



Specialist
Disability
Accommodation
Alliance

Best Practice Guide: Specialist Disability Accommodation

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Introduction

Best practice specialist disability accommodation (SDA) is participant-focussed, ethical, and relentless in its pursuit of delivering high-quality, contemporary housing.

This best practice guide has been developed based on deep engagement with SDA Alliance members and our Participant Reference Group. Our members are committed to the principles of best practice and achieving good outcomes for people in need of specialist accommodation.

This best practice guide represents an updated and expanded version of our best practice guide first published in 2024 – this version supersedes the previously published document.

The purpose of the best practice guide is to offer guidance and recommendations on several major areas of SDA including:

- Design best practice + innovation in design
- Thin markets
- Location
- Smart home assistive technology
- Protecting tenants
- Life safety and fire safety measures
- Participant engagement: design + build process
- Conflict of interest + rights and responsibilities
- Separation of housing and supports
- Service agreements with participants
- Tenancy management
- Safety and complaints process
- Choice and control + participant safety
- Self-ownership + self-provision of SDA
- Investing in SDA
- Diversity + inclusion
- Quality providers – staffing, organisational culture

This resource has been designed for SDA market players including SDA providers, institutional investors, developers, builders, allied health professionals and other stakeholders. It also includes recommendations to government on opportunities for improvement.

SDA is a complex, nuanced and dynamic sector. While this resource does not encapsulate all aspects of SDA, the SDA Alliance is committed to developing additional best practice resources to support the delivery of a thriving and sustainable SDA market.

Specialist Disability Accommodation

SDA supports National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) participants with extreme functional impairment or very high support needs. SDA is approved in a participant's NDIS plan when (amongst other wellbeing outcomes) the combined SDA and other supports would represent better value for money compared to other supports alone. Funded by the NDIS, SDA can be life changing for many people with disability.

Prioritising the best interest and safety of people with disability lies at the heart of best practice SDA: this involves adherence to relevant legislation, practices and standards including (but not limited to):

- [NDIS SDA Rules](#)
- [NDIS Practice Standards](#) and [NDIS Code of Conduct](#)
- [National Disability Insurance Scheme Act 2013](#) (NDIS Act)
- [The National Disability Insurance Scheme Amendment \(Securing the NDIS for Future Generations\) Bill](#)
- [The NDIS Rules](#)
- [SDA Design Standard](#)
- [SDA Pricing Arrangements and Price Limits](#)
- Any applicable state or territory residential tenancy legislation, National Construction Code requirements and any other planning legislation.

About the SDA Alliance

The 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.

With 73 members Australia-wide, together we:

- Represent approximately \$4.2 billion of total development costs for SDA projects
- Have delivered over 3375 homes with a further 890 under development to date
- Provide housing to 6031 people with disability

The SDA Alliance is driven by three principles: collaboration, participant choice and control and excellence & innovation.

The voices of people with disability will always guide our work and influence our strategies. By engaging with governments and other key stakeholders, we seek to improve standards and regulations and promote the provision of excellence in SDA.

Design best practice + innovation in design

Maximising participant safety and wellbeing in the design of SDA	• Understand each participant's unique needs: conduct a participant-centred risk assessment and design review processes to ensure the dwelling is safe, responsive to individual needs, supports independence, and remains adaptable over the participant's life course. • Commit to ongoing quality improvement in the design of SDA. An example includes managing a Design Change Register – a document which captures all lessons learnt throughout the entire design and development process. • Ensure fire sprinklers and occupant warning system (i.e. interconnected smoke alarms) are fitted into all SDA properties, with fire sprinkler systems being proportional to the dwelling size and fire risk. • Ensure compliance with the National Construction Code, SDA Design Standard, SDA Rules and any other relevant legislation, policy and practices. • Ensure safety procedures are in place which have been designed specifically for each site/dwelling and occupancy. • Consider the scale of SDA dwelling congregation to ensure large numbers of SDA dwellings are not constructed in a single location/cluster. The SDA Alliance recommends: Apartments - The total portion of SDA apartments within an apartment complex shall not exceed 10 tenants or 15% of the total apartment complex. - The number of SDA apartments per storey are spread evenly across all levels of an apartment building. Houses/villas - A maximum number of 10 participants on one cluster/project ought to be introduced. (A cluster/project is defined as collocated SDA, unbroken by other housing, on one or more titles.) - In instances where the upper limit is exceeded, the project should enable mixed-tenure, community-embedded, choice-driven housing options (i.e., salt and pepper with non-SDA residents). - Group homes (housing four, five or more participants) should not be enrollable in the future.
NDIA SDA Design Standard: supporting innovation in design +	• The SDA Design Standard is developed to offer clear, unambiguous guidance on design requirements and compliance, while also being appropriately flexible so the SDA market can create dwellings which support participant needs and promote choice and control. The balance between rules and guidelines is critical, as flexibility can foster innovation and participant choice, but without sufficient clarity and safeguards it can also lead to inconsistent interpretation and poor practice.

SDA market: offering bespoke designs	- Flexibility within the SDA Design Standard is important to address participant needs which depart from the SDA Design Standard (e.g., when co-designing purpose-built homes for participants, supporting bariatric participants, responding to the needs of individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds). Recommendations for government action: - The NDIA needs to establish a mechanism/process for exemptions which allows for variations to the SDA Design Standard across all design categories: this would enable SDA providers to seek advice and deliver proposals/receive approval for person centric changes and innovative design types. A variation/innovation pathway which approves variation requests to the SDA Design Standard would offer a rigorous approach to ensuring SDA dwellings comply with building codes and regulations while supporting the delivery of high-quality homes that meet individual needs and innovation across the SDA market. - The SDA Design Standard must offer explicit guidance on the design features that SDA dwellings must possess ensuring that features are conducive to 'home like' dwellings and a cost-effective approach is adopted to the development of SDA. - The SDA Design Standard needs to offer clear and specific guidance on the design, construction and features that SDA dwellings must possess to reduce the potential for incorrect interpretation (eradicating subjective judgments during the certification process). - Sustainable design innovation could be triggered by the NDIA incentivising SDA providers who build above minimum standards (namely beyond the requirements of the SDA Design Standard). - Cost recovery is required to support the development of bespoke designs: a methodology whereby bespoke design features are funded directly by the NDIA is required to ensure quality outcomes for tenants.
Good design: how it can reduce the need for support and increase participant independence	- Good design has far-reaching benefits. Design features and processes that enable people with disability to complete tasks independently promote greater independence, confidence and autonomy; they also ensure participants have control over their decisions without the need to defend their choices. - Adopting the following design features can lead to positive outcomes for participants: - Assistive technology: this can improve participant independence and safety. Smart home assistive technology can support benefits including extended independent living, safety and security, physical and mental activity and healthcare monitoring (The role of smart home assistive technologies in supporting ageing in place and disability housing, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute). - Functional design (e.g., zero thresholds, ensuites, accessible kitchen features): this can contribute to improving participant independence. - Environmental design considerations: this can improve natural light, ventilation and temperature control – all of which can impact an individual's health and wellbeing. Studies have found links between levels of natural light in

