



## **NCC Accessible Housing Options Paper**

**Submission**

**November 2018**

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## Key Recommendations

The MAV recommends that:

- Minimum standards for accessibility be implemented for private dwellings and applied to newly constructed buildings.
- The Liveable Housing Design Guidelines (LHDG) Gold Level are a suitable starting point for designing minimum accessibility requirements for housing.
- Consideration be given to where variations from the requirements should be through the National Construction Code (NCC), and where they should instead be through State provisions
- The policy parameters should explicitly include potential impacts upon housing affordability and the overall supply of accommodation

## Introduction

The Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) welcomes the opportunity to provide a response to the Australian Building Codes Board's Accessible Housing Options Paper. The MAV is the peak body for local government in Victoria. Formed in 1879, we have a long and proud history of supporting councils to provide good government to their communities.

The MAV supports the inclusion of accessibility requirements for Class 1a buildings as well as the private components of Class 2 buildings. We believe there are numerous benefits to the adoption of minimum acceptable standards of accessibility across all housing stock. Based on the preliminary costings provided in the options paper we believe these benefits will outweigh the expense. We are keen to see the further development of options and to provide comment through a Regulatory Impact Assessment process.

Noting that the application of these requirements beyond the construction of new buildings is a matter for each State and Territory to decide, we would not support a requirement that these standards be met on existing buildings in Victoria. This would impose a significant and unwarranted cost. Instead, the gradual uplift of housing stock through new construction is a more reasonable path to achieving these requirements.

We also believe it is important that industry is given a suitable lead time to build capacity to meet new performance requirements. The requirements should be bedded down in a final form well ahead of the time that they become mandatory. We are concerned that adopting them as part of the NCC in 2022 may not give builders and suppliers sufficient time to work through existing stock and ramp up production to comply with the requirements.

## **Benefits of accessibility requirements for dwellings**

### Increased housing options for people with limited mobility

As outlined in the options paper, it is believed that only a small amount of new houses meet reasonable levels of accessibility for people with limited mobility. While we are not able to quantify the gap between existing or new housing stock and where we want to be, it is clear that people with limited mobility are forced to choose between being restricted to a limited supply of housing or undergoing potentially complex, lengthy, and expensive retrofits (while acknowledging that some people may be able to access funding to undertake this through the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)).

It should also be noted that these requirements would improve the amenity and liveability of houses for people seeking to age in place, those with temporary injuries, or families with young children.

Due to the number of tenants and owners a building will pass through in its life, the likelihood that someone with limited mobility would live in a given building at some point during the building's useful life span is also significantly higher than just the proportion of the population with limited mobility at any given time.

### A more cost effective and equitable method

Where improved accessibility is sought, it makes sense to approach that in a cost-effective and equitable manner. As shown in the preliminary costings, achieving accessibility standards at construction is vastly less expensive than attempting to achieve the same through retrofitting. Using the weighted averages, retrofit is between 10 and 26 times more expensive for class 1a buildings depending on the standards sought, and between 7 and 31 times more expensive for class 2 buildings.

Sharing the burden of providing increased accessibility through gradual uplift is also more equitable than placing it solely on those with limited mobility at the point of purchase.

### Improved visitability of housing stock

For many people with limited mobility, the lack of accessibility across many dwellings places a serious constraint on their social life. Friends or families may live in houses which are inaccessible from the street, difficult to move within, or do not have accessible toilets. Gradual uplift of housing stock would remove this barrier and enable people to more easily have a full social life.

### Decreased pressure on support mechanisms

Support mechanisms such as the NDIS provide assistance to people who need to modify their home to make it more accessible. As discussed above, retrofitting to achieve accessibility standards is vastly more expensive than achieving those standards at the initial construction phase. Reducing the need to perform those retrofits by requiring housing to address

accessibility has the capacity to significantly reduce pressure on the NDIS and similar support mechanisms.

