



# **Whitehorse Accommodation Forum**

## *Options for People with Disabilities*

*An Initiative of the Whitehorse Disability Advisory Committee  
Sponsored by Whitehorse City Council MetroAccess and Community Development*



**Report**  
November 2010

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on behalf of the Whitehorse Disability Advisory Committee

## *Why did we want to host this Forum?*

Home is one of the most powerful and evocative terms in our vocabulary. Having a place to live, which is affordable, safe and appropriate to our needs is a basic and fundamental human right. It is a universal determinant of health and is crucial to our sense of integrity and belonging, our ability to function as people and, ultimately as community members.

Within Victoria and the City of Whitehorse, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2006) estimates that one in five people have a disability. Furthermore, one in 15 Victorians requires assistance with self-care, mobility, communication or coping with the activities of everyday life. These figures help build a picture of the number of people who may require assistance to access appropriate accommodation.

Over the past two decades there has been significant change in the provision of accommodation for people with disabilities and mental illness, institutions have been closed down and people with a disability are living in range of settings within the community. Healthy communities are characterised by a diversity of people and places. Diversity makes community vibrant as well as socially and economically sustainable. People with a disability add to the diversity of communities and play an integral role in the social and economic fabric of communities. Yet it is recognised that people with a disability face multiple barriers to full participation within communities including access to safe, affordable and accessible accommodation.

*Shut Out: The Experience of People with Disabilities and their Families in Australia Report (2009)* highlighted that many people with a disability experience significant challenges when seeking or accessing accommodation options. People with a disability are more likely to be faced with little choice of where to live and who to live with, within the current models of shared accommodation, group homes or community residential units. The report also highlights the lack of accommodation models that link support to accommodation options.

"Few Australians without a disability can imagine what it would be like to have no say in where they live or who they live with. The freedom to choose where and with whom one lives is a fundamental freedom, but it is one few people with disabilities are able to exercise. Many people with disabilities want to live independently in the community but are unable to access the support they need to do so. Many parents also reported profound frustration that despite their desire to see their adult son or daughter move out of the family home, there was simply nowhere for the child to go" *Shut Out Report* (p28)

The *Inquiry into Supported Accommodation for Victorians with a Disability and or Mental Illness (December 2009)* found that Victoria leads the way in many areas of accommodation service provision. When compared with other states Victoria provides more supported accommodation with less federal funding. Despite this finding, there is a growing demand for accommodation services and options that cannot be met within existing resources. The Inquiry recognised whilst there were

differences between supported housing models for people with a disability and people with mental illness there was also many similarities.

According to VICSERV, the peak body for Psychiatric Disability Rehabilitation Support Services (PDRSS) in Victoria, the link between housing and mental illness is well established. Recent research found a 30 per cent prevalence of mental illness amongst homeless people. At least 42 per cent of people with severe mental illness are currently housed in tenuous forms of accommodation, including boarding houses, hotel/rented rooms, emergency accommodation, shelters or with no fixed address. Many people living at home with their parents are considered 'housed' even though the arrangement might not suit either party. Only 27 per cent of people with a psychiatric disability purchase their own homes, compared with 70 per cent of the broader community.

Research shows that around 65 per cent of consumers identify "housing" and "housing support" as the most important issue in their lives. There is a strong association between housing and clinical improvement with stable housing being shown to be a more accurate predictor of reduced hospital admissions than clinical interventions.

For many people with a mental illness and or disability, accommodation means more than access to a house unit or flat, it is also needs to be affordable and appropriate accommodation, and have the supports necessary to maintain tenure. Furthermore, support needs to be scalable, flexible and tailored to meet individual needs.

### ***Understanding the accommodation continuum***

The Victorian State and Federal Government have by far the biggest role in the provision of affordable and social housing. The Federal Government influences housing distribution through high level policy such as taxation, income support, and assistance to homeowners, industry policy and the State Commonwealth Housing Agreement.

*The Commonwealth State Territory Disability Agreement (CSTDA)* provides the National framework for the provision of government support to services for people with disability. Under the three agreements signed to date, (the first occurred in 1991), state and territory governments have the responsibility of planning, policy setting and the management of accommodation support, community support, community access and respite care services for people with a disability. The Australian Government also has similar responsibilities for specialised employment assistance.

