

Executive Summary – “A Place to Call Home”

There is a significant disparity between disabled and nondisabled people in New Zealand in terms of housing. Lack of accessible housing continues to undermine many other rights of disabled New Zealanders such as the right to participation in the community, the right to have choice and control over their lives, and the right to employment.

Several factors contribute to the housing issues for disabled people. Exacerbated by the chronic income inequality, most disabled people have limited financial security. So, affordability is the main issue. In addition, a range of other barriers continue to prevent disabled people from fully enjoying their rights and living in dignity and safety in their communities; some of these barriers include lack of comprehensive accessibility and disability legislation, undersupply of accessible housing, and existing barriers in the built environment.

While most New Zealand homes do not incorporate Universal Design principles or provide good accessibility for disabled people right now, the demand for accessible housing is projected to increase for several reasons such as population aging, insufficient supply of accessible housing, and lack of comprehensive policy and planning. In this sense, New Zealand seems to lack appropriate legal and social frameworks that are being used to address accessibility issues for disabled people in countries such as Australia, UK, the United States, Canada, and Sweden.

The best time to incorporate accessibility and universal design is during new builds or renovations. The extra costs of adopting Universal Design principles at the design stage for new builds and major renovations is minimal, compared to retrofitting that can be difficult and is always more expensive. Indeed, the cost of implementing 100 per cent of accessibility standards at the design stage is less than one twentieth of the cost of retrofitting the features in an existing home.

To improve the accessibility of housing for disabled people, New Zealand Disability Support Network recommends a comprehensive policy package that includes legislation and policies, financial incentives and assistance, as well as engagement with and support for the disability community. Some of our recommendations are:

- An entrenched, comprehensive, and enforceable accessibility legislation
- Providing incentives for all relevant stakeholders (such as builders, developers, and Councils) to build accessible housing
- Engaging with the disability community and utilise its various capacities

Housing for disabled people in New Zealand – status quo

New Zealand has experienced increasing house prices since the early 1990s with rates higher than income growth. From January 1992 to May 2022, house prices rose an average of 7.2 per cent per year. The sharp increase over the past few years,

especially the 30.62 per cent increase in the one-year period ending August 2021, means that the prices are so high that many people cannot save the required deposit to buy a house; and if they can, they must borrow a significant amount which would then require spending a big proportion of their income on loan repayments. Accordingly, many New Zealanders face significant challenges when accessing suitable, affordable, and healthy homes – whether as tenants, owners, residents, or within the national social housing system¹². This has been referred to as the ‘housing crisis’ of New Zealand³. For disabled people – who make up 24 per cent of the population⁴ – anecdotal and academic evidence suggests that these challenges are compounded, especially when accessing homes that suit their specific needs⁵.

In 2017, a report based on the Disability Matters Conference (hosted at Otago University in Dunedin) highlighted that “New Zealand has a big issue with housing and accessible housing. This undermines many other rights of disabled people such as the right to participation in the community, the right to have choice and control over their lives, and the right to employment” (Disability Matters, 2018, p. iv).

The data in 2018 Census showed a disparity between disabled and nondisabled people in terms of housing. Disabled New Zealanders were more likely than non-disabled people to live in rental accommodation. 18 per cent of disabled people said their home was damp, compared with 13 per cent of non-disabled people. 17 per cent of disabled people had problems with the internal environment of their home and 17 per cent of people with a physical impairment had a need for modifications to their home to improve accessibility. This compares with 10 per cent of non-disabled people. This category includes problems with ventilation and air quality, lighting, floor surface, pests such as rats and mice, and mould.⁶

The data in 2018 Census showed disabled people were more likely than non-disabled people (18.5 per cent) to live in a house with mould. In the 2018 GSS, 4.2 per cent of New Zealanders said they lived in an unsuitable or very unsuitable home. Disabled people were more likely to find their homes unsuitable or very unsuitable than non-disabled people (7.2 per cent and 3.9 per cent, respectively).

