

**Submission
No 24**

OPTIONS FOR ESSENTIAL WORKER HOUSING IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: People with Disability Australia

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13 September 2024

Ms Ashley Kim
Committee Manager
The Legislative Assembly Select Committee on Essential Worker Housing
NSW Parliament

Delivered by email to EssentialWorkerHousing@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Dear Ashley

Essential Worker Housing

Thank you for the opportunity to submit to the Select Committee on the issues and options for essential worker housing in NSW.

People With Disability Australia (PWDA) is Australia's national peak disability organisation, representing the 1 in 6 Australians with disability. We are the leading disability rights advocacy and representative organisation and the only national cross-disability organisation representing the interests of people with all kinds of disability. We are a not-for-profit and non-government organisation, and our membership is comprised of people with disability and organisations primarily constituted by people with disability, including the [PWDA Board](#) and many members of [our staff](#).

Our Work

PWDA co-chairs the **Building Better Homes Campaign** with the **Physical Disability Council of NSW** (PDCN) where we call on all States and Territories in Australia to adopt the National Construction Code for all new dwellings, which includes the

mandatory **Livable Housing Design Silver Standard**. This standard provides a minimum level of accessibility for people with disability, reducing the need for expensive modifications to enable access.

We have called for **inclusive housing and employment**, and for the measurement of progress towards this outcome in NSW to be incorporated into the new framework for reporting the performance of wellbeing outcomes in NSW.

The opportunity

PWDA was heartened to learn that the government would be **investing \$450 million** to build new apartments for essential workers in Sydney. However, the announcement specified that this housing would be for "...nurses, paramedics, teachers, allied health care workers, police officers and fire fighters..." and no mention was made of the need for similar housing in other locations.

All housing must be accessible

People with disability work, or are qualified to work in, all areas of government, essential services and allied health, so we call on the NSW Government to ensure that all essential worker housing is built in conformity with the National Construction Code and **Silver Livable Design Standard**. Building to the Silver Livable design standard adds less than 1% to the cost of building homes according to Australian Building Codes Board modelling, but this is far less than it will cost to retro-fit these homes.

People with disability are already excluded from much of the housing stock in NSW, due to inaccessible design, which often cannot be affordably modified. This housing discrimination can have the effect of excluding people from taking up or maintaining employment opportunities. We recommend the development of a standard pattern book of accessible home designs via the **NSW Government Architect** for use during the development of these homes and beyond.

Defining an essential worker

PWDA calls on the NSW Government to widen the definition of an essential worker. Nurses, paramedics, teachers, allied health care workers, police officers and fire fighters

are all critical to our society. However, staff and care workers in the disability, aged care, childcare and social services sectors are as critical and essential, however their average pay rates are lower.

Housing affordability is a critical problem with median Sydney rent rates at **\$745 per week**. Affordable rent is **no more than 30% of a person's income**, according to the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute's settings. Based on this measure, a person would need a salary of \$116,220 for \$745 per week to be an affordable rate of rent.

The table below compares average annual salaries for full time employed workers, at the beginning of their careers (where this is able to be identified), based on publicly available information in September 2023 – sources are linked. The workers are ranked from the highest pay-rate to the lowest, in order to identify who may have the greatest difficulty securing housing. However, no worker's salary meets the level needed for median Sydney rents to be affordable.

Role	Average annual salary
Paramedic	\$107,500
Teachers – new graduate	\$95,000
Fire fighters	\$85,000
Social services – social worker	\$84,812
Allied health care workers	\$84,500
Probationary constable	\$80,733
Nurse in Sydney	\$80,000
Disability support worker in Sydney	\$68,242
Childcare worker in Sydney	\$60,189

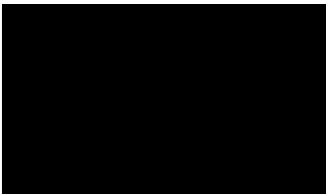
SCHADS Award NSW – Level 1, Year 1	\$50,211
Aged care level 1 employee	\$47,366

Where essential worker housing is needed

Whilst PWDA welcomes measures to address housing affordable in Sydney, across NSW workers struggle to access accessible, affordable housing. We are aware of difficulties recruiting and retaining staff in disability, aged care, childcare, social services including domestic and family violence- due to the unavailability of affordable housing in NSW. Where housing stock is: limited, built based on older less accessible designs, or has been reduced by fires and flooding- this has an even more pronounced impact on recruiting and retaining essential workers.

Together with our peers at Domestic Violence NSW, and the NSW Council of Social Service, we call on the NSW Government to plan for, and ensure, that accessible essential worker housing is developed across the whole of NSW.

Yours sincerely



Megan Spindler-Smith
Acting CEO
People with Disability Australia

