Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into Specialist Disability Accommodation service delivery through Housing ACT

Submission number: 08

Submitter: National Disability Services ACT (NSD ACT)

Date authorised for publication: 13 April 2026

National Disability Services

Submission to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and Administration

Inquiry into Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) Service Delivery Through Housing ACT

April 2026

Accessible format

National Disability Services (NDS)

National Disability Services (NDS™) is Australia's peak body for disability service organisations, and Australia's biggest and most diverse network of disability service providers. Our valued members collectively operate several thousand services for more than 300,000 Australians with disability and employ a workforce of more than 100,000 people. NDS is committed to a sustainable and diverse disability service sector, underpinned by the provision of high-quality, evidence-based practices and supports that strengthen, safeguard and provide greater choice for people with disability in Australia.

Acknowledgement of Country

NDS acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Custodians of the lands, waters, and skies where we live, learn and work. We pay our respects to Elders past, present, and future and honour the enduring cultural authority, knowledge systems, and Ways of Knowing, Being and Doing that continue to strengthen communities across Australia.

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Executive Summary

National Disability Services (NDS) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the ACT Legislative Assembly inquiry into Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) service delivery through Housing ACT. NDS is Australia's peak body for disability service organisations, representing providers delivering supports and housing to people with disability, including those with the most complex support needs.

This submission addresses matters relevant to the committee's terms of reference, including the underutilisation of National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) funding for SDA; delays and barriers to home modifications, repairs and maintenance; and systemic governance and accountability issues affecting disability housing outcomes in the ACT. It examines the ACT Government's role as landlord, asset manager and service partner, and the interface between territory housing responsibilities and NDIS-funded supports.

While the introduction of the NDIS and SDA created significant opportunities to improve housing outcomes for people with extreme functional impairment or very high support needs, these opportunities have not been consistently realised in the ACT. Drawing on national and ACT-specific data, provider evidence and lived experience, this submission identifies a persistent disconnect between policy intent and lived outcomes.

Key issues include the lapse of Housing ACT's SDA provider registration; ongoing underutilisation of SDA funding; limited transparency regarding reinvestment of equivalent own-source revenue; and chronic delays in essential repairs, maintenance and accessibility modifications. This submission does not allege misuse of NDIS funding; it identifies missed opportunities and weak accountability mechanisms.

Evidence demonstrates that many Housing ACT owned dwellings used for supported accommodation fail to consistently meet basic standards of safety, accessibility and habitability, resulting in adverse impacts on tenant wellbeing and unsafe working conditions for support staff. Addressing these issues is essential to meeting the ACT Government's emerging human rights obligations and ensuring public funds are used effectively to deliver safe, accessible and dignified homes for people with disability.

The disability sector stands ready to work constructively with the ACT Government to address these issues.

Context

The role of the NDIS

The NDIS forms one part of the disability ecosystem, supporting Australians and their families to ensure those living with disability can lead a fulfilling life. The NDIS was designed to complement, not replace, other services for which the states and territories are responsible, including housing. (NDIS Quarterly Report, Q2-2025-26, pg 71)

The NDIS plays a significant role in addressing housing and homelessness issues for people with disability in Australia. While the primary focus of the NDIS is to provide support and services to people with disability, its impact on housing and homelessness is indirect but substantial. This currently includes:

- Funding for SDA
- Improved Access to Support Services
- Personalised Plans
- Addressing Specific Needs
- Transition Planning
- Funding for Home Modifications
- Support for Accessibility Equipment

**See Appendix A for a description of each of these areas.*

While the NDIS contributes to improving housing outcomes for people with disability, there are still challenges and gaps in the system. The NDIS primarily focuses on support services and funding, whereas housing policies and construction standards, as well as the availability of accessible and affordable housing, are typically managed by state/territory and local governments. Coordination and collaboration between the NDIS and housing agencies is essential to create comprehensive solutions for people with disability seeking housing stability. (NDS Submission: National Housing and Homelessness Plan;2024)

What is SDA and how does it work?