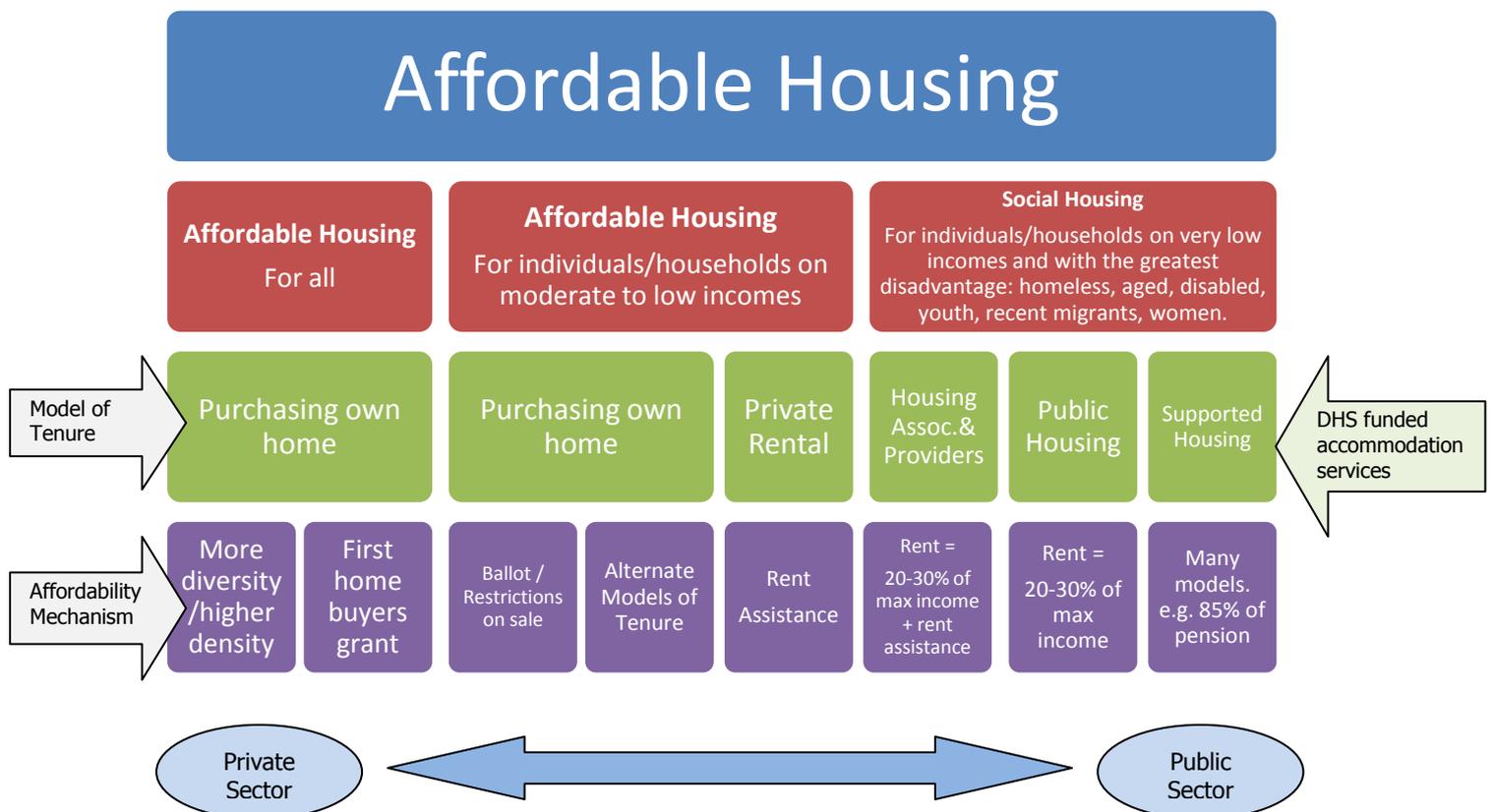
Beyond direct service provision to people with a disability, the State Government has a responsibility for the provision and management of public and community rental housing, landlord-tenant relations and statutory and strategic planning frameworks, including accessibility standards through the Building Commission.

Housing associations are third major provider of social housing. Housing associations are not for profit organisations that develop, own and manage rental properties for people on low incomes. Currently the Victorian Government is investing \$300 million into registered housing associations to deliver 1,550 dwellings by 2011.

The Department of Human Services Eastern Metropolitan Region operates and or funds approximately 132 group homes across the region. (<http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/operations/regional/eastern/regional-information>). Disability accommodation services within the Eastern Region are only one component of a broader accommodation discussion; public housing, housing associations, private rentals and home ownership also form part of the picture.

Diagram 1 provides an overview of the affordable and social housing continuum. Public housing in the model represents the housing stock available through the Office of Housing. Supported accommodation includes accommodation managed and funded by the Department of Human Services.

**Diagram 1: Affordable and Social Housing Models**



## *What we did*

In November 2009, the Whitehorse Disability Advisory Committee (WDAC), whose purpose is to provide Council with strategic advice concerning disability-related issues, explored housing options for people with mental illness and people with a disability within the City of Whitehorse and came to the conclusion that comprehensive information was difficult to find.

The WDAC believed that this experience would be similar within the broader community and that whilst there had been some recent new projects and initiatives, that it was doubtful that people with a disability, their families and carers and service providers would be aware of the work being undertaken. This led the WDAC to initiate the **Whitehorse Accommodation Forum**, a forum that would allow housing providers to share information directly with people with mental illness and or disability and their supporters, who were seeking accommodation options.

### *Aim*

The aim of the forum was to provide information regarding safe, accessible and affordable housing options that enable people with a disability to live as independently as possible in the community.

### *Developing the Forum*

The Whitehorse Disability Advisory Committee actively led the planning, development and implementation of the Whitehorse Accommodation Forum with support from the Whitehorse MetroAccess Development Officer.

To achieve this, the Whitehorse Accommodation Forum was listed on the Agenda as an action item, for all Whitehorse Disability Advisory Committee meetings throughout 2010.

The Whitehorse MetroAccess Development Officer through various network meetings, working groups and discussions with people with a disability, service providers and government departments was able to confirm an interest and also a community need for such an event to assist in building the knowledge of people with a disability, their families and carers as well as disability service organisations

### *Presenters*

The then City of Whitehorse Mayor, Cr Bill Pemberton gave an opening address for the forum.

Potential presenters were identified in a brainstorming exercise during a Whitehorse Disability Advisory Committee Meeting in February 2010, apart from two personal journey presenters whose details emerged later in the planning process. Presenters were invited to present at the forum, a copy of the Invitation to Presenters is located in the Appendices section of this document. All invited presenters confirmed their willingness to be part of this event.

The following organisations presented at the forum (the Whitehorse Accommodation Forum agenda can be found in the appendices section of this report)

- Department of Human Services – Central Office
- Common Ground
- Housing Choices Australia
- Terra Firma
- Universal Housing Alliance
- Office of Housing – Eastern Regional Office
- Department of Human Services – Eastern Metropolitan Regional Office

Presenters were asked to include the following information in their presentations

- An overview of the service, program, initiative including
- Eligibility criteria, target groups
- Costs
- How people can become involved
- Waiting lists
- How support (living skills, budgeting, personal care) is provided to, or accessed by people within the service, program or initiative

Past experience informed the WDAC that people attending such a forum or seeking information, often take courage and are encouraged by the stories of others in similar situations. The WDAC was keen to ensure that people with a disability and/ or their families presented their stories in addition to government and organisational pathways, projects and initiatives. Three personal stories were presented as part of the forum:

- **Anita O'Brien** presented her family's story of resolving accommodation issues for their adult son
- **David Montgomery** presented his personal journey through homelessness and accommodation, resulting from his experience of mental illness
- **David and Vicki Brown** as parents of a child with a disability presented information regarding two property development projects they are undertaking, the first is to offer international respite opportunities to families and the second is a proposed housing development project in Regional Victoria

The presentations covered a wide range of information regarding current projects and initiatives from large government initiatives to private property developers. Presentations can be viewed on Councils website with hard copies provided in the appendices section of this report.

A draft agenda was forwarded to presenters two weeks prior to the event and confirmed in the week leading up to the event.

