



# *The National Housing Report*

**22 June, 2009 – Issue 3**  
**Aged & Community Services Australia**



In the last issue of ACSA's National Housing Report (Issue 2 2009) we reported on the recently announced Nation Building Economic Stimulus Package where Prime Minister Rudd outlined an unprecedented \$6.4 billion injection of funds for the development of 20,000 new social housing dwellings via a development program to be managed by the State Governments. ACSA enthusiastically welcomed this initiative and advised the Minister for Housing that our members were eager to participate in the program but that some implementation issues needed attention.

In this issue we provide an update on:

- Progress towards resolving these issues;
- How the various states are looking to implement the program; and
- What this means for aged care providers.

ACSA appreciates that the State Governments are under considerable pressure to build 20,000 units in a very short period so there is little time for consultation and consideration of a diversity of approaches. However some State Governments have program guidelines that make involvement of a potential key ally, the aged care industry, problematic. Some jurisdictions require applicants to be registered Community Housing Associations in order to protect Government funds. ACSA has consistently argued against this requirement with the Commonwealth and representations have been made at state level. Aged care providers are already highly regulated and do not need another set of accountability requirements. Moreover the registration systems are premised on the notion that the organisation will have the single goal of providing social housing rather than combining this with other activities and integrating social housing into the broader community. For this reason the State may want a caveat or other legal vehicle over the organisation's land which in the case of aged care providers may contain residential and community facilities as well as social housing. Some of the Church based organisations in Victoria have opted to establish separate legal entities so that the registration requirements only relate to the social housing component of their businesses developed with Government funds. This is a costly and cumbersome exercise.

ACSA members are well placed to provide some social housing to older people within their current and future developments. They often own land in ideal settings such as activity centres. Some states are willing to accept non-conforming bids for funds to enable innovative and interesting projects to proceed. Perhaps this is a way forward where specialist providers can get access to some of the funds but different accountability requirements could apply.

At the time of writing the key areas of concern to ACSA members with State Government Guidelines for the Stimulus package are:

**NSW** – The State Government has a preference for Community Housing Associations but will accept non-conforming bids. They have recently opened up the registration process so that new entrants such as aged care services can apply but there may be issues with the winding up clauses.

**Victoria** – The State Government will provide capital funding to Associations and Providers within the State regulatory framework or an aged care provider can partner with a registered association. However wind-up clauses may be problematic. Proposals made directly by aged care providers may not be considered.

**Queensland** – Applicants need to be registered but this requirement may be waived if the aged care provider makes a substantial contribution to the project.

**Western Australia** – The guidelines state that the State Housing Authority will become the owner of the land. ACSWA has received advice that this does not relate to not for profit providers.

**South Australia** – The State Government will select growth providers through this process and aged care providers can apply.

**Tasmania** – Aged care providers have been actively encouraged to apply by the State Government.

The Commonwealth is working on a new National Registration System that is due for completion by the end of the year. ACSA will work with the Commonwealth to ensure that the needs of older people and the capacity and characteristics of the aged care industry are understood and incorporated in the national approach.

## Brief Updates

- The results of the second round of NRAS are due soon which marks the end of the establishment phase. The Commonwealth has reserved the right to amend the NRAS guidelines at the completion of this phase before commencing the expansion phase.
- FaHCSIA has commissioned KPMG to provide advice on the policy settings, industry development initiatives and strategies required to create a mature and highly functioning community housing sector in Australia, enabling the industry to become a significant provider of social and affordable housing. The community housing sector has been defined as any organization (specifically including aged care providers) providing 10 or more units to people on low and medium incomes ie households within the bottom 40% of income distribution and at the higher end, the NRAS income levels. They are currently doing some financial modeling and some of our member providers are involved. The report, setting future directions, should be available in a couple of months.
- The Older Persons Affordable Housing Alliance, ACSA and COTA, has produced a Discussion Paper calling for a collaborative approach at the Federal, State and local levels to create a **National Older Persons Housing Strategy**. The paper contains a number of recommendations about existing and new stock. The Alliance wishes to canvas the views and the level of support of the sector, consumers, government and other interested bodies over the next 6 months with the view of developing a sharper

position in the new year that the Alliance can use for lobbying purposes in the lead up to the Federal Election. A copy of the paper is available on the ACSA and COTA websites.

- ACSA is about to commence The Innovative Housing Solution for Older People project with the support of ACSA's new National Partner, Thomson Adsett architects. It will inform and educate members about contemporary and innovative housing models from Australia and overseas via case studies on the ACSA websites. Watch this space for updates.

## **Lifetime Homes Lifetime Neighbourhoods: Housing for an Ageing UK Society**

The Alliance Paper mentioned above highlights the role that adaptable and accessible housing can and should play in supporting older people to remain successfully in their local communities. Homes designed to a universal standard are liveable for the majority of the population, design features typically include slightly wider hallways, open plan kitchens and living areas and level entry to houses. Universal Housing makes sense at a time when our population is ageing and the design features benefit everyone.