	homes and physical and mental health of residents.¹ Research also demonstrates that indoor thermal comfort – the temperature and quality of air – affects our health and wellbeing, as well as the amount of energy used for heating and cooling our homes². Further, good passive solar design can reduce heating and cooling costs (The case for good design: Housing, Office of the Victorian Government Architect). – The provision of accessible spaces within housing: this can increase the ability for people to independently complete activities of daily living. – Communication systems (e.g. voice calling systems, mobile phones): these can be used by tenants to contact supports in the event they need information (e.g. support timetables) rather than requiring someone to be in-person to assist.
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Thin markets

Addressing the obstacles of delivering SDA in a thin market	Recommendations for government action: 1. The provision of consistent, timely and robust market data (including market demand) from the NDIA is essential for SDA providers to respond to thin markets and make informed decisions. Participants understanding SDA and their housing choices is critical: improved data will allow SDA providers to market to participants which in turn will improve housing options for people with disability in need of specialist housing. 2. The current SDA pricing and payments framework will continue to cause challenges to delivering much needed SDA in thin markets. SDA Pricing Arrangements for dwellings in thin markets needs to reflect the challenges of thin markets (e.g., increasing prices). 3. The application of location factors for SDA need to reflect the realities of operating within thin markets especially in regional and remote areas where the cost (and risk) of developing SDA can be much higher 4. The NDIA commits to underwriting risk in thin markets (geographic, population, low demand correlation) to ensure people with disability have access to SDA. This can include:
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¹ One study found that inadequate levels of natural light in apartments is associated with increased rates of falls and depression; another study reported that rooms with sunlight were found to reduce stress, lethargy, improve depressive symptoms, visual comfort and cognitive impairment issues ([The case for good design: Housing](#), Office of the Victorian Government Architect).

² One study found that as a result of improved thermal comfort, apartment residents experienced a significant fall in their blood pressure, enjoyed improved overall health, required less medication and hospital visits, and had reduced heating costs compared with those who remained in homes with poor thermal design ([The case for good design: Housing](#), Office of the Victorian Government Architect).

	– Underwrite vacancy risk for SDA providers: Extend funding for SDA vacancies in thin markets (beyond two or three months, depending on setting). – Underwrite vacancy risk for Supported Independent Living (SIL) providers: Provide funding to SIL providers operating in thin markets that enables the ongoing delivery of services to participants while supporting a financially sustainable business model. (For example, block funding in advance which allows the service provider to deliver predictable and sustainable services including in the event of an unexpected vacancy/latency). – Underwrite maintenance costs for Robust dwellings occupied by participants with behaviours of concern resulting in material and regular damage: Provide additional subsidies or expense reimbursement for maintenance costs when housing participants with known significant behaviours of concern resulting in property damage thus enabling financially sustainable provision of safe, accessible housing while avoiding costly hospital admissions or interactions with the criminal justice system.
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Location

Location: ensuring participant demand is met	• SDA providers adopt a participant-led approach to planning, development, and service delivery to ensure SDA dwellings are built in locations that reflect participant demand. Recommendations for government action: 1. A strategic, data-driven approach is adopted to direct investment where it has the greatest benefits for participants and the NDIS. To this end, the NDIA must provide reliable data and guidance to the market to inform investment decisions and ensure that capital is efficiently applied to the right type and location of housing so that quality homes are delivered for participants in areas they wish to live. 2. The NDIA consider incorporating evidence of participant consultation into the enrolment process for SDA dwellings. This could include an SDA enrolment panel that includes people with disability who understand the numerous factors which need to be considered in the context of an SDA dwelling.
Addressing the issue of oversupply/undersupply	• Repurposing SDA properties located in oversupplied areas for other government-funded housing programs or supported accommodation models may occur. Examples include aged care, supported independent living and hospital transition housing. Any repurposed SDA must be unenrolled as SDA to avoid inaccurate vacancy data. Repurposing SDA properties in oversupplied areas could reduce excess stock and address other housing challenges in a manner that is sustainable for all stakeholders.

Recommendations for government action:

1. The provision of reliable and regularly updated data from the NDIA which includes market demand as well as current and future supply of SDA developments such that the market gains a clear understanding regarding areas of oversupply and undersupply. With such clear data, enrolment of SDA properties in oversupplied areas ought to be discouraged.
2. The NDIA update and adjust location factors applied to SDA such that they encourage the development of SDA in undersupplied areas and discourage development in oversupplied areas.
3. The NDIA adopts a strong market stewardship role which includes (but is not limited to): building and maintaining market confidence, setting stable rules to enable all stakeholders to make long-term decisions and collaborating with participants and other stakeholders to ensure the delivery of best practice SDA.
4. State governments consider providing a form of subsidy for repurposed SDA stock given the amount of stock that could potentially be repurposed to achieve sustainable housing outcomes for Australians at scale.

Smart home assistive technology

Incorporating smart home assistive technology into SDA

- Smart home assistive technology can support benefits including extended independent living, safety and security, physical and mental activity and healthcare monitoring.³ The application of quality, well-designed smart home assistive technology, which aligns with each participant's unique needs, can ensure daily routines are safer and more efficient, enable support workers to respond more quickly, and reduce manual handling tasks.
- A key approach to achieving enabling environments is to apply the principles of universal design. Examples of universally designed products include text-to-speech functions built into cell phones or motion-controlled doors.⁴ The smart home assistive technology should be reliable, easy to use, and properly maintained, and explained clearly to both the participant and support workers on its safe use.
- The following need to be considered in designing best practice SDA:
 - Smart home assistive technology should be made available across all design categories.