Following the outcome of the Federal Government Election, Senator Jan McLucas Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Carers was invited to give a keynote address; unfortunately Senator McLucas was unable to attend as parliament was sitting at the time of the event.

State Ministers were not invited to provide a keynote address due to the imminent State Government Election.

### Facilitator

Mark Riches from Level Consulting was appointed following consideration of submissions responding to the brief that was forwarded to a number of organisations.

Mark met with the MetroAccess Development Officer and the WDAC in preparation for the forum. Mark also contacted those presenting personal stories to offer his support during their presentation.

### Venue and Catering

The forum was held at the Whitehorse Centre, a venue owned and operated by Council and adjacent to the Civic Centre. This location was chosen because of its suitability, with the forum date being selected based on venue availability.

### Communication plan

Council's Communication Department and MetroAccess Development Officer developed a communications to market and promote the event; it included internal and external promotional strategies including:

- Media releases: Leader, Melbourne Eastern Weekly, Asian Print Media, 3WBC, Light FM
- External Networks Information Share
- Internal publication on Councils Intranet
- Web event listing on DARU and RIDE information portals.

### Promotional Material

The WDAC with the assistance of the MetroAccess Development Officer, and Community Development Administration Support Officer designed the promotional flier. The image used in the promotional material was taken from the images portrayed in the Whitehorse Community Wellbeing Plan. A copy of the promotional flier is located in the appendices section of the report.

Those attending were asked to provide contact details to enable the dissemination of information following the forum.

### Costs

The Whitehorse Disability Advisory Committee sought partnership with and assistance in funding the forum from the Department of Human Services and sponsorship through the Department of Planning and Community Development without success.

Committed to be responsive to the needs of people with a disability and their families Whitehorse Council fully funded the event.

## Audience

The forum was open to people with a disability, their families and carers within the City of Whitehorse, as well as local service providers. Registrations were limited to 120 places due to the venue size and to ensure people using wheelchairs could be comfortably accommodated within the venue. The event booked out within 3 weeks of the first circulation of promotional material.

Priority was given to people with a disability, their family and carers as it is recognised that people with a disability, their families and carers often struggle to locate relevant information. This priority resulted in three organisations being contacted to reduce the number of staff members attending, to enable additional places for people with a disability, their family and carers.

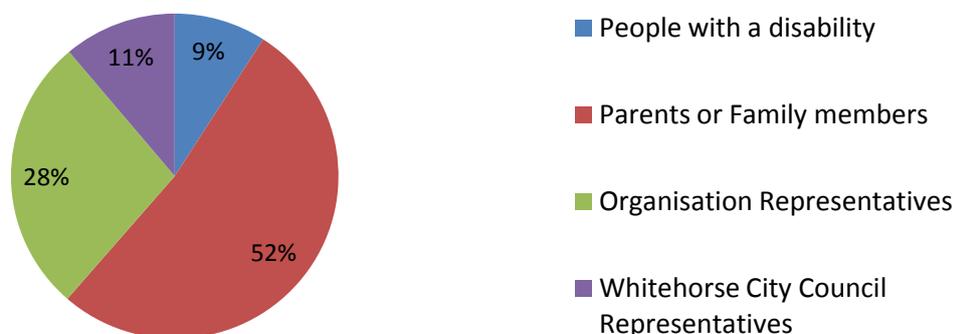
On the day of the forum, 116 people attended with a further 28 people electing to be placed on a waiting list that would enable them to receive information from the forum at a later date. In addition, a Cantonese Interpreter utilised a Whisper System to communicate with 10 representatives from the Chinese Parent Special Network who attended the forum.

Of the 116 people who attended the forum:

- 8 were people with a disability
- 62 were parents or family members
- 24 were people representing 12 different disability or health services organisations
- 10 people represented Whitehorse City Council:
  - 2 people were Councillors
  - 4 people were members of the Whitehorse Disability Advisory Committee
  - 4 people were Whitehorse City Council Senior Managers or Officers

Over 50% of the people attending the forum were parents or family members with a further 9% of attendees being people with a disability. Diagram 2 depicts the percentage representations of people attending the forum.

**Diagram 2: People attending the forum**



## What we heard from the audience:

Following each presentation, people attending the forum were able to ask questions of the presenters. To ensure that maximum information could be provided question time was limited to 5 minutes following each presentation, however the opportunity to document questions and comments was provided throughout the day.

As depicted in Table 2 information and feedback was sought from people attending the forum at key points during the day:

**Table 2: Feedback Opportunities**

| <b>Questions</b>  | <b>Intention</b>   | <b>When</b>   | <b>Method</b>  |
|---|--|---|--|
| From today I would like   | Setting the scene, understanding the interests of people attending                         | Morning   | Table Discussion<br><br>Recorded on butchers paper<br><br>Tables were asked to report key items  |
| Questions, feedback and thoughts from today   | Provide opportunities to document unanswered questions or thoughts raised in presentations | Throughout the forum with an emphasis prior to scheduled breaks | Table Discussion<br><br>Recorded on post it notes and displayed on butchers paper for the day<br><br>Tables were asked to report key items |
| What helped me most was...<br><br>Today left me with the following questions...<br><br>What actions you will take as a result of today....<br><br>Any other thoughts or comments... | feedback and evaluation  | Prior to forum close  | Table Discussion<br><br>Recorded on A3 Paper<br><br>Tables were asked to report on any other thoughts or comments                          |

From each opportunity to raise questions, seek clarification and provide feedback, a wealth of information emerged and was collected. The following section commences with the question that was asked and is followed with the highlighted emerging themes and also provides discussion in relation to the general feedback from the forum. Shaded boxes provide indicative feedback statements.

