

**Submission
No 21**

TENANCY MANAGEMENT IN SOCIAL HOUSING

Organisation: Action for People with Disability Inc.
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Position: Executive Officer
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ACTION

FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

a northside advocacy group

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8th December, 2014

Committee Manager
Public Accounts Committee
Legislative Assembly
Parliament of NSW
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Sir/Madam

Please find enclosed our brief, due to time constraints and the high level of individual critical situations that we are currently supporting, submission to the Inquiry into tenancy management in social housing.

After consulting with people with disability and their families, we are relaying their request to have direct input, through public meetings, into the issue of improving tenancy management.

Action looks forward to hearing the results of this inquiry.

Yours faithfully



CHRISTINE AGIUS
Executive Officer

To: The Committee Manager of the Legislative Assembly Public Accounts Committee

Inquiry into tenancy management in social housing

Terms of Reference Relevant to this Submission:

- the cost effectiveness of current tenancy management arrangements in public housing particularly compared to private and community housing sectors;
- the range and effectiveness of support services provided to tenants in social housing;
- outcomes for tenants from current tenancy management arrangements; and
- possible measures to improve tenancy management services.

Submission

August, 2014

**ACTION FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY INC
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Introduction

This submission has been prepared following a short time of consultation with the some members of Action for People with Disability Inc. (*Action*), and with people with disability and their families who are currently residing in social housing and people with disability who are awaiting provision of social housing in *Action's* region.

Given the short time frame for responses to this inquiry, we were not able to undertake a high level of consultation regarding the issues. Our submission is also based on our experience in continual provision of advocacy for people residing in social housing.

The work of Action for People with Disability Inc. is based upon the following vision:

Action is committed to the belief that people with disability have the same rights as all other citizens and that their physical, emotional, educational, economic and social well-being is best met in environments which:

- Reflect rights rather than privilege
- Aim to include rather than segregate
- Reflect the status of people with disability as valued citizens
- Ensure that people with disability are included and treated with respect and dignity
- Are the most advantageous for people with disability and do not impose inappropriate restrictions

Action has 36 years of experience in providing a high level of effective advocacy and support for people with disability and support to their families in the northern metropolitan region of Sydney. *Action* was formed by families of people with disability in 1978 to promote and protect the rights and wellbeing of people with disability.

We are submitting to the inquiry through our knowledge and experience of a regional advocacy and support agency for people with disability of all ages.

The inquiry

Feedback from people with disability and their families has been disappointment that this inquiry is being held and they have expressed a high level of concern at the possibility of the tenancy management being undertaken by the private sector.

People with disability and their families have expressed concerns that they have been prevented from making informed submissions due to the lack of information made available to them regarding the proposed actions of NSW State Government following this inquiry and the lack of information regarding the safeguards, check and balances and processes that would be required to be followed if the tenancy management were to be allocated to the private sector.

People with disability and their families would have preferred an opportunity of making their submissions with specific points in response to what will be planned after this inquiry is closed. Their responses would have been based on their years if not decades of experience with the private sector in regards to housing. This wealth of experience would have been used to respond to specific actions/processes planned by NSW State Government and this opportunity will not be afforded following the closure of this inquiry.

Submission:

Our experience is that initial documentation and financial information and directives that are provided to people with disability prior to them commencing their rental payments is provided in a more timely manner by Housing NSW than by community housing.

Our further experience is that the approval of the installation of required physical disability aids, including hoists, is provided in a more timely manner by Housing NSW than by community housing.

There is a dearth of vacant social housing in NSW with thousands of people on the waiting list, including those being provided with 24 hour care by parents aged in their 80's and many being supported by sole parents.

For families supporting a person with disability and requiring one of the scarce four bedroom social housing accommodations, NSW State Government is paying over \$1,000 per week in private rental of properties due to the lack of real growth in social housing in NSW.

The implementation of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) will exacerbate this situation as there is no 'bricks and mortar' component within the NDIS. Thousands of people with disability, many of them in critical situations, are waiting now for the provision of permanent supported accommodation in NSW. In reality, with no funding for new and purpose built accommodation in the NDIS, the only opportunity of these people moving into a vacancy will be following the death of, or moving to an aged care facility for, another person with disability.

The majority of families supporting a person with disability in their family home, due to their continual and high level of support provision, do not have the opportunity of earning a salary that would enable them to purchase accommodation for their family member, and to date, they have relied on an allocation of funding from NSW State Government to the relevant Department, at this time Family and Community Services (FACS), to build new accommodation or to provide assistance for private rental of a property. This will not be the process following the implementation of NDIS and the families of people with disability will increasingly be making application for social housing for their family member.

People with disability and their families with whom we consulted stated their belief that the private sector will not manage tenancies that will have to be crisis driven due to the current critical level of unmet need of accommodation for people with disability in NSW. Many people with disability are only provided with accommodation upon the death of their aged parent. The majority of allocation of vacancies in permanent supported accommodation for people with disability at this time is crisis driven, with many people currently living in interim accommodation inappropriately in respite houses.

People with disability must also be provided with housing in reasonably proximity to transport, education and programs. The concern for the families of these people, including those with high and complex support needs, in the management of tenancy is the question of capacity of the private sector to prioritise tenancy on need and risk, rather than on financial expediency. A high number of people with disability and/or their families experience negative responses from

the private sector when they apply to rent properties, often based on the lack of knowledge or fear of property damage by the letting agent or the property owner and this experience is the basis of their belief that tenancy management of social housing would be a regressive step for them or their family member.

Another issue is the query of the expertise of the private sector in disability support in the management of tenancy in comparison to that currently experienced by people with disability and their families.

It is Action's experience that a person with disability and/or their families are better supported through their engagement with Government social housing providers who have the expertise of eliciting information to assist in making referrals to additional appropriate support services or have the knowledge of networks of support within their local regions.

People with disability and their families with whom we consulted stated their belief that the private sector will not afford them the valuable referrals that are currently and readily provided to them by their social housing agency, due to the motivation of financial gain.

Another concern is a lessening or complete exclusion of input of tenants to tenant participation projects and access to tenancy support service within social housing due to the financial focus of the private sector.

For people with disability, the issue of their tenancy management in social housing is far more complex than just the financial issues in comparing current management and private sector management.

People with disability and their families who are tenants of social housing report greater satisfaction, better levels of wellbeing and better outcomes in the sustaining of their tenancy.