SDA is the *capital* component of the NDIS that fund's purpose-built dwellings for participants with **extreme functional impairment or very high support needs**, requiring providers to be registered and dwellings to be **enrolled** and **certified to the SDA Design Standard**. SDA funding flows to providers (not participants) to ensure supply of safe, accessible housing.

Australian governments that are providers of SDA do not claim the service provision in the same way a private provider does. Instead of 'claiming' reimbursement Australian governments provide in-kind support, which is then offset against their negotiated jurisdictional contribution to the NDIS (reducing what they pay to the Commonwealth to operate the Scheme).

SDA was introduced to the NDIS in 2016. Its introduction was to address the priority need for purpose-built housing for approximately six (6) per cent of NDIS participants.

Human Rights (Housing) Amendment Act 2025

In September 2025, the ACT government passed legislation to recognise housing as a human right in the ACT from 1 January 2027.

Recognising a right to housing acknowledges and protects the importance of housing to safety, dignity, privacy and autonomy. It recognises housing's role in providing the material goods that make these things possible, and its inclusion in our laws can lead to a fairer and more equal Australia now and into the future. (Right to Housing Report, pg2) It also reinforces the importance of landlords meeting their obligations to their tenants. (ACT Ombudsman Report, pg4)

This sets a clear **human rights baseline** against which SDA and more broadly disability accommodation delivery must be assessed. There are seven essential elements of adequate housing as a right, they are:

1. Legal security of tenure
2. Availability of Services, Materials, Facilities and Infrastructure

3. Affordability
4. Habitability
5. Accessibility
6. Location and
7. Cultural Adequacy

Each of these elements is of equal importance, however, in the context of Housing in the ACT in 2026, it is essential to draw attention to what constitutes habitability as outlined in the Right to Housing Report.

- Housing must meet basic standards of safety and quality, protecting the occupants from physical threats (such as heat, damp, or structural hazards).
- As habitability requires safety, residents must be safe from domestic and family violence for the condition of habitability to be satisfied. (pg4)

ACT Housing Strategy October 2018 and Snapshot June 2024

The ACT Housing Strategy opens with a statement from the Minister for Housing recognising secure housing as fundamental to wellbeing, participation and safety, while acknowledging that people on low incomes and those facing disadvantage continue to be left behind by the housing market. The Strategy affirms the ACT Government's commitment to intervening where the market fails and positions housing as a priority area for innovation in management, design and ownership.

The Strategy sets out five goals, of which three directly or broadly address housing needs for people with disability, and one includes specific reference to SDA. **Goal 1** seeks an equitable, diverse and sustainable housing supply. **Objective 1F** commits to well-designed, environmentally sustainable and accessible housing, with a focus on universal design and accessibility standards to support people with disability and enable ageing in place.

Goal 3 focuses on strengthening social housing assistance. **Objective 3B** recognises that a significant proportion of social housing tenants are older people or households living with disability and commits to renewing ageing stock with adaptable, accessible and energy-efficient dwellings. Associated actions include delivering purpose-built housing with access to transport and amenities and continuing public housing renewal programs.

Goal 4 aims to increase affordable rental housing. **Objective 4E** includes targeted programs and seed funding to support innovative housing developments, including SDA, and commits to working with the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA), the development sector, and people with disability and their families to facilitate SDA delivery under the NDIS.

As detailed in the ACT Disability Strategy Annual Report 2025, Housing ACT continues to make home improvements to its asset base; “across 2023 and 2024 more than 470 homes had a disability modification made to it.”

However, on reviewing the ACT Housing Strategy – 5-year Snapshot June 2024, it is difficult to ascertain exactly what has occurred that supports improvements in the provision of safe, accessible and affordable housing for people with disability who reside in supported accommodation services, under a historical service provision.

Social Housing and the disability interface (AHURI SDA report)

Although 40 per cent of social housing households include at least one person with a disability, social housing often does not fully meet the needs of people with disability due to limited supply and accessibility requirements.

