DAY TWO TRANSCRIPT OF DR COURTNEY WRIGHT

Our next speaker is Courtney Wright from Griffith University.

There is a back story here. The Australian Network for Universal Housing Design ran a survey at the end of last year across Christmas to early this year on the costs and benefits of liveable housing design and the implications or impacts of regulation.

It was a pretty basic survey, a survey monkey job. But we got some very interesting data from that. The Australian Network needs to acknowledge Griffith University who then agreed at our request to analyse the data at arm’s length.

Because the Australian Network has such a position, we needed to have some probity in this report so Courtney very kindly stepped forward to do that work and she is now going to report on that analysis of data. So welcome, Courtney.

DR COURTNEY WRIGHT:

Thank you, Marg. So brief outline, I will breeze through the background because I am sure it is nothing new to everybody here. Then talk through the research. Our aim, method, research, findings. And where to next.

The background, it is well known that housing is a social determinants of health and well-being but many thousands of Australians face significant housing challenges that impact on our quality of life.

Due to existing housing design standards and subsequent lack of physically accessible housing in the private sector, ageing Australians and people with short-term, long-term or lifelong injury or illness are often forced to modify your home at a significant expense, relocate to an undesirable residential environment such as a group or nursing home or remain in their physically inaccessible property where they and/or the family or non-family carers are at high risk of injury.

This is the timeline of what has occurred. In response to persistent advocacy for people with disability, the Australian government established the national dialogue of universal housing designed to address the lack of inclusive housing in Australia.

The dialogue comprised industry leaders, community leaders and others. It argued for industrywide volunteer approach over 10 years, National guideline of strategic guidelines that all new homes will be of an agreed universal housing design standard by 2020. We know that hasn't happened.

We know there has been a lack of response to the voluntary guidelines and a lack of uptake from the sector. This research really wanted to delve into what is going on from the very base level of attitudes and perceptions.

Why has this lack of housing, why might it have resulted?

This research aimed to investigate the perceived costs and benefits to Australian society if all new homes were built to an agreed Universal Design standard.

Very briefly, the method, as Mark mentioned was an online mixed messages survey, there was a total of eight questions, both quantity and quality.

Convenience and snowball strategy were used to recruit a total of 1300 participants. So the sample were recruited through (Inaudible) and they uploaded the URL onto the website.

They were encouraged to forward information to the survey through their personal and professional networks to increase participation. Despite these broad recruitment strategies the sample predominantly reflected the voice of homeowners and people whose needs are not met to the current housing system.

The quantitative data obtained through multiple choice questions was the frequency of accounts and percentage of participants who endorsed each possible response.

The qualitative data obtained from participants open ended answers were analysed using a text to answer software to identify emerging concepts and then to research is then manually, thematically analyse the resulting data into broad themes.

The questions to participants if we only need housing to be liveable, what would the cost and benefit be to Australian society? It prompted people to think about cost or benefit as social, economic what are human rights and of course people elaborated on those answers.

For the quantitative findings, there were two separate multiple-choice questions. One related to cost and one to benefit. This was ranging from a five point scale ranging from no cost to massive cost or no benefit to massive benefit, what they believed.

What would be the cost of benefit to Australian society as a whole if all new housing was built to a new design standard? These were two graphs resulting from these questions.

The perceived cost of Australian society, the top left you can see the number of participants indicated they would be minimal or some cost. Compared to significant or massive. And the perceived benefit is to Australian society, the degree indicated as significant benefit or massive benefit.

The qualitative question asked participants to explain the reasons behind their multiple-choice response which was very interesting with what people said. From this thematic analysis, two main themes were identified. People's rights to participation and autonomy and also the perceived financial impact of change.

These findings were not based on stats or hard evidence, these findings are what participants believe which I think presents an additional challenge if it doesn't match what the hard evidence says, how do we change people's attitudes and perceptions if they are incorrect, based on the hard evidence.

The first theme was in relation to people's rights to participation and autonomy. A smaller number of responses suggested that mandating liveable design standards would infringe on the rights of people who don't have a disability and the rights of others to choose their own housing design and features. These participants asserted that change in law was unnecessarily restrictive and may result in all residential properties using the individuality.

Some participants with a view believed government funding would enable people with disability with limitations to live in suitable housing while also providing themselves the freedom to design and build homes to suit their preferences. These participants therefore viewed government funding, to people requiring modifications as a means to satisfy everyone's rights.

Other participants suggested building more accessible housing, not all, would be a reasonable and somewhat realistic compromise.

However, the majority of participants were in favour of mandating liveable housing design standards for all new builds as there would be many benefits right across the spectrum and the social cost of not doing this is massive. Liveable housing design was considered to be a human right based on equality and antidiscrimination principles.

