

**Submission  
No 64**

## **OPTIONS FOR ESSENTIAL WORKER HOUSING IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

**Organisation:** Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association of NSW Inc.

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# MDAA submission response to: Legislative Assembly Select Committee on Essential Worker Housing

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This submission is produced by the Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association of NSW Inc. (MDAA) for the Select Committee on Essential Worker Housing.

### **About MDAA**

MDAA is a state-wide advocacy service for all people with disability, their families, and carers, with a specific focus on people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) and non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB). We aim to promote, protect, and secure the rights and interests of people with disability, their families, and carers in NSW with the view to empower communities through systemic and individual advocacy, advocacy development, capacity building and networking, as well as industry development and training.

MDAA is guided in our work by national and state legislations namely, but not limited to, the United Nation Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), the National Disability Service Standards, Disability Discrimination Act, Anti-Discrimination Act, and the Disability Inclusion Act. MDAA respectfully implements the human rights framework and social justice principles, exercising fairness and equity, and combating violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation. The essence of the social justice principles is that no consumer seeking assistance is excluded because of their background.

### **About this Submission**

MDAA welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback to the Select Committee on Essential Worker Housing. This is particularly so following our recent submission into the new framework for reporting the performance of wellbeing outcomes in NSW where we focus on Housing as a priority. As discussed in that submission, MDAA intends to stress the importance of ensuring that new social housing developments prioritise accessibility.

MDAA joins other peak disability organisations in calling NSW to adopt the National Construction Code for all new dwellings, which includes the mandatory Livable Housing Design Silver Standard. We stress the importance of NSW joining almost all other states and territories in Australia in adopting the Silver Liveable Design Standards in the 2022 National Construction Code when building new accommodation.

We also call for the Government to broaden their definition of an essential worker to include front line services, who made the importance of their roles particularly clear during COVID lockdowns.

**a) Establishing an appropriate definition for essential worker.**

Nurses, paramedics, teachers, allied health care workers, police officers and fire fighters much like those working in disability, aged care sectors, domestic and family violence, and child care, play a vital role in the function of our society. Ensuring that the latter group are included in the definition for essential workers, particularly considering their lower rates of pay, is critical in addressing the needs of our communities.

With an average annual salary between <\$50,000 to <\$70,000 for disability, child care and aged care workers, housing unaffordability is an increasing concern for workers in these industries. It is also becoming increasingly difficult to recruit staff in these sectors both in and outside of Sydney, creating greater vulnerability and sustainability of other social support systems.

**b) Identify options to increase housing supply for essential workers, including but not limited to investigate reforms that promote fiscal sustainability, innovation and essential worker housing in-perpetuity.**

**Liveable and accessible housing standards**

One in five Australians live with disability working in all areas of allied health and essential services. Working off this knowledge, it is imperative that all essential worker housing is designed with accessibility principles from the outset.

Further to this, Australians from CALD backgrounds and collectivist cultures continue to hold larger family structures, as well as preferencing and adopting family caring responsibilities. We stress the necessity of considering essential workers who may be living with disability or caring for a family member with disability. Not doing so will undoubtedly exclude a number of essential workers from access to the Government's efforts in delivering affordable housing.

On this note, MDAA celebrates the Government's announcement to invest \$450 million to build new apartments for essential workers in Sydney but eagerly awaits the expansion of this plan to other areas. This would help families and individuals stay close to their community and support networks, which is crucial for many CALD communities.

Importantly, MDAA continues it's call to the NSW to join all other states, excluding WA, to sign up to the mandatory Livable Housing Design Standard as part of the National Construction Code. The mandatory Livable Housing Design Silver Standards are not onerous and include seven core design elements:

1. A safe continuous and step free path of travel from the street entrance and / or parking area to a dwelling entrance that is level.
2. At least one, level (step-free) entrance into the dwelling.
3. Internal doors and corridors that facilitate comfortable and unimpeded movement between spaces.
4. A toilet on the ground (or entry) level that provides easy access.
5. A bathroom that contains a hobless shower recess.
6. Reinforced walls around the toilet, shower and bath to support the safe installation of grabrails at a later date.
7. Stairways are designed to reduce the likelihood of injury and also enable future adaptation.<sup>1</sup>

The Australian Building Codes Board modelling for these standards shows it will only add about 1% to the cost of a new build<sup>2</sup>, and research shows it would be 22 times more efficient than the inevitable home modifications in the long-term.

### **Recommendations**

We thank The Committee's efforts to investigate planning tools and resources that might be drawn on to increase essential worker housing across NSW. In these efforts we stress the need to:

- 1) Include disability support and aged care workers, domestic and family violence frontline staff and child care workers in the Governments definition of essential workers for the purposes of this scheme.
- 2) Ensure all future building are accessible and in compliance to the mandatory Livable Housing Design Silver Standards.

MDAA thanks the committee for considering the feedback within this submission and would welcome the opportunity to further work with the NSW Government to ensure that the housing is accessible to all essential workers to ensure the functioning, safety and wellbeing of our communities.

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<sup>1</sup> Livable Housing Design Guidelines, LHA Silver 2020. Available at: <https://livablehousingaustralia.org.au/lha-silver/>

<sup>2</sup>Building Better Homes 2024. Available at: <https://buildingbetterhomes.org.au/new-south-wales/>