



Meeting the Housing Needs of People with Intellectual Disabilities:

Research and Policy Bulletin
prepared by the
Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute
UNSW - UWS Research Centre

by
Lisa Bostock, Brendan Gleeson, Ailsa McPherson and Lillian Pang
2001

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This material was produced with funding from the Commonwealth of Australia and the Australian States and Territories. AHURI Ltd gratefully acknowledges the financial and other support it has received from the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments, without which this work would not have been possible.

DISCLAIMER

Ahuri Ltd is an independent, non-political body which has supported this project as part of its programme of research into housing and urban development, which it hopes will be of value to policy-makers, researchers, industry and communities. The opinions in this publication reflect the views of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of AHURI Ltd, its Board or its funding organisations. No responsibility is accepted by AHURI Ltd or its Board or its funders for the accuracy or omission of any statement, opinion, advice or information in this publication.

INTRODUCTION

All Australian States and Territories have programmes to close or downsize institutions for intellectually disabled people. This study, by Lisa Bostock, Brendan Gleeson, Ailsa McPherson and Lillian Pang of the AHURI UNSW-UWS Research Centre, collected data on each of these programmes, to provide the first national snapshot of the projected numbers of people moving from institutions to community-based housing. It aimed to predict the effect of deinstitutionalisation on housing markets and to assess how effectively and appropriately the housing needs of intellectually disabled people were being met in the

community. The research team aimed to help policy makers, especially those in State/Territory housing agencies, to better understand the increasingly complex and challenging links between deinstitutionalisation, community care and housing for people with disabilities.

KEY POINTS

- There are approximately 6,000 people with intellectual disabilities living in institutions in Australia, although this figure should be treated with caution as definitions of institutions vary between States and Territories.
- Deinstitutionalisation appears to be slowing across most jurisdictions in Australia, with notable exceptions, such as New South Wales and Victoria.
- The separate evolution of Commonwealth funding agreements for housing, and for people with disabilities, poses a policy coordination barrier and may work against achieving stable accommodation for people with complex needs.
- A tension exists between the policy aim to be more responsive to diverse client needs, and funding constraints. Group homes, which enable support services for several clients to be pooled, provide economies of scale in operation, and are often preferred over other (more expensive) models which cater more explicitly to individual needs.
- There is an emerging need to ensure that the housing built for intellectually disabled people today is appropriate for future generations of users. Many younger people prefer individual or share housing, and service providers are aiming to better cater to individual needs. These factors could lead to increased demand for individual housing options and an oversupply of group homes in the future.
- New funding frameworks that 'tie' funding to individuals and are portable between service providers could improve individual client control and choice in housing and support.
- Greater use of the private rental market may ease cost pressures on public and community housing agencies in providing suitable accommodation to this group of people.

CONTEXT

All Australian States/Territories from the 1960s have embarked on programmes of deinstitutionalisation - the closure and/or downscaling of institutions for disabled people.

Plans by State and Territory governments for future closures or downscaling of institutions are not centrally monitored or reported. Consequently, there is no readily available Australia-wide picture of the proposed changes in the numbers of people living in institutions for people with intellectual disabilities. This information would enable more realistic negotiations between Commonwealth and States and Territories for planning and resourcing housing and disability services.

This project has examined the future housing needs of people with intellectual disabilities who have been, or will be, "deinstitutionalised". The study documented numbers of people expected to move from residential institutions into community-based living arrangements in each State/Territory, focusing on the 2000-2010 timeframe.

Key findings and policy implications are reported below.

FINDINGS

Deinstitutionalisation

Evidence from this study suggests that there are approximately 6,000 people with intellectual disabilities living in institutions in Australia. This figure must be treated with caution. It is based on definitions of institutions which vary by State/Territory and relate to different types of facilities. This compares to 8,800 people living in such institutions in 1988.

Deinstitutionalisation appears to be slowing in most jurisdictions in Australia. There are notable exceptions. Tasmania closed Australia's oldest institution for people with intellectual disabilities in November 2000. New South Wales is committed to closing all its large residential care centres by 2010. Victoria announced the decision to redevelop Kew Residential Services in May 2001.

Almost 2,500 people will move into community based housing over the next ten years if devolution plans go ahead in New South Wales. Another 900 people can expect to move to accommodation in the community by 2011 according to reports from other states.

Housing Models

These figures suggest that, at least in the short to medium term, many people with intellectual disabilities will continue to live in institutions.

For those people leaving institutions across Australia, housing options have tended to be driven by their requirements for various forms of care and support. This has led to a predominance of group homes of various types, which facilitate the pooling of support services for several clients.

In the group home model, a range of housing has been designed, modified and built to maximise the potential to pool support services. These include duplex, triplex, quadruplex and cluster developments.

Again, there are notable exceptions. Queensland has attempted to move away from group homes as the major model of community based housing, despite the increase in costs associated with this approach.

The other type of housing provided for people with intellectual disabilities is individual houses or units. This type of housing can better cater to individual needs, but is more costly to provide because support services must be delivered individually.

Differing Perspectives

i) Consumer groups: Accommodation support services must cater for many different ages of intellectually disabled people and their families. The attractiveness of the different housing models depends on the

perspective of these different consumer groups. Evidence provided by one peak organisation, People with Disabilities (NSW) Inc., suggests that many younger people with disabilities and their families would like individual or shared houses in the community.