32 per cent of disabled people with a physical impairment used building modifications (such as ramps and handrails) to improve accessibility to, or within, their home.

¹ Johnson, A. (2017). Taking stock: The demand for social housing in New Zealand.

<https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2017-08/apo-nid103641.pdf>

² Johnson et al., (2018). A Stocktake of New Zealand’s Housing.

<https://www.beehive.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2018-02/A%20Stocktake%20Of%20New%20Zealand's%20Housing.pdf>

³ Roy, E. (2018). New Zealand housing crisis: just 47 'affordable' homes built in six months.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jan/28/new-zealand-housing-crisis-just-47-affordable-homes-built-in-six-months>

⁴ Statistics New Zealand. (2013).

⁵ McIntosh, J and Leah, A. (2017). Mapping housing for the disabled in New Zealand.

<https://journal.nzma.org.nz/journal-articles/mapping-housing-for-the-disabled-in-new-zealand>

⁶ Statistics New Zealand. (2013). Disability and housing conditions.

<https://www.stats.govt.nz/assets/Reports/Disability-and-housing-conditions-2013/disability-housing-conditions-2013.pdf>

Housing suitability tended to increase with age. After adjusting for age differences, about 1 in 10 disabled people (9.5 per cent) were living in a dwelling that they thought was unsuitable⁷.

Demand for accessible housing in New Zealand

Most New Zealand homes do not incorporate Universal Design principles or provide good accessibility for disabled people. As a result, significant and often costly modification are required where the needs of occupants change. The current shortage of accessible properties will only get worse as the population ages. Most common access barriers include narrow doorways, long narrow hallways, small rooms, and spaces, indirect or convoluted travel paths within the building, and stairs. These can make moving around the home impossible or difficult for young children, older people and people with disabilities or limited mobility.

When looking at the demand for accessible housing, a range of factors should be noted:

- 1) Aging population: By 2034, New Zealand will have 1.2 million people aged over 65 by. As well as a range of social issues, this will have a significant implication for housing⁸. In addition, more New Zealanders in mid-life and older are renting now. This is likely to be a source of additional significant demand for affordable and accessible rental properties in the future. The older demographic will need housing that offers greater accessibility, with features such as ramps, wider corridors for wheelchair access, handrails, bathroom grab bars and lower cabinets that are scarce on the current market. Lack of accessible housing for the elderly will negatively impact on people's possibilities to perform activities of daily living independently, constitute fall risks, and lead to relocation to residential care facilities.⁹⁻¹⁰
- 2) Specialist school rolls in Auckland and elsewhere across New Zealand are full, and there are waiting lists¹¹. With various advancements from medical to social, assistive equipment, and technology, disabled children born in the past two decades are expected to outlive their parents. The government (and the housing market) is not building enough accessible houses and accessible residential facilities, so the big question is where these disabled people are going to live, especially if they are to live independently.
- 3) The demand for accessible public housing continues to grow. A tenant survey conducted by IHC New Zealand (the largest public housing provider outside of Kāinga Ora) indicated 54% of households have someone living with a disability. Anecdotal evidence suggests many of

⁷ Statistics New Zealand. (2018). Measuring inequality for disabled New Zealanders.

<https://www.stats.govt.nz/reports/measuring-inequality-for-disabled-new-zealanders-2018>

⁸ Office for seniors.

⁹ Slaug at al., (2020). An Aging Population and an Aging Housing stock – Housing Accessibility Problems in Typical Swedish Dwellings. *Journal of Aging and Environment*.

¹⁰ Stineman et al., (2012). Home accessibility, living circumstances, stage of activity limitation, and nursing home use. *Archives of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation*.

¹¹ Alison Smith. (2021). nzherald. <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/bay-of-plenty-times/news/students-with-special-needs-on-waiting-lists-for-in-demand-school/IIZCTDULL5NRD55N2MZ5N3XHZA/>

those in emergency housing have either a disability and/or mental health challenges. Providers tell us that it is very difficult to find housing that meets the needs of individuals with high and complex needs.

