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Q1

Name of organisation

Disability Advocacy Network Australia (DANA)

Q2

Your name

Liam Thatcher

Q3

Position

Advocacy and Policy Officer

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Q10

Describe the experiences of people struggling to access affordable and suitable housing in the context of your organisation's work.

People with disability face significant and substantial additional barriers to accessing a home and are disproportionately represented in homelessness and social housing statistics. We hear from our membership of disability advocacy organisations that a lack of affordable, accessible housing is leading to a crisis for many people with disability. Housing makes up a very large amount of the requests for assistance that advocates receive. Advocates assist people with disability to:

navigate the complex process to join a public housing waitlist (and ensure that a person is flagged as a priority if eligible) when experiencing home insecurity,

navigate homelessness services that may not be accessible in a crisis,

assist to resolve issues between landlords and tenants (including social and community housing authorities); and

(otherwise) attempt to help people who are living in unsuitable, insecure, or inappropriate housing.

Given the volume of this work housing is a common systemic concern of advocates. Many of the issues experienced by advocates in supporting people with disability are outlined in:

DANA's submission to the National Housing and Homelessness Plan, October 2023: <https://www.dana.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/181023-Housing-and-Homelessness-Plan-For-Submission.pdf>

Joint statement by Inclusion Australia and People with Disability Australia and DANA August 2022: <https://www.dana.org.au/housing-statement-22/>

This discussion transcript, July 2022: <https://www.dana.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/DANA-Submission-Advocates-Discuss-homelessness-5-July-2022.pdf>

Q11

Describe the flow-on impacts of the housing crisis in the context of your organisation's work.

Often people who are homeless or living in insecure housing will have more trouble accessing vital disability and health supports, or other essential services, due to not having a stable fixed address to apply for or receive supports.

The real threat and fear of homelessness can also contribute to people with disability remaining in unsafe housing, including in situations of family or intimate partner violence and coercive control, or in poor quality, neglectful or abusive supported accommodation, whether in segregated group homes or exploitative boarding houses or supported residential services/facilities, with inadequate regulation and oversight.

Having limited or no access to housing, or being restricted to inaccessible or unsafe accommodation can lead to a myriad of problems, including deterioration of an individuals' health, wellbeing and relationships. This will ultimately lead to increased demand and need from people with disability in crisis overwhelming the disability advocacy sector and other not-for-profit services, and government funded or operated systems of support.

Q12

Describe how current policy settings impact housing affordability and access to housing from your organisation's perspective.

Current policy settings entrench the disproportionate poverty, marginalisation and disadvantage of homeowners, private renters and tenants with disability.

Though voluntary approaches have existed, there has been a failure for many years for housing construction standards to mandating suitable levels of universal design, adaptability and accessibility. Though progress has been made in the amendments made to the National Construction Code, two large jurisdictions have not yet committed to implementing these minimum standards in new housing:

(See <https://www.buildingbetterhomes.org.au/index.html>)

This means that people with specific access needs are extremely limited in options in the private market and in social housing.

Something advocates regularly observe is disputes between public or community housing authorities and the NDIS about who should pay to make changes to a property to accommodate the accessibility needs of a tenant.

Q13

Describe what actions your organisation believes should be taken by governments to most improve affordability and access to housing.

Advocate for a greater level of support for people with disability in homelessness services, address the dramatic shortfall in social housing, ensure that people with disability are not discriminated against in the private housing market, and ensure there are pathways to home ownership. Given the urgency of this situation, governments should be prepared to take drastic action to regulate the cost of private rentals in the short-term in addition to efforts to build more social housing over the long-term. Other short-term measures should include increasing the Disability Support Pension and Jobseeker payments, which are at such a low rate that they exclude their recipients from most of the private market.

DANA also provided a submission to the National Housing and Homelessness Submission, which reflected on the urgent need for further government intervention at all levels. This stresses the need for much greater levels of investment in social housing, as well as direct market intervention in the private market that many are now forced to rely on. <https://www.dana.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/181023-Housing-and-Homelessness-Plan-For-Submission.pdf>

Q14

Respondent skipped this question

Is there anything else your organisation would like to share with the Commission?
