



Media Release

BILL SHORTEN MP

**Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children's Services
Parliamentary Secretary for Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction**

Tuesday, October 27, 2009

National Dialogue Agrees to Improve Accessible Housing Options

Participants in a National Dialogue on Universal Design have agreed to work together towards a national approach to promoting Universal Design and to provide Australians with a greater range of homes.

Universally Designed homes are those which include features which meet the changing needs of occupants across their lifetimes, as they age or acquire a disability.

Participants in today's dialogue, convened by Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities Bill Shorten and held at Kirribilli House in Sydney, unanimously agreed that more work was needed to make Universally Designed homes more available and to educate the community about their benefits.

Mr Shorten said the agreement showed the strong support for the principles of Universal Design and its role in making housing more accessible for people with disability.

"I would like to thank all participants in today's dialogue for their contributions, and their desire to find a way to improve provision of Universally-Designed housing," Mr Shorten said

"People with disability face serious challenges when finding housing that meets their needs.

"Universally Designed homes, which are built for the whole of the population to live in for their whole lives, give people with disability greater independence and choice about where they live.

"A lot of great work has been done in universal design, but the building industry and governments need to work together to make this kind of housing more widely available.

"Today we began a much needed discussion, with some excellent ideas to tackle the effects of the rising prevalence in disability, and Australia's ageing population."

Representatives at the forum included those from disability organisations, as well as representatives from the building industry.

They were:

- Amelia Starr; National Convenor, Australian Network for Universal Housing Design

- Rhonda Galbally; Chair, National People with Disabilities and Carers Council
- Ivan Donaldson; General Manager, Australian Building Codes Board
- Graeme Inness; Race and Disability Discrimination Commissioner, Australian Human Rights Commission.
- Michael Small; Senior Policy Officer, Disability Rights Unit, Australian Human Rights Commission
- David Waldren; General Manager-Carlton Brewery, GROCON
- Rod Fehring; CEO, Lend Lease Primelife
- Mike Zorbas; General Manager Government Relations, Stockland
- Ron Silberberg; Managing Director, Housing Industry Association
- Peter Verwer; Chief Executive, Property Council of Australia
- Wilhelm Harnisch; CEO, Master Builders Australia
- David Parken; CEO, Australian Institute of Architects
- Chris Lamont; Group Manager, FaHCSIA
- Dougie Herd; Executive Director, Office of the Disability Council of NSW
- Angela Jurjevic; Executive Director, Housing and Building Policy, DPCD (Victoria)
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Representatives unanimously agreed on the need to codify a national approach to Universal Design which would incorporate:

- The value of universal design to the community
- A definition and a set of principles of 'universal design'
- What its features are in relation to housing.

The forum expressed a commitment to form a high-level working party to achieve substantial progress within six months.

It was agreed that there is a need to work closely with industry and the community, including around education and training. It is understood that all participants need to be included and that change won't be instantaneous.

As an aspirational goal, all new homes will be of agreed universal design standards by 2020, with interim targets and earlier completion dates to be determined for some standards.

Australian Bureau of Statistics research shows that between 1981 and 2003, the number of people with a disability more than doubled from 1.9 million to 3.9 million.

The ABS estimates that the number of Australians with disabilities will continue to increase through the first half of this century, due to the ageing of Australia's population.

Mr Shorten said he hoped builders and developers would expand the range of Universally Designed houses and apartments in recognition of this growth.

"A few simple design features, such as a reinforced bathroom walls, and easy-to-operate windows can make a home suitable for a person with a disability at minimal cost."

"For builders, that means their potential market is expanded."

“Homebuyers today recognise that environmental sustainability is an important factor in buying a new home.”

“We need to ensure that consumers become aware of the importance of ‘social sustainability’ as well, and the advantages of having a home that can be easily adapted as they age or if they acquire an impairment.”

The full statement of the forum is as follows:

There was a clear consensus about the critical nature of the issue of universal design.

‘Universal’ means designing Australian homes to meet the changing needs of their occupants across their lifetimes.

We all agree that we need to provide Australians with choice about housing design and work harder to explain the benefits of universal design. In other words that universal design is about making life easier for young families, people who have short term injuries, as well as senior Australians and people with disability.

We agreed on the need to codify a national approach. This would incorporate:

- 1) The value of universal design to the community*
- 2) A definition and a set of principles of ‘universal design’*
- 3) What its features are in relation to housing, of which there is already a fair amount of recognised consensus.*

We agreed it is important to have a national approach, in other words the code should apply nationally to allow harmonisation across the country.

The code will deal with the minimal or basic solutions to design, through to more aspirational features for homes. Essential elements on which consensus was achieved are: wider doorways and passages; wet areas, such as bathrooms, on an entry level; and reinforced bathroom walls to allow grab rails to be easily fitted in the future.

More than 15,000 public and social housing dwellings are being built under the Rudd Government’s economic stimulus plan that incorporate universal design features. This will provide important feedback about universal design and lessons for the future.

It was agreed that there is a need to work closely with industry and the community, including around education and training. It is understood that all participants need to be included and that change won’t be instantaneous.

Everyone is committed to forming a high level working party to achieve substantial progress in the next six months.

Part of the document to be developed by the group will be technical in nature and will be accessible to designers, builders and consumers.

As an aspirational target, all new homes will be of agreed universal design standards by 2020, with interim targets and earlier completion dates to be determined for some standards.