- 4) The market is not providing suitable housing for disabled people, their families and whānau. Furthermore, homes (including new homes) purchased from the market to house disabled people do not meet the minimum accessibility requirements. As a clear instance of market failure, the government needs to intervene through investment, laws, regulation, and guidance so more accessible homes are being built, especially for social and rental markets.
- 5) Negative impacts on disability support services: the shortage of accessible housing in New Zealand places an artificial limit on available services. The waiting list for access to respite is an example. This has grown 50 per cent during the current COVID-19 pandemic. Disability service providers do not have access to sufficient accessible housing. There are several providers who would explore expanding the number of accessible houses if they had the staff to support them. They report having a waiting list of disabled people wishing to access supported living environments, which is currently impossible due to the impact of the chronic support worker shortage.
- 6) Accessible housing is not purely an issue for disabled people. The current shortage of accessible housing – which is going to worsen if not adequately addressed – has created significant issues for disabled people, their family and whanau, disability service providers, and the health and disability support system (due to the adverse impact of inadequate housing on physical and mental health).
- 7) There is a level of discrimination/inequity in the Government's own policies and administrative systems when it comes to accessing housing. Many disabled people either do not present on housing waiting lists or are being deemed low priority as they are considered 'adequately housed' (compared to someone who is imminently homeless) because of the level of reliance on families' love, care, and sense of obligation. An example is the issue of social housing and the challenges people with learning difficulties face in accessing housing via the current social housing register waitlist. We believe there is a group of disabled people who are currently living in housing that doesn't meet their needs but because they have somewhere to live, they are unlikely to ever be eligible for social housing. A couple of further examples would be:
 - An adult person living at home. Mum and/or Dad are getting older, and the person wants to live either by themselves or with someone of similar age. They are not eligible (nor should it be the option) for residential services but because they don't live in a car or the park, they will never be high enough on the waitlist to benefit from an income-related rent through a community housing provider because their need isn't deemed critical.
 - An individual might be living at home or in a residential service but with some wrap-around support and through supported decision making could potentially live independently. Again, because they are not

deemed homeless or because someone deems them to lack capacity, they never get the opportunity to live independently.

- 8) Social housing criteria are rightfully targeted to those in greatest need, but there is little recognition given to the needs of disabled people and because they tend to have support, whether, through residential services or whanau, they are not deemed a high enough priority and therefore never get a chance to live in an affordable, stable rental environment. Homelessness has many faces and isn't just the result of living in a car, park or in a violent relationship (all of which are valid).
- 9) Finally, most Council's minimum accessibility standard for developers to gain building consent is an impediment to accessing social housing for disabled people.
- 10) Wellington City Council offers consent fast tracking for developers willing to build to Lifemark standards. Hamilton City Council discounts consent fees to developers who build to Lifemark standards. These appear to be the only two Councils to offer such an incentive. When it goes wrong, it goes wrong. A young man in Tauranga, who was delighted to move into his new accessible rental, only to find the width between wall and washing machine didn't allow him to manoeuvre his wheelchair to load or transfer washing to the dryer. Yet the accessible rental was deemed accessible by the local Council.

Contributing factors to the housing issues for disabled people

Affordability is a key factor impacting upon disabled people's access to an adequate standard of living and housing. Limited financial security means that many families have no choice or control in terms of accessing adequate housing for their disabled family members.

Research conducted by Disability Connect¹² indicated significant policy and provision gaps, as well as significant personal costs of unresolved housing and care issues for the families of disabled people. The evidence suggests that the current level of reliance on families' love, care and sense of obligation is not sustainable. There appears to be little planning or forethought by policy makers to the problem of aging parents caring for their disabled children.

