



# Action for More Independence & Dignity in Accommodation

1<sup>st</sup> Floor, Ross House, 247 Flinders Lane, Melbourne Vic 3000  
Phone: 9650 2722 Fax: 9654 8575  
Email: [amida@amida.org.au](mailto:amida@amida.org.au) Website: [www.amida.org.au](http://www.amida.org.au)  
Inc No: A001608SV ABN: 32 993 870 380

*Advocacy, Self Advocacy, Rights, Accessibility, & Community Living for People with a Disability*

8 Nov 2021

## **Social Housing Regulation Review – Aboriginal Victorians and Social Housing Regulation**

Action for More Independence and Dignity in Accommodation (AMIDA) supports people with disability as valued members of our community. AMIDA recognises that people with disability contribute to and develop our community.

AMIDA acknowledges that people with disability have a right to a choice of who they live with and where they live. Further, people with disability have a right to good quality housing which is accessible, affordable and non-institutional. People with disability have a right to live in the community with access to support to participate and have a good quality of life.

AMIDA is an independent advocacy organisation which advocates for good housing for people with disability. We provide advocacy to individuals, with priority given to people with an intellectual disability, and advocate for change in systems which prevent people from achieving good housing.

AMIDA strongly supports the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of Persons with a Disability (CRPD) and works to assert these rights and community inclusion for people with a disability. The following was given to Australia from the UN after the last reporting period. Australia needs to incorporate these recommendations into action in order to meet our obligations, having ratified the CRPD in 2008.

Specifically as mentioned in our previous submission on Social Housing Regulation Review :-

**[Accessibility \(art. 9\)](#)**

**[Living independently and being included in the community \(art. 19\)](#)**

Our experience with Community and Social housing has shown us that residents are not always well supported by Community and Social housing providers. Some recent cases that we have worked on have shown the following

People living in community housing have had problems such as;

- Housing not accessible for a disabled person or family member
- Resolving access issues are not seen as a priority
- Maintenance issues are extremely difficult to have resolved
- Often residents fall behind with their rental due to medical or other issues and are evicted

In 2018, the Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (SDAC) found there were 581,400 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in households in Australia. Of these almost 1 quarter had disability.

Many of our clients have been threatened with or evicted from Community housing due to ongoing complaints about maintenance issues being unresolved. This has left whole families homeless and in need of new housing at a time when accessible and affordable housing is extremely limited and we have a general wait list of around 80,000 just for Victoria alone.

Most Community housing services have a particular number of properties and several which are temporary/emergency housing, (once they have long term tenants they lose that property from their books which often means they are unable to provide support to many in need of housing). Many of our clients have been in temporary/emergency housing for a very long time and this housing is often in urgent need of repair, which is not affordable to the community housing service and so many are left with the only option which is leave and become homeless due to health and safety issues which are not being met by the Community housing provider.

Homelessness has become a best option to many people with a disability in their families due to many things which need to be considered when finding someone housing which will suit people's needs. At the moment due to the lack of suitable housing options people are put into public or community housing options that are not in areas with their supports, or close to schools or other services, with others living in low income areas, trapping people in the welfare and social disadvantage models. Often this is unlivable for families with young children with disability or other high support needs, their families are unable to access needed supports and when they are offered housing they take it as they are in desperate need for a safe and affordable place to dwell. This doesn't always work out as there are so many barriers that people face in congregate or public housing areas and often they need accessible housing options which are not available. Some are living in properties that are damp and have mould throughout their homes which is dangerous to the health and safety of many people with a disability.

As said in our submission to the **10 Year Social and Affordable Housing Strategy for Victoria** AMIDA endorses the key initiatives listed in the discussion paper released on 9 Feb 2021. In this paper we also stated:-

Fund existing services to implement a Housing First Model. This model has been proven to succeed in other Countries including the Housing First Europe Hub and

also in Australia. Make this National Housing Policy for Australia. As seen in previous years, if it is only aspirational or voluntary, it will fall short of meeting the needs of individuals in the community. The investment being made by the State Government in the Big Housing Build needs to be repeated every year for 10 years if the current need is to be met let alone future need.

Many staff working in Community housing services do not have adequate training in regard to people with a disability and very little knowledge about how to speak to someone with a cognitive or psycho social disability. Training must be a requirement for staff at Community housing services this must be delivered by people with disability so that they are more able to understand the very differing needs of people with disability in their housing needs and why some needs are extremely important. This training should be done on a regular basis so that staff are able to become more understanding of peoples varying needs.

It is also important to consider the housing needs of people with disabilities and low income families when deciding on the future of Community housing. While it is agreed that there is a lack of accessible affordable housing in Victoria it is important with the cost of private rental and home ownership, that there are viable and useful housing rental options available to low income families and a commitment to invest in new housing. It is extremely important that the 10 year Victorian Social and Community housing strategy is funded and expanded over time to assist all of those who will be seeking affordable accessible housing in the coming years.

Ensure regulations include input from tenants

- tenants needs are seen as a high priority
- ensure all information is provided to tenants in an accessible way e.g. Easy English or other accessible formats
- ensure that all complaints processes are clear and easy to follow and have clearly understood outcomes
- allow for swift outcomes to tenant issues which are clear, easy and accessible depending on tenant needs
- in our experience it would be great if there was an independent person who was able to assist to resolve issues
  - this needs to happen in a way that tenants understand
  - it is important that all communication is accessible
  - it is important that tenants with a disability have decision making explained to them in a way that they can understand
    - VCAT needs to provide time for understanding decisions
      - E.g. a tenant had rental arrears and didn't realise that she would need to pay the arrears anyway, and her refusal to pay led to eviction, homelessness and a rental debt. If she had agreed to set up a payment plan she may have been able to stay at the property and the maintenance that was required may have been done
    - Tenants may need to consult so that they understand the consequences of their actions
    - Tenants need to be given the appropriate support when dealing with Community housing services
- Maintenance issues in Community housing services is difficult -
  - Many Community housing services have wait lists for their housing
  - Many community housing services don't have funding to provide

- maintenance and disability modifications
- It seems that if a tenant makes a complaint or raises a maintenance issue they are seen as a problem
- It is difficult for a tenant to receive action for a number of issues- neighbor disputes, maintenance or other problems

Community housing tenants have rights under the Tenancy act but this is often ignored

AMIDA endorses the Accountability back to the community indicator included in the finding and options paper however notes that human rights considerations need to be included in all decision making of Aboriginal Housing providers, particularly when one or more resident has disability. At present there appears to be an absence of regulation on these grounds, the Victorian Housing Registrar only holding community housing providers to their own policies and procedures. A stronger regulator of accountability to residents is required.

In particular, there needs to be responsibility taken for funding necessary modifications to properties on the basis of accommodating disability which are currently not paid by Community housing, are not automatically funded by NDIA for participants who are eligible for the NDIS and only 10% of people with disability in Australia are accepted onto the NDIS. This leaves an enormous service gap for residents of Community housing who need disability modifications made to property and there remains no funding available.