

Background

Due to existing housing design standards and a subsequent lack of physically accessible housing in the private sector, ageing Australians and people with short-term, long-term, or life-long illness or injury are often forced to:

- Modify their home at significant expense;
- Relocate to an undesirable residential environment such as a group home or nursing home; or
- Remain in their physically inaccessible property where they (and/or their family or non-family carers) are at high risk of injury.

In response to persistent advocacy from people with disability and their supporters, the Australian Government established the National Dialogue on Universal Housing Design (NDUHD) in 2009, to address the lack of inclusive housing in Australia. NDUHD argued for an industry-led voluntary approach over 10 years, a national guideline, and a strategic plan with the aspirational goal that "all new homes will be of an agreed Universal Housing Design standard by 2020" [1]. Owing to a perceived lack of consumer demand, however, the voluntary uptake of Universal Housing Design has been met with resistance by the housing and construction sector. This has resulted in a relatively unchanged housing landscape for many individuals who require physically accessible housing to support inclusion and participation in family and community life.



This study aimed to investigate the perceived costs and benefits to Australian society if all new homes were built to an agreed Universal Design ('Livable Housing Design') standard.

Method

An online mixed-methods survey was available for completion over a three month period. Convenience and snowball sampling strategies were used to recruit a total of 1,329 participants. The sample predominately reflected home owners and people whose housing needs are not met through the current mainstream housing system.

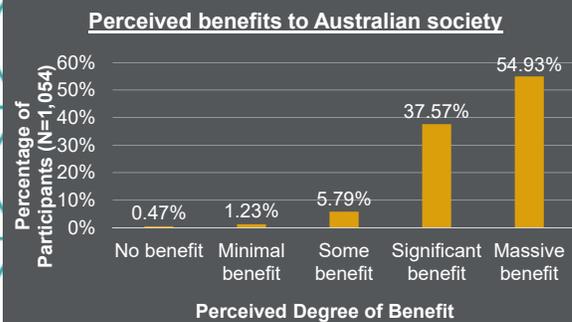
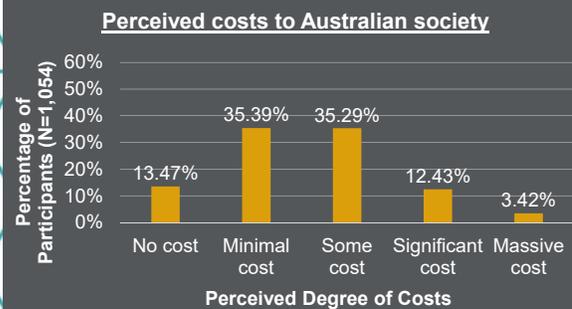
Quantitative component:

Participants were asked to indicate their perspectives on how (1) costly and (2) beneficial it would be to Australian society if all new homes were built to Livable Housing Design standards, using a five point Likert scale (i.e., no cost to massive cost; no benefit to massive benefit). Data was analysed according to frequency counts and the percentage of participants who endorsed each possible response.

Qualitative component:

Participants were asked to explain their reason/s for their multiple choice response. Data was thematically analysed using a text analysis software package, Leximancer (Version 4.5, 2016), to identify a full list of emerging concepts. Following the software-supported text analysis, a manual thematic analysis was completed by two researchers to develop overarching themes and limit interpretation bias.

Quantitative Findings



Qualitative Findings

Theme 1: Right to choice, autonomy and participation

The majority of participants were in favour of mandating Livable Housing Design standards. Participants believed that mandating Livable Housing Design in all new builds would ultimately promote the physical, psychosocial, and emotional health and quality of life of individuals and families. These benefits were perceived to relate to all Australians (either now or in the future) since "we are all ageing as well as stage of life" (Response 0324). Participants therefore suggested that mandating Livable Housing Design features would prepare individuals well for when (rather than 'if') their circumstances or needs change. Livable Housing Design was considered to be a human right, based on equality and anti-discrimination principles.

A smaller number of participants suggested that mandating Livable Housing Design would infringe on peoples' right to choose their housing design and features: "Socially boring!!! ... Lack of human-rights for individuals to choose to live in the built environment they prefer" (Response 0036).

Theme 2: Perceived financial impact of change

Participants' perceptions regarding the financial impact of mandating Livable Housing Design standards varied. Several participants believed that implementing livable design features following regulation would cost little or no more than current housing options since changes would be made during the design stage. Others believed that implementation would cost a lot more than current housing designs. As one person suggested, more space is needed regardless and "space costs money" (Response 0369). Others noted "the initial cost of changing from current designs and learning how to do things differently" (Response 0674). However, most participants believed that mandating Livable Housing Design standards would come with an initial cost, but that the cost would be outweighed by social benefits and/or recovered over time.

"[Mandating Livable Housing Design] would be of economic benefit to society - in the mid- to long-term. It would save money on expensive retrofitting. It would save on potential injuries caused by inappropriate housing. It would reduce the cost associated to people who have mobility issues having to stay in hospital due to having no accessible home to which to return" (Response 1344).

Conclusion

The majority of participants considered mandating Livable Housing Design in all new builds a cost-effective venture for Australia's housing future. The research findings indicated that any cost-benefit exercise must go beyond the immediate impacts on the housing industry and the housing market, to consider the public interest in Australia's housing infrastructure in the long-term, and the significant Government investment to assist people to be socially and economically included and to participate in family and community life. The results also highlighted the perceived need for a comprehensive education and awareness strategy to accompany regulation, so that all stakeholders understand why the regulation of Livable Housing Design is important for them, their businesses, and for a more inclusive Australian society.

References

[1] National Dialogue on Universal Housing Design (NDUHD). (2010). *Strategic plan*. Retrieved from https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/05_2012/national_dialogue_strategic_plan.pdf

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