

New technology opens door to accessible housing

- Online matching platforms could increase accessible housing options for people with disability.
- Existing accessible housing or housing that has been adapted through existing government programs could form a trusted, national matching market platform.
- Improving efficiency in matching properties with buyers or tenants could help five niche housing sub-markets.

The same technology that powers Airbnb and Uber has the potential to improve the lives of people with disability, new AHURI research finds.

Between 80,000 and 120,000 people with disability registered for the NDIS—many of whom are among the poorest in the country—are unable to find affordable and suitably equipped housing. Market matching algorithms, which match landlords and owners of accessible housing with people who want to rent or buy such properties, could help solve this problem.

The research, *Matching markets in housing and housing assistance*, was undertaken for AHURI by researchers from RMIT University and Swinburne University of Technology, and investigated five important aspects of Australia's housing market that could be significantly improved through using new online technology to match highly specific 'buyers' and 'sellers'. The researchers also considered ways that these 'match up' programs might operate.

Matching markets differ from the more common commodity markets, where price connects buyers and sellers. Finding matches in matching markets is often difficult and costly. Now online computing technology, or platforms, can reduce the search and transaction costs for buyers and sellers in these specialised sectors of the housing market.

"Currently, the accessible housing market suffers because accessible housing is not registered and people living with a disability cannot easily find what exists. Further, home owners often remove accessible features prior to selling or letting, as they are seen to lower the property's value. However for some buyers and tenants, these features are just the things they are looking for." says lead researcher, **Dr Andrea Sharam** from RMIT University.

A dynamic online inventory of accessible housing or housing that has been adapted through the Commonwealth Home Support Programme, Home Care Packages Program or transport accident agencies could become the basis for a trusted, national match making platform. People living with disability would become members of the platform and provide information on their needs and housing preferences. Strict privacy provisions would apply.

'A critical measure for such an inventory to work is the requirement for mandatory disclosure of accessibility by owners. Governments would need to regulate for this' says Dr Sharam.

'On a local, rather than national, scale, the Summer Foundation in Victoria, an advocacy organisation for people with disability, have already established a pilot project – the *Housing Hub* website, which is a register of accessible housing for rental or sale,' says Dr Sharam.

'The ability to discover the housing needs of people living with disability is also important for housing developers who struggle to obtain development finance as the depth of this market is not well understood'.

The other four housing markets the research considered are low-cost private rental housing; apartment supply for low to middle income earners; precinct-level urban redevelopment; and swaps and transfers in public housing (in the UK, the cost to government of public tenants' inability to move has been estimated at £542 million per year).

The report can be downloaded from the AHURI website at <http://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/307>

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