On top of the lack of safe, affordable, accessible, and barrier-free housing and transportation, a range of barriers continue to prevent disabled people from fully enjoying their rights and living in dignity and safety in their communities across Aotearoa New Zealand. Some of the barriers to exercise the right to adequate housing for disabled people include:

- Absence or lack of legislation that enable disabled people to exercise their right to adequate housing
- Denial or not recognising their right to live independently and in community

¹² Disability Connect. (2021). The Community Housing Collective March 2021.

<https://knowledgeauckland.org.nz/media/2099/where-will-we-live-in-the-future-disability-connect-march-2021.pdf>

- Lack of comprehensive accessibility legislation
- Under-supply of accessible housing
- Income inequality
- Barriers in the built environment
- Lack of or difficulty in accessing resources and opportunities
- Lack of monitoring and complaint mechanism.

Recent developments at the intersection of housing and disability

There has been a gradual paradigm shift in housing policy and practice over the past couple of decades; there is a move away from traditional understanding of housing as a roof and four walls, and towards recognition of housing as a right to live somewhere in security, peace, and dignity. This new paradigm places people and human rights at the forefront of urban sustainable development and considers socio-developmental dimension of housing.

Article 11.1 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights specifies the right to housing as a key aspect of an adequate standard of living. Furthermore, the right of disabled people to adequate housing is increasingly being recognised in international and national contexts. For instance, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) requires State parties (including New Zealand) to progressively realise the right of disabled people to adequate housing. Similarly, Article 9 requires the Government to immediately implement inclusive rights-based strategies for the realisation of the right to housing. To do so, governments need to ensure Universal Design are adhered to and houses are accessible.

Universal Design

As a precondition for achieving inclusion and equality, Universal Design seeks to make the design of all infrastructure, services, Information-Communication Technology, and public facilities usable by all persons. In other words, Universal Design is the design of products and environments to be usable by all people to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialised design. More specifically, Universal Design is a framework for the design of places, things, information, communication, and policy to be usable by the widest range of people operating in the widest range of situations without special or separate design. At its core, Universal Design is human-centred design of everything with everyone in mind.

International evidence and examples

A broad range of policies and legislation has been applied internationally to improve disabled people's access to appropriate housing. Some of these international experiences are briefly mentioned below.

Sweden – Sweden was amongst the first countries that implemented a comprehensive deinstitutionalisation and community integration policy for disabled people. All institutions for disabled people were closed so they could choose where they live and the way they receive support. This process was effectively supported by

a series of relevant legislation. For instance, the Swedish Building Code of 1977 required all units in residential buildings of three levels or more to have wheelchair access, large lifts and kitchen and bathrooms of certain dimensions. This type of accommodation provided disabled people a broader choice in the housing market and enabled them to visit others more easily. In addition, people faced less pressure to move if they became disabled. Sweden's government estimated the additional cost of including these features to be less than one per cent of the total building costs¹³.

The United States – there are a range of federal and state laws, regulations, and policies aiming at the provision of accessible, affordable, integrated, and self-determined housing for disabled people. For instance, the Fair Housing Act prohibits discrimination based on disability in any matter related to housing. This act also establishes certain design and construction requirements for multifamily dwellings. The Rehabilitation Act prohibits discrimination based on disability in any programme or activity that receives federal funds. For agencies and organisations that receive federal housing (HUD) funds, this includes the requirement that in new construction and substantial alterations at least five per cent of the housing units be accessible to people with mobility impairments and at least two per cent of the housing units be accessible to people with vision or hearing impairments. This act also requires recipients to make reasonable accommodations, including structural changes, to enable access to housing for disabled people. Similarly, the Americans with Disabilities Act prohibits discrimination based on disability in any programmes, services, and activities of public entities, including state and local public housing and housing assistance. The Architectural Barriers Act requires that buildings and facilities designed, constructed, altered, or leased with federal funds be accessible by people with disabilities. Finally, many States have additional regulations to improve the accessibility of disabled people to proper housing.

