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# ***The Right Living Space*** **A CIB/DFI Social Policy Report**



# Aims of Study

- To capture the actual experiences of people with disabilities and their families in accessing appropriate accommodation and the community supports necessary for independent living;
- To channel the voice and experience of people with disabilities, their families and the organisations working with them into the policy-making arena.



# Research Methods

- analysis of policy documents;
- a survey of voluntary/community organisations;
- focus groups (involving people with disabilities and voluntary/community organisation representatives);
- feedback from Citizens Information Services (CIS) throughout the country;
- interviews with key informants;
- identification of case examples.

# Use of Terms



- The terms ‘housing’ and ‘accommodation’ are used interchangeably throughout the report in order to reflect the complexity of need that exists across all categories of people with disabilities.
- ‘Housing/accommodation’ is understood as ‘not just bricks and mortar’ but as embracing a range of housing supports

# National Housing Strategy

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- The development of the National Housing Strategy for People with Disabilities was seen as offering a timely and significant opportunity to put the housing and accommodation needs of people with disabilities centre stage

# Categories of People with Disabilities

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- People with physical/sensory disabilities
- People with mental health difficulties
- People with intellectual disabilities
- People with an acquired brain injury
- People with Alzheimer's or other dementia



# Key Contextual Points

- The population of people with disabilities is very diverse;
- People's disability status is not fixed;
- The incidence of disability increases with age with most disability being acquired over the life cycle
- The gradual or sudden onset of disability frequently necessitates changes, sometimes major, to people's accommodation requirements.

# Contextual Points



- People with a disability often have fewer housing choices (Towards 2016);
- Lack of a strategic framework to support the provision of tailored housing and housing supports for people with disabilities (NESC 2004)
- Many people with disabilities require community-based support services which, ideally, should form part of their accommodation provision.



# Key Findings



- There is a substantial discrepancy between the aspirations and principles of Irish social policy instruments in respect of housing provision for people with disabilities and day to day realities.

# Key Findings



Stated principles of housing policy are in many instances aspirational, e.g.,

- person-centred planning,
- supports for independent living;
- accessibility,
- equality of access,
- choice



# Key Findings: Hidden Housing Needs

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- adults in family homes
- people in long stay residential settings
- people in community group homes
- people awaiting discharge from hospital
- people without accommodation(homeless)
- some people in nursing homes, for example, people with an acquired brain injury, people with MS
- people with Alzheimer's or other dementia who are not in appropriately designed accommodation.

# Key Findings



- a substantial underestimation of housing needs of people with disabilities by local authorities;
- a lack of a standardised national, transparent housing needs assessment for people with disabilities;
- people with disabilities experience difficulties in managing transitions from residential /hospital settings;
- poor levels of collaboration between housing and health authorities.



# Main Findings

- Experience of landlords in the private housing sector as often reluctant to accept people with disabilities or rent supplement/rent accommodation scheme tenants.
- In the private rented sector, accessible dwellings are in short supply.
- Rent Cap too low to cater for additional space/accessibility requirements of people with disabilities



## Main Findings

- There are instances of people with disabilities being very successfully housed by local authorities in appropriately designed accommodation – this is not universal;
- The voluntary housing sector are initiators of innovative housing provision for people with disabilities
- Good schemes have been developed;
- Access to such schemes is limited due to short supply and uneven geographical spread.

# Main Findings



## **Voluntary Housing Sector: Issues**

- Budgetary constraints (particularly for ongoing housing supports);
- Inability to purchase sites on the open market;
- Lack of design expertise;
- Lack of adequate support from statutory authorities;

# Main Findings



## House Adaptations: Difficulties

- maximum adaptation grant levels inadequate;
- difficulty in making up shortfall between the grant and actual building cost;
- problems locating builders to undertake the work;
- significant delays in processing applications;
- inadequate funding for the scheme.



# Main Findings



- Community group homes and sheltered or supported housing vital in providing long term accommodation, particularly for people with intellectual disabilities;
- Scarcity of such facilities in some areas/ only limited availability relative to demand in others.
- A significant lack of resources in this vital area of provision.

# Main Findings



## ***Supports for Independent Living***

Supports for independent living tend to be in short supply relative to need with some being vulnerable to cutbacks arising from budgetary constraints.

The dearth of social work, occupational therapy and physiotherapy services is also noted.

# Personal Assistants



- The overall funding available for PAs is insufficient.
- Many people who are getting a PA service need more hours.
- Lack of sufficient PA hours may affect a person's ability to avail of an independent housing option;
- It is difficult to get people to work as PAs on a part-time or limited hours basis.

# Personal Assistants



A person with a disability may need help to apply for, organise and put the PA service in place. This help may not always be available.

The person who needs the PA service is not always adequately involved in its design and development.

Lack of clarity about entitlements and options arising from different models of delivery in different parts of the country.

# Main Findings



## ***Accessibility: A Core Concern***

- A shortage of fully accessible accommodation
- Current building regulations fall short of delivering fully habitable housing for people with disabilities;
- Regulations are not always enforced;
- Many so-called accessible houses are not suitable for larger wheelchairs;
- The built environment continues to pose significant problems of accessibility.



# Main Findings

## ***Absence of an Integrated Approach***

- Involvement of a number of statutory agencies and the absence of adequate streamlined funding sources;
- Very difficult for both people with disabilities and their support organisations to put in place and sustain adequate integrated packages of housing provision and related supports.

# Main Findings



## ***Impact of Social Attitudes to Disability***

- Social attitudes to people with disabilities is a key factor in shaping responses to their housing needs;
- Society has not to date fully subscribed to the right of people with disabilities to live independent and autonomous lives and to form separate household units.

# Key Factors Going Forward

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- A person centred planning approach with the individual at the centre of the process;
- Equality of access to housing for all and an extension of housing options and choices accordingly;
- A commitment to the concept of independent living as a cornerstone of public policy and the provision of commensurate community supports;





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# Key Factors Going Forward

- High levels of inter-agency collaboration;
- Funding to promote innovation
- A continuum of housing provision;
- In-built progression/transition options to more independent living;
- Enforcement of high levels of design and accessibility standards



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# Key Factors Going Forward

- Information, advice and advocacy as essential components to equality of access;
- A life-cycle approach to planning social housing;
- Life-time adaptability;
- Mainstreaming at the heart of housing policy for people with disabilities;
- More mixed housing, mixed communities
- More choice of tenure and housing style



# Case Examples

- The Report contains a number of case examples which illustrate some of the issues identified and, also, some which point to good practice



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**THANK YOU**