VCOSS research indicates that if universal design principles were adopted, the Victorian State Government could save over \$70 million each year on the basis of savings in home care, residential aged care and hospital costs based on the ageing population. In recent times, the Australian Government has made major commitments to universal design in housing, it is a major criteria for obtaining funding under the Nation Building Economic Stimulus Package and from the National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS).

The UK Government is an international leader in the area with its *Lifetime Homes Lifetime Neighbourhoods* initiative which is based on universal design principles. The Government's aim is to build homes that will support people to age in place and to support the development of inclusive or 'future proofed' neighbourhoods. The Government states *"we want to prepare our communities for the multiple changes that we will face; to our society so that it does not alienate or exclude; and to allow everybody, regardless of age, to participate and enjoy their home and their environment for as long as possible"*.

As part of the development, the UK government has committed to build more mainstream and specialised homes for older people. This includes increased investment in social housing and innovative equity sharing schemes. The government has also developed a new national housing advice and information service and national rapid repairs and adaptations services.

Standards are a key to the new approach and all new UK public housing will be built to Lifetime Homes Standards by 2011. The government is supporting industry to encourage take-up on a voluntary basis and take-up of the standards will be reviewed in 2010. Regulation will be brought forward in 2013 if *"take-up in the private sector has not matched market need or expectations"*. The areas covered by the standards include:

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|------------------------------|--|
| (1) Car parking width        | (9) Entrance level bedspace              |
| (2) Access from car parking  | (10) Entrance level WC & shower drainage |
| (3) Approach gradients       | (11) Bathroom & WC walls                 |
| (4) Entrances                | (12) Stair lift/through-floor lift       |
| (5) Communal stairs & lifts  | (13) Tracking hoist route                |
| (6) Doorways & hallways      | (14) Bathroom layout                     |
| (7) Wheelchair accessibility | (15) Window specification                |
| (8) Living room              | (16) Controls, fixtures & fittings       |

The UK is also committed to an ambitious plan for Lifetime Neighbourhoods through regional and local planning processes. The commitment to Lifetime Neighbourhoods is “to develop neighbourhoods where transport, good shops, green spaces, decent toilets, and benches, are consciously planned for people of all ages and conditions in mind. Such neighbourhoods would promote community spirit and civic pride”.

The UK Government’s Lifetime Homes Lifetime Neighbourhoods initiative is leading the way in supporting older people to remain at home as they grow older. It is smart policy that acknowledges the strong compatibility between consumer and government goals in the area of supporting people to age well. Both want to see outcomes which support people to remain as independent as possible, for as long as possible.

<http://www.lifetimehomes.org.uk/pages/home.html>

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## Darwin Court London: Report by Roland Naufal



For people attending the IAHSA Conference in the UK this July a must see (but not on the conference program) is Darwin Court in the London district called The Elephant and Castle. Darwin Court run by the Peabody Trust is one of the most interesting best practice models supporting older people in Lifetime Homes.

The Darwin Court project was completed in 2003, is highly successful and has won numerous awards. A visit to the site shows it to be engaging, well designed and age friendly. The facilities are alive with life and movement and it appears to be an excellent environment to support older people on low incomes to age well.

[www.peabody.org.uk](http://www.peabody.org.uk)

The building comprises 76 flats for people over 50, forty of the flats are supported housing for older people, the remainder are general social housing. Darwin Court includes facilities for the whole community and promotes the principle of mutual help. The community facilities include a popular restaurant, a swimming pool, healthcare suite, IT training room and a multi-purpose room/dance studio for meetings and social events.

Darwin Court is in Southwark, London and much of the surrounding area is low income with a very diverse population and high unemployment. The community has a large and diverse multicultural population. Darwin Court has formed a focus for the surrounding community. For example, swimming in the area has developed significantly since the introduction of the facilities at Darwin Court with on average over eight hundred users per week. Community groups such as Muslim women, older people and schools have particularly benefited.

Darwin Court put a lot of effort into community consultation during design and development of the project and the outcome is an engaged and vibrant community. Darwin Court succeeds in part because:

- A lot of effort was put into the process for *maximising community ownership* of the project before and after construction
- An *enabling culture* has been developed through highly skilled leadership and management
- The *mix of residents* is controlled to ensure no group dominates
- *Flexibility* is built into the building in design, tenure, facilities and programs
- Lifetime home or *universal design standards* have been employed

Darwin Court is vibrant, successful and the food is terrific! The differences between Darwin Court and many projects that offer similar facilities are significant but not always tangible. It takes an inquisitive eye to see that staff have an enabling attitude, they work *with* older people not *for* older people. It makes a world of difference to how older people live.

## Aged Care and Housing Partners



The recent funding available through both NRAS and the stimulus package has favoured registered housing associations in most states. Although the funding available to the housing sector has been very significant, in general housing associations have insufficient land that is available for development. As a consequence they have been seeking opportunities to work with organisations that have compatible values and land they wish to develop.

