

ACT Shelter

Working together for housing justice

ACT BUDGET 2003-2004: INCREASE FOR HOUSING WELCOMED - BUT PEOPLE NEED PLACES TO LIVE

The week ending 9th May 2003 was a very busy week for the housing sector. Firstly the Stanhope Government delivered the 2003-2004 Territory Budget which contained a number of new housing initiatives. Secondly, the Government released its response to the Affordable Housing Taskforce report (see article this newsletter). In spite of our disagreement with some of the recommendations this was a sound initiative that contains some very useful background research. It also provides us some scope to do further work with groups, such as the housing industry, that we do not usually work with.

ACT Shelter welcomes the spotlight on housing and commends ACT Housing Minister, Bill Wood for raising its political profile both within the Government and the media.

It is with mixed views that we view the 2003-2004 Territory Budget. There is an increase in the housing budget - that we warmly welcome - however, we would have preferred to see the funds directed into initiatives that would have a more lasting benefit to both the community and individuals.

Increase in Funding for Homelessness

Homelessness is the big winner in this budget receiving an increased allocation of \$13.3m over 4 years. In the coming financial year, this will equate to \$1.7m for increased support services targeted to increased outreach services and single men and families in crisis. \$700,000 will be allocated to head-leasing properties from the private market to support this initiative.

From our consultation, ACT Shelter agrees with the identified target groups, however SAAP services tell us that their biggest issue is that they can't move people on from their services because of lack of affordable housing options. Shelter would advocate for a proportion of these funds to be allocated to the acquisition of long term housing to free up existing services for client intake.

Likewise we have some support for head-leasing schemes, but we believe that these

schemes have only short term application. There is no long term benefit to either the community or an individual in head-leasing schemes. Canberra rents are escalating as the private rental supply is dwindling and the outcome is that few people will be assisted in the long term.

As Government funds for housing reduce, a view is emerging that people only need short term assistance from programs such as SAAP and they can then move on to purchase their housing from the market. For some people that is true, but many others need long term assistance that can only be provided through secure and affordable housing. This is particularly relevant as employment becomes less secure and increasingly casualised.

We are told that only this year's allocation is firm and that future year's expenditure will be shaped by the outcomes of the Homeless Advisory Group. Hopefully this group will take a view that many homeless people are simply in need of secure and affordable housing and that funds should be allocated to capital acquisition of housing. ACT Shelter will continue to make representations regarding these issues.

Affordable Housing Supply

The budget documents lack detail about capital acquisition programs. The document prepared by ACT Housing appears to mix up funds for insurance replacement and other capital works with new acquisition targets.

Public housing is not targeted for an increase in overall stock numbers. A total \$8.8m (\$4.4m this year and \$4.4m next year) has been allocated on top of insurance money, to assist with the replacement of rural properties lost during the bushfires. Again Shelter is mixed about this initiative - we want to see the properties replaced, but we are also concerned that this decision pre-empt the outcomes of the inquiries into the future of the rural settlements and does not allow the views of these tenants to be heard.

Any social housing growth is targeted through community housing, however even this is not clear. \$3m is allocated to head-leasing and innovative programs. The Government appears to have great expectations that the community housing sector will be able to generate its own funds through borrowing against equity. However, from our

discussions in the sector, considerable concerns have been expressed regarding this strategy.

SACS Award

A budget highlight is full funding of SACS Award increases. ACT Shelter welcomes this initiative as it allows services to employ good staff and to target program funds where they are meant to be targeted.

Current Initiatives

Current initiatives that span a number of years have not been detailed in the papers. However we are pleased that all current initiatives, such as the Ainslie Village redevelopment, are fully committed and ongoing.

Bond Loan Scheme

The much anticipated Bond Scheme was not a budget announcement - but happily its still happening. The scheme will be announced in June or July and will be funded from ACT Housing recurrent funding. The scheme will be managed by ACT Housing.

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ACT SHELTER SAYS WE NEED MORE HOUSES - RESPONSE TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING TASKFORCE REPORT

In December 2002, the Ministerial Taskforce on Affordable Housing released its report 'Affordable Housing in the Australian Capital Territory, Strategies For Action'. (Go to www.housing.act.gov.au/AffordableHousing/FinalReport for a copy of the report.)

