



Purple Orange

New standards for accessible housing benefit us all

Most houses and apartments in South Australia do not have basic accessibility features and there are currently no requirements in place for new builds. This **severely reduces the availability of suitable housing options for people living with disability** and **fails to prepare our state for the needs of our ageing population**. It also prevents these same people from visiting family and friends who live in houses they cannot access.

The updated **National Construction Code 2022 aims to address this injustice** through the introduction of some low-level mandatory accessibility standards for new residential construction projects based on the Livable Housing Design silver standards. Adhering to higher standards would remain voluntary.

The Code is updated every three years through a comprehensive process led by the Australian Building Codes Board (ABCB), which involves extensive research and consultation including considering the costs of changes. Although the **South Australian government participated in this process, it has declined to implement the changes**. In contrast, Victoria, Queensland, Tasmania, the ACT, and Northern Territory have all indicated their commitment to do so.

South Australia's decision **undermines the intent of its disability inclusion legislation**, the *Disability Inclusion Act 2018*, as well as **Australia's obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**. In 2019, the UN Committee that monitors the implementation of the Convention urged Australia to introduce mandatory standards for new and extensively renovated housing to address the widespread inaccessibility problems and to fulfill our obligations.

In the lead up to the state election, JFA Purple Orange is calling on all parties and candidates to **commit to implementing as mandatory the recommended changes to standards for new builds within a broader long-term funded plan to address the current housing crisis** in South Australia. Failing to do so **will continue to disadvantage people living with disability** in finding suitable housing and prolong another barrier that impedes their participation in mainstream community life for the benefit of us all.

JFA Purple Orange is an independent social-profit organisation that undertakes systemic policy analysis and advocacy across a range of issues affecting people living with disability and their families.

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The 2020 study 'Lived experience and social, health and economic impacts of accessible housing', conducted by the University of Melbourne's Dr Ilan Wiesel, highlighted the broad range of consequences of inaccessible housing. Almost **one third of respondents** to the study's questionnaire indicated it had **led to the loss of a job, a missed work opportunity, reduced work hours, or reduced productivity**, while more than **80 per cent** agreed or strongly agreed that they **cannot visit family or friends' homes due to inaccessibility**.

The **requirements of the updated Code address only basic access needs** that make residential properties easier to enter and navigate in and around, as well as ensuring further adaptations can be made later to suit a resident. Examples of these basic requirements are at least one entrance without a step, a ground level toilet, handrails on stairs, and reinforced toilet walls so grabrails can be added if needed.

The cost impact of the changes has been widely misunderstood or exaggerated. Indeed, during the ABCB process, various housing industry stakeholders provided vastly different figures, suggesting unreliability in their estimates. **Short-term cost impacts will be minimal** in the context of overall construction budgets, particularly for operators with strong building and design expertise, and these will be **reduced or eliminated once accessible building plans and materials are standard**. In any case, as the Centre for Universal Design Australia has pointed out, **the cost to retrofit these features is at least 20 times higher compared to doing so as part of the initial build**.

Furthermore, the existing pressures within our current housing market are particularly impacting the rental market and **exacerbating the difficulties for South Australians living with disability in finding suitable affordable housing**. The government's recent commitment to new beds for the Transition to Home program for people living with disability who cannot otherwise be discharged from hospital because they do not have suitable housing, demonstrates how **the lack of accessible housing in South Australia severely impacts other vital services**.

A long-term housing plan for South Australia should have the twin objectives of **increasing the availability of accessible dwellings in the private market** through the implementation of the new mandatory Code and **investing significantly in new accessible affordable social housing** to address the current shortfall. Meeting these objectives would ensure that South Australians living with disability have far greater opportunities to find a suitable home, while also strengthening the housing sector more broadly as our population ages.

A proper home is **a key foundation of improving life chances** for people living with disability, central to claiming their rightful place as valued and active members of our communities. We call on all parties and candidates **to commit to:**

- **Implementing the updated National Construction Code 2022** in South Australia including **making the new silver standards for accessibility mandatory for all new builds** in line with the transition arrangements of other states and territories
- **Producing a long-term fully funded housing plan** for South Australia to address the current housing crisis including through **investing significantly in new accessible affordable social housing** to address the current shortfall

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