³ [The role of smart home assistive technologies in supporting ageing in place and disability housing](#), Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute

⁴ [Global Report on Assistive Technology](#), World Health Organisation and UNICEF

	- All SDA homes should be built to enable future smart home assistive technology additions and modifications customised to individual needs. This will ensure that adding smart home assistive technology at a later stage does not cause major disruptions or is cost prohibitive. - Adopted technologies need to be customised to each participant (given individual needs vary significantly) to achieve optimal outcomes for people with disability and to maximise utilisation. Recommendations for government action: 1. The NDIA need to ensure streamlined and swift smart home assistive technology approval processes are in place to support seamless customisation for participants post occupancy. When there is a requirement for a variation, funding reallocation or review, this should be done quickly to avoid risk for the participant (losing their housing allocation) and risk for the SDA provider (losing their tenant). 2. The SDA market needs to keep pace with technology and innovations that are rapidly changing in smart home assistive technology; the SDA Design Standard needs to be sufficiently flexible so the market can keep pace with technology advancements.
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Protecting tenants

Ensuring a participant has been assessed as eligible for SDA and their funding has officially been approved in their NDIS Plan	• Ensure a participant is assessed as eligible and has their SDA funding officially approved in their NDIS plan prior to being matched or signs a tenancy agreement. • Undertake a comprehensive and fair eligibility assessment process: ensure participants provide evidence that their SDA funding has been approved by the NDIA and is acceptable to the SDA provider at the approved level. Work with participants (and their families) to understand their SIL/other support funding to ensure the best housing outcome for each prospective tenant. • In the event an existing SDA tenant, with a signed tenancy agreement, has SDA funding either reduced or removed as a result of an NDIA Plan Review, support the participant by working with them, the NDIA and other stakeholders (e.g., Support Coordinator) to address the issue via the Administrative Review Tribunal or securing alternate accommodation. • To the extent it is possible to do so, support participants who have not been officially assessed as SDA eligible by the NDIA. For example:
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	– Support participants to understand the application process and refer them to other stakeholders who could assist them through the application process, such as allied health professionals with SDA expertise, Housing Hub or SDA Services. – Where required, provide support and referrals so the participant (and their family) can explore other available housing options (e.g., SIL) while their application for SDA funding is in process/being assessed.
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Life safety and fire safety measures

Life safety and fire safety measures: protecting participants	• Fire sprinklers are currently not mandated in SDA, which poses an unacceptable risk to participant safety. SDA properties will typically be National Construction Building Code Class 1a, 1b, Class 2 or Class 3. The National Construction Code requirements for Classes 1a and 1b do not address the critical fire safety needs of SDA residents. Adding to this are the differences in state and territory jurisdictional regulations, both for the building and for the competent practitioners who design, install, test and commission home sprinkler systems. Fire sprinklers should be included in all SDA dwellings. Recommendations for government action: 1. Home fire sprinklers and interconnected smoke alarms must be mandated for all SDA properties, with fire sprinkler systems being proportional to the dwelling size and fire risk. A best practice approach is to ensure all SDA properties are equipped with home fire sprinklers. Home fire sprinklers are a reliable, cost-effective, and environmentally-sound solution: – Home fire sprinklers not only put out fires, but create a significantly higher probability of survival, extending the time all occupants have to safely escape – this is critical because a person living in SDA may require more time and assistance to evacuate a building. – 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.
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	The 2018 Australian Building Codes Board Regulatory Impact Statement calculated that installing FPAA101D rather than an AS 2118 system would save approximately \$100,000 in construction and maintenance costs per typical mid-rise apartment building. – 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. – Retrofitting automatic fire sprinklers to apartments is not currently required, while incorporating them into new developments where home fire sprinklers are not currently required would need negotiation on infrastructure and government service delivery to achieve the most cost-effective and sustainable improvement in community fire safety. – Sprinkler mishaps (such as leaks) are generally less likely and less severe than home plumbing system problems: there's only a 1 in 16 million chance they'll discharge accidentally, and all key stakeholders strongly recommend the use of concealed head fire sprinklers in residential settings.
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Participant engagement: design + build process

SDA participant engagement with stakeholders during the design and build process	• Participant-centred design lies at the heart of best practice SDA: it should inform all aspects of developing SDA from initial concept to completion. • Where possible, promote a custom process which integrates design collaboration with the participant (and guardian/family) from conception to completion. This can include: – Engaging with the participant's supported independent living provider prior to purchasing land. – Immediately after purchasing land in the participant's requested location: The development team meet with the participant to develop a design brief (which captures all the design expectations and requirements for the individual) for the site. – Design brief developed to 80%: When the brief has been developed into a set of design documentation with specifications that balances the participant's design brief, SDA Design Standard, National Construction Code requirements and any other planning legislation, the development team conducts a workshop with the participant (and guardian/family) to talk them through the design documents and specifications. This is an opportunity for the participant (and guardian/family) to make any final amendments to the plans prior to proceeding with construction.
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	– Construction hold point: During the construction phase, the participant (if possible) attends the site to witness progress of the build. A sample sign-off can be undertaken during a visit to allow the participant to approve the final finishes and fixtures for the build. • In the event a participant has not been identified ahead of the design and build process, perform customisations (to the extent it is possible to do so) which meet the needs of each new SDA participant. Engage with the participant (and guardian/family), support providers, allied health care professional (e.g., occupational therapists) and any other relevant stakeholders to ensure the customisation is fit-for-purpose for the tenant. Seek feedback from tenants on existing builds to inform future designs. Recommendations for government action: 1. The NDIA consider incorporating evidence of participant consultation into the enrolment process for SDA dwellings. This could include an SDA enrolment panel that includes people with disability who understand the numerous factors which need to be considered in the context of an SDA dwelling.
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Conflict of interest + rights and responsibilities