The UK – the UK's National Disability Strategy aims at improving the everyday lives of disabled people by ensuring that barriers across society are tackled – including housing. To do so, the UK Government announced it will be taking steps to boost the supply of housing for disabled people, to be achieved through increasing the supply of affordable homes – including supported housing. A comprehensive plan for delivering new, accessible homes to be delivered is currently being finalised. In addition, an extension of the Equality Act 2010 has given disabled tenants the right to require landlords to make reasonable adjustments to common parts of residential buildings. The Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) will be used to pay for installing aids such as stair lifts and handrails or adapting things like heating systems to make them easier to use. Furthermore, the provisions within England's Building Regulations have recently been updated to improve various aspects of buildings for disabled people in areas such as the means of escaping from buildings, care homes, and specialised housing for disabled people. There have also been a variety of initiatives such as the London Accessible Housing Register (LAHR) that supports disabled home seekers by providing information on accessible housing in the capital.

Canada – Canada has implemented comprehensive disability and accessibility legislation, policies, standards, and guidelines both at the federal and state levels developing a new accessible homes standard.

¹³ Ratzka, A. (2003). "The pre-requisites for deinstitutionalization" presented at the European Congress on Independent Living, Chapter 3, Section C on lack of accessible housing for more on issue of cost.

The Accessible Canada Act (ACA) came into force in 2019 with the overarching goal of removing ALL barriers that affect disabled people by 2040. The legislation benefits all Canadians, especially disabled people, through the proactive identification, removal, and prevention of barriers to accessibility in seven priority areas. The legislation established Accessibility Standards Canada (ASC) to develop national accessibility standards. ASC has established several technical committees that are actively developing standards that remove barriers in several different priority areas. Compliance with standards developed by ASC is voluntary until they are gradually adopted into regulations. The Accessible Canada Act (ACA) is a landmark non-discrimination law that applies to most organisations in Canada that fall under federal jurisdiction.

Australia – Australian government’s commitment to disabled people’s rights for inclusion and participation is enshrined in its ratification of the 2008 United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities as well as the Australian National Disability Strategy (NDS). In Australia, housing accessibility is assessed in relation to Liveable Housing Australia three standard of silver, gold, and platinum¹⁴.

Federal, state and territory Building Ministers have agreed on a series of national reforms to ensure the quality, live-ability, and efficiency of new Australian homes. From October 2023, all new homes will need to meet new minimum standards of accessibility in many parts of the country. Changes to the Building Code Board’s 2022 National Construction Code (NCC) will reflect new standards for Liveable Housing Design requiring all new homes to have basic minimum accessibility features – including a minimum of one step-free entrance and a toilet on every ground floor, wider internal doorways to allow wheelchairs, accessible showers, reinforced walls around showers, toilets, and baths – as well as higher minimum energy efficiency ratings, from six to seven star. The gold accessibility standards would add about three per cent to the cost of a new home or building.

Accessibility in New Zealand’s legislation and standards

Although New Zealand has legislation addressing access to buildings, this typically applies to buildings with public access, not housing. In New Zealand, two major pieces of domestic legislation apply to accessibility of the built environment: The Building Act 2004 and The Human Rights Act 1993. New Zealand is also a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) that requires the Government to acknowledge and take effective measures to protect and realise various rights of disabled people, including housing and accessibility.

New Zealand building legislation currently mandates accessibility features only in public buildings through provisions in the Building Act and Building Code. Private and residential buildings are not legislated in the Building Act to have accessible features or facilities.

The Building Act 2004 requires the provision of access for people with disabilities to buildings to which section 47A of the Building Act applies. These are typically buildings with public access, so this provision does not apply to housing. There are also specific

¹⁴ Living with disability in inaccessible housing: social, health and economic impacts (2020). https://disability.unimelb.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0019/3522007/Accessible-Housing-FINAL-REPORT.pdf

requirements on the design and detailing of access routes, ramps, stairs, and handrails. These requirements as well as design information on Universal Design are explained in the New Zealand Standard 4121:2001 – Design for access and mobility: Buildings and associated facilities.