The transition of housing provision for people with disabilities from state to federal levels is complex. It brought about changes and challenges to the role of the social housing sector in delivering appropriate housing for people with disabilities.

The SDA program is not designed to provide housing for all NDIS participants. To this end, it is anticipated the NDIS will provide a housing pathway for approximately 6 per cent of NDIS participants. The remaining 94 per cent are expected to secure suitable accommodation in the social housing sector, in housing provided by disability support organisations or the private housing market (NDIA 2018; 2022a; 2022b; Summer Foundation 2020). However, finding accommodation in the private housing market is far from ideal. Recent analysis shows that only 0.2 per cent of listed private rental properties across Australia are affordable for a person living on a Disability Support Pension (DSP) (Anglicare 2023).

In 2019, the community housing sector constituted one of the largest providers of SDA (Beer, Flanagan et al. 2019). More recently, private market providers have greatly outpaced the position of community housing providers (CHPs) in the direct development of SDA, with CHPs representing only 11 per cent of SDA development and ownership by 2022.

The AHURI SDA report identifies opaque and inconsistent SDA funding decisions, which undermine participant confidence and create financial and vacancy risks for housing providers. Although significant capital has been invested nationally, much SDA stock enrolled to date consists of older, pre-2016 “basic” dwellings, limiting accessibility and quality. CHPs play a pivotal role - supporting investors, managing tenancies, and navigating compliance - but face financial exposure and uncertainty due to shifting policy settings and demand data gaps.

The interface between social housing and SDA is inherently complex. Social housing systems within the ACT were not redesigned following the introduction of SDA, resulting in structural and administrative misalignment. In particular, Housing ACT did not have systems in place to readily identify whether tenants with disability were participants of the NDIS or whether SDA funding had been included in their plans.

Introduction of the Housing Australia Future Fund (HAFF) and Affordable Housing Project Fund

The Housing Australia Future Fund (HAFF) was established on 1 November 2023 by the Housing Australia Future Fund Act 2023 (HAFF Act). The HAFF is a dedicated investment vehicle to provide additional funding to support and increase social and affordable housing, as well as other acute housing needs including, but not limited to, the particular needs of Indigenous communities and housing services for women, children and veterans. The HAFF was credited with $10 billion on establishment.

In March 2025 it was confirmed that 7 projects were funded under HAFF to supply 757 homes. What isn’t clear is how many of these will be fully accessible.

SDA utilisation nationally and locally within the ACT

The number of participants using SDA has increased by an average of 6% annually over the past 2 years, while the number of participants eligible for SDA (but not yet using SDA) as at 31 December 2025 has reduced by 3% annually over the same period.

As at 31 December 2025 the ACT recorded 210 participants using SDA. At the same time there were 139 participants eligible for SDA but not using it. (QR-Q2-2025-26_0 (1).pdf Table D.10 Number of active participants plans by other characteristics as at 31 December, NDIA Q2 Report).

SDA usage in the ACT represents 1.3% of the national usage. Participants not accessing their SDA represents 1.5% of the national totals. This highlights that underutilisation is a national issue (representing 9,577 people as at 31 December 2025).

Reasons why a participant may not have SDA funding in use include:

- SDA is newly included in their plan
- they are not yet ready to move from their current accommodation
- they are still exploring options or waiting to move when a vacancy becomes available
- they may be awaiting the completion of an (identified) new-build SDA dwelling
- they are yet to locate a suitable SDA dwelling – by location or SDA type/category. (QR-Q2-2025-26_0 (1).pdf page 71)

AHURI's Specialist Disability Accommodation in the social housing sector: Policy and practice paper released March 2024, stated that participants approved for SDA payments received just over $15,000 per year on average (NDIA 2022c).

If we were to take a very simplistic approach and assume that 50 per cent of the current ACT participants not accessing SDA from their plans (139 people), are residing in ACT housing and that they would receive $15,000; that places approximately $1.04m in the market to improve, upgrade and address existing maintenance issues. Extrapolated over the now 10 years since SDA introduction to the Scheme, approximately $10m has gone unutilised.