In this context there appears to be good potential for collaboration between the aged care and housing sectors. To inform such developments, ACSA has been searching for examples of good practice where a housing association has partnered an aged care provider with positive outcomes for both.

Our recent conversations with the peak body for housing associations, the Community Housing Federation of Australia (CHFA) has indicated that Harmony Village in Shepparton was one of the pioneers in such partnerships.

Harmony Village is a retirement village built alongside an aged care facility. Dousta Galla, a well known Victorian aged care provider partnered with Common Equity Housing Limited (CEHL) to deliver this innovative project. CEHL was established in 1986 and is a company owned by 105 voluntary housing co-operatives. CEHL is large and owns approximately 2,000 dwellings around the state that are leased to the co-operatives.

At the heart of the Shepparton project, CEHL project managed and financed the construction of 60 retirement village units on Dousta Galla land. CEHL then retained 8 units for its member cooperatives and the other 52 units were occupied from older people from the local area under a DMF arrangement. Dousta Galla now owns, coordinates and manages Harmony Village on an ongoing basis. CEHL retains the ability to nominate their CERC members for its 8 units that are sprinkled throughout the Retirement Village. CEHL was awarded the 2007 Master Builders of Victoria award for the “Best Integrated Housing Development” for Harmony Village. The award encompassed the landscape features plus the design and ease of living for residents in retirement.

The development was built to meet the demand for ageing residents in the region and to provide integrated community housing as part of a total lifestyle package. The project was a win-win for both organisations both at the financial and operational level. Just as importantly, it has been a success with the local community and models how collaboration between aged care providers and housing associations can be beneficial for both.

## Housing: What Older People Want

*Following a National Shelter series of housing roundtable consultations with older people in April and May, Roland Naufal provides an overview on what people said they regard as most important in housing, the full draft of the report is available by emailing [roland@4clivingwell.com](mailto:roland@4clivingwell.com).*

Every forum demanded that we acknowledge that the diversity of need amongst older people requires a diversity of responses. To respond to this diversity, older people want to be engaged in their planning for their own futures. They appreciated the roundtable consultations and being involved in this level of discussion and insisted that this should occur in all facets of housing planning.

At a very basic level, older people want the cost of housing addressed. A large number of older people on fixed incomes are struggling to pay the rent or mortgage as the price of utilities and council rates continue to increase. Many older people are spending a large proportion of their income on housing and don't have sufficient money left for food, social activities or health care needs. Older people want affordable housing.

For many older people, the location of housing is critical. Housing needs to be located close to public transport, family and local services. Older people want to be able to age in place. However, for many older people this related to wanting to remain in their local community and was less about the house than its location. People want to remain close to their friends and family, to be able maintain those relationships that are most important. When housing is developed away from these assets, older people move away from their social capital and are more likely to become socially isolated and less able to address key health care needs.

The design of housing is an important issue for older people. All groups recommended new homes should have universal design features such as wider hallways, accessible bathrooms, open plan kitchens and living areas and level entry to houses. Strong support was also voiced for innovative approaches to housing for older people such as the Dutch *Apartments for Life*, intentional communities or housing for older people located on top of shopping centres. Many older people would like sustainable housing for future generations and to be able give back to these generations through environmentally friendly housing.

Unsurprisingly, older people don't want to be live in dull, tiny rooms. They want space for their friends, family and carers to come and visit, where genuine interactions can take place as well as space for their personal belongings. Many of the older people believe this is not possible in a one bedroom flat, but some like the idea of a one and a half bedroom flat as a compromise.

Older people discussed their need for security within the home they are living as well as security of tenure. They do not necessarily want a gated community but would like a better sense of security to put their minds at ease, to enable them to feel more comfortable and happy within the place they are living.

Older people want choice. This includes choice about the people they could live with; such as younger people, or people of different cultural backgrounds. Some want mixed communities; others would like to live with people of their own age or background.

A key message from the roundtable forums is that everyone is different, yet older people are frequently stereotyped as frail and needing solutions developed for them by experts. This patronising approach to addressing older peoples' needs was demolished by the range of ideas put forward by the active, passionate and expert older people who attended the roundtable consultations.

## **South Australian Research**

Flinders University and ECH (a member organisation) have recently released a research report that echoes the findings of the National Shelter roundtables. The report concluded “that current market trends in the provision of housing for older people often fit poorly with the needs and aspirations voiced by older South Australians.” Interestingly this research found that a significant number of participants expressed a preference for purpose built aged housing that is provided in a community setting, usually individual units in small clusters of up to 10 dwellings. They did not embrace the prospect of living in a large retirement village.

The findings of the Roundtables and the South Australian research challenge Governments, the Retirement Living Industry including aged care providers, and planners to develop a range of creative housing options based on these expressed desires. Can we respond?