## From today I would like.....

Whilst obtaining information was the dominant reason for people attending the forum, they also had a range of general and specific requirements from the day:

- Accommodation that caters for specific needs:
  - Types of accommodation for young adults with intellectual disability
  - Choices for independent high functioning adults with disabilities
  - Options for family with young son with cerebral palsy
  - Accommodation for younger people with dementia (in addition to disability)
- Developing an understanding of what is available, what models are in place and are being developed:
  - What housing options are available?
  - Options and accommodation models
  - Mental health accommodation pathways
- People also sought information relating to the accommodation system:
  - What is being done to alleviate the housing shortage of respite and permanent accommodation?
  - Does the government have a master plan?
  - Wait times between approval and moving in
  - Understanding eligibility criteria and paperwork
  - Processes for accessing options and contacts that can help get the process started
- Information to support people to live more independently in the community and are there private/ non government options that can be explored:
  - Private accommodation options, how do we go about it, where do we start, and who do we speak to?
  - What are the choices moving from group homes to more independent living?
  - What should we consider when buying a house for the future use of a person with a disability
  - Are the possibilities for parents to work together through networks or a matching service that links parents to resolve their family members accommodation needs
  - Options for parents to purchase a house together
- For parents and family members the focus of attending the forum related directly to the person in their lives and trying to gain information that would support current and future accommodation needs:
  - Ideas for future accommodation for my son/brother
  - Looking for supported accommodation for 43 year old intellectually disabled man

### What helped me most was...

People found that information from services and contact details were what helped them the most:

- Hearing from different service providers
- Window into various support services
- Information gleaned from different presenters
- Where to source for help

Sharing personal stories and hearing other people's stories was valued and helped build hope:

- Hearing from families
- Sharing personal stories and ideas
- Relation to other persons experiences ie: not feeling alone

### Today left me with the following questions...

People attending the forum responded to this question as a mechanism to reflect on the whole day rather than questions arising from presentations which were covered in the section title Questions, Feedback and Thoughts from Today:

- Help so much information to absorb and get through, retain
- A one stop shop is needed – perhaps through DHS where there is information on as many avenues as possible. It needs to be current and user friendly
- How can we achieve a better housing model such as small block of units for people with physical disabilities who can share support you have on site 24/7
- How can I make my son's ISP go further
- The timing of support and accommodation to ensure best outcomes for the person

### What actions you will take as a result of today....

The range of actions people felt able to undertake as a result of attending the forum was extremely encouraging:

- Contact department re discrepancies in planned and actual support promised
- Apply for housing through Housing Choices as now know it is possible
- Go on holidays to Fiji
- Seek more information from: Housing Choices Australia, Department of Housing, Office of Housing
- Follow up on the mixed equity models
- Research the information about housing – about managing a property by a group of parents (2-4 residents with Autism)

### Any other thoughts or comments...

A focus on advocacy, raising awareness of the needs of people with a disability in relation to accommodation emerged from this feedback:

- The whole issue (of accommodation) needs more awareness in the community – the idea of a government lobbyist is great
- DHS needs to consider how to support young adults to live earlier
- Information needs to be easier for families and professionals to access and learn about
- Until the care in the home and voluntary care in the community is given a monetary value – the needs of the people with disabilities or mental illness will not get the attention they need.

Carer fears were also presented:

- As older carers (70 and over) we need to put plans into action, we would like to see our children happy and settled before we die. As yet we have no real assurance of that happening
- It is scary for aging parents – how will their children manage when their parents are gone?

There were several comments on the event itself:

- Thank you for an informative day
- Very informative
- Well run session, great speakers, kept to time, MC managed questions well, good overview of options and great questions by parents
- Really enjoyed today, lots of food for thought for the whole of life planning
- It was a good initiative – so we could all hear each other

### Questions, feedback and thoughts from today

This feedback was obtained throughout the day as questions, thoughts and discussion resonated with participants. The themes that emerged through this process were:

Access to information regarding accommodation:

- Lack of information about available for service housing models etc
- We need practical information on how to find referral information and request housing options
- There are so many funded bodies no one can find out what they all do – they can't always contact us
- Information is hard to find – it is word or mouth or you find it by accident.
- Lack of coordinated information
- Things happen that we don't hear about

#### Policy questions:

- What is nation building?
- Why would it be contentious to have 10 people with disabilities living on one site?
- Can we share DHS support in Housing Choices Australia accommodation?
- A new approach to disability services
- Are there any links to address housing and support funding needed for people to access housing

#### Feelings of hope and despair:

- I came here with a sense of hope. I leave with a sense of despair, because there is just not enough housing out there for people with disabilities.
- Frustration reigns – it feels so hard – another maze to navigate
- Ageing parents become tired and give up. We need a solution for our individual children's needs
- We have taken on so much bringing up a child with a disability why does it have to be an ongoing battle to get accommodation for our children
- Listen to parents

#### Process difficulties:

- Should be a much more simplified way of getting into the housing maze- most people don't know who to talk to, what is available and then they finally do we have to fight to prove our child is worthy of a housing option
- DHS needs to be more approachable and respond to individuals needs rather than their own agenda

#### Networking:

- Could we have a service like a matching service to find and put a few compatible clients to share housing and pool their funding and entitlements
- Website and forum for finding resources and interacting with others for ideas and share information

### Discussion of issues arising during the forum

This section of the report highlights aspects of feedback and commentary that occurred during the course of the forum. The purpose of this section is to both confirm the information provided on the day as well as provide linkages to key legislation and policy documents and services.

#### Knowledge and Access to Information

It is well researched that access to relevant and appropriate information enables people with a disability, their families and supporters, as well as service providers to

enables informed discussions that lead to decisions that reflect the person's interests, aspirations and needs.

Access to appropriate information was the main area of need that was identified throughout the Whitehorse Accommodation Forum. There were several discussions regarding information: information was difficult to find, difficult to understand, differed depending on who you spoke to within a service and which service they were from. People attending the forum requested a simplified process to gain information and suggested key locally based information services that were accessible knowledgeable and user friendly. People also commented that a growing reliance on internet based information was detrimental to sharing knowledge, as it did not provide an opportunity to ask questions, talk through issues or assist in personalising the information relevant to the person and their family's particular situation.

Further, people attending the forum commented on the value of sharing stories and experiences, learning from others and the support provided by peers who have shared experiences of supporting a person with disability.

As a result, it is the intention of the Whitehorse Disability Advisory Committee and MetroAccess Development Officer to offer those people attending the forum an opportunity to convene in small interest based groups to continue discussions commenced during the forum.

## **Recommendations**

The Whitehorse Disability Advisory Committee and Council advocate for improved pathways to accessible, appropriate and reliable information regarding accommodation for people with a disability, their parents and supporters, as well as service providers.

