

MEDIA RELEASE

Urgent calls for mandated home fire sprinklers in disability accommodation as temperatures soar

There are urgent calls for home fire sprinklers to be mandated in specialist disability accommodation (SDA) as temperatures soar across the country and fire risk escalates rapidly.

This comes after a man with a disability tragically died in a house fire in a disability support home in Sydney this week and a disability carer was also charged with manslaughter following the death of a participant in a Sydney house fire in 2021.

Home fire sprinklers are currently not mandated in SDA which poses an unacceptable risk to participant safety.

On average, approximately 64 people across Australia die in preventable fires in their homes each year, and approximately 62% of these people have a disability.

The Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) Alliance is calling for home fire sprinklers and interconnected smoke alarms to be mandated for all SDA properties, with fire sprinkler systems being proportional to the dwelling size and fire risk.

"For people living with disability in SDA, fire sprinklers are vital: this is because a person living in SDA will require more time and assistance to evacuate the building," says Jeremy Hope, SDA Alliance CEO.

"Most fatal home fires occur at night when people are sleeping. Fires are fast: they can become deadly in just three minutes."

"Home fire sprinklers offer the highest degree of fire protection and are critical in saving lives and property: they not only put out fires, but create a significantly higher probability of survival, extending the time all occupants have to safely escape," Hope says.

For Brisbane man Todd Winther, who lives in SDA with cerebral palsy, the thought of not having home fire sprinklers is terrifying.

"I require a lot of physical support to move around and I'd be unable to leave the house in an emergency quickly. Fire safety is really important for someone like me. I'd feel incredibly unsafe without these sprinklers," Todd says.

"For people with disability to have independence, we have to feel safe."

The SDA Alliance believes that the inclusion of home fire sprinklers in disability housing represents a best practice approach to SDA.

Chair at Home Fire Sprinkler Coalition Australia Mark Whybro says automatic fire sprinklers are not a new technology: they've been protecting property and people for more than 150 years.



“There are safe, reliable, fit-for-purpose and cost-effective sprinkler systems available to better reduce the known higher home fire risk of people living with disability,” Whybro says. “Governments, regulators, providers and industry specialists should be working together to introduce a mandatory requirement for home fire sprinklers, so we can prevent tragedies that we know are ‘preventable’”

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About the SDA Alliance

The Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) Alliance is a national peak body representing the best-practice SDA sector. Our members include SDA providers, institutional investors, developers, builders, financial institutions, allied health professionals and industry consultants. Our members make a significant impact on the lives of people with disability – by providing housing that is modern, innovative and designed to serve the needs of SDA residents.

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Additional quotes attributable to Michael Lynch, Managing Director of Synergis Fund:

“The safety of people with disabilities in their living environment is not negotiable. High quality SDA with mandated fire sprinklers is a significant mitigant to the risk of fire and provides the best possible protection for people.”

“There are still thousands of people living in older style group homes where they are at greater risk and the SDA Alliance remains committed to working with stakeholders to increase availability of high-quality SDA.”

Additional quotes attributable to Jeremy Hope, SDA Alliance CEO:

“Each year, fire sprinklers save thousands of properties across the country. Numerous Australian and international studies have repeatedly demonstrated that automatic sprinklers give occupants around a 90% improvement in surviving a typical house fire. No other single residential fire safety measure is comparable to the life-saving benefits of fire sprinklers.”

“While smoke alarms are mandatory in every home, they can only detect and warn of a fire, not suppress or control it. Home fire sprinklers detect the fire and automatically activate to suppress, control and potentially extinguish it, saving lives, injuries and property loss.”

“Home fire sprinklers are a reliable, cost-effective, and environmentally-sound solution:

- Home sprinkler systems are far cheaper than the systems installed in commercial buildings. The cost of installing a home sprinkler system into most new Class 1 dwellings is typically below \$5,000, depending on the size of the dwelling, the water supply and how many sprinkler heads are installed.
- Several options are available on the market: for example, the FPAA101D system – a Deemed-to-Satisfy solution referenced in the National Construction Code for mandatory fire sprinklers in identified Class 2 and Class 3 buildings – offers a safe, reliable, cost-effective and fit-for-purpose solution.