No timelines were set for responses to the document, but on May 8, 2003, following a motion from Green's MLA Kerrie Tucker, ACT Housing Minister, Bill Wood tabled the Government's response. Full copy at: www.dhcs.act.gov.au/pubs/Afford_housing/Affordable_housing.htm

ACT Shelter attended the consultation for the response and with a deadline of only a few days, we prepared a hasty submission. Clearly some of the Taskforce recommendations are complex, particularly those involving revenue. So while we have given in principle support to a number of recommendations, we have requested the opportunity for further input.

The following is a summary of ACT Shelter's submission to the Government response to the Taskforce report.

ACT Shelter's Response

We agree with the Taskforce finding that the supply of affordable housing in Canberra is limited and dwindling. We note that much of the data that informed the task force was compiled in 2001. It is our contention that the situation has considerably worsened since then. Industry sources were quoting a private rental market vacancy rate of under 2% in December 2002 and this has been exacerbated by the bushfires in January 2003 when the private rental market experienced unexpected and unprecedented demand and movement of public housing waiting lists was virtually halted.

The loss of temporary accommodation options, such as the Macquarie Hotel and Canberra Central Apartments has also impacted negatively on the market as people moving to Canberra for short term work contacts now take up housing that

might otherwise be available longer term for low income households.

Insufficient supply of rental housing is locking low income and disadvantaged people out of the market and forcing rents up. We agree with the Housing Advisory Committee that the Affordable Housing Taskforce recommendations that lead to an increase in housing supply be supported and immediately implemented.

In December 2002, we welcomed the Government's announcement of the restoration of security of tenure in public housing. While we welcome

recommendations that increase tenant choice, we do not support Taskforce recommendations that seek to force market renters out of their homes or out of public housing altogether. We are particularly concerned that the Taskforce seeks to blame these tenants for the failures of successive Federal and Territory Governments to maintain funding for social housing acquisition. It is our submission that these recommendations contradict the objective of supporting sustainable communities and also the Taskforce's findings on widening public and community housing eligibility. As well as contributing to the building of social capital in communities, market renters make a considerable financial contribution to the public housing budget.



For a copy of ACT Shelter's response go to www.shelter.net.au/act/

HOUSING, TRANSPORT & PARTICIPATION

Annette Wade

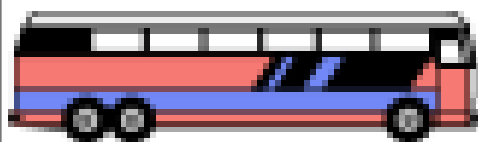
'Smogbusters', a national speaking tour auspiced by Conservation Councils came to Canberra on 5 May 2003. The following article is based on a talk by ACT Shelter's Annette Wade for the tour. Funding from the Natural Heritage Trust allowed Smogbusters to invite Meeky Blizzard, a transport and liveable communities activist, from Portland Oregon USA to address the forums. Meeky talked about the LUTRAQ (making the Land Use, Transportation, Air Quality Connection) project in Portland. See the article on page 6 for details of this project.

Housing for Low Income Renters in the ACT

In spite of having comparably higher incomes and workforce participation rates than the rest of the country, a substantial proportion of Canberra's population are on low incomes and experience housing related poverty. The ACT Government recently commissioned a Taskforce to examine housing affordability in the ACT. The Affordable Housing Taskforce found that some 9,000 ACT households to be in housing stress, ie they are paying more than 30% of their incomes on housing costs, and 30% of these households are renting in the private market¹. According to the Taskforce, the highest levels of unaffordable housing are located in North Canberra and Belconnen. It stands to reason that low income people cannot rent in the private rental market in these areas, but will do better in Southern or outer areas.

Anybody looking for rental housing in Canberra at the moment will know that the rental market is very tight. Rents are rising, there are very few vacancies and even fewer at an affordable level of rent. I have been studying vacancy levels and patterns over the last few weeks and for this talk I undertook a 'thumbnail' study of the private rental market by looking at the rental vacancies advertised in the Canberra Times on Saturday 3 May 2003. This Saturday is similar to any other Saturday in the last 6 weeks or so with the exception of the Easter weekend.

