



Joint Statement:

MS Australia & Young People in Nursing Homes National Alliance

Immediate - 22 December 2009

**ACCESSIBLE HOUSING INITIATIVE WELCOMED
BUT STILL MORE WORK TO BE DONE**

A state government initiative which could see Victoria lead the nation in mandating a Universal Housing building code has been warmly welcomed by MS Australia and the Young People in Nursing Homes National Alliance.

A Regulatory Impact Statement (RIS) has today been released examining ways to mandate improved housing design to cater for people with mobility issues including the elderly and people living with disabilities.

The proposals within the RIS would see changes to building codes to include:

- Clear pathways from the street to a level entry within the home/residence
- Wider doorways and halls
- Suitable toilets for people with limited mobility
- Reinforced bathroom walls to allow grab rails to be fitted inexpensively if they are needed after the building stage is complete

Mr Robert Pask from the MS National Advocates Program has congratulated the State Government on leading the nation in introducing much needed changes to the design and building process.

“We know that one in five Victorians are affected by mobility issues and this statistic is only going to increase with an ageing population,” said Mr Pask.

“Buildings should adapt to people, people shouldn’t have to adapt to buildings. By making these small, inexpensive changes it will allow elderly people and people living with disabilities to stay living in their own homes for longer,” he said.

Dr Bronwyn Morkham, National Director Young People in Nursing Homes Alliance said the initiative is a step in the right direction for young people who have been inappropriately housed in aged care nursing facilities, “This Christmas we have young people living in aged care nursing homes because of a lack of appropriate housing.

“This initiative gives young Victorians with disabilities the chance to have lives worth living in the community at last” she said.

Mr Pask has warned that while the RIS is a positive move forward, there is still plenty of work to be done “The RIS has highlighted some fundamental changes that need to be introduced however we hope that through the public consultation process, more vital changes will be considered such as lipless showers”

“We hope that the building industry will also welcome this initiative through the understanding that there are thousands of people who stand to benefit from these small, inexpensive changes,” said Mr Pask.

Members of the general public are welcome to make comment on the RIS and further information can be found at <http://www.dpcd.vic.gov.au/>.

Case study

Jane Ruggieri has lived in a period home in Pascoe Vale South for the past 11 years, however four years ago when Jane’s MS symptoms left her in a wheelchair she was forced to reconsider her living situation.

“Moving was not an option. I knew that finding a home with the modifications I needed would be near impossible. But modifying my home also seemed like such a big job,” said Jane.

Four years on and Jane has spent thousands of dollars and is still battling to get her home modified so that she can access all of the rooms in her house and shower without assistance.

“It just seems too unfair that along with everything else I have to deal with, I have daily battles with accessing my own home.

“The frustrating thing is that small changes could be made at the design stage which most people wouldn’t even notice, but which would make literally a world of difference to me.

“It’s not just people with disabilities, but older people too who are going to have problems accessing their homes and the homes of their friends and family when their movement is restricted” said Jane.

Jane’s story is representative of most people living with impairments. Unpublished research into people with living MS in Australia found that the average cost for house modifications in a five-year period was close to \$40,000, with over 90% of the cost being borne by individuals.

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