NDS ACT has specific data obtained from two disability service providers showing:

- Provider 1: $164,235.73 for the 2025-26 year (12 participants)
- Provider 2: $400,000.00+ for the 2025-26 year (31 participants)

  ** Average is less than that identified by AHURI, $13.6k and $12.9k respectively*

We know there are other disability service providers where similar situations are occurring.

Other reasons for underutilisation of SDA in the ACT

The NDIA's Quarterly Report does not include the possible reason for not utilising SDA funding available within their plan due to the registered provider not claiming what they are entitled to. NDS and its members (and non-members) contacted regarding this inquiry believe this to be the case for a large proportion of the 139 people who are not currently claiming SDA.

The initial for-profit investors and developers' investment in SDA was for the High Physical Support Design (the highest level) and one of two configurations:

I. sole occupancy, being a 1:1 ratio; and

II. 1:2 ratio; that comprises of two bathrooms (one of which must be fully accessible) and 3 bedrooms (one of which can be standard to meet the needs of the support person).

In 2018, NDIA made a decision to restrict the number of sole-occupancy approvals (NDIA 2018) having huge implications for SDA providers of such dwellings. This decision lead to an increase in SDA vacancies, with some providers offering tenancies to SDA recipients with lower funding levels or letting them on the private rental market. This situation compromised the choice and control for NDIS participants who desired to live alone or with family members. A similar situation is occurring now with configuration ii, with the NDIA generally funding a 1:3 or 1:4-person ratio.

In the ACT, CHC recently completed a new build of units at high physical support design category in Scullin. These properties were left vacant for long periods of time and required a need to reclassify at a lower design category as there is not the number of participants funded in this level.

AHURI SDA report states, the greatest demand for SDA in the future is anticipated to be for the Improved Liveability design category which, under the current price framework, generates much lower returns than High Physical Support dwellings. As a result, Beer, Flanagan et al. (2019: 32) predicted that the majority of SDA would be delivered by the not-for-profit sector rather than the private market. (pg 35)

ACT Government Accessing SDA funding

Housing ACT registered as an SDA provider in 2017 but has allowed this registration to lapse in December 2025, for numerous reasons.

Housing ACT as a registered provider was entitled to offset the in-kind support of these registered houses against their NDIS contributions.

SDA payments contribute towards the cost of developing, operating and maintaining an enrolled dwelling.

It is highly likely that the homes leased to people with disability and or disability service providers with participants eligible for SDA would be at the “Basic” Design Category of either:

- Existing: Dwellings built before 1 April 2016 that were used as disability-related supported accommodation under a previous government scheme.
- Legacy: Existing dwellings that do not meet the requirement of five residents or less.

Given the passage of time since the introduction of SDA, it may no longer be feasible to conclusively determine whether the ACT Government claimed SDA entitlements at particular points. There is also limited prospect that unclaimed SDA funding could be retrospectively recovered through the NDIS. In this context, the more pressing issue is ensuring transparency about how equivalent own-source funding has been applied, and whether available resources have been reinvested to maintain, upgrade and improve the safety, accessibility and habitability of housing used by people with disability.

What are the real issues at hand with Housing ACT’s commitment to people with disability in meeting their housing needs?

Against this policy and funding backdrop, the following section examines the practical outcomes for tenants with disability living in Housing ACT properties. It focuses on safety, accessibility, maintenance responsiveness and engagement - areas directly relevant to the committee's inquiry into service delivery. These examples have come directly from disability service providers operating from Housing ACT properties.

Safe and accessible housing

Housing ACT states it maintains ACT-owned dwellings used for supported accommodation through its standard public-housing maintenance system, including:

- structural repairs
- building safety (electrical, plumbing, fire safety)
- lifecycle maintenance of disability housing stock.

These responsibilities apply regardless of whether the dwelling is tenanted directly by individuals or operated by a CHP or DSP under an agreement.

