

The Hopkins Centre

Research for Rehabilitation and Resilience

Building all new homes to an agreed universal design standard: Understanding the perceived costs and benefits to Australian society

Dr Courtney Wright¹, Dr Jacinta Colley¹, & Dr Margaret Ward^{1,2}

¹The Hopkins Centre, Menzies Health Institute Queensland, Griffith University

²Australian Network for Universal Housing Design

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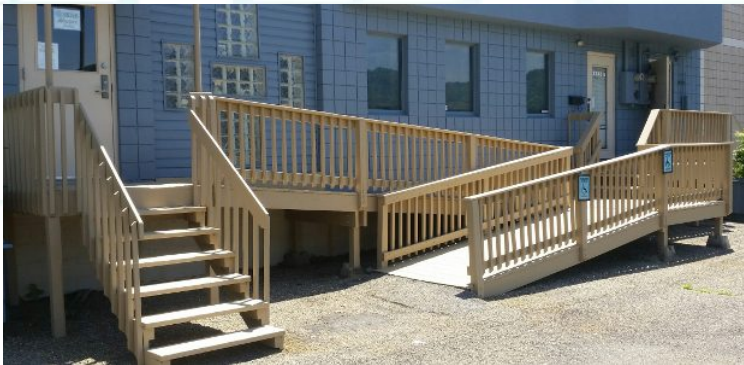
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Outline

- Background
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- Findings
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- Acknowledgements

Background

- Many thousands of Australians with reduced physical capacity incur significant housing challenges
- Ageing Australians and people with short-term, long-term, or life-long illness or injury are often forced to:
 - modify their home at significant expense;
 - relocate to an undesirable residential environment; or
 - remain in their physically inaccessible property.



- Australian Government established the National Dialogue on Universal Housing Design (NDUHD) in 2009
- NDUHD comprised housing industry leaders, community leaders and others, and argued for:
 - an industry-led voluntary approach over 10 years;
 - a national guideline; and
 - a strategic plan with the aspirational goal that “all new homes will be of an agreed Universal Housing Design standard by 2020” (NDUHD, 2010).
- A year later, COAG’s *2010-2020 National Disability Strategy* included a commitment by all three levels of government to work with the National Dialogue
- Voluntary uptake of Universal Housing Design has been met with resistance to implement

Research Aim

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

Method

- Online mixed-methods survey
- Convenience and snowball strategies used
- Total of 1,329 participants
- Sample predominantly reflected home owners and people whose needs are not currently met
- Quantitative data analysed according to frequency counts and percentages
- Qualitative data thematically analysed using Leximancer to identify emerging concepts. Manual thematic analysis was then completed by two researchers

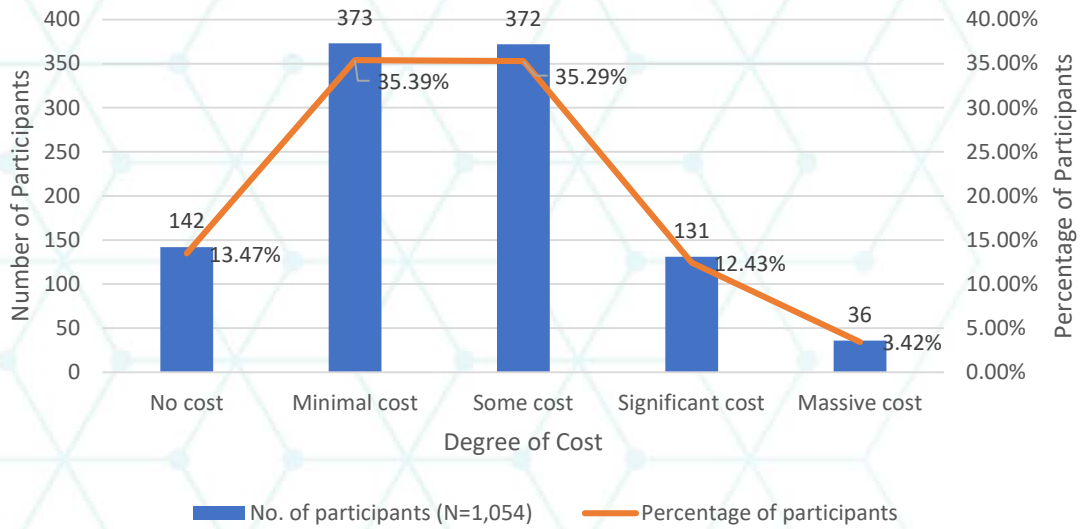
Findings

Q: “If all new housing were to be livable, what would be the cost / benefit to Australian society?” (The ‘cost’ or ‘benefit’ might be social, economic, or to human rights)

