

Open Letter to Minister Cook, Minister for State Development, Jobs and Trade; Tourism; Commerce; Science

23 September 2022

Dear Minister,

RE: LIFTING ACCESSIBILITY STANDARDS FOR NEW HOMES IN THE NATIONAL CONSTRUCTION CODE (NCC) UPDATE 2022

Following our letter to you on the 24 August 2022, we note that at the Building Ministers Meeting on 26 August 2022, the governments of Victoria, Queensland, the ACT, Northern Territory, South Australia and Tasmania all agreed to adopt updated accessibility standards in the National Construction Code (NCC) 2022.

We note with disappointment that this leaves Western Australia alongside New South Wales as the only two states to not adopt the standards.

There are hundreds of thousands of Western Australians living with mobility impairments, including people with a disability, many of our ageing population and others who have suffered an injury. Research shows that 75 per cent of these people are living in a home that doesn't meet their needs. For some people that means not being able to access the bathroom, for others it can literally mean being trapped inside their homes.

The social costs of this are clear: isolation, reduced ability to work, increased risk of injury, lack of ability to age at home, and overall negative impacts on people's health and well-being. But there are also significant economic costs that come from a lack of accessible housing stock, including significant additional costs to the health and hospital sector, to aged care and the community services sector.

The Aged Care Royal Commission specifically highlighted the issue, recommending "[a]s a matter of priority, [that] governments should work together to increase accessible housing, including private rental housing and social and affordable housing, for the ageing population".

Given this reality, we would like to express our disappointment that that there is no current commitment from the WA Government to implement the accessibility standards in the NCC 2022 update nor to establish a timeline to do so.

While we acknowledge current challenges in the building and construction sector, the decision to delay implementation indefinitely in Western Australia will lead to inconsistent national standards which is a poor outcome for business and for the community.

We, as a collective group of disability, ageing, injury prevention and housing groups in Western Australia, would like to understand the reasoning behind the WA Government not committing to implementation along with the majority of states and territories.

The community wants these standards in place, the housing industry is seeking consistency with the rest of the country which has adopted these standards and the WA Government has previously indicated it supports increasing the number of accessible houses being built to cater for our community.

It is significantly more cost effective to include these standards in the construction of a new home rather than retrofit them later. Every day we delay the adoption of these standards only passes the eventual and high cost of retrofitting on to the consumer or the government.

To benefit everyone, we are seeking a clear timeline for the introduction of the NCC 2022 accessibility standards in WA. We would welcome the opportunity to work with the State Government to overcome real and perceived barriers blocking a pathway forward.

Signed,

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CEO, Shelter WA



Brendan Cullinan
CEO, People with Disabilities WA



Louise Giolitto
CEO, WA Council of Social Service



Peter Hobbs FRAIA
Board Chair,
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Michelle Blakeley
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Christine Allen
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Coralie Flatters
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Paul Coates
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Sandy Lukjanowski
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John Bouffler
Executive Director, Community
Employers WA



Mary Butterworth
CEO, Developmental Disability WA



CC: Hon Don Punch MLA, Minister for Disability Services and Hon John Carey MLA, Minister for Housing