FROM HOUSE TO HOME

Key insights and recommendations on Specialist Disability Accommodation in Western Australia

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Fairer markets for Australians

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The Consumer Policy Research Centre (CPRC) is an independent, not-for-profit research organisation. We conduct research into the issues affecting Australians and translate our findings into practical policy recommendations that help create fairer markets and improve people's lives.

Acknowledgements

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Statement of Recognition

CPRC acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters throughout Australia. We pay our respect to Elders, past, present and emerging, acknowledging their continuing relationship to land and the ongoing living cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples across Australia.

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Introduction

The Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) market provides critical housing for people with disability with extreme functional impairment or very high support needs.[1] Many people living in SDA also receive funding for in-home support services including Supported Independent Living (SIL). A person's level of SIL funding heavily influences the type of disability housing they live in, including whether they live alone or with other residents.

SDA was established in 2016, when the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) formally introduced SDA as a funded support category at the national level. Recent NDIS data shows 3.3% of all NDIS participants across Australia are either eligible for SDA or are actively using SDA. The SDA market is notably smaller in Western Australia (WA), with 1.2% of NDIS participants in the state eligible or living in SDA.[2]

In 2025, Consumer Protection WA commissioned Consumer Policy Research Centre (CPRC) to undertake research to understand the lived experience in SDA for people living with disability in WA. The research involved speaking with people living in SDA and other modified disability housing, carers (family members and friends), and people operating in and working in the SDA sector in WA. A Lived Experience Advisory Group guided the research and shared insights on life in SDA.

The research sought to understand what is working well in SDA in WA, what challenges exist, and how SDA design, services, regulation and policy can be improved to support the livelihood and wellbeing of people who live in SDA.

Given access to SDA homes involves interactions with both state and federal governments, this report provides recommendations for the WA Government, as well as for the Federal Government.

This snapshot report provides a synopsis of the key findings and recommendations from the research. The following report provides a deep dive into the research for further information:

Life in Specialist Disability Accommodation in Western Australia Report →

CPRC conducted a concurrent research project looking into SDA in Victoria which was funded by the Victorian Government. Comparative insights between WA and Victoria are provided throughout the *Life in Specialist Disability Accommodation in Western Australia* report where a notable difference exists.

As recommendations were developed with the Advisory Group from each jurisdiction, the recommendations including those directed towards the Federal Government and the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission differ accordingly.

Life in Specialist Disability Accommodation in Victoria Report →

Finding a SDA home

Residents need meaningful support to find a SDA home

- Residents and carers reported that finding a SDA home could take months to many years, with experiences varying considerably based on experience navigating the system and the level of support available to the person.
- The pathway depended heavily on advocacy, with better outcomes for people who had skilled and effective support coordinators, occupational therapists, hospital staff, informed carers or advocates.
- Residents and carers explained how entry into SDA was often crisis-led, triggered by unsafe housing, hospitalisation, failed placements, homelessness risk, deterioration or carer strain, including a change in a family member's capacity.
- There are underlying issues relating to SDA funding through the NDIS that are front of mind for carers and residents. The process was frequently described by residents and carers as complex, slow and evidence-heavy.

"And then my brother was like, oh my god, I'm homeless, I'm going to be homeless. And anyway, then the coordinator stepped in and helped him, but he didn't even know about it (SDA), and I didn't know much about the process either."

– CARER

SDA providers must understand residents' requirements holistically and individually at the application process

- Insights from residents and carers highlighted how resident needs are highly individual, as needs differ widely by condition, capability, risk, personality and life stage. Physical, sensory, psychosocial, cognitive and health-related needs often overlap and need to be considered holistically.
- From the perspective of industry members, meeting with residents to determine their needs and preferences was a critical part of the application and selection process into SDA and SIL housing.