In Building Code clause D1 Access routes, Objective D1.1 (c) states that people with disabilities can enter and carry out normal functions and activities within buildings. This objective only applies to buildings to which section 47A of the Building Act applies (typically buildings with public access). Performance requirement D1.3.2 requires that at least one access route shall have features to enable people with disabilities to approach the building from the street. However, this is not applicable to housing.

Article nine of the UNCRPD requires States to identify and remove barriers and ensure accessibility. This article is particularly important to housing because it requires the New Zealand Government to ensure that all housing available to the public, including social and private rental housing, consider all aspects of accessibility for disabled people. The Convention provides a broad definition of accessibility issues that encompass the physical environment, transportation, information and communication, and services. Accordingly, State Parties are required to:

- Ensure physical accessibility (such as through ramps and accessible doors as well as the accessibility of windows, bathrooms, and kitchens)
- Remove the communication barriers confronted by persons with disabilities applying for and living in housing
- Ensure access to work, services, and public spaces.

Therefore, all aspects of the housing environment should be accessible. It is noteworthy that State parties are also required to address economic and social accessibility barriers by ensuring sufficient benefits or housing subsidies to cover the cost of adequate housing and other services.

Article 28 of the Convention requires the Government to progressively realise the right to adequate housing. The obligations of States under Article nine can be seen as components of the requirement to immediately implement inclusive rights-based strategies for the realisation of the right to housing. Both housing strategies and plans for the implementation of accessibility must establish definite time frames, allocate adequate resources, prescribe the duties of the public authorities, including regional and local authorities, and private actors and ensure participation and consultation with those affected. Ensuring that any new housing is developed in accordance with barrier-free design requirements is an immediate obligation of States. States must also adopt, as quickly as possible, legislation and plans to ensure that barriers in existing housing are removed over time.

Furthermore, Outcome five of the New Zealand’s Disability Action Plan 2019-2023 is dedicated to “accessibility”. Outcome five contains five work programmes. One of these is homes and communities’ accessibility. Through several actions under this outcome, Kāinga Ora is trying to improve the accessibility of housing and communities for disabled people. Since its establishment in October 2019, Kāinga Ora strives to transform housing and urban development throughout New Zealand. Included in Kāinga Ora’s Accessibility Policy is a commitment to increase the number of State homes that meet Universal Design standards; meet the individual needs of customers (including modifications and specialised solutions); and improve information about

customers' needs and the accessibility of State properties: Kāinga Ora is committed to ensure that at least 15 per cent of the new homes they are building across the country meet Universal Design standards, and the rest meet as many of the Universal Design standards as possible. This 15 per cent target is even below the 25 per cent mentioned in the current Labour Party manifesto.

Building more accessible housing

Lack of an entrenched, comprehensive, and enforceable accessibility legislation is arguably the main factor for the very slow progress in improving disabled peoples housing in New Zealand. While an Accessibility Bill is currently being drafted, the disability community believes the proposed Bill (and the resulting Act) will not go far enough to address various issues disabled people face, including housing.

Most New Zealand homes do not incorporate Universal Design principles or provide good accessibility for people with disabilities. As a result, significant and often costly modification can be required where the needs of occupants change. The current shortage of accessible properties will only get worse as the population ages.¹⁵

In addition, housing affordability and accessibility for disabled people is emerging as a critical issue at a time when Enabling Good Lives is supporting people to truly shape their life in a way that works for them – this requires that there are housing options available and realisable outside of the group home model we have seen for many years.