Whitehorse City Council through the MetroAccess Officer convenes a series of small group meetings to enable people with a disability, their parents and carers to continue to discuss accommodation issues and experiences.

Useful internet sites for people with a disability, their families and supporters to explore accommodation options includes the recently developed ramp up and divine sites.

You can view

- Ramp Up website at <http://www.abc.net.au/rampup/>
- Divine website at <http://www.disability.vic.gov.au/>

## **Accommodation Models**

A range of accommodation models were presented on the day, ranging from parents providing separate living within the boundaries of the family home , group homes-community residential units and purchasing options. Also obtained from the

feedback were questions regarding co-locating a number of units or properties in one area. This requires further exploration.

Questions put forward during the forum:

How can we achieve a better housing model such as a small block of units for people with physical disabilities who can share care support you have on site 24/7?

How do we find other likeminded people with similar situations or disabilities, so that we can get together in a block of units and share support?

Would it be considered contentious to have 10 disabled people living on one site – and if so, why should this be the case?

Research shows that Legislation and policy speaks of choice, meeting individual needs and interests and therefore seeks to expand the opportunities available to people. Furthermore, whilst there is no specific policy or legislation that prevents the building of a series of units or houses on one site or in a street for occupation or ownership by people with a disability, the *Disability Accommodation and Support Framework Report* undertaken by the Centre for Developmental Disability Studies (2008), provides insight into the complexity of accommodation models.

In exploring a range of accommodation models, both Australian and International research found that the outcomes and or experiences for people with a disability following deinstitutionalisation is more positive if living in smaller dispersed community housing which tends to provide more opportunities and improved participation outcomes for people with a disability.

The report cautions that careful consideration should be given to the configuration and types of supports provided in cluster housing arrangements. Experiences of aged care accommodation models also provides caution regarding the understanding of contracts, life lease arrangements, equity models, ownership rights and responsibilities in retirement villages, all of which could be equally applied to the range accommodation models that were discussed and explored at the forum.

In discussions leading up to the forum and since the forum, there is concern that multi unit/house sites that exclusively house people with a disability may be viewed as an institution, or out of bounds to other community members. This may then impact on how people interact within their community. There also needs to be consideration given to whether people with a disability actually wish to live together, the following is feedback received during the forum.

As someone living in a group home with high physical support needs I find it difficult to get peace and quiet whilst living with other people with a disability. It seems like people assume that since I have support needs I will get along with anyone else with support needs. People in my situation need the choice to live independently with support catered to needs specifically.

The terms group homes, shared supported accommodation and community residential units have all been used to describe a home that is shared by 4 -6 people with a disability support requirement. As many of these houses were developed in response to deinstitutionalisation, the report goes on to comment that some homes, continue to be focused on routine rather than being responsive to individual needs and interests.

For parents and organisations exploring alternative models of accommodation, the report provides useful discussion and also highlights key considerations. Whilst only a summary of key points is provided in this document the full report can be found on the Department of Human Services website:

<http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/disability/publications-library/disability-accommodation-and-support-framework-report>

## Legislation and Policy Directions

During the course of the forum it became increasingly clear that information regarding legislation and policy direction at each level of government was not well understood. This section of the report aims to address this by providing a brief overview of legislation and policy direction that influences how accommodation and support are delivered within Victoria. Whilst the intent of the legislation and policy will be covered, internet and office contacts will also be provided to enable readers to follow up on areas of interest.

It is important to develop a broad understanding of the current legislation and policy directions that relate to accommodation and support as it is this legislation that shapes program and service delivery options.

Legislation refers to legal Acts or laws at either the Federal or State level. It is through the release of policy statements and supporting guidelines that the government implements the intent of the various Acts.

Mental Health and Disability Service providers are required to meet the requirements of both legislation and policy as part of their service or funding agreements with the Department of Human Services. The Department of Human Services releases policy such as the one pertaining to access; to assist community service organisations meet their obligations. Monitoring how effectively services are meeting their obligations is determined through an auditing process.

### Legislation

The main legislation relating to accommodation for people with a disability includes the following:

#### ***Disability Discrimination Act 1992***

Often referred to as the DDA, this Commonwealth Act provides a legal framework which aims to reduce discrimination on the basis of disability, within Australia. Discrimination is treating someone unfairly because of a

personal characteristic and causing them to be disadvantaged as a result. Equal opportunity laws such as the Disability Discrimination Act protect people from discrimination, sexual harassment, and racial and religious vilification.

Discrimination can happen when on the basis of disability, accommodation providers such as real estate agents, landlords or vendors:

- refuse to sell or rent out a property
- process an application differently from other applications for the same property
- change the terms upon which accommodation is offered, such as imposing a higher bond or requiring guarantors
- change the terms upon which accommodation has already been provided
- deny or limit access to a benefit or facility that is available to other tenants
- refuse to extend or renew accommodation
- evict tenants

Full details of this Act can be obtained from the Victorian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission advice line 1300 292 153 or via their website:

<http://www.humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au>

### ***Victorian Mental Health Act 1986 (currently under review)***

The Victorian Mental Health Act 1986 is currently being reviewed with submissions for input into the draft of the new legislation closing on the 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2010. Whilst this legislation has a dominant focus on the persons rights, care and treatment, there is also the intent to promote the wellbeing and recovery of persons with a mental illness by advancing their inclusion and participation in the community.

Full details of this Act can be obtained from <http://www.health.vic.gov.au> or by contacting the Department of Health on their general enquiries line 1300 767 299

### ***Victorian Disability Act 2006***

The *Disability Act 2006* (the Act) commenced on 1 July 2007. The Act provides the framework to enable people with a disability to more actively participate in the community. The Act is guided by the principles of human rights and citizenship and provides substantial law reform for people with a disability in Victoria. The Act also provides the framework to deliver more flexible support, based on maximum choice and a person's individual requirements.

Full details of this Act can be obtained from the Department of Human Services website <http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au> or by contacting the Eastern Region Metropolitan Office Intake and Response Team on 9843 6312.

