



## **PRACTICAL AND ACCESSIBLE HOMES FOR ALL AUSTRALIANS**

### **A Chronic Illness Alliance Position Statement August 2009**

The Chronic Illness Alliance welcomes recent measures introduced into Victoria to encourage the building of new homes that have accessible features for people with a disability or people who are over the age of 60. The Alliance would like to see such measures made available to Australians in all States and territories. There are few houses with disability accessible features available to cope with the needs of Australia's ageing population.

In Victoria the *Build for Life* awareness campaign will inform builders, designers and consumers of accessible design elements that can be built into new homes. In addition the Brumby Government is taking action to boost the supply of accessible housing by consulting on the proposed regulatory impact that will consider mandatory accessibility features for all new homes.

Minimum mandatory requirements in Victoria's building regulations are being investigated and include four accessible features:

- A clear path from the street to a level entry;
- Wider doorways and halls;
- A toilet suitable for people with limited mobility on entry level; and
- Reinforced bathroom walls so grab rails can be fitted inexpensively if they are needed in the future.

The Chronic Illness Alliance argues that when the needs of the many people living with chronic illnesses in the community are also included there is a large number who will benefit from these accessible features. Because a chronic illness may last a whole lifetime and the person often/usually grows progressively more disabled ideally there are a number of features that should be considered beyond these minimum requirements.

These include:

- Medical cooling and heating which takes into account temperature control, including better insulation and solar design concepts;
- The ability to maintain temperatures throughout the house;
- The removal of sharp edges and corners especially in bathrooms to minimise injuries due to a fall;
- Internal telephones and alert systems;
- Regulated water temperatures to minimise accidental burns;

- Reinforced ceilings in bathrooms and bedrooms for the installation of hoists, taking into account that extra load-bearing capacity will at times be an issue;
- Larger showers, bathrooms and toilets to cater for people who require assistance as well as those who may be obese;
- Three phase electrical wiring to assist with charging of electric wheelchairs and hoists;
- Access to public transport and community hubs to ensure community integration
- Retrofitting of an existing dwelling to comply with regulatory frameworks so that a person may continue in their own home.

Not all people with chronic illnesses and disabilities live in stand-alone dwellings. Flats, apartments and supported accommodation units should include:

- Security;
- Emergency facilities for the disabled;
- Lifts that are large enough to take wheelchairs;
- Adequate lighting in corridors.

View the *Build for Life* awareness campaign and resources on [www.buildforlife.com.au](http://www.buildforlife.com.au)