While Kāinga Ora appears to be receptive to the idea of building appropriate houses for residential care, in practice, there are significant barriers to make this happen. For instance, Kāinga Ora wants the Ministry of Health (or the newly established Whaikaha) to be involved to handle the cost and staffing issues required for building and operating state-run residential care facilities (like the “Iceland model”). In addition, as there is currently no budget allocation for this, a tangible advancement seems quite unlikely, and there will be for a few years before any such facilities are able to be built.

Furthermore, the disability community is concerned about the possibility that Kāinga Ora is looking at cutting back on the accessible housing expenditure. If true, this policy blatantly ignores the potential needs of one-in-four New Zealanders. The current target of 15 per cent of new state houses being accessible is inadequate given the number of disabled people in our community. The disability community believe this should be lifted to 85 per cent - and not cut. It should be noted that the CRPD considers accessibility as a precondition for the enjoyment of all human rights. Hence, the convention specifies “States parties are not allowed to use austerity measures as an excuse to avoid ensuring gradual accessibility for persons with disabilities. The obligation to implement accessibility is unconditional, i.e. the entity obliged to provide accessibility may not excuse the omission to do so by referring to the burden of providing access for persons with disabilities¹⁶.”

Increasing the stock of accessible housing will result in improving the choice and options for those disabled New Zealanders in need of housing assistance, which is consistent with the government’s Enabling Good Lives principles.

¹⁵ Universal design for houses.

¹⁶ UN-HABITAT (2015). The Right to Adequate Housing for Persons with Disabilities Living in Cities

The cost of accessibility and Universal Design

The best time to incorporate accessibility and universal design is during new builds or renovations. The extra costs of adopting Universal Design principles at the design stage for new builds and major renovations is minimal, compared to retrofitting that can be difficult and is always more expensive. For instance, incorporating essential Universal Design features for a 150 – 200 m² house would cost about \$1,700 for a new house compared to \$14,000 if that same house was to be retrofitted¹⁷ (BRANZ research, 2016). To further clarify the cost aspects, please note the following analysis from BRANZ research (the dollar amounts specify the costs at the specific time of detailed analysis in 2011; so, although they might have gone up, they still provide a good basis for comparison):

The extra cost of incorporating Universal Design features into most single-storey new houses is usually around 0.5 per cent of the total build cost. For internal changes only, about 80 per cent of new houses require either no or minor changes to layout, doors and strengthening of bathroom fittings prior to construction. These adaptations only add around \$500 to the total new house cost. For external changes, many new houses require wider parking areas and better access to the front door. These changes typically add another \$1,200 to the house cost. When changes are made to existing houses, the costs are typically \$15,000 per house for internal work and another \$7,000 for ramps and other external access features.

In the 2019 September quarter, Statistics NZ estimated that there are 1,903,400 private dwellings in Aotearoa New Zealand¹⁸. According to Lifemark, a New Zealand-based organisation that promotes, and endorses safe and accessible homes, only a very small percentage of these private dwellings meet Universal Design standards despite it being no extra cost to implement 90 per cent of the Lifemark accessibility standards¹⁹⁻²⁰.

The cost of implementing 100 per cent of accessibility standards at the design stage is less than one twentieth of the cost of retrofitting the features in an existing home. The annual value of the quantified benefits of the features is estimated to be \$5.4 million. This estimate excludes the unquantified benefits of reductions in hospital stays, greater safety, and amenity, and better-quality homes and ageing in place. Taking into consideration the unquantified benefits, and in particular the unquantifiable participation and equity benefits²¹, any cost-cutting measures now will only add to the future costs for providing accessible housing. If the Government and Kāinga Ora want to save money, then Kāinga Ora's goal of 15 per cent of their new builds being accessible must, in our view, increase to 85 per cent.

¹⁷ BRANZ (2016). Getting Universal Design into New Builds and Major Renovations

¹⁸ Statistics New Zealand. Dwelling and household estimates: March 2019 quarter.