Informing participants of any potential or perceived conflicts of interest with support providers	• A participant's choice and control must be promoted and respected: a participant's housing rights, including security of tenure, are upheld, irrespective of any decision/s the participant makes about the provision of other NDIS supports within the SDA dwelling. • Organisational policies (including a conflict of interest policy, participant conflict of interest policy, code of conduct) must be in place that detail how perceived or actual conflicts of interests are managed. The policies must be made available to participants in the language, mode of communication and terms which each participant is most likely to understand. • A Conflict of Interest Register must be established and maintained. Conflicts of interest, perceived or actual, should be managed and documented by organisations. • Provide clear messaging in all verbal interactions with participants as well as in written materials that they have choice and control regarding their support services. • All vacancies and housing projects must be promoted transparently. Where applicable, policies and procedures are in place about how a provider will declare, advertise and fill vacancies in shared living. The policies are made available to participants in the language, mode of communication and terms which each participant is most likely to understand.
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	• Careful and considered tenancy matching: work with participants and their families ensuring a supported journey to identify their housing preferences. Ensure a tenant selection criteria is in place and agreed and understood by participants. In the context of shared living, a participant (and family) should be given a brief profile of other tenants, including prospective tenants, enabling them to make an informed decision; explain the design features of the property that promote independence, as well as opportunities to engage and retreat. • In instances where an SDA dwelling has a support provider in place delivering supports to residents in a shared setting (e.g., onsite shared support, onsite overnight assistance), ensure that all communication with the participant is honest and transparent from the outset. Provide clear and accessible information that explains the support models available at each dwelling, and where applicable, how tenants may be able to jointly choose the provider providing shared supports. Ensure these terms are clearly set out in formal agreements with the tenant. Supply tenants with house rules/information statement which covers the responsibilities of the providers and residents. (Useful resources include: Consumer Affairs Victoria). • Ensure participants have easy access to information (e.g., policies, information resources etc) in a central location, such as an online tenant portal through the SDA provider website.
Supporting participants to understand the distinction between the provision of SDA and other NDIS supports delivered in the dwelling	• Ensure processes are in place which inform participants about the distinction between SDA and other NDIS support providers (e.g., supported independent living providers) throughout the onboarding program from start (lead enquiry) to end (tenancy). Participants must be made aware that SDA and support services are provided by separate entities. • Service agreements with participants must clearly articulate the responsibilities of an SDA provider and how they differ from other NDIS supports. • Information + resources: SDA providers must use marketing and educational materials to explain the distinction between an SDA provider and other NDIS support providers (e.g., supported independent living providers, onsite shared support providers). The materials should never imply that access to housing depends on using a nominated support provider. These materials can include Participant Handbooks, Frequently Asked Questions, website content, brochures, and one-pagers outlining the different roles and responsibilities of each party. • Consider assisting participants and/or their support networks to understand, articulate and design the particular support model they require to live in an SDA dwelling.

Separation of housing and supports

Promoting choice and control: ensuring	• Ensuring the separation of the provision of housing, support and support coordination: One organisation/individual should not provide more than one of these services to a participant.
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participants choose their own support provider	• SDA providers have a policy in place regarding the independent provision of housing, support and support coordination services. The policy must be made available to participants in the language, mode of communication and terms which each participant is most likely to understand. • SDA providers refrain from entering into exclusive collaboration agreements with supported independent living providers ensuring all collaboration agreements are subject to tenant choice and control. • In instances where an SDA dwelling has a support provider in place delivering supports to residents in a shared setting (e.g., onsite shared support, onsite overnight assistance), allow tenants to jointly choose the provider providing shared supports (e.g., via an annual voting system). This ensures the participants' needs are prioritised over the needs of the collaborating providers. Recommendations for government action: 1. The separation of housing, support and support coordination services must be mandated: this means that separate entities must be providing these services to participants. 2. Governance: Multi-entity organisations which report into a single Board, have any common directorship or common owner - whereby the separate entities are delivering housing and supports, respectively - ought not to be considered as sufficiently 'separated.' There is a risk that a participant in this situation may have their choice and control restricted (e.g., an SDA tenant in this situation may feel pressured to choose the support provision offered by the other entity part of the organisation). 3. An SDA tenant should be able to change their supported independent living provider, support coordinator or housing independently of the other services. There should be nothing in the tenancy, collaboration or service agreements that prevents or restrict a participant's right to freely choose these services (noting possible exceptions such as shared support agreements/arrangements and thin markets). 4. Processes need to be established, by the NDIA, to consider circumstances where separation can be exempted or explained. For example, remote/very remote locations, and SDA self-providers that choose to self-manage their in-home care supports.
Collaboration agreements: using them to promote best practice and deliver good outcomes for participants	• Collaboration agreements between an SDA provider and a support provider (e.g., supported independent living provider) ought to set out the legal and practice roles and responsibilities of each provider relating to the property. The collaboration agreements must comply with all relevant NDIS and other applicable legislation and standards. • The collaboration agreement should: – Explicitly state that tenant choice and control is the paramount right affecting the parties' rights and obligations under the agreement. – Not include 'commercial terms' which can inhibit choice and control. – Ensure the method to exercise choice and control of support provider is transparent.

	- Clearly define expectations in quality support provision. - Require each party to support the tenant to sustain a successful long-term tenancy and work towards the best outcomes for participants. • A copy of the SDA provider and a support provider Collaboration Agreement is shared with the participant to ensure full transparency and the participant is aware of the scope of the collaboration between the parties. • The collaboration agreements are a critical component of the separation of housing and support services.
SDA providers and disability support providers (e.g., SIL providers): working together to best serve participants	• Effective collaboration among providers leads to improved outcomes for tenants. Creating strong, transparent partnerships where each organisation focuses on its expertise while working collaboratively around shared participant outcomes create the conditions for people with disability to thrive. • The following examples can assist to ensure effective collaboration: - All parties must understand the legal and professional obligations to uphold participant choice and control and other participant rights. All parties must implement practices and models of business that uphold the NDIS Practice Standards and other applicable standards/legislation. - SDA providers and support providers must develop transparent and honest relationships with participants: there should be no arrangements in place between providers whereby a participant has not given informed consent during the process of signing a tenancy agreement. - Ensure meetings between SDA providers and support providers take place to discuss matters relating to tenants (e.g., issues relating to the dwelling, support needs etc.). - All parties ensure each participant has support for decision-making and is involved in decisions that affect them. - Be transparent about issues that may be impacting provider or participant relationships and inform other providers that are involved so a resolution is collectively reached. - Never seek to legally restrict another provider's right to speak freely and transparently with participants or the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission about provider suitability and quality. - Consider ideas and opportunities that seek to pioneer new, innovative and flexible ways of practice that better meet participant needs.
House design: how it can support multiple service providers to deliver their services simultaneously	• Housing design and the built environment can play a significant role in enabling service providers to deliver simultaneous services to a tenant. Examples of design features which can support the cost-effective + safe delivery of multiple (simultaneous) services are listed below (noting the examples exceed the current requirements of the SDA Design Standard):

