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Chair Chat

with Prof. David Gilchrist



Housing Issues in the WA Disability Sector.

In the past the State Government provided a variety of policies and programs to assist people with disability to rent or purchase suitable housing. No single option has met everyone's specific needs.

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) has stated a commitment to ensure that eligible people have choice and control over all aspects of their lives, including access to appropriate housing options. Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) funding will be available for eligible participants 'who require specialist housing solutions to assist with the delivery of supports that cater for their significant functional impairment and/or very high support needs'. Approximately six per cent of all NDIS participants will be eligible for SDA funding which equates to about 1,000 people, with the majority located in the Perth metropolitan area.

At a time of significant change, there is at present insufficient certainty to guide planning and no clear mechanism to encourage potential investors; including service providers, community housing agencies, banks, superannuation funds and private investors to invest in disability related housing without taking a major speculative financial risk. Consultative leadership by all levels of government, the disability sector and other key stakeholders is required to stimulate and encourage the investment to meet potential demand. There are some key policy imperatives that can progress the development of housing opportunities as outlined below.

Potential investors and the disability sector require the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) to meet the development timeframes to implement the 'Specialist Disability Accommodation Pricing

and Payments Framework' and ensure the prices provided are adequate. The established benchmarks must also be subject to regular review and adequate annual indexation.

Both the Federal and State Governments need to provide coordinated and combined commitments on the amount of capital funding in the budget forward estimates to encourage and enable the long-term planning required for housing construction.

State Government agencies can play an important role to coordinate effective partnerships with key stakeholders, such as the disability and community housing sector, to explore and establish innovative and relevant models to scale up efficient housing developments.

Alliances can be encouraged to stimulate a wide range of options for financing, such as shared equity and social investment options, as well as the more traditional commercial return and government funded options. A 'notice board' of potential partners interested in investing in the housing arena could be registered by the NDIA.

Potential investors require detailed local population data to determine demand and supply for more co-ordinated planning of housing options and developments. This information will include promoting the entire continuum of housing arrangements, financing options and identifying tenants prior to the completion of new

developments in order to minimise vacancy rates. Cash flow is a significant consideration for potential investors during an era where cash flow will be significantly challenged by the many other administrative processes of the NDIA.

The NDIA and the State Government could consider funding a state-wide vacancy management 'clearing house', including accessible online platforms, to link potential residents with appropriate accommodation options to ensure service providers do not carry unfunded vacancy costs.

These stimulus strategies will complement investments from the government by offering tax offset incentives indexed annually for approved dwellings. Investors may benefit from annual incentives, rental yields and potential capital gains applied to schemes that meet relevant quality and probity standards.

All new and extensively modified housing should be required to meet the national access and adaptability standards. In WA, the minimum universal design access standards are defined in the "Liveable Homes" initiative.

All levels of government, including Local Government Authorities, are encouraged to play their part to address the national shortage of affordable housing, through ensuring approvals for all new developments include accessible and affordable housing options.

In conclusion, the State Labor Government has yet to provide coherent policies and actions in this essential area. There is no discernible financial strategy to stimulate the development of community and social housing. The disability sector will continue to encourage the State Government and the NDIA to investigate innovative ways to improve the availability of affordable housing.

There is a need to implement comprehensive, collaborative, coordinated and innovative policy and implementation solutions to increase the amount of appropriate and accessible housing supply for people living with disability in the most efficient and cost effective manner. Nulsen Disability Services will continue to lobby for clear directions and financial investment in this vitally important area.



Professor David Gilchrist BA BBus PhD FCA FAIC is a chartered accountant and a historian. He holds a PhD in economics from the University of Notre Dame Australia and is currently a Professor at the University of Western Australia as well as the Public Sector Accounting and Disclosure Research Cluster. Over his 25-year career, David has held many senior roles in the not-for-profit, commercial and public sectors. He has taught at several universities across the globe, sits as Chairman on multiple boards and has published several key national reports. Achievements include: working as the Assistant Auditor General WA, the Associate Dean of the School of Business, University of Notre Dame Australia, Chairman to Nulsen Disability Services, and the Kimberley Individual and Family Support Association. David produced the "Australian Charities 2013" and the "Australian National Costing and Pricing Framework" issued jointly with National Disability Services. He is widely published as an academic and a journalist. [See David's full profile here.](#)