Using a benchmark of what a landlord might rent to a low income person, rather than what they can afford to pay, there were only 64 properties that



might be able to be rented to a person on a low

income. Of these there were:

- 13 properties that might be rented to a single person on a low income (up to \$160.00 per week);
- 22 properties that might be able to be rented to a single parent with one or two children (up to \$230 per week);
- 29 properties that might be able to be rented to a low income family (up to \$260 per week)

A study of the *Action Canberra Bus Map* determined that of these 64 properties only 14 properties were in areas that could be considered well serviced by public transport.

The bulk of the properties that might be rented by people on very low incomes were located in New South Wales in Queanbeyan and these were predominantly 1 bedroom flats.

In the ACT, private rental housing that a low income household might rent exists mostly in outer suburbs, while employment opportunities tend to be located near to the city centre, Fyshwick or the larger town centres.

This situation is described as **spatial mismatch** - a term that is applied when workers are separated from their places

of employment

Transport & Workforce Participation

The policy initiatives aimed at developing sustainable communities must be built on maximising inclusion, or the ability of the community to participate and make the most of opportunities available to them. Low income renters in outer suburbs are prevented from enjoying the opportunities that the rest of the community has access to. Sporadic and sometimes non existent public transport in outer areas provides a major disincentive to low income people participating in the workforce.

'Low income renters are more likely to live in areas poorly serviced by public transport.'

People who rent in Queanbeyan because of little affordable housing in Canberra may pay between \$100 and \$150 per week in rent, but they will pay \$52.00 for travel to and from work by bus. The high cost of travel is a hidden housing cost and a significant disincentive to workforce participation.

A study into housing and employment undertaken for a report for National Shelter found that the ACT labour market had changed and there is increased casualisation of employment.² Casualisation is more often found in the hospitality industry and inevitably involves increases in shift work, particularly in this industry.

Many low income workers who work outside standard business hours have to catch taxis home from work at night as on some services the last bus can be as early as 6.15pm. Other services run buses at intervals of more than an hour apart at night. The last bus from Civic to Queanbeyan leaves at about 9.00pm.

Because most transport routes are aimed at bringing people to the city centre or the major town centres, feeder services or cross town transport to places of employment is lengthy, sporadic and in some cases more expensive. The trip from many outer suburbs is unable to be timed to take advantage of cheaper transfer fares as lengthy trip and waiting times cannot be coordinated in the time allowed. This situation particularly affects parents dropping children at child care centres on their way to work.

Transport and Community Participation

In December 2002, a single parent was evicted from public housing for falling behind in her rent. She told the Residential Tenancies Tribunal that her priority was to buy a car over paying the rent as she had children and could not manage without the car.

This woman is typical of many low income tenants. Canberra is a car-centric city. Community attitudes

mean that people feel somehow dysfunctional if they do not own a car. Because of inadequate and difficult public transport or peer pressure, many low income households will enter into unacceptable levels of debt in order to buy a car to be able to manage their employment or family obligations.



Young people living in areas disadvantaged by inadequate public transport are unable to participate in sporting and other recreational activities along with their peers. Saturday and Sunday buses on some lines run at intervals of an hour or more and other services do not

run at all.

Lack of public transport at night or on weekends and other off peak times means that young people from low income households often cannot join in social activities. Unlike the children of higher income households, mum or dad may not own a car to pick them up.

Conclusion

Low income renters, or indeed low income home purchasers, are more likely to live in areas poorly serviced by public transport.

'Canberra is a car-centric city. Community attitudes mean that people feel somehow dysfunctional if they do not own a car.'

Inefficient or costly public transport is a disincentive to low income renters participating in the workforce, particularly where the employment is in a low paid industry or is casual shift work.

Inefficient or costly public transport is a barrier to the development of sustainable communities as low

income households are prevented from participating fully in community activities.

Housing policy, especially regarding the location of affordable housing, cannot be developed in isolation of transport policy.

(Endnotes)

¹ Ministerial Taskforce on Affordable Housing, *Affordable Housing in the Australian Capital Territory, Strategies for Action (2002)*

² National Shelter, *Creating the Links Between Housing, Employment and Income Support (2001)*

MAKING THE LAND USE, TRANSPORTATION, AIR QUALITY CONNECTION (LUTRAQ) - FREEWAYS OR COMMUNITIES: IT'S YOUR CHOICE

(Adapted from 1000 Friends of Oregon Information Sheet. For more information e-mail LUTRAQ@friends.org)

"Making the Land Use, Transportation, Air Quality Connection" (LUTRAQ) began as a response to a proposed new suburban freeway in the Portland, Oregon metropolitan area. LUTRAQ grew out of an understanding that one of the prime reasons for Washington County's congestion is an underlying land use pattern that provides its inhabitants with no choices in how to travel. Segregated land use patterns that isolate people from the places they need to go and development designs catering only to automobiles have given Washington County citizens no logical option but to use their cars for virtually every function of their lives.