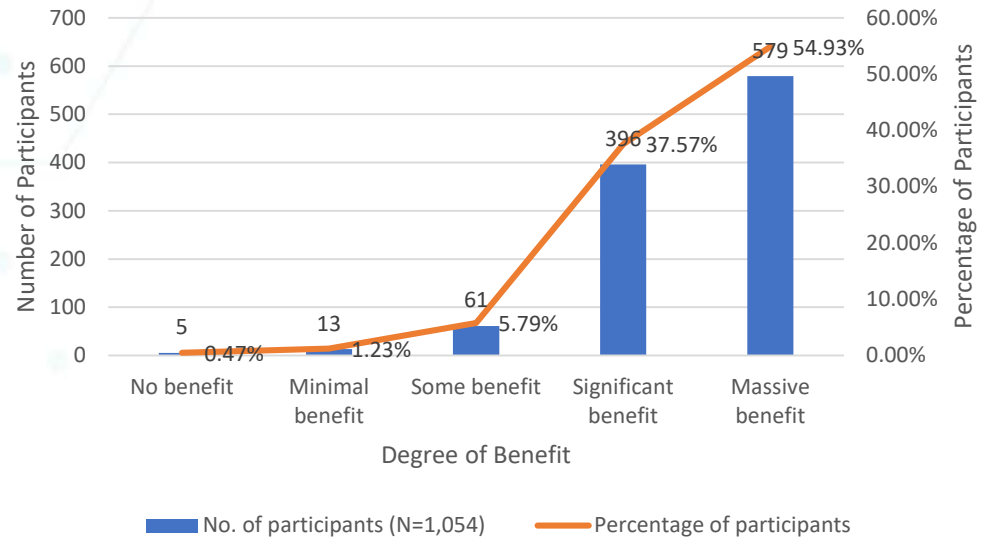
Quantitative findings:

- In two separate multiple choice questions, participants were asked to indicate how costly and beneficial they believed it would be to Australian society to ensure all new housing was a livable design standard.
- Responses were recorded on a five-point scale (i.e., no cost to massive cost; no benefit to massive benefit)

Perceived Cost to Australian Society



Perceived Benefit to Australian Society



Qualitative findings:

- Participants were asked to explain their reasons for their multiple-choice response, and identify the costs and benefits from their perspective.
- From the thematic analysis, 2 main themes were identified:
 - Right to participation and autonomy; and
 - Perceived financial impact of change.



Theme 1: Right to Participation & Autonomy

A smaller number of responses suggested that:

- Mandating livable design standards would infringe on the rights of others to choose their housing design & features.
- Government funding would enable a person with mobility limitations to live in suitable housing while also providing themselves the “freedom to design and build homes” (Response 0429) to suit their preferences
- “Building more accessible housing, not all” (Response 0246) would be a reasonable / realistic compromise

Majority of participants supported mandating livable housing standards for all new builds:

- Livable housing design considered a human right
- Participants strongly suggested that mandating livable housing would:
 - foster independence over the life course;
 - encourage more inclusive communities;
 - enable all people to participate in society as equals;
 - increase housing choice;
 - enable a person to age in place in their familiar neighbourhood if they choose;
 - allow individuals to maintain relationships with friends and family; and
 - reduce the likelihood of negative experiences associated with unsuitable housing

- Mandating livable housing design would promote physical, psychosocial and emotional health, and quality of life for all Australians

“We are all ageing as well as vulnerable to illness, accidents or injuries which could lead to incapacity of varying degrees at any age or stage of life” (Response 0324).

- Participants also noted previous societal resistance to change regarding housing, transport, and community issues that had subsequently been overcome.
- Participants suggested that the same would happen in relation to mandating livable housing.

“...just like we have gotten used to other regulations, people will get used to this” (Response 0622).

Theme 2: Perceived financial impact of change

- Several participants believed implementing livable design features into new housing would cost little or no more than current housing options
- Others believed that the implementation of livable design features would cost a lot more than current housing designs (e.g., impact the housing footprint)

...more space is needed regardless, and "space costs money" (Response 0369).

- Costly to implement livable housing design in regional / rural areas of Australia & in areas that have steep or sloping blocks of land
- An increase in overall costs would be passed on to buyers

- Mandating livable housing design would come with an initial cost for a transition phase.
 - education to consumers / the general public & the building industry;
 - education / training to designers, architects, and builders; and
 - the revision of current design templates
- Initial cost would be outweighed by numerous social benefits to Australian society and/or recovered over time from the:
 - scale of economics and mass production of fittings and materials;
 - reduction in need for home modifications as retrofitting an existing property can be expensive; and
 - significant cost savings to the health system by enabling individuals to remain in their own home.
- Majority of participants considered mandating livable housing design a cost-effective venture

Where to Next?: Research into Action

- Majority of participants endorsed ANUHD's call for regulation and need for a comprehensive Regulatory Impact Assessment
- However, the findings must be contextualised in relation to its limitations - narrow participant sample
- This research did not attempt to quantify the costs and benefits of Livable Housing Design. Rather, it considered some key issues that participants raised.
 - Whose rights take priority?
 - Costs of changing mainstream practice
 - Measuring broader systemic costs and benefits

Conclusion

- Any cost-benefit exercise must go beyond the immediate impacts on the housing industry and the housing market, to consider the public interest in Australia's housing infrastructure in the long term
- Perceived need for a comprehensive education and awareness strategy to accompany regulation.

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