources.
- 2.11 Encourage equity of funding and service provision for people with similar needs, regardless of the cause of their impairment.
- 2.12 Identify unmet need and develop affordable solutions to fill these gaps.
- 2.13 Improve timeliness of service provision and ensure continuity of choice based service provision.
- 2.14 Increase the opportunities for disabled people to live in the community with choice of affordable, integrated quality housing.
- 2.15 Research funding mechanisms to create a benchmark that equates to housing solutions based on individual choice.
- 2.16 Ensure that housing is independent of support wherever possible, and people can access most levels or type of support within or while retaining their own home, which they can keep for as long as they want.
- 2.17 Investigate the timeliness and appropriateness of needs assessment processes as related to housing services, endorsing mechanisms for self-referral.

Actions

Target – 100% of all new build properties comply with universal design principles by 2010.

Create a database of modified properties available to disability sector to encourage recycling of modified properties.

Development of a series of brochures relating to design features and products.

HNZC to look at processes governing the recycling of modified properties:

- create an efficient system;
- change tenancy agreements to include a clause that states the tenant must vacate a modified house if it is needed by a person with a disability;
- Review of the social allocation system e.g. accessibility to include physical accessibility.

HNZC to look at a programme of upgrading existing properties that present a barrier to accessibility

- Property Managers need retraining to incorporate accessibility in the course of maintenance and upgrading of HNZC housing.

Ensure already modified housing is rigorously maintained for good accessibility.

All residential providers should have a “tenancy audit” which includes their coverage by the Residential Tenancies Act, certificate of fitness and meeting best practice standards and their involvement of tenants / consumers in the development of housing projects.

A consistent funding framework is established that supports housing provision and separates out housing provision and support components in health funding contracts to allow for the funding of purely housing initiatives.

Make private housing more accessible by addressing financial barriers through reviewing level of Accommodation Supplement, the use of the disability allowance to address housing costs, increase re-establishment grant and extra income for those who need to live alone.

Provide financial support to independent tenant advocacy organisations to carry out individual advocacy and organisational audits, and maintain a register of these organisations.

Housing facilitation services are promoted as a means of encouraging housing choice for people with disability.

The onus is on providers to show how they have actively involved consumers / tenants in the development of any housing projects.

Increase the availability of one-bedroom units.

Increase the ability of Community Group Housing to respond to the housing needs of the disability sector by allowing more flexible tenancy arrangements and increasing the capacity of the group to purchase stock.

Timeliness and appropriateness of needs assessment processes, as related to housing, investigate and endorse processes for self-referral to housing services.

Ensure that housing provision is not affected by fluctuating support needs.

Goal 3 - Ensure that government agencies, publicly funded services and publicly accountable bodies are responsive to disabled people and are well led and co-ordinated.

Issues Overview

It was noted that urgent work is required to address the application of the Resource Management Act, Building Act and Fire Service Act by Territorial Local Authorities and government agencies responsible for them. There was a call for a co-ordinated approach to presenting submissions to reviews of relevant legislation.

There was discussion of the need for Territorial Local Authorities and other publicly funded agencies to “develop understanding” of the disability sector in relation to housing and for the agencies to remove barriers in the application of their housing related role.

Once again the strong theme of the need for leadership and co-ordination within the social housing sector was a component of the discussion.

The discussions regarding the need for publicly funded agencies to be more responsive to the needs of the disability sector in regard to housing was summed up by the call for agencies to “recognise the right of people with disability to live in communities without unreasonable regulatory impediment.”

Members of the working group who have interaction with the Housing New Zealand Corporation social allocation system urged that there be a review of the system with emphasis on the needs of the disability sector. They highlighted the following concerns:

- a review of the system needs disability sector input
- accessibility concentrates on financial criteria rather than access in terms of modification
- issue re suitability of current housing situation, i.e. need to take a “disability” view of a housing situation e.g. young person living in a rest home seen as adequately housed?
- There are issues surrounding sustainability of housing solutions, for example, situations where a person seeks a home before support mechanisms are put in place but not obtaining a home due to perceived issues of sustainability because care hasn’t been defined.

Specific activities or pathways to reach the goal

- 3.1 Ensure regulatory authorities (Territorial Local Authorities) recognise the right of people with disability to live in communities without unreasonable regulatory impediment.
- 3.2 Work with territorial authorities to develop ways they can be informed by and respond to the New Zealand Disability Strategy and any other key guidelines and research.
- 3.3 Develop mechanisms to ensure that all government housing policy, legislation and practices are consistent with the objectives of the NZ Disability Strategy.
- 3.4 Adapt public sector training to ensure that service development and service delivery are consistent with the NZ Disability Strategy including education specifically addressing mental health awareness issues.

- 3.5 Establish high level definition of responsibilities and funding sources and develop inter sector collaborative working groups with a goal of seamless service delivery, consistent criteria and access across health, housing and disability sectors.
- 3.6 Establish independent monitoring of housing related services and of the social housing strategy.
- 3.7 Establish independent monitoring of the social housing strategy (disabilities including mental health).
- 3.8 Fund and support key people within the disability and housing sector to act as liaison people to providers, consumers and other private and public agencies.
- 3.9 Ensure that government agencies, publicly funded services and accountable bodies co-operate to place the disabled person at the centre of housing service delivery.

Actions

“Roadshow” approach to educating Territorial Local Authorities - a joint Housing New Zealand Corporation and disability sector initiative.

Develop a training package to ensure Housing New Zealand Corporation staff, service development and delivery is consistent with the New Zealand Disability Strategy – and that this package be extended to all publicly funded agencies.

Review regional planning and the degree to which it creates barriers to housing provision.

Ensure that emerging housing gaps are identified and addressed.

Review the ability of the Department of Work and Income to assign rental payments directly to landlords at the request of tenants.

Make private rental housing more accessible by addressing financial barriers through reviewing the level of Accommodation Supplement, the use of the disability allowance to address housing costs, increase the re-establishment grant and extra income for those who need to live alone.

Goal 4 - Collect, use and disseminate relevant information about disability and housing issues.

Issues Overview

Research critical to inform decision making and address emerging issues.

Appropriate research, following principles of involving disabled people at all levels.

Specific activities or pathways to reach the goal

- 4.1 Ensure that guidelines for housing research funding take into account the need for research on disability issues, include disabled people in the development and monitoring of the housing disability agenda, and enable disabled people to put forward their own experiences in the context of the research.
- 4.2 Collect relevant and useful information about housing and disability through all relevant surveys and the census to inform the research programme.
- 4.3 Undertake research focusing on disability housing issues for Māori and Pacific peoples.
- 4.4 Make housing information available to disabled people in culturally appropriate and accessible formats.
- 4.5 Adopt ethical and procedural standards for housing disability research projects.
- 4.6 Encourage research into mental health and housing outcomes to inform best practice development.
- 4.7 Ensure that emerging housing gaps are identified and addressed.
- 4.8 Research and disseminate best practice models for housing provision .