	- Where possible, each tenant has their own spacious bedroom with a private ensuite, allowing personal care providers to deliver services directly in the resident's private space. This is imperative for maintaining dignity and comfort, especially for residents requiring intensive personal care. - Where possible, a centralised automation system which can be controlled through an App on personal devices that allows residents and service providers to manage various aspects of the home (e.g., lighting, climate control and security). - Spacious open living areas, where possible, which offer space for multiple service providers to work simultaneously without crowding. - Open living spaces that are multi-functional and can be easily reconfigured to accommodate different activities and services (e.g., a quiet area for relaxation, a private meeting space for consultations). - Where possible (e.g., a house with three residents) a second living room that offers tenants a private retreat when needed, ensuring personal space even when multiple providers are present in the main living areas. - Where possible, proximity to appropriate amenities (e.g., healthcare centres, shopping, and recreational facilities) which supports service providers to deliver services. - Access to parking (e.g., street parking) for service providers. - Safety systems that allow tenants to alert staff when feeling unsafe or when an incident has occurred in their home. - Dedicated onsite overnight assistance space where required (with electronic communications systems direct to tenants): this allows for different support providers to deliver different aspects of an individual's supports and enhances privacy for tenants.
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Service agreements with participants

Supporting participants to understand their tenancy obligations and tenancy agreements	• Ensure the terms of the tenancy agreement are transparent, fair and reasonable. The service agreement must meet the requirements of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (Specialist Disability Accommodation Conditions) Rules 2018, and any applicable state or territory residential tenancy legislation. • Consider using a separate tenancy agreement rather than combining tenancy terms into a service agreement. A standalone tenancy agreement clearly defines the rights and obligations of both parties, reduces the risk of ambiguity, and helps ensure that tenants' rights are adequately protected under applicable legislation. If tenancy terms are incorporated into a service agreement, ensure the agreement clearly and comprehensively defines the rights and obligations of both parties to minimise ambiguity and adequately protect the tenant's rights.
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	• Offer participants the option of a tenancy agreement prepared in easy read and plain English format (in addition to the original tenancy agreement) so that even the most complex legal aspects of the tenancy relationship can be understood by all participants. • Each participant is supported to understand the terms and conditions that apply to their SDA dwelling and the associated service and/or tenancy agreements by using the language, mode of communication and terms which that participant is most likely to understand. Prior to being offered a tenancy agreement, the terms of the tenancy relationship and the participant's rights and obligations are discussed with the participant. • Once a tenancy agreement is offered, all documents including tenancy agreements, SDA service agreements, and any other tenancy/strata related documents are provided to the participant (and/or guardian); the participant is given adequate time to read/discuss with others (e.g., guardian/advocates/support persons) if required and ask questions prior to signing the agreement. Staff remain available to answer any questions and discuss tenant's rights during this process with the participant and their advocate where required. • All participants must receive a copy of the agreement once signed by the participant and the provider. • Provide tenants with a welcome pack prior to moving into their home which includes key information about the property and a resource which explains the SDA service. • Ensure tenants who may lack legal capacity to enter into a contract are provided with appropriate support for the duration of the process: ensure their support person receives the tenancy agreement and all other documents/resources (and are given adequate time to read the documents prior to signing) and are informed of the tenant's rights and responsibilities. • Ensure a suite of policies are in place (e.g., policies regarding working with people who lack legal capacity to enter into a contact.)
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Tenancy management

Frequency of engaging with SDA participants	• Ensure a point of contact for the tenant (e.g., Tenant Support Specialist/Officer) is established so they know who to contact about issues which may arise with the property and any other support they may require during their tenancy. • Engage with tenants on a regular basis as appropriate (e.g., quarterly visits) regarding tenancy issues and to provide any updates (e.g., strata law updates, energy rebate information, Body Corp Committee minutes etc.). • Respect the privacy of tenants outside of scheduled tenancy engagement and routine inspections. • Ensure a suite of policies are in place (e.g., tenancy management policies).
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Assisting participants to transition to their SDA home	• Allocate a dedicated staff member (e.g., Tenant Support Officer) to the tenant to support their successful transition into their new home. Arrange a transition planning meeting between staff, the tenant and where required key support persons (e.g., their guardian, supported independent living provider, support coordinator, occupational therapist etc.) to discuss matters such as: - the participant's move-in plans and expected move-in date - requests for home modifications + assistive technology needs - pet applications - any information required to complete a home risk assessment - supported independent living service agreement and operational readiness - training required to support the participant or their support services to operate technology or other appliances at the property - questions the participant has about their tenancy agreement + any other matters that may impact the participant move-in or tenancy. • A collaborative approach is essential across all parties involved during the transition process, particularly between support coordinators, occupational therapists, the support provider/s and the SDA provider: good communication will deliver optimal outcomes. The participant is central to this partnership arrangement, which supports them to maximise their choice and control. • Adopt a participant-centred approach to supporting the transition: responding to the needs of the tenant and the amount of support they have to assist with the move). • Subsequent to the tenant moving into their homes, a dedicated staff member (e.g., Tenant Support Officer) allocated to the tenant contacts the participant (e.g., during the first week, and periodically for the first three months) to ensure the experience for the tenant is positive and meeting their expectations.
Measuring tenants' satisfaction with their tenancy	• Tenant satisfaction surveys: use feedback to continually improve services. Examples include: offering a feedback survey 6 weeks after moving in and quarterly thereafter; surveys must be conducted at least annually. Ensure the survey methods are designed in an inclusive manner, and support persons are engaged where required (e.g., participants with complex communication needs). (Useful resources include: Disability Gateway - creating accessible materials, SA Government Online Accessibility Toolkit.) • Use face-to-face meetings with tenants to elicit feedback and encourage conversations about their tenancy to ensure any issues are addressed promptly. • Conduct audits throughout the year (e.g., every 6 months). • Provide tenants with feedback forms so they may communicate feedback at any time.