There has been persistent public pressure placed on the ACT government pertaining to the state of their housing stock since early 2023. The quieter, diplomatic voice of disability service providers operating services within Housing ACT properties, has been raising concerns for decades. This voice became stronger after the introduction of SDA as a funding source in 2016. A decade into the scheme, the apparent failure to utilise this funding stream has caused significant concern across the disability sector.

The sector describes ongoing, unattended major safety issues including:

Unsafe living conditions due to delayed repairs

- Mould infested dwellings
- Rising damp
- Water ingress through light fittings
- Water ingress through skylights
- Damaged and inoperable hot water systems
- Damaged tiles leading to water damage in bathrooms
- Floors not being repaired, with temporary measures in place, that include plasterboard coverings

- Leaking roofs, roof tile damage, - water running down walls and resulting in mould
- Exposed electrical wiring
- Sewage leaks and plumbing failures
- Poor drainage leading to flooding in significant rainstorms
- Delays to repairing household appliances e.g. oven

Poor security and personal safety concerns

- Broken, inadequate or non-existent locks
- Faulty fire alarms
- Poor lighting in common areas, streetlights non-existent or perpetually broken
- Lack of environmental design that discourages antisocial behaviour

Accessibility failures for people with disability and mobility needs

- Long delays (sometimes years) in installing accessibility modifications such as ramps, rails, accessible bathrooms, or widened doorways
- Homes unsuitable for ageing in place, forcing residents to choose between unsafe housing or relocation
- Inadequate consultation with tenants before or during accessibility assessments

Structural failures and building deterioration

- Collapsing retaining walls
- Cracked walls and ceilings
- Water-damaged foundations
- Driveways that are cracking and lifting

Health impacts linked to safety and accessibility failures

Providers, tenants and their families have reported that unsafe and inaccessible housing has led to:

- Worsening chronic illness
- Increased hospitalisation

- Mental health deterioration
- Financial hardship from self-funding urgent repairs

These conditions have significant implications for others, families, visitors, service providers. A lack of investment in properties is creating unsafe workplaces for those people who provide care services to tenants living in Housing ACT properties.

Providers advised that in many cases where no traction has been made with Housing ACT or their contractors that they or family members have remedied issues. Providers, collectively, have spent hundreds of thousands of dollars, making repairs to houses that fall outside of their leasing obligations to ensure the health and safety of tenants, employees and visitors.

Evidence from providers and families suggests that these delays are not isolated incidents but reflect systemic process failures and budget prioritisation decisions within Housing ACT's repairs and maintenance framework.

There appears to be a significant disconnect between commitment / policy intent and implementation mechanisms and outcomes, including the Wellbeing Framework.

These identified issues were also identified by the ACT Ombudsman in their independent review: **Falling through the gaps: How Housing ACT manages tenant requests for repairs to their homes**.

NDS notes that in the past four to six weeks a number of previously outstanding issues, primarily minor maintenance matters, have been addressed. Housing ACT has also issued correspondence to some disability service providers outlining the existing processes for requesting repairs and maintenance. While these developments are noted, communication and resolution have not been consistent across the sector.

Inefficient and ineffectual maintenance response

Disability providers consistently describe Housing ACT's repairs and maintenance processes as inefficient, ineffective and lacking accountability.

The types of disrepair are outlined above. Disability providers have provided advice and evidence that shows:

- Often multiple notifications needed to have an issue logged and responded to.

- Timeframes and expectations for repairs outlined by Housing ACT are not adhered to.
- Initial attendance by contractors to notifications is often to assess the situation or make the situation temporarily safe, with full rectification delayed for extended periods without clear communication, escalation pathways or accountability. Examples of which include:
    - In December 2022, a tree fell in a storm damaging a roof. SES fitted a tarpaulin over the damaged roof, securing it with bricks. Incident was reported. It remains an outstanding repair.
    - A leaking skylight into a bathroom, creating slip hazard for residents and staff, not to mention the damage to the ceiling, outstanding for 6 years.
    - The only hot water system in the house faulted in May, was replaced by a small portable system, that proved inadequate immediately, was not replaced until early July 2025. Residents were unable to shower properly due to the water running cold almost immediately. This situation took not only the provider to intervene on a daily basis but family guardians.
    - An oven door was not fixed (would not shut properly). The heat from the oven caused damage to surrounding cupboards. The household was reduced to microwave and cooktop meals. The Official Visitor intervened after 3 months, it was not repaired for 8 months.