When 1000 Friends of Oregon first floated the idea of a land use alternative to the Bypass in 1989, many were incredulous - the notion of changing what appeared to be immutable development trends seemed impossible. It was almost as if sprawl development was part of the natural law - one of the self evident truths in the Declaration of Independence (the right to life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness, and to be stuck in traffic).

Although the Department of Transportation (ODOT) was unwilling to develop a land use alternative on its own, it was willing to consider one developed by 1000 Friends.

The resulting LUTRAQ alternative became one of five alternatives that ODOT studied in the Major Investment Study (MIS) on the Bypass. To our knowledge, this was the first time in the US that a land use alternative has ever been included in an environmental document.

The final unravelling of the Bypass proposal began in the spring of 1995 when ODOT released its MIS report, showing the LUTRAQ alternative to be equal

or superior to the Bypass in virtually every category. This was followed in September 1995 with ODOT's official recommendation from the study process, calling for various smaller road improvements, but no Bypass.

Traffic and Transportation Class - City of Portland Oregon

One of the tenets of a Liveable Community is meaningful citizen participation. Since 1991, the City of Portland, Oregon has offered a university-level class on traffic and transportation policy, giving interested citizens the information and perspective they need to understand and contribute to the decisions that affect their communities and their daily lives. In the

past 12 years, nearly 600 citizens have graduated from this course. Many have worked with the City staff to craft effective solutions to contentious neighbourhood traffic issues; others continue to make significant contributions to transportation policy discussions at the local, regional and state level. For more information go to:

www.portlandtransportation.com/education/.



Cartoon by Louise & Erin, Shelter WA Social Housing Resource

National Shelter is the housing peak in Australia, advocating for low to moderate income housing consumers. The work of National Shelter is directed towards the elimination of homelessness and housing related poverty as well as ensuring every person has access to adequate, secure, affordable and appropriate housing. When National Shelter was de-funded in State Shelters undertook the role of National Shelter as well as their respective States. Since then National Shelter has convened bi-annual councils, bringing all State Shelters together to collectively discuss current housing issues at a national level.

National Shelter convened its first National Council of 2003 in Brisbane, following AFHO's Homelessness Conference during April. National Shelter took the opportunity to launch 'Re-building the Australian Dream: National Shelter Policy Platform, 2003'. The platform identifies four practical measures that can provide a basic framework for improvements in housing provision. These are:

1. A Commonwealth Housing Department and Housing Minister

National Shelter recommends that the Housing Minister be a member of cabinet so housing affordability receives the profile that it warrants.

2. A National Housing Policy

National Shelter recommends that the first priority of a new Commonwealth Housing

Department be the development of a National Housing Policy. This Policy would provide a national framework to evaluate existing programs and to identify and respond to any housing gaps. Furthermore it would incorporate

other relevant national policies, such as the National Homelessness Strategy.

3. A Target for Social Housing

National Shelter recommends increasing social housing as a key element of any National Housing Policy because it provides housing to people who have limited access to the private market.

4. An Affordable Housing Innovation Unit

National Shelter recommends that an Affordable Housing Innovation Unit be established within the Commonwealth Department of Housing. This unit would provide budget support to fund the facilitation of innovative approaches to low to moderate income housing provision.

Reference:

This article draws heavily from *Rebuilding the Australian Dream: National Shelter Policy Platform 2003*, National Shelter Publication, © 2003. For further details consult the National Shelter

Policy Platform sent out in ACT Shelter's most recent mail out.



Back Row: Gary Wilson, Shelter SA; Adrien Pisarski, Queensland Shelter; Pattie Chugg, Shelter Tasmania.
 Middle Row: Kirily Philp, ACT Shelter; Deborah Phippen, NATO; Paul Pendergast, Shelter WA.
 Front Row: Mary Perkins, Shelter NSW; and Phillip Beddell, Shelter SA.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: WHAT DOES IT HAVE TO OFFER?