Managing property maintenance	• Comprehensive property maintenance policies and procedures are in place to ensure accountability and responsibility. • Clearly explain to tenants what to expect when it comes to maintenance including what property maintenance is on offer, how to report issues, and what to expect when resolving maintenance issues. Ensure this information is made available to, and is easily accessible by, tenants (e.g., in the welcome packs). Another example includes a fridge magnet which reminds tenants about the different maintenance priority levels (Emergency, Urgent and General) and how they can report issues. • Offer communication methods and/or systems that are user-friendly for tenants to lodge maintenance requests. Ensure tenants have access to a 24/7 maintenance hotline for urgent maintenance requests. • Offer responsive and timely maintenance management services to tenants: communicate clearly and efficiently with tenants regarding all maintenance requests. • Efficient systems are in place to manage all maintenance tasks, maintain historical records, and keep track of maintenance requests and work completed. • Undertake regular inspections and assessments of the homes to help identify maintenance needs and resolve them promptly. Performing annual proactive maintenance of all automation and air-conditioning. • Partner and engage with reputable trades to ensure accountability in the work performed and adherence to service agreements and contracts. Ensure all third-party trades engaged follow organisational compliance requirements. • Offer tenants the chance to provide feedback following the completion of a maintenance request.
Property inspections	• Undertake routine property inspections as stipulated in the tenancy agreement. • Provide tenants (and their support network where required/advised to do so) with appropriate notice (as stipulated in the tenancy agreement) prior to a property inspection.

Safety and complaints process

Ensuring participants are informed about how to make a complaint via the NDIS Safeguards Commission	• Ensure details of how to make a complaint, including to the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission, are included in tenancy agreements, service agreements, tenancy handbook and via SDA provider websites. • Ensure a complaints policy is in place which details how feedback, compliments and complaints can be submitted and the process the organisation follows to respond (identification, acknowledgement, investigation, action, check-ins, resolution or appeal and review stages). • Ensure the complaints policy is given to each tenant, and they are informed of their right to escalate the complaint to the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission (as well as the NDIA).
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	- Consider providing an information sheet which clearly and simply communicates the different pathways to making a complaint including contact details (e.g., the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission, NDIA, SDA provider, Onsite Shared Support provider etc.). - Offer tenants assistance to make a complaint about their other support providers: inform participants that they can contact staff with complaints about their other support providers and offer to support them to resolve their complaints (as far as appropriate and to the extent it is possible to do so). Offer multiple contact points to raise issues, e.g., phone, email, in person, via an App, whereby tenants can submit complaints which are not traceable by their other support providers.
Providing information on how to make a complaint without making the home look institutional	- Avoid displaying information on how to make a complaint in a home (e.g., posters on a wall) as it would make the home appear 'institutional.' (It is up to tenants to decide what is displayed in their homes.) - Consider the use of technology, such as an App, which allows tenants to make a complaint. - Consider the use of information products, such as an information magnet which can be placed on a fridge. - Ensure regular communication with tenants as this offers an opportunity for individuals to raise concerns. - Provide tenants documents such as complaints policies and procedures in hard copy (e.g., via a welcome pack) and digitally (e.g., via email and/or an online tenant portal). Offer tenants the option of receiving these documents through alternative ways, for example, providing them directly to a person nominated by the participant, where requested and with their consent.
Ensuring tenants (and their families) feel safe enough to raise a complaint with the SDA provider	- Ensure tenants are informed that raising a complaint will not impact their tenancy. - Build strong relationships with tenants based on trust, respect and effective communication. Effective communication upholds the rights of people with disabilities to have choice and control and to make decisions about their own lives; with effective communication, staff can support and enable people to express themselves, to be heard and be safe (NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission - Supporting Effective Communication Training). - Foster a culture of communication: regularly engage with tenants (and their families/guardians) and proactively seek feedback through this engagement. - Ensure tenants understand they can speak to any staff member to raise a complaint (this means in the event they have an issue with a staff member they can approach others in the organisation). Offer tenants multiple contact persons within the organisation so tenants always have options regarding which staff member to approach. - Provide multiple access points: allow complaints from multiple channels so tenants can choose one that meets their specific needs, e.g., phone, email, online form, post and face-to-face. Offer the option of submitting a complaint anonymously. - When a complaint is raised, seek to act on and resolve it promptly and fairly. - Work out what barriers people may face and what can be done to address these barriers. Examples of barriers include: fear of retribution or language barriers.

	• Create an organisational culture that values complaints as a source of feedback; ensure the approach is modelled by all staff including senior managers. • Staff must be well trained, empowered and supported to manage complaints. Complainant concerns must be listened to, acknowledged and taken seriously (Commonwealth Ombudsman Better Practice Complaint Handling Guide). • Ensure a suite of policies are in place and the complaints handling system is designed in an accessible way. Pay particular attention to the needs of people who may be vulnerable due to age, language, financial or other reasons. For example, a complaint handling system should include a process to identify and respond to a need for communication to be in a language other than English (Commonwealth Ombudsman Better Practice Complaint handling Guide).
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Choice and control + participant safety

Safeguarding residents from coercive control SDA from	• SDA providers must provide housing services only (and not provide any support services). • Any communication with the participant (and guardian/family) about the provision of SDA, including about rights and responsibilities in relation to the dwelling, is responsive to their needs and provided in the language, mode of communication and terms which that participant is most likely to understand. • SDA providers undertake regular private check-ins with SDA tenants where appropriate (independent of their support provider) to ensure there is no closed system that could enable coercive control to develop. Regular property inspections by SDA provider staff can offer informal opportunities for general safeguarding. • Provide participants with a dedicated tenant support specialist (or equivalent) that understands their individual needs and goals and is available to answer any of their enquiries or complaints. • Ensure all staff are trained to identify the signs and indicators of coercive control. Ensure staff promptly and appropriately act on suspicions of coercive control. • Ensure tenants have the opportunity to provide feedback to the SDA provider. • Provide tenants with information about their rights and how to make a complaint to the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission. • Seek participant consent to contact guardians and nominated support persons in relation to their tenancy, services and other matters affecting their wellbeing. • Consider using tools such as an App which enables participants to confidentially report issues and make complaints about control they are experiencing (either from their support providers, housemates or others).
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	• SDA providers regularly meet with support providers operating in their SDA properties (e.g., supported independent living providers) to provide key updates regarding participant safeguarding, reiterate their expectations as the SDA provider and raise any general concerns, issues or trends about their service provision (where applicable).
Protecting participants from being incentivised to agree to a service that is not suitable for them	• Ensuring the separation of the provision of housing + support services: the provision of these services must be from two separate providers. • SDA providers should ensure that any pricing practice, incentive, gift or other benefit (including free or discounted rent) is transparent and does not compromise a participant's informed and independent choice of home. Participants should be given sufficient information and opportunity to consider whether a dwelling meets their individual needs and preferences, including access to decision-making support or independent advice where they choose. SDA providers must comply with all relevant legislation. Once a tenancy agreement has been entered into, SDA providers may provide an appropriate welcome gift. Any welcome gift should be modest, unconditional and not promoted beforehand as an incentive. Cash, gift cards or other goods and services are not appropriate. • SDA providers and supported independent living providers must understand the boundaries within which they each provide services. • Support participants to ensure they are aware of their rights (e.g., choice and control over their support provision). Examples include: – Designing onboarding processes that support choice and control (e.g., making it clear that participants are not required to disclose their full NDIS plan funding amounts to providers when they are not certain they wish to receive their services) – Outlining participant rights in transitioning and onboarding information + leasing documentation – Specialist staff/teams who can receive enquiries from participants – Offering Apps which allow tenants to confidentially report concerns – Ensuring participants are informed about how to make a complaint to the NDIS Quality & Safeguards Commission Recommendations for government action: 1. Independent support coordination: the separation of support coordination from any other type of support.