Some parents and advocates, however, have expressed a strong preference for congregate care to house groups of people with intellectual disabilities in shared facilities. But the type of congregate facilities suggested is not like the institutions of the past. These new style facilities are based on 'sheltered village' models, cluster housing developments and 'centre-based care' - clusters of residential units established as alternatives to both large institutions and dispersed community care networks.

ii) Service providers: Another perspective is that of the State and Territory agencies which provide support and accommodation services to intellectually disabled people.

Funding constraints mean that the demand for support services is significantly greater than the supply. Within this context, pooling support services for a number of clients appears to be an economically rational option.

Agencies that provide accommodation (but not support) services to this group are not generally focussed on providing special facilities and instead look to modification and redesign of existing houses, and other means such as rental assistance to meet individual client needs.

The type of housing provided in each jurisdiction appears to depend on what viewpoint or agency is the primary policy driver - housing or disability. This means that if support services are the policy driver, economies of scale and convenience suggest that people share support services by living together in group homes. If individual housing needs drive policy, then support packages can be designed to take account of differing accommodation requirements for individuals.

The predominance of group homes suggests that in many States/Territories in Australia, support agencies are the primary policy driver.

However, there is a growing recognition in both disability support services and housing agencies that their services must become more responsive to the diversity of client need. In disability services there is a growing emphasis on providing services that are flexible.

This focus emphasises the need to tailor support services to individuals, rather than providing services that impose 'one-size-fits-all' models of support. There is recognition of adopting accommodation and support models that move beyond the group home.

It should be noted that for other client groups using housing agencies there is no suggestion that, for reasons of economies of scale or financial imperatives, people in housing need should be asked to share rooms, or to live in collectives or group homes or in clusters. This is despite the equally significant funding constraints on providing secure, affordable housing for people in housing need.

Coordination Between National Policy Frameworks

The last 15 years have seen a number of significant reforms that have reshaped social and housing policy frameworks in Australia, including a strategic emphasis on deinstitutionalisation and the restructuring of housing assistance.

The 1991 Commonwealth State Disability Agreement (CSDA) prescribed a uniform national model and emphasised collaboration between different Commonwealth/State programmes with particular reference to consultation with State Housing Authorities.

The second CSDA, released in 1998, aimed to be more enabling and to facilitate variations in service delivery within each State/Territory. However, consultation mechanisms included in the 1991 CSDA were not replicated in the second CSDA. An unintended consequence of this decision is that the second CSDA no longer explicitly requires consultation between disability and housing agencies.

The 1999 Commonwealth/State Housing Agreement (CSHA), on the other hand, explicitly states the importance of developing links with specialist programmes, which include the CSDA, in order to improve housing outcomes for those in need.

The separate development of these two programmes has meant that dialogue between the responsible agencies has lessened.

Impact On Housing Markets

At the beginning of this study it had been anticipated that deinstitutionalisation significantly affects local housing markets and that people moving from institutions have a diverse range of housing options available.

Information from this study suggests, however, that the housing experiences and choices of people with intellectual disabilities remain highly constrained. The study also reveals that the client relocation process tends to be closely managed in disability services and that the group home remains the major community housing model.

In fact, people with disabilities often cannot meet their needs for secure, affordable and appropriate housing in the private market.

With relatively small numbers of people with intellectual disabilities likely to move from institutions to community living in the near future and if similar policies direct their housing options, then it appears that deinstitutionalisation will have minimal impacts on housing markets.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- If genuine housing solutions for people with complex support needs depend on the development of working

relationships between housing and disability agencies, then there is a need for greater dialogue and information sharing between key State/Territory and Commonwealth agencies. The separate development of the CSHA and CSDA may undermine the provision of effective programmes aimed at achieving stable accommodation for people with complex needs unless Commonwealth, State and Territory health, housing and disability agencies take a more co-ordinated approach.

- Such co-ordination could improve the understanding and anticipation of deinstitutionalisation trends and address the wider issues of housing and disability support provision.
- This suggests the need for joint working initiatives. At the national level, agreements could be developed *together* rather than in isolation. This might also apply to the development of links with other specialist programmes such as the Crisis Accommodation Programme (CAP) and Supported Accommodation Assistance Programme (SAAP).
- The development of new funding frameworks that 'tie' funding to individuals (individualised funding) and are portable between service providers could improve individual client control and choice in housing and support. This would also meet agency goals to give clients more choice.
- Consideration of the issues and policy directions that bear on the inaccessibility of the private housing market might suggest ways to relieve the pressure on housing agencies to provide appropriate accommodation for this group.
- Using the private rental market to accommodate more people with intellectual disabilities may also change the tendency of agencies to concentrate people with complex needs in the same places. This could lead to greater dispersal of services throughout the community and would therefore impact on service planning and delivery across a range of policy portfolios.
- Another challenge for agencies is to ensure that housing options meet the aspirations of current and future clients while also being effective long-term investments of public money. The over-development of new group houses for currently institutionalised residents may lead to unfairness for future generations. There may be a danger that future generations of people with disabilities will be placed in these facilities in spite of their wanting individual houses in the community.
- Service agencies also need to acknowledge and integrate the views of those who are not direct users of disability services. Parents/advocates have a significant stake in disability service evolution. It will be difficult to balance tensions among different generations of parents who may have conflicting expectations about appropriate accommodation.

For more information about this research project, the following papers are available:

- Positioning paper
- Work in Progress Report
- Final Report

See www.ahuri.edu.au/research/summary/project15.html

Or contact AHURI National Office on +61 3 9613 5400