### ***Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities 2006***

Human rights are the basic entitlements that we each have, regardless of our background, where we live, what we look like, what we think or what we believe. Based on the values of freedom, equality, respect and dignity, human rights acknowledge the fundamental worth of each person. The Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities outlines the basic human rights of all people in Victoria. It requires that governments of every level and other public authorities consider human rights when they make law, develop policies or provide services. The law came into full effect on 1 January 2008 and aims to build a fairer, more inclusive community. The Charter gives specific legal protection to 20 fundamental rights. In certain circumstances, some rights may be limited. However, this must be necessary and reasonable and there must be clear reasons for the decision.

Full details of this Act can be obtained from the Victorian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission advice line 1300 292 153 or via their website: <http://www.humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au>

### ***Residential Tenancies Act 1997 –***

In most cases where the Department of Human Services is the funder or operator of a shared supported accommodation or group home, residency provisions are covered by the Disability Act 2006, however for private and public housing the pertaining legislation is the Residential Tenancies Act.

Among other things, the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 sets out the general duties of landlords, tenants, owners and residents; provides for rights of entry by landlords or owners; and sets out the means by which a tenancy agreement or agreement in relation to a residency right may be ended.

Information about this act can be obtained from the following website [www.legislation.vic.gov.au/Domino/Web\\_Notes/.../97-109a.pdf](http://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/Domino/Web_Notes/.../97-109a.pdf) or you may wish to contact Consumer Affairs Victoria who are able to provide free and confidential information and advice to:

- Residential tenants
- Property managers
- Residential landlords
- Rooming house residents, owners and managers
- Caravan park residents, owners and managers
- Tenancy workers and community agencies

Contact details are as follows: Consumer Affairs Helpline: 1300 55 8181

### Policy Directions

The policy documents that relate to support and accommodation for people with a disability are.

#### ***National Affordable Housing Agreement***

The National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) replaced the former Commonwealth State Housing Agreement (CSHA) and the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program Agreement (SAAP) from the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2009.

Its purpose is to ensure that all Australians have access to affordable sustainable housing that contributes to their social and economic participation.

The NAHA is an agreement by the Councils of Australian Governments, including local government, which commenced on 1 January 2009, initiating a whole-of-government approach in tackling the problem of housing affordability.

The NAHA will provide \$6.2 billion worth of housing assistance to low and middle income Australians in the first five years.

More information regarding this agreement can be found on the following website:

<http://www.facs.gov.au/sa/housing/progserv/affordability/affordablehousing/Pages/default.aspx>

#### ***National Rental Affordability Scheme***

The National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS) is a long term commitment by the Australian Government to invest in affordable rental housing.

The Scheme seeks to address the shortage of affordable rental housing by offering financial incentives to the business sector and to community organisations to build and rent dwellings to low and moderate income households at 20 per cent below-market rates for 10 years. NRAS aims to:

- Increase the supply of new affordable rental housing;
- Reduce rental costs for low and moderate income households; and
- Encourage large scale investment and innovative delivery of affordable housing.

The Australian Government has committed \$1 billion to the Scheme over four years to stimulate construction of up to 50,000 high quality homes and

apartments, providing affordable private rental properties for Australians and their families

More information regarding this scheme can be found on the following website:

<http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/housing/progserv/affordability/nras/Pages/default.aspx>

### ***Nation Building – Economic Stimulus Plan:***

In February 2009, the Commonwealth Government announced the provision of additional funding for social housing under the Nation Building - Economic Stimulus Plan.

The Social Housing Initiative provides funding of \$5.238 billion over three and a half years from 2008-09 to 2011-12 for the construction of new social housing (in two stages), and a further \$400 million over two years for repairs and maintenance to existing public housing dwellings.

This Initiative is being conducted in partnership with State and Territory Governments. It will provide a boost to public housing and housing administered by the not-for-profit community sector and is designed to assist low income Australians who are homeless or struggling in the private rental market.

More information about the economic stimulus plan can be found on the following website:

<http://www.economicstimulusplan.gov.au/housing/pages/default.aspx>

### **Victorian Policy**

#### ***Victorian State Disability Plan 2002 -2012***

This strategic plan sets the goals and strategic directions in relation to people with a disability within the specified timeframe. The vision of the Victorian State Disability Plan is that:

“By 2012, Victoria will be a stronger and more inclusive community – a place where diversity is embraced and celebrated, and where everyone has the same opportunities to participate in the life of the community, and the same responsibilities towards society as all other citizens of Victoria.”

The goals of the Victorian State Disability Plan are:

#### **1. Pursuing individual lifestyles**

This is about enabling people with a disability to pursue their own individual lifestyle, promoting the rights of people with a disability in the community and strengthening the disability support system so that people’s individual needs can be met. It also highlights the reorientation of disability services so that they are more responsive and

more focused on people's individual needs and choices, and to the needs of their families and carers.

## **2. Building Inclusive Communities**

Building Inclusive Communities means strengthening communities so that people with a disability have the same opportunities as all other citizens of Victoria to participate in the life of the community – socially, economically, culturally, politically, and spiritually

## **3. Leading the Way**

The Government will lead by example, building more inclusive communities by improving the accessibility and responsiveness of the public service and making it more inclusive of people with a disability.

The Victorian State Disability Plan has been the foundation document for changing the way in which disability services and supports are provided. Changes have included:

- Introduction of Individualised Support Packages
- Emergence Self Directed Approaches – including changes in planning, service funding, access to services
- Greater emphasis on people with a disability accessing community opportunities
- Stronger relationships between disability service providers and community service providers to support people with a disability to access community services that meet their interests and needs
- The emergence of the Community Building Initiative – a partnership between State and Local Government that fund and support the MetroAccess position within each metropolitan Council and similar services in rural and regional Victoria. The Community Building Program has five major objectives:
  - 1) To mobilise and support people with a disability to optimise participation in the life of their local community.
  - 2) To build and strengthen the community's capacity to provide support to people with a disability and their families.
  - 3) To facilitate integrated local community planning and coordination which engages and involves people with a disability and their families, disability service providers and community organisations
  - 4) To work with existing disability service providers to enhance their capacity to provide relevant and appropriate supports in the community.
  - 5) To improve access to information about relevant services and community activities available to people with a disability in their communities.

In relation to disability service provision and accommodation this plan states:

- The Government believes that, as much as possible, people with a disability should be able to choose where they live, with whom and in

what type of housing – just like most other member of the Victorian community.