Self-ownership + self-provision of SDA

Supporting participants to build or buy their own SDA

- Participants must be supported to understand the complexity, costs and potential risk of owning their own SDA. Access to accurate, transparent and accessible information (e.g., via an online portal with dedicated resources in one location) managed by a trusted housing specialist organisation (which is independent from the development, sale or acquisition of the housing) would support participants to make informed choices.
- Financial institutions offering SDA home loans for individuals and families must have a thorough understanding of the SDA market. Financial institutions must take all reasonable steps to ensure an individual (and their guardian/family) understand the risks and obligations of owning an SDA dwelling and have the capacity to successfully manage the loan.
- Financial institutions must balance the dignity of risk (a customer's right to autonomy and self-determined financial choices) with their legal duty to prevent financial abuse, exploitation and harm when assessing SDA home loans.
- Participants must be supported to understand the potential complexities of owning and managing an SDA dwelling including the option to register as a 'self provider' with the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission, SDA assessment and enrolment with the NDIA and the ongoing process of claiming monthly SDA payments from the NDIA. Participants must also be supported to understand the alternative to registering as their own SDA provider is to outsource this to a third party: namely a person or an organisation (e.g., an SDA provider) – this will ensure participants can make informed choices which best suit their circumstances.

Investing in SDA

Ethical investment: creating a thriving SDA market

- The SDA sector is complex and nuanced: it demands that investors possess specialist SDA knowledge. Investment decisions need to be driven by a relentless commitment to ethics, participant safety and a sound understanding of the market including the associated risks.
- The consequences of a failed SDA investment can be devastating on participants. This can include an individual losing a home which was intended to provide them with long-term housing security. The latter can occur in the event an investor suffers financial loss.
- Retail investors taking direct ownership of SDA (outside of a regulated Fund environment) are more prone to suffering losses and failed investments in the SDA market as they are generally less able to conduct meaningful due diligence, access quality providers (generally contracted by institutional funds) or mitigate risks through diversification or other strategies. Inexperienced investors are also at higher risk of being misled by property spruikers and less adept at navigating the complexity of the SDA market.

- Investment in SDA should be undertaken through well managed, reputable entities with a proven track record in funds management, including institutional funds or other sophisticated investors. These investors have the processes and systems to manage risk, diversify exposure, navigate changing environments and withstand market fluctuations. This provides both participants and investors with greater protections.

Recommendations for government action:

1. To support a strong and sustainable SDA market, the NDIA or the Department of Health, Disability and Aging must create a market steward role within government. Role responsibilities include (but are not limited to): building and maintaining market confidence, setting stable rules to enable all stakeholders to make long-term decisions, pricing advice, sector co-ordination, supply and demand forecasting, market performance monitoring and reporting. The SDA market steward will collaborate with stakeholders to ensure the delivery of best practice SDA, uphold healthy, competitive and free markets and ensure the delivery of scheme maturity in a cost effective and orderly manner.
2. The NDIA must ensure that SDA payments are administered in a transparent, accurate and timely manner. This includes providing clear payment processes and responsibilities, visibility of SDA approvals and plan values, minimising payment delays, errors and arrears and establishing effective mechanisms to resolve payment enquiries. Reliable and timely payments are essential to maintaining provider confidence and viability, supporting ongoing investment in SDA, and ensuring participants have access to high-quality housing and support outcomes.
3. A strategic, data-driven approach must be adopted to direct investment where it has the greatest benefits for participants and the NDIS. To this end, the NDIA must provide reliable data and guidance to the market to inform investment decisions and ensure that capital is efficiently applied to the right type and location of housing so that quality homes are delivered for participants in areas they wish to live.

Diversity + inclusion

Practices to ensure participants have access to services that respect their

- Connect, partner and work with diverse service providers.
- Ensure staff understand the principles of trauma informed and culturally safe practices: this will ensure the delivery of safe, accessible and supportive services for all communities including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, culturally and linguistically diverse communities and LGBTQIA+ communities.
- Hire a diverse team of staff including culturally diverse staff.

culture, diversity, values and beliefs	• Enable and promote the individualisation of participant records in organisational systems (so each participant's background, preferences and values are recorded). • Provide correspondence in both English and tenants' native language and provide interpreter services where required. • Ensure a suite of organisational policies are in place (e.g., anti-discrimination policy, diversity policy, diversity focused recruitment policy). • Tenant satisfaction surveys: use feedback to continually improve + tailor services to cater to diverse populations. • Consider engaging tenant advisory consultants to the organisation's board. • Deliver personalised interactions with participants based on their individualised needs (beyond disability specific requirements, e.g., culture, spirituality, values etc.). • Careful and considered tenancy matching: respect the privacy and dignity of participants by ensuring their personal background, practices and preferences are upheld during the tenant matching process.
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Quality providers – staffing, organisational culture

Staff recruitment: finding the right staff	• Adopt a value-based recruitment process: attract and select employees whose attitudes, values and behaviours align with those of the organisation and the requirements of the role. Prioritising organisational culture, staff and capacity to deliver high-quality service delivery begins with the recruitment process. • Identifying talent: advertise vacancies widely (e.g., use platforms such as Seek, Ethical Jobs, Linked In; approach potential candidates through professional networks; engage value-aligned recruitment agencies). Adopt accessible and inclusive recruitment practices to attract people with disability. Consider placing an emphasis on attributes such as emotional intelligence, teamwork, and compassion in addition to technical ability, experience and qualifications. • Interviews: Where possible and appropriate, involve participants in the interview process to ensure sensitivity to the needs of people with disability is prioritised. • Screening checks + referee reports: Conduct screening checks (e.g., Police Check, Working with Children Check) and undertake reference checks. • Onboarding + induction training program: Provide a comprehensive and supportive onboarding and induction program relevant to the role. • Ensure a comprehensive suite of policies are in place (e.g., recruitment and selection [diversity, hiring practices etc]; supervision; code of ethics; work health & safety etc).
	• Provide a comprehensive induction program for new staff. Set a core minimum training expectation requiring 100% completion of initial onboarding modules, paired with periodic refreshers, covering topics such as disability rights,