The continual follow-up necessary to have repairs and maintenance undertaken places enormous and unnecessary burden on disability service providers and at times residents' family members.

The lack of response and temporary repair nature has resulted in relatively easily repaired but significant issues becoming major and more costly repair issues.

Lack of timely, respectful engagement with people with disability and those supporting them regarding tenancy issues

Disability service providers have spoken about their frustration and disappointment in the way Housing ACT and their contractors, have spoken to tenants, them and often family members of tenants.

Home is more than a physical asset

Despite all the evidence that properties owned by the ACT government and managed through Housing ACT are not fit for purpose, are not safe in many instances, and don't represent value for money, there is significant reluctance by many people with disability and their guardians to move.

The reasons are many and varied but include:

1. Home is more than the building

For many people with disability, a long-term home represents:

- safety and predictability
- personal identity and autonomy
- emotional attachment built over years or decades

Even if a home is physically run down, it may still feel **safer and more controllable** than an unfamiliar "better" dwelling. The disruption of moving can feel disproportionate to the perceived benefits.

2. Established support networks and routines

People with disability (and ageing family members) often rely on finely balanced routines:

- nearby family members and friends, or carers, support workers or neighbours
- predictable travel routes
- proximity to familiar shops, health services, or community spaces

A move, even within the same town, can break these networks and routines, creating risk to health, independence and wellbeing.

3. Attachment to place and community inclusion

Remaining in a familiar location can mean:

- continued recognition in the community
- social inclusion rather than starting again
- maintaining cultural, family, or neighbourhood ties

For some, even a small geographic move can feel like **social dislocation**, particularly if stigma or discrimination has been previously experienced.

4. Fear of losing control, choice, or security of tenure

Newer or purpose-built housing may come with:

- different tenancy terms, including increased rental costs
- more restrictive rules
- perceived or actual loss of control over daily life

Some people fear that moving could:

- reduce their ability to personalise their home
- increase surveillance or managed living
- make it harder to refuse future moves

This is especially relevant where people have experienced **forced relocations** or institutional settings in the past.

5. Mistrust based on past experiences

People with disability may reasonably distrust promises about "better" housing due to:

- past delays in promised supports or modifications
- relocations that did not meet needs
- experiences where consultation felt tokenistic

A run-down home they know may feel **less risky** than change that depends on systems they do not fully trust.

6. Uncertainty about suitability of "purpose-built" housing

"Purpose-built" does not always mean person-centred. People may worry that:

- the design suits generic needs, not their own
- assistive technology or layouts won't work for them
- the home is designed around cost efficiency rather than lived experience

Without genuine co-design, newer housing can feel imposed rather than supportive.

7. Health, trauma, and stress impacts of moving

Moving house is one of life's most stressful events. For people with disability - particularly those with:

- psychosocial disability
- intellectual disability
- acquired brain injury

  the stress alone can significantly worsen health and functioning.

In short, people with disability may stay in run-down housing not because they do not recognise its shortcomings, but because home, safety, relationships, identity, trust, and choice often matter more than building condition alone. Any successful relocation requires trust, co-design, genuine choice, and clear protection of rights - not just a newer dwelling.

SDA supply in the ACT

As noted earlier, much of the existing SDA supply in the ACT falls within the "Basic" design category and consists of ageing dwellings. More recent SDA development has tended to focus on staff-to-participant ratios that are no longer consistently funded under current NDIS settings, resulting in a mismatch between available housing, participant need and, in some cases, participant preference.