<https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/dwelling-and-household-estimates-march-2019-quarter>

¹⁹ Lifemark. (2017). <https://www.lifemark.co.nz/news/accessible-housing-by-the-numbers/>

²⁰ Donal Beasley Institute. (2022). My Experiences, My Rights: A Monitoring Report on Disabled Person's Experience of Housing in Aotearoa New Zealand.

<https://www.donaldbeasley.org.nz/assets/projects/UNCRPD/My-Experiences-My-Rights-A-Monitoring-Report-on-Disabled-Persons-Experience-of-Housing-in-Aotearoa-New-Zealand/My-Experiences-My-Rights-A-Monitoring-Report-on-Disabled-Persons-Experience-of-Housing-in-Aotearoa-New-Zealand.pdf>

²¹ Department of Planning and Community Development Australia (n.d) - Visitable and Adaptable Features in Housing

Conclusion

Non-discrimination and equality are founding principles of UNCRPD. By signing and ratifying the Convention, New Zealand Government has committed to develop and implement legislation and policies to remove social barriers for disabled people, including inaccessibility of the built environment. While ensuring that disabled people are not excluded from participating in social life and work, these commitments not only improve equity and fairness, but also recognise that the whole community benefits socially and economically when all its members are able to participate and contribute.

The intervention in the housing market is warranted to achieve the Government's commitments to a high degree of accessibility in new housing. The grounds for the intervention are based primarily on equity and social policy goals. These policies also have cost-saving and social investment aspects. For instance, widespread adoption of the Universal Design would create savings due to reduced health care services for the elderly and people with a temporary impairment. The net benefits also include the equity and dignity benefits of widespread visit-ability and adaptability in new housing, along with other benefits such as greater safety and amenity, better quality homes and ageing in place, and lower healthcare costs, which significantly outweigh the costs.

Recommendations

We need an approach to enable disabled people to have “a place to call home”.

To improve the accessibility of housing for disabled people, significantly more accessible houses are needed. This, in turn, requires a comprehensive policy package that includes legislation and policies, financial incentives and assistance, as well as engagement with and support for the disability community. More specifically, NZDSN recommends the followings:

Legislation – Developing a legal framework for accessibility through:

- Enacting an entrenched, comprehensive, and enforceable accessibility legislation
- Updating the Building Code and relevant standards so accessibility and Universal design are mandatory in all social housing

Financial incentives and assistance – Supplementing the legislation through:

- Providing incentives for builders, developers, and councils to build accessible housing
- Providing disabled people with facilities so they can afford accessible housing
- Taking measures to accelerate equality for disabled people (income, employment etc.)
- Require Kāinga Ora to lift their target for building new social housing from 15% to 85%.

Engagement with the disability community – Addressing the housing issue for disabled people will also require engagement with the disability community and utilising its capacities. The government needs to:

- Engage with the disability community including disability support providers to ensure the evolving needs of the disabled people are accounted for in the development of policies, supports, services, and legislation
- Engage with disabled people and with disability support providers to ensure proposed accessibility solutions are fit for purpose
- Engage with disabled people and with disability support providers to enhance the accessibility of residential care and respite and to increase the availability to meet demand
- Utilising and further developing the disability community's capacity in addressing the housing issue for disabled people. For instance, facilitating partnerships that allow disabled people's whanau to achieve home ownership for their disabled family members through collaboration with disability service providers
- Considering the impact of the housing situation on the provision of disability support, there is a great opportunity for government to partner with providers to start addressing the inaccessibility of housing for disabled people from those living in supported living arrangements or group homes. The government should provide disability service providers with affordable finance so they can start building accessible housing to house and serve their clients.

Considering the negative impact of inadequate housing on physical and mental health of disabled people and their family and whanau, disability service providers, and the health and disability support system, the Government needs to stop thinking of accessible housing as an issue for disabled people. It is a significant social issue that needs a comprehensive policy package capable of addressing various aspects of the problem.

NZDSN stands ready to support and otherwise contribute to the advancement of a social housing development approach that includes some or all of the above.