Participants suggested that mandating liveable housing would foster a person's independence over the life course, encourage more inclusive communities, enable more people to participate in society as equals, increase housing choice for many Australians, enable a person to make a place in the familiar neighbourhood if they choose.

Allowing individuals to maintain relationships of friends and family and reduce the likelihood of negative experiences associated with unsuitable housing like injury, hospitalisation, forced relocation into residential aged care, especially for young people, and social exclusion.

Participants believe that mandating the housing design in all new builds would ultimately promote the physical psychosocial and emotional health and quality of life of individuals and families.

These benefits were perceived to relate to all Australians, either now or in the future, since, this is a participant quote, we're all ageing as well as sustaining illness, accidents or injuries which could lead to incapacity of varying degrees of any stage of life.

Participants therefore mandating liveable housing design features would prepare individuals well for when the circumstances or needs change. They also noticed previous societal resistance to change for housing, transport and community issues that have subsequently been overcome.

Building repairs to comply with heritage requirements, environmental issues that were deemed too hard, changes to fire alarm legislation, the introduction of accessible public buildings and tactile ground surface indicators for people who are blind or have visual impairment. And the cessation of outhouses or outdoor toilets.

The second theme, perceived financial impact of change, several participants believe that implementing liveable design features into new housing features following regulation would cost little or no more than current housing options since changes would be made during the design stage.

And it was thought that less material would be used during construction. Others believe the implementation of liveable design features would cost a lot more than current housing designs.

These participants suggested that liveable design features would impact the housing footprint and could require more rather than less materials to build. As one person suggested, more space is needed regardless and space costs money.

Several participants perceive it costly to implement liveable housing design in regional and rural areas of Australia. As well as places that have steep or sloping blocks of land. Several participants also believed that an increase or overall cost will be passed on to buyers, making it unaffordable.

However, the majority of participants believe that mandating liveable housing designs would be affordable, however the costs would be outweighed by social benefits are all recoverable over time.

They believe there would be a transition phase, and that this would include education to consumers and the general public, and include the benefits of liveable housing design, education to designers, trainers, architects about how to build accessible housing designs and improving existing templates.

This would improve benefits to society, and be recovered overall over time, as there would be a reduction in costs through (inaudible), allowing people to remain in their homes, reducing need to go into rehabilitation and nursing home facilities. This would reduce the need for paid support and reduce injuries and falls in the home.

The majority of participants thought that it was worth mandating the changes.

The majority of participants endorsed the changes. It reached beyond the mandated changes and the findings need to be considered when the participants in the sample are homeowners, people needing liveable housing for themselves, their family and friends to live in and visit.

The survey findings were made available through the ABCB, however few from the government participated in the research. So this needs to be considered when looking at the participant samples. However, the findings are from a very b voice and are absolutely very relevant to it also provides an opportunity for those who are not captured in their sample to be included in the future.

These sorts of conflict that were highlighted require particular attention. It highlighted whose rights take particular priority. Regarding personal rights, some participants contested this.

The majority of participants’ comments reflected the thoughts ours outlined in the United Nations Convention on the rights of people with a disability. People wanted to have a home that was accessible. This raises the issue as to whether it is a public issue to have accessible housing.

Changes in mainstream practice were also addressed. The costs of accessible design comes in two parts. Firstly is the cost of inherent features and the second is changing construction practices and design. This may not have been considered so much previously.

Much of the participants comments on the cost related to the immediate costs of designing and building liveable housing design. But when we looked at the benefits, participants comments reflected more global benefits.

For example, how residents throughout the life of the dwelling would benefit, the benefits to Allied health and support services, and the normalising of disabled people living well and safely in their own homes.

Costs are difficult to quantify and the benefits are often limited to immediate tangible outcomes. Participants pointed to a much broader analysis, regardless how difficult that may be.

Any cost/benefit exercise must go to beyond the immediate impact on the housing market to consider the Australian housing infrastructure in the long term, as well as the significant government investment to assist people to be socially and economically included and participate in family and community life.

To conclude, the research findings indicated that any cost/benefit exercise must go beyond any immediate impact on the housing industry and housing market to consider the public interest in Australia's housing infrastructure in the long-term, as well is a significant government investment to assist people to be part of the community and live a full life.

The results also highlighted a perceived need for awareness to accompany the legislation so that all stakeholders understand why the regulation of liveable housing design is important for them, their business and for a more inclusive Australian society.

Thank you very much.