### Consistency with Class 1b buildings

While single dwellings do not currently have accessibility requirements under the NCC, Class 1b buildings such as rooming houses do. This creates a significant barrier for operators who wish to transition an existing Class 1a building to be used as a rooming house or other Class 1b building. If new dwellings were constructed with accessibility in mind, it would increase the flexibility with which the market could adapt to provide more affordable housing options when and where it is needed within the existing housing stock.

### **Response to proposed performance requirements**

The MAV supports the LHDG Gold Level as a starting point for minimum accessibility requirements.

As put forward in the options paper, we strongly recommend that any Performance Requirements adopted be quantified similarly to the existing Performance Requirements under the NCC.

We have the following comments on those Performance Requirements which were presented in the paper.

On a number of items we have noted that there may be some constraints on a site where an element should not be required. These constraints may include steep gradient across the site, particularly narrow sites, as well as sites subject to flooding. Importantly, potential of flooding should include risks of flooding over the lifespan of the building to account for sea level rise and increased intensity or frequency of weather events. We believe it is appropriate that these sites be exempted from requirements which they cannot reasonably meet.

Many homes contain multiple bathrooms and showers, and some may have additional kitchens. In this case, we believe it would be sufficient that there is at least one of each of these facilities which is designed to meet accessibility requirements and accessible from a bedroom.

Thought should also be given to “Tiny Houses”. Tiny houses can achieve a number of environmental and affordability benefits, but by their nature would be unlikely to be able to meet many of the accessibility requirements proposed.

Where exemptions are justified, thought should be given to how this could best be achieved. There appear to be three main methods of achieving this: Writing an exemption into the code, writing an exemption into State level regulations, and allowing state agencies to allow modifications to the requirements on a case by case basis. Addressing this through the policy development at a federal level may encourage a more consistent implementation across States.

Exemptions relating to the topography of the site, such as a steep rise or narrowness of the lot appear well suited to being addressed within the code itself.

Exemptions relating to issues of flooding could be handled similarly to requirements for bushfire prone areas, with the NCC flagging what requirements apply, but designation of areas liable to flooding being subject to appropriate State controls.

Case by case assessment of modifications should be pursued where there may be need for flexibility in unusual circumstances.

In some cases, the cost of achieving the Platinum Level requirements may be minimal. We believe that the Platinum Level requirements for the design of light switches and the choice of door and tap hardware should be considered as part of the RIS process.

	<b>Performance Requirement</b>	<b>MAV Position</b>
1	A safe, continuous, step-free pathway from the street entrance and/or parking area to a dwelling entrance that is level.	Supported. This is important to address not only liveability but also visitability. However, there may be sites which cannot reasonably meet this requirement and where exemptions should be considered.
2	At least one level (step-free) entrance into the dwelling to enable home occupants to easily enter and exit the dwelling.	Supported.
3	Internal doors and corridors that facilitate comfortable and unimpeded movement between spaces.	Supported.
4	The ground (or entry) level has a toilet to support easy access for home occupants and visitors.	Supported, although recommend this only be applied where there are habitable rooms on the ground (or entry) level.
5	The bathroom and shower is designed for easy and independent access for all home occupants.	Supported.
6	Bathroom and toilet walls are built to enable grabrails to be safely and economically installed (immediately or in the future).	Supported.
7	Where installed, stairways are designed to reduce the likelihood of injury and also enable a safe pathway.	Supported. However, there may be sites which cannot reasonably meet this requirement and where exemptions should be considered.

8	The kitchen space is designed to support ease of movement between fixed benches and to support easy adaptation.	Supported. The presence of a kitchen is a requirement for a dwelling under the NCC and thus it is appropriate to ensure that it be easily adapted to support someone with limited mobility.
9	The laundry space is designed to support ease of movement between fixed benches and to support easy adaptation.	Supported. The presence of a laundry is a requirement for a dwelling under the NCC and thus it is appropriate to ensure that it be easily adapted to support someone with limited mobility
10	There is a space on the ground (or entry) level that can be used as a bedroom.	Supported. However, there may be sites which cannot reasonably meet this requirement and where exemptions should be considered.
11	Light switches are located at heights that are easy to reach for all home occupants.	Supported.
12	Occupants are able to easily and independently open and close doors.	Supported.