Peter Cooper

Community development is probably most recognised as projects and initiatives to support developing countries or programs that deal with the aftermath of crises such as the recent bush fires in Canberra. Some might wonder what it has to do with the general Canberra community or with residents of ACT Housing. In its contemporary interpretation it has a great deal to do with everyone. Virtually everyone working in the community services sector has something to do with 'community development'.

One reason that 'community development' (CD) may be of interest to residents of public housing in the ACT is that last year the Department of Housing, Planning and Policy launched the 'Community Linkages' strategy. This program aims to achieve safer living environments, prevent people and families from being evicted, improve relationships between residents and the community and decrease poverty for public housing tenants. One component of this program is the provision of part-time community development workers for nine of the multi-unit housing sites.

In most strategies from both state/territory departments and federal government departments where engagement with communities is a component, concepts of CD and partnerships and collaboration are aspects of policy. This can be seen in a whole range of community services where service provision is being increasingly encapsulated in a CD model.

Community development has many interpretations and definitions both as a concept and as a practice. Generally it is a term that is used to describe how departments and agencies engage with communities to enhance the wellbeing of residents. Community development is often seen to be about the social wellbeing of communities but in its broadest context CD also includes spacial, environmental and economic planning and management.

Perhaps the earliest form of 'community development' was the 'missionary approach' intent on driving change according to a doctrine of external morals, values and beliefs of institutions such as churches and governments and usually viewing those receiving it as incompetent,

inadequate and deficient in the 'right' way to live. This often involved forceful intervention and strict control and management as was experienced by Aboriginal communities last century. Some may argue that we have not come very far in practice, however, conceptually, CD has come a long way from this 'colonisation of communities' model.

There is a great deal of literature on the concept, method and practice of 'community development'. This has evolved through influence by a broad range of ideas such as economic rationalist ideology that would have a focus on economic outcomes, 'systems theory' that would have a focus on policy, infrastructure and structures and systems of delivery of services; and social theory with ideas of justice, equity and participation.

This has resulted in concepts of CD that recognises strengths of individuals and groups in the community and aims to develop 'community capacity'. "The strengths perspective... posits that the strengths and resources of people and their environment rather than their problems and pathologies should be the central focus of the helping process... and is rooted in the belief that people can continue to grow and change and should have equal access to resources (Kennedy Chapin, R: 1995, *Social Policy Development: Strengths Perspective*. Social Work 40 (4) 506-514)."

Encapsulated in recent concepts of CD are ideas of resilience and sustainability, a move away from social control to ideas of working with communities rather than working 'on' communities. This acknowledges the power of institutions such as governments, government departments and

'Community Development recognises strengths of individuals and groups in the community and aims to develop community capacity.'

agencies to set and control the agenda through language, categorisation of 'problems' and their own particular policies. The contention is that to achieve sustainable social initiatives, they must be driven by the community. Integral in this is avoiding co-dependency on institutions and their ability to 'welfarise' communities.

Fundamental to the idea of CD is identifying needs and aspirations of communities. For CD workers, this means getting to know the particular community they are working with, developing trust and facilitating aspirations and initiative. Often entailed in this is an idea of community mobilisation.

Given all this, one might expect that there is broad discussion about CD policy and implementation, about infrastructure support such as resourcing and training, about systems and approaches to undertaking 'needs assessment', about rationale of government policy, about funding structures and duration of funding and about the nature of partnerships and collaboration between communities, service providers and government departments, and between government departments. From my experience this has not been the case.

Perhaps motivated by lack of discussion and a sense of professional isolation and with a clear intention to explore "how we can do better together", in late March, twenty five people from non-government organisations, departments and the community met to discuss the potential and benefit of establishing a 'Community Development Network for the ACT and Region. The meeting was organised by Southside and Northside Community Services (both non-government organisations), ACTCOSS and Community Education Studies, University of Canberra.

A focus of discussion was on "strengthening linkages at the grass-root level" with a contention that CD is arguably a central objective and theme for the community sector as a whole, and is an important dimension of the work of most community organisations. Yet in a complex, busy and rapidly changing environment of service purchasing and provision, it is sometimes hard to maintain a focus on community development, or to even clearly define what it is. There is also a

perceived lack of opportunities for sharing experiences and ideas among community development practitioners."