Many disability service providers continue to operate long-term supported accommodation services from these ageing properties. There has been limited investment in the renewal or replacement of this housing stock, contributing to ongoing concerns about suitability, sustainability and alignment with contemporary SDA policy settings.

There is a significant cost burden associated with newer SDA dwellings when they are managed externally to Housing ACT through a CHP or DSP. In these arrangements, the headlease charges and the mandated 33.3 per cent payment to the SDA provider often exceed the rental income that can be lawfully collected. As a result, CHPs and DSPs are required to operate these tenancies at a financial loss to house a person with disability.

Outsourced vs Insourced housing repairs and maintenance

Housing ACT has historically outsourced repairs and maintenance to Programmed Facilities Management, under a long-term contract established in 2018. The ACT governments commitment to enshrine housing as a human right in legislation, public criticism and persistent tenant complaints were potentially 3 key reasons why the government made the decision on 25 September 2025 to bring repairs and maintenance back in-house, with Infrastructure Canberra assuming responsibility when the Programmed contract ends in late 2027.

There is a hybrid model currently in place where Infrastructure Canberra is working alongside Programmed. Disability service providers report that an increased number of outstanding maintenance and repair issues have been reviewed and, in some cases, addressed in recent months. While communication appears to be improving, progress has been uneven and not consistent across the sector.

Whether the transition to an insourced model will deliver greater accountability, improved service delivery and safer housing outcomes for public housing tenants remains to be determined and will require ongoing monitoring and evaluation.

NDS recommends that the ACT Government consider an alternative service delivery model under which CHPs and DSPs are allocated responsibility, supported by an appropriate and defined budget, for minor and responsive maintenance works, while Housing ACT retains responsibility for major repairs and capital works.

Recommendations

1. Establish a Disability Housing Taskforce (Terms of Reference e)

The ACT Government establish a Disability Housing Taskforce comprising people with disability, specialist disability housing providers, DSP, CHPs, DPOs and relevant peak bodies (including NDS, ACT Shelter and the ACT Disability Caucus). The Taskforce would support the development of a Disability Housing Strategy and associated Action Plan, including measures to revitalise, fully utilise and, where necessary, redevelop Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) owned by the ACT Government to ensure it is fit for purpose and aligned with contemporary participant need. (NDS ACT Prebudget Submission 2026-27)

2. Develop a Disability Housing Strategy (Terms of Reference e)

Many people with disability need social housing, whilst others require SDA tailored to their needs. The ACT Government needs to continue its investment in community disability housing through a specific Disability Housing Strategy that identifies need, gaps and opportunities that include better use of current and development of new housing options. (NDS ACT Prebudget Submission 2026-27)

The ACT government needs to determine if Housing ACT will or will not function as an SDA provider. Where Housing ACT does not intend to undertake this role, the Government should identify and support alternative delivery pathways through specialist disability housing providers or CHPs.

NDS further considers that Housing ACT should take an active oversight role in the planning, development and approvals process for new housing developments, to ensure that the needs and priorities of people with disability are appropriately and systematically incorporated into design, location and delivery decisions.

3. **Establish a dedicated reinvestment mechanism for SDA or equivalent funding with public reporting on expenditure and outcomes to ensure transparency and accountability (Terms of Reference b, c, e)**

NDS estimates that a conservative $10m in SDA funding may have gone unutilised in the ACT since the introduction of SDA. We recommend that the equivalent underutilised SDA funding is ring-fenced for reinvestment using equivalent own-source revenue to:

- remediate critical maintenance and safety issues in disability housing;
- undertake accessibility upgrades to support ageing in place;
- ensure dwellings meet habitability standards consistent with the Human Rights (Housing) Amendment Bill 2025; and
- invest in the build of new SDA properties in line with recommendations from the Disability Housing Taskforce.