- The Government will develop more housing options, so that people with a disability can exercise more choice. This will involve more emphasis on public housing, private rental, supported accommodation, and support to enable people with a disability to live in the community, if they choose to do so.
- The Government is also committed to supporting people with a disability to live in setting that are best suited to their individual needs and wishes.

### ***Victorian Mental Health Reform Strategy 2009 -2019 – Implementation Plan 2009-2011***

The Mental Health Reform Strategy was released in March 2009 and sets a comprehensive vision for change in mental health over the next decade. The implementation plan sets initial priorities in child and youth early intervention, improved advice and information services, enhanced referral and triage systems and expanded home-based recovery and supports. Significant (new) money has been invested in new acute and sub-acute mental health beds.

More information regarding this policy document can be found on the following website <http://www.health.vic.gov.au/mentalhealth/reformstrategy/> or by contacting the Department of Health general enquiry line on 1300 767 299

### ***A Fairer Victoria***

This is the Victorian Governments social policy action plan that works towards addressing disadvantage and promoting inclusion and participation. People with a disability are recognised as a vulnerable group within this social policy document. One of the key areas is 'Developing Liveable Communities'. This aims to create communities where people feel safe, there is a sense of belonging and community pride, where there are job opportunities, affordable housing, good local services and facilities and enjoyable environments.

More information regarding this policy document can be found on the following website <http://www.dpccd.vic.gov.au> or by contacting: Department of Planning and Community Development Regional Team Level 2, 30 Prospect Street Box Hill VIC 3128 Tel: 9296 4670

### ***Melbourne 2030 and Melbourne @ 5 Million***

This report is the State Government's 30 year planning strategy which aims to provide a framework for future planning, including transport infrastructure, public transport, housing needs and land use including open space. Both documents refer frequently to the need for housing to be more affordable into the future.

More information regarding these policy documents can be found on the following website <http://www.dpccd.vic.gov.au/planning/planning-policy-and-projects/managing-melbournes-growth/> or by contacting:  
Department of Planning and Community Development Regional Team  
Level 2, 30 Prospect Street Box Hill VIC 3128, Tel: 9296 4670

### ***Better Services, Better Opportunities – Strategic directions for the Department of Human Services***

This policy states that the strategic intent of the Department of Human Services which includes the responsibility for the provision of Disability Services and the Office of Housing is:

“We improve people’s lives and reduce their experience of disadvantage. To achieve this we provide housing and community services to support and protect Victorians most in need.”

More information about this policy can be found on the Department of Human Services website <http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au> or by contacting the Eastern Region Metropolitan Office Intake and Response Team on 9843 6312.

### ***Eastern Region Housing Statement (EHRS)***

The Statement was developed between the State Government and Local Government across the Eastern Region. It provides a strategic framework for planning for the future housing needs of the eastern region to 2031. It is intended to give guidance and direction at a regional level for Councils in the development of their strategic planning work, including local housing strategies and activity centre action plans. The vision of the EHRS is for the eastern region to be a region where a diverse range of housing meets the needs of all current and future residents.

### **Whitehorse City Council**

The vision of the City of Whitehorse – Council Plan 2009- 2013 is that”

“We aspire to be an inclusive, vibrant, prosperous and sustainable community”

Council’s Strategic Objectives within this plan are:

1. Serve and strengthen our diverse community to be inclusive vibrant and engaged;
2. Promote, protect, enhance and respect the quality of our natural and built environments;
3. Deliver organisational excellence, visionary leadership and strong governance through dedicated people, to ensure the best possible contribution to our community; and
4. Support a prosperous, diverse and healthy local economy that contributes to the wellbeing our community.

Local government actions in relation to accommodation is dependent on a range of factors such as location, existing housing stock, affordability, existing infrastructure, development pressures and opportunities, Council priorities and community values.

Under the Local Government Act 1989 the role of local government in housing includes:

- Ensuring that there is adequate planning for the future of the local municipality;
- Working with other public bodies to ensure services and facilities are provided and resources are used effectively and efficiently;
- Representing and promoting the interests of the community and to be responsive to the needs of the community;
- Raising funds for local purpose but the equitable imposition of rates and charges and by obtaining borrowing and grants.

These can be broadly summarised as:

- Planning,
- Networking partnerships and collaborations,
- Advocacy
- Rates

#### Whitehorse Disability Policy and Action Plan 2008- 2011

The Whitehorse Disability Policy and Action Plan aims to reduce the barriers experienced by people with a disability in the Whitehorse community through the following priority areas and strategies:

1. Strengthening the community
  - a. Promote and facilitate active participation by people with a disabilities in community planning and activities
  - b. Advocate for the rights, needs and concerns of people with disabilities, their families and carers
2. Improving the built environment
  - a. Demonstrate leadership and advocacy in addressing the built environment concerns of people with disabilities, their families and carers
3. Enhancing information and communication
  - a. Encourage mainstream services and programs to promote their initiatives to people with disabilities, their families and carers.
4. Providing responsive and accessible services and
5. Promoting employment, education and training

Whitehorse Council has already committed to affordable housing through:

- The City of Whitehorse Affordable and Social Housing Policy 2002 and the Whitehorse Affordable Housing Policy 2010;
- Structure Plans at Box Hill, Burwood Heights, Nunawading Megamile and Mitcham, and the Tally Ho Urban Design Framework. This was in keeping with a resolution passed by Council requiring affordable housing opportunities to be identified;

- The endorsement of the Eastern Regional Housing Statement 2006, which specifies the need to increase the supply of affordable housing options in the eastern region;
- The existing provision of social housing.

The Whitehorse Accommodation Forum builds upon the City of Whitehorse's commitment to provide relevant and appropriate information to people with a disability, their families and carers and support for a range of diverse housing options to suit the needs of the community. The information and outcomes obtained from the Whitehorse Accommodation Forum will assist Council to continue to advocate for the interests, aspirations and needs of people with a disability with other levels of government and community organisations.

## References

Australian Government (2009). Shut Out: the experience of people with a disability and their families in Australia. National Disability Consultation Report prepared by the National People with Disabilities and Carer Council. The report can be obtained from the Federal Department of Families Housing Community Services and Indigenous Affairs or their website <http://www.fahcsia.gov.au>

Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (2010). Housing assistance, social inclusion and people with disabilities. Position Paper No 131, authored by Selina Tually and Andrew Beer.