Staff training, development + support	safeguarding and coercive control, accessible communication and SDA-specific obligations. Ensure role specific expectations are clearly communicated during the induction period. • Provide ongoing training, development and mentoring for staff. • Ensure each role in the organisation has a well-defined key performance indicator (KPI) set which is used as performance benchmarking in regular one-on-one meetings with supervisors. When developing KPIs, treat personal growth measures, quality of service delivery and commitment to organisational values on par with commercial KPIs. • Provide regular professional staff supervision: effective supervision supports good working relationships, helps to address any issues and celebrates achievements. • Create a positive workplace culture where staff feel supported and where collaboration and open communication is encouraged. This can include regular staff meetings and senior leadership constantly engaging with their teams to support growth. • Ensure a comprehensive suite of policies are in place (e.g., employee assistance program (EAP); employee supervision; staff training and development; employee performance; professional development; escalation procedures for staff/grievance and complaints resolution procedure; bullying policy etc.).
Fostering an organizational culture where staff feel safe enough to raise issues/speak out when things are not right	• Foster an organisational culture whereby: – Board leaders set the tone by actively promoting and demonstrating psychological safety. – Senior leadership prioritise client safety and the delivery of quality services, and lead by example in their commitment to receiving feedback and instigating ongoing quality improvement. – Open communication and the opinions of all staff are valued. This includes creating a psychologically safe work environment and celebrating accountability. – Staff are encouraged to speak up: encouraging and rewarding honest feedback from staff. An example includes offering confidential disclosure options for staff, so they feel empowered to speak out about sensitive issues. • Ensure a comprehensive suite of policies are in place (e.g., whistleblower policy). • Ensure all staff are informed about the processes in place to raise issues. This can include providing resources in easy read and plain English and resources translated into languages other than English.

Tom's story

Tom was one of the first people in Australia to build and own his own specialist disability home. He lives in Devonport, Tasmania – a coastal city boasting river, ocean and mountain views.

Tom grew up in Tasmania driven by a single passion: to become a pilot.

At the age of 18, Tom was accepted into the Australian Defence Force Academy in Canberra where he began a university degree alongside Airforce training.

One year later, in 2000, Tom was involved in a diving accident that left him paralysed. Tom was medically discharged from the Airforce and returned to Tasmania.

Tom lived with his father and step mum in a small unit built onto the side of their home. Tom's mother lived close by. Tom was supported by both his parents and a team of support workers.

Housing options for people with disability in Tasmania are scarce, Tom says. "I always worried that if I could not live with either of my parents, I would end up in a nursing home or group home," he says.

Tom decided he wanted to try to live alone when his father retired.

So, in 2016, Tom used his savings to buy a block of land in Devonport – a coastal city by the Mersey River, on the northwest coast of Tasmania.

At the time, he did not know that specialist disability accommodation (SDA) had just been introduced to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

He discovered SDA a year later, in 2017, through one of his dad's friends. In Tasmania, the NDIS roll out began in 2013 by age cohorts with the first group being 15–24-year-olds. It was not until 2018 that the NDIS became available for Tom's age group.

For Tom, the possibility of owning and living in his own SDA was a gamechanger, as up to that point he wasn't even sure if he could afford to build a home.

"I learnt everything I could about SDA," he says. "At that stage, I was not yet on the NDIS – that occurred in mid 2018. But I wanted to be prepared to undertake all the assessments that were required."

As so many occupational therapists had closed their books as the NDIS rollout was gathering pace, Tom decided to set up an appointment months in advance even though he had not yet entered the Scheme.

It all happened quickly for Tom: shortly after joining the NDIS, Tom had his SDA assessment and some six weeks later his SDA application was approved by the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA).

Building a dream home

Tom began building his SDA in 2018 during a pioneering phase of the market. Few people had any experience building SDA in Tasmania.

Tom found a trusted builder through friends.

While the builder had no experience with SDA, he was very happy to learn quickly Tom says.

Tom was closely involved in every stage of the design and build of his two-bedroom home, working collaboratively with his builder throughout the development process.

“I managed the building project once it reached the lockup stage – so once the shell of the building was complete and secured,” Tom explains.

Tom studied the SDA Design Standard and watched home design programs for creative inspiration.

“I put a lot of research and thought into the design,” he says. “I studied what people regretted when they built a house and what they wish they'd done differently.”

Tom’s aim was to design a home that accommodates his circumstances and lifestyle.

Tom played a significant role in creating his interior space. He helped make his own flat-pack cabinets and storage units using a computer-controlled wood router – a tool which supports automated cutting, carving and engraving of materials.

Tom’s home features well-designed assistive technologies that have been thoughtfully integrated into the interior design, creating a supportive and accessible living environment. He imported some assistive technologies from the United Kingdom to keep costs low.

Tom’s home was completed in December 2019.

“I spent the Christmas holidays learning how to claim SDA payments from the NDIA which is something you need to do when you manage your own SDA,” he says. “That was the start of living on my own and it's worked out amazingly well.”

Living life to the full

For Tom, living in SDA has been transformative.

For the past seven years, Tom has enjoyed the privacy of living alone, along with the peace of mind that comes from living in a space designed to support his safety and independence.

Tom’s home also allows him to do the things he loves the most.

Tom enjoys flying remote-controlled planes in nearby parkland, which was an important consideration when looking for land to build on.

“A few years ago, I learnt how to modify controls so I could fly the planes using my mouth,” Tom explains.

“I use first person view video goggles which provides an immersive remote-control flying experience. A camera on the aircraft streams a real-time video feed directly to screens inside the headset, creating the sensation of sitting in the actual cockpit. This is the closest I can get to real flying.”

Tom always dreamed of building his own home but never thought it would be possible. “SDA has helped make this dream a reality,” Tom says.

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