Another area of discussion focused on "linking community development with the 'bigger picture' with a contention that "the ACT Government is in the process of developing a 'Social Plan' – and there is also a plethora of other processes for developing plans, strategies and policies in specific social areas (eg health, housing, disability services etc). Yet the link between these processes and the community development work carried out on the ground is often unclear.

The group looked at:

- What can be done to strengthen useful information sharing and collaboration among community development practitioners?
- What other strategies might be employed to support more effective and cohesive community development?
- What are the opportunities and constraints to making effective linkages between community development and broader social planning?
- What collaborative strategies might be employed to that ensures that CD can contribute to relevant policy development?
- What actors need to be involved for this to happen?

The group in April established a number of working groups to develop terms of reference for a structure, a group to look at mapping of community development activities in the ACT and a group to look at providing more professional development for workers.

For residents of ACT Housing there is the opportunity right now, at least in the nine multi-unit sites across the ACT, to gain benefit for themselves and their neighbourhoods through linking with existing programs. For workers in CD there is the opportunity to be better resourced and supported by others in the sector.

Peter Cooper is Community Development Program Manager, Southside Community Services. Southside Community Services manages 'Community Linkages' CD projects in Red Hill and Oaks Estate.

'For residents of ACT Housing there is the opportunity right now to gain benefit for themselves and their neighbourhoods through linking with existing programs.'

ADAPTABLE HOUSING

'Adaptable Housing', also called 'Housing for Life', is housing that can accommodate anybody. It allows for diverse needs, lifestyles and age groups - for the present and the future. The term 'Adaptability' is used to describe a structure that has the ability to be modified at minimum cost to suit the changing needs of the people in the house. The functions of a house don't change; we eat, sleep and spend our private lives in them. What does change over time is our lifestyle and needs. Some of us may wish to run a business from home; others, as we grow older may want to look after our grandchildren, or may need assistance from carers. Either way, living in an adaptable home gives the assurance that we may not unnecessarily need to move to another more accommodating residence.¹

Adaptable Housing = Housing for Life

When people think of 'Adaptable Housing' they generally think of issues like accessibility and circulation spaces for people with disabilities, and/or handrails in bathrooms and toilets for the elderly. However, these considerations should be planned in all housing, as standard practice, with the provision to add handrails or simply modify the construction as required at minimum cost and disruption. In fact, the principles that apply to good design for the elderly usually apply to all the other groups, such as young families with prams.¹

Benefits of Adaptable Housing

1. Tenants are more likely to be able to remain in their existing homes, rather than having to move out or do extensive renovation, if a family member develops a disability.
2. All tenants find it easier to bring in baby strollers, grocery carts, heavy furniture, kid's tricycles, laundry trolleys.
3. Re-sale of government homes is enhanced in an era where senior demographics are growing rapidly.
4. Adaptable features cost little up front - unlike the higher after-the-fact cost of renovation for widening doors and adding ramps.
5. These features are also usually easy to construct, visually unnoticeable, and allow increased flexibility in renting homes.

Who needs Adaptable Housing?

Anybody who is planning on growing old! Like it or not, the reality of ageing is it can make some everyday things, such as stepping into a bath or bending down to a ground level power point,

increasingly difficult. Homes that are built today are most likely to still be in use in 50 years time. By then, 26% of the population will be over 65 years, and more than 2 million people will be over 80 years. Inferior design in today's social housing homes will add significant costs to future governments as they struggle to modify their homes so tenants can continue to live in them with

Imagine this....

'You have just come home after a month-long hospital stay following a car accident. Your broken hip will eventually be as good as new, but in the mean time, you must use a wheelchair for the next six weeks. Your brother has carried you up the three steps to your front door, and has now left you to your own devices.

In due course, you need to relieve yourself. You push into the bathroom and with horror, realise that the wheelchair won't fit through the door to the separate toilet...²

safety and dignity.

Every 10 minutes, someone in Australia becomes severely or profoundly disabled - most are aged between 45-64 years. At a time of illness, or traumatic injury, the last thing a family needs is to have to move, or have to modify the family home. Home modifications required to accommodate a single such disability are estimated to cost around \$20,000, while the average amount of financial assistance given to individuals to help with these modifications is only approximately \$6,500. Therefore modifying a pre-existing home to be accessible for people with a disability will incur an additional cost of approximately \$13,500.