Centre for Developmental Disability Studies (2008). Disability Accommodation and Support Framework Report. Prepared by Trevor R. Parameter and Samuel R. C. Arnold

Commonwealth of Australia (2010) ABS Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers 2009 The report can be obtained from the Australian Bureau of Statistics or their website <http://www.abs.gov.au>

VICSERV (2008) Pathways to Social Inclusion: Housing and Support <http://www.vicserv.org.au/uploads/documents/pathways/paper4.pdf>

## **Appendices**

1. Whitehorse Accommodation Forum - Invitation to presenters
2. Whitehorse Accommodation Forum – Flier
3. Whitehorse Accommodation Forum – Agenda



## Accommodation Forum: Options for People with a Disability

### Invitation to Present

The City of Whitehorse would like to invite your organisation to present at the Accommodation Forum: Options for People with a Disability forum to be held on November 18<sup>th</sup> 2010.

The broad federal and state focus on Affordable Social Housing and the Inquiry into Supported Accommodation for Victorians with a Disability and or Mental Illness Report 2009 provide an opportunity to raise awareness of and promote accommodation initiatives that benefit people with a disability within Victoria and the Eastern Metropolitan Region.

In November 2009 the Whitehorse Disability Advisory Committee highlighted that for people with a disability access to appropriate accommodation is a major barrier to community participation. In discussing accommodation issues further the concept of hosting a forum that would explore the options available to people with a disability which included looking beyond the shared supported accommodation or community residential models. This opportunity is supported by Whitehorse City Council and championed by MetroAccess.

What we are aiming to deliver is a forum that provides information regarding safe, accessible, and affordable housing options and initiatives that enable people with a disability to live as independently as possible in the community.

To achieve this we are contacting a range of services and organisations to share and information and promote opportunities regarding accommodation initiatives and opportunities. We are estimating that each presenter will be allocated 20 minutes followed by 10 minutes of question time. As the intention is to share information presenters are asked to cover the following information in their presentation:

- An overview of the service, program or initiative
  - Eligibility criteria, target groups
  - Costs
  - How people can become involved
  - Waiting lists

- How support (personal care, living skills, budgeting etc) is provided or accessed by people with thin the service program or initiative
- Real stories, what are the experiences of people who have used your service, what are some things people should consider.

The intended audience is people with a disability, their families and support networks and service providers in the Eastern Metropolitan Region of Melbourne. We are estimating an audience of 120 people.

We are also intending to provide an opportunity for people to submit questions prior to the forum to be answered by a panel of presenters on the day.

**At this stage we would like to know:**

Are you or someone else from your organisation able to present on the day?

# Whitehorse Accommodation Forum

## *Options for People with Disabilities*

*An initiative of the Whitehorse Disability Advisory Committee  
Sponsored by Whitehorse City Council MetroAccess and Community Development*



Are you thinking about new accommodation? Would you like more information about accommodation options? Come along to the Whitehorse Accommodation forum to hear about new housing initiatives, projects and supportive housing options.

This forum is for people with a disability; parents; carers; or disability service organisations that have connections to Whitehorse

**Date:** 18<sup>th</sup> November 2010

**Time:** 9.30am - 4.30pm

**Venue:** Waratah Room  
Whitehorse Centre  
397 Whitehorse Rd  
Nunawading  
(Rear of Whitehorse Civic Centre)

**FREE  
EVENT**

Presentations from: Personal and Family Journeys, Department of Human Service, Office of Housing, Common Ground, Terra Firma, Universal Housing Alliance, Housing Choices Australia.



**Places are limited and bookings are essential**

To book please call Helen or Maureen on 9262 6443 or  
Email your booking request to: [Maureen.Darcy@whitehorse.vic.gov.au](mailto:Maureen.Darcy@whitehorse.vic.gov.au)



# Whitehorse Accommodation Forum

## Options for People with Disabilities



*An Initiative of the Whitehorse Disability Advisory Committee (WDAC)  
Sponsored by Whitehorse City Council MetroAccess and Community Development*

|                    |                             |   |
|--------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| <b>9.00-9.30</b>   |                             | <b>Registration</b>   |
| 9.30 – 9.35        | Welcome                     | <b>Welcome and Opening Address</b>  |
| 9.35 - 9.45        | Opening Address             | <b>Mayor:</b> Bill Pemberton  |
| 9.45 – 10.00       |                             | <b>Table Discussion</b><br>What do you want to get out of today?          |
| 10.00 – 10.20      | Personal Story              | <b>Sharing Personal Journeys</b><br>Anita O'Brien                         |
| 10.20 - 10.30      |                             | <b>Short Break</b>  |
| 10.30 – 11.00      | New Projects and directions | DHS – Projects – Heather Thompson   |
| 11.00 - 11.20      | New Projects                | Common Ground – Camille Heagney   |
| 11.20 – 11.50      | Big Picture                 | Housing Choices Australia – Marg Lee and Dione Stephen                    |
| 11.50 – 12.00      |                             | Table Discussion  |
| <b>12 - 12.50</b>  |                             | <b>Lunch</b>  |
| 12.50 - 1.10       | Pathways                    | Mental Health Accommodation Pathways – Aaron Jones - Terra Firma          |
| 1.10 – 1.30        | Personal Story              | <b>Sharing Personal Journeys</b><br>David Montgomery                      |
| 1.30 – 1.50        | Big Picture                 | Universal Housing Alliance – David Brant                                  |
| 1.50 - 2.00        |                             | Table Discussion  |
| <b>200 - 2.30</b>  |                             | <b>Afternoon Tea</b>  |
| 2.30 - 2.45        | Personal Story              | <b>Sharing Personal Journeys</b><br>Vicki and David Brown                 |
| 2.45 – 3.15        | Pathways                    | Department of Housing - Tammy Cox and Howard Shell                        |
| 3.15 - 3.45        | Pathways                    | DHS Accommodation Pathways – Disability Client Services EMR - Donna Hayes |
| 3.45 - 4.15        |                             | Table Discussion and Feedback   |
| <b>4.15 - 4.30</b> | <b>Close</b>                | <b>Cr Ellis on behalf of the WDAC</b>                                     |