



Victorian Universal Housing Alliance

Platform

The Victorian Government has said that it is serious about enhancing Victoria's liveability and improving the sustainability of the built environment. But until it regulates for universal housing – housing designed to be used by all people to the greatest extent possible – the Government will not have made Victoria's housing 'five-star' sustainable and liveable for all Victorians.

The inappropriate design of most housing makes it unsuitable for many people. Families with children in prams, people with a temporary or permanent injury or a chronic illness and anybody who has ever moved house will have been inconvenienced by narrow doorways, curved staircases and steps to the entrance of the house. Building houses with some simple universal design features makes them liveable for everyone, regardless of age, family needs, or the changes a person may experience during their lifetime. It also means that they are visitable by everyone, regardless of age or ability.

While there is already considerable unmet need for universal housing, the most urgent need comes from Victoria's ageing population. According to Victorian Government projections, by 2031 around one quarter of Victorians will be over 65. Many of these people will acquire some sort of mobility impairment, as the likelihood of these increases with age. Most will want to live independently in their own homes, in their communities, for as long as possible.

It's internationally accepted that well-designed housing reduces the risk of injury, ill health, and institutionalisation. Badly-designed housing however costs government – and taxpayers - millions of dollars each year in hospital admissions, home care, early aged care admissions and expensive modifications, many of which would be unnecessary if houses were built to universal design standards. These costs will blow out over coming years if we do not 'future-proof' our housing now.

The housing market has failed to provide enough universally-designed housing to meet the needs of our population currently, and cannot by itself provide sufficient universal housing to account for future demographic change. Overseas experience shows that

adopting elements of universal design into planning and building codes is one of the most successful strategies to future-proof housing. For example, the United Kingdom's "Lifetime Homes, Lifetime Neighbourhoods" Strategy sets out a plan for all housing to be built to a universal design standard within five years. In Victoria, several councils have developed planning amendments to increase the amount of housing in their areas that meets a universal standard, but many are still waiting for state government approval.

Acting now to increase our stock of universally-designed housing will benefit Victorians of all ages and abilities, and will enable us to meet the needs of our population in future. An objective of at least one quarter of Victoria's housing meeting a universal design standard by 2031 is realistic and achievable as long as regulatory measures are implemented which apply to all new housing and to major home renovations.

The minimum low cost/no cost features necessary for housing to be liveable, visitable and adaptable by people of all ages are:

1. A clear pathway to a step-free, well-lit entry with access to street/car parking
2. Appropriate lighting evenly distributed throughout the house
3. Identifiable light switches, controls and handles in easy-to-reach places for someone sitting or standing
4. Reinforced walls in the bathroom, shower and toilet
5. Wide doorways and corridors
6. A straight staircase adjacent to a load-bearing wall
7. Slip-resistant flooring
8. Open-plan kitchen, lounge and bathroom with step-free shower
9. Open-plan room on entry level that can be used as a bedroom
10. Accessible toilet and bathroom on entry level

The Victorian Universal Housing Alliance calls on the Victorian Government to ensure that at least one quarter of all Victoria's housing will meet a universal standard by 2031 by:

- **Developing a Universal Housing Standard which includes the above features as minimum**
- **Immediately implementing regulatory measures applying the Standard to all new housing**
- **Progressively implementing regulatory measures applying the appropriate elements of the Standard to major home renovations.**

The Victorian Universal Housing Alliance is auspiced by:



Alliance members at 22nd September 2008 are:



Alliance members at 22nd September 2008 (continued).



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