4. **CHP and DSP have responsibility for, with a defined and appropriate budget, for minor and responsive repairs.**
5. Implement all 8 recommendations of the ACT Ombudsman's report: **Falling through the gaps: How Housing ACT manages tenant requests for repairs to their homes**. (March 2026)
6. **Integrate SDA and disability housing into infrastructure planning (Terms of Reference e)**

That the ACT Government fully embed accessible disability housing, including SDA, within broader infrastructure and precinct planning, ensuring proximity to:

- accessible public transport;
- health and community services; and
- employment and social participation opportunities.

Research highlights that infrastructure planning often treats housing as a by-product rather than a core component, compounding disadvantage for people with disability.

7. **Undertake targeted research to quantify the extent of hospital "bed block" involving people with disability in Canberra, including analysis of admission pathways and the factors contributing to delayed discharge. This research should inform consideration of a time-limited pilot, developed in partnership with the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA), Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) providers and the disability sector, to improve transition pathways from hospital to appropriate housing and supports.**

Conclusion

Access to safe, accessible and fit-for-purpose housing is not discretionary - it is foundational to dignity, wellbeing and the realisation of human rights for people with disability.

NDS acknowledges the ACT government on its recent commitment to housing as a human right and the efforts taken with CHPs to deliver purpose-built housing for people with disability.

The evidence set out in this submission demonstrates a significant and persistent disconnect between the ACT Government's stated commitments, policy frameworks, legislative obligations, government systems and the lived reality of tenants with disability residing in Housing ACT properties.

It also highlights a lack of understanding by SDA developers of what housing options are being funded by the NDIS, what types of housing people with disability in the ACT want and where they want it.

The introduction of the NDIS, Specialist Disability Accommodation, and more recently the Housing Australia Future Fund, created opportunities to transform disability housing outcomes. However, the ACT's apparent failure to fully utilise SDA funding - combined with chronic maintenance failures, delayed modifications and the lapse of Housing ACT's SDA registration - has left tenants, families and service providers carrying unacceptable risk and cost.

This inquiry is not limited to whether Housing ACT should have been, or should again become, an SDA provider. It is about whether the ACT Government is meeting its responsibilities as a landlord, asset manager, service partner and duty-bearer under human rights law. The conditions documented in this submission - unsafe dwellings, accessibility failures and ineffective maintenance systems - are inconsistent with the right to adequate housing and the ACT Government's own Housing Strategy objectives.

The Committee now has an opportunity to recommend reforms that restore accountability, transparency and trust. Addressing the structural and systemic failures outlined in this submission will not only improve housing outcomes for people with disability, but also ensure public funds - whether SDA, HAFF, or own-source revenue - are used effectively and ethically to deliver safe, habitable and respectful homes for some of the ACT's most vulnerable residents.

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Appendix A: NDIS responsibilities to support people with disabilities housing needs summarised

Funding for **Specialist Disability Accommodation** (SDA): The NDIS provides funding for eligible participants to access SDA. SDA refers to housing that is specially designed to cater to the needs of people with significant and permanent disability. This funding allows individuals to access appropriate housing that meets their disability-related requirements.

Improved Access to Support Services: The NDIS offers funding for support services that can be critical in preventing homelessness among people with disability. This may include personal care and support, which can help individuals live independently and avoid homelessness.

Personalised Plans: NDIS participants receive individualised support plans that may include funding for housing-related supports. These supports can range from home modifications to assistance with daily living tasks, making it easier for individuals to maintain stable housing situations.

Addressing Specific Needs: The NDIS considers the unique needs and circumstances of people with disability when crafting their plans. This personalisation can include addressing housing concerns, like making accommodations for wheelchair access or finding housing solutions that suit the individual's disability needs.

Transition Planning: For those transitioning out of institutional care or supported accommodation, the NDIS assists in creating plans to ensure a smooth transition into independent living or other appropriate housing options.

Funding for Home Modifications: The NDIS provides funding to eligible participants for necessary home modifications. These modifications can include installing ramps, handrails, accessible bathrooms, and other adjustments to make the participant's home more accessible and suitable for their needs.

Support for Accessibility Equipment: The NDIS can also fund accessibility equipment, such as wheelchair lifts or mobility aids, to help participants move around their homes more independently and safely.

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