(Applause)

QUESTION FROM FLOOR:

Hi, thank you. I wanted to ask your opinion. I have noticed there is a theme at the moment with regards to the potential topography of a site being exempted from being required to design liveable housing, as Kieran mentioned earlier, at least from option one of the new liveable design guidelines initially.

What do you think would be the impact from that on people who would like to continue living in the community they have lived with for decades, who have a big community connection, who would be put in a position, I suppose, where they have no option but to consider other areas to live in because of that potential loophole for exemption?

DR COURTNEY WRIGHT:

I think if that loophole or exemption were to actually come into effect, there would be a number of people who would be potentially negatively impacted by that and who would likely not have a choice have to move.

So unless systems are able to adapt and make every bit accessible, we would still see that happening and a lot of people would not be able to stay in areas that they have grown up in and choose to live in.

QUESTION FROM FLOOR:

Thank you. This probably crosses over from previous topic so we talked about a 40% tax cost for the bills, maybe those taxes will help with the topography challenged places and any other designs that those taxes start getting subsidised when you build a universally designed house.

And if people start paying for that, all developers would jump on it if they can take 40% of their cost to build a universally designed house, if you can come back in and take, "These are all the benefits, this has been proven."

Then how do the government not pay the 40% and take that 40% off?

DR COURTNEY WRIGHT:

Absolutely. Thank you.

DR COURTNEY WRIGHT:

Unfortunately that is a limitation with the survey, and it can't be linked to this survey. Capturing what people believe, we can try to capture potential trends and understand a bit more.

QUESTION FROM FLOOR:

Thank you for that presentation. A bit more on the methodology, it is great that you acknowledge the limitations. You said it wasn't a question questionnaire. Can I ask what percentage were qualitative?

DR COURTNEY WRIGHT:

Six of the eight had both qualitative and quantitative. This presentation is based on questions seven and eight. There are broader qualitative questions that discuss what features people thought or believed should be mandated.

There were some other questions around what should be mandated...

SPEAKER:

What their interest was to this topic. When they were looking for accessible housing... It was also about their interest in the topic.

DR COURTNEY WRIGHT:

And their experience of the current housing landscape, what was working, what was not working, that kind of thing. The perceived cost of benefits were questions seven and eight.

QUESTION FROM FLOOR:

In regards to the lectures and distribution of material, going forward, do you have an alternative methodology to capture a broader audience, you said you only captured homeowners who have access to computers or online. Is there an alternative strategy?

DR COURTNEY WRIGHT:

Yes, it always presents a challenge, doesn't it? Online, if you want numbers, that seems to be the most efficient and cost-effective way to obtain numbers of participants that doesn't necessarily mean it is a good representation. We prefer to use both online and paper-based methods, that will improve the representation.

Or likely improve. But surveys, online surveys are more cost-effective than doing face-to-face focus groups. It can be more expensive to transcribe. So by using a mixed method survey, I think it's a good option to have those open text questions throughout it so that people can elaborate on their quantitative questions. But being representative is always a challenge.

It is about getting the survey out there to the groups who can spread it widely through their networks and tap into different networks that we can get a greater voice.

QUESTION FROM FLOOR:

Thanks for that. I guess I was just sitting here thinking as the coalface OT in the community, 12 different people in the community in a week are in those recently built brick on slab houses, they might not have a specific disability, to say they have a long-term health condition which is now disabling them.

The vast majority of the people in their 70s, while they may be using the computer and not opening up attachment and completing a survey, we all know those difficulties. I see as I am ageing, and the process of being on access and IT consultant, I am seeing more individuals week after week making comments about the limitations of modern design.

People who has sensibly gone out to the suburbs and built a brick on slab house and now they are having trouble with the 150 mm step down and the sliding patio doors that have no adjacent structure on which to put a handle and they are tripping on the way out of the laundry and that sort of thing.

There is this untapped number of young aged people out there and big numbers because of the baby boomer bulge, that would just be there with bells on in terms of universal housing design.

DR COURTNEY WRIGHT:

Just with people with the older generation, not based on research but what has been coming through, is the perception that accessible housing is clinical and not homely.

I think that is a challenge, people will potentially prefer to live in an inaccessible home because of the aesthetics and what they feel it looks like so it comes back to perception. We can say it still needs to be homely, doesn't have to be clinical.

SPEAKER:

Particularly if it is done at the design stage. We can convince somebody to accept a grab rail if it is horizontal and can go not to the corner because they are bracing behind the wall and therefore it looks like a towel rail and you can hang a bath mat over it if you are not in a shower, everyone will think it is a towel rail as well.

DR COURTNEY WRIGHT:

Yeah.

MARGARET WARD:

OK, thank you very much, Courtney.