"The biggest challenge for me, hands down, and for anyone that works in a tenant engagement role is finding people to put in your house. It's a literal needle in a haystack. So because there's a small amount of people with funding and there's an influx of SDA providers, it's really hard to actually find that person and make those connections with people to even start a conversation…"

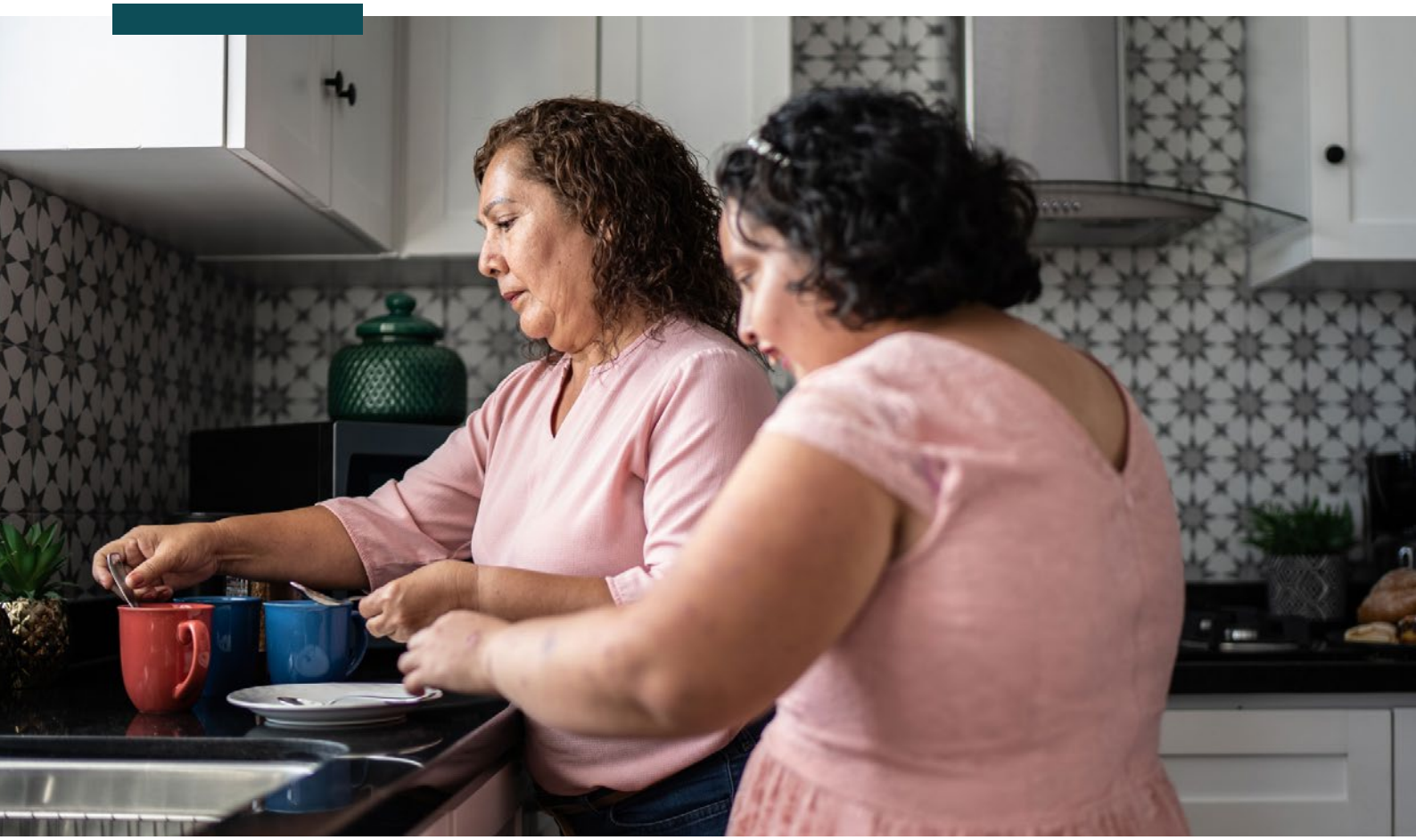
– SDA FRONTLINE WORKER

"It's the planning and actually having people with disability involved. It feels like everything that everybody does, because 95% of the world is able-bodied and never had an issue with, you know, any kind of disability in their lifetime, they become the planners, they (go) this works for everybody, when it doesn't actually work for anybody."

– SDA RESIDENT

There is a lack of suitable SDA that meets residents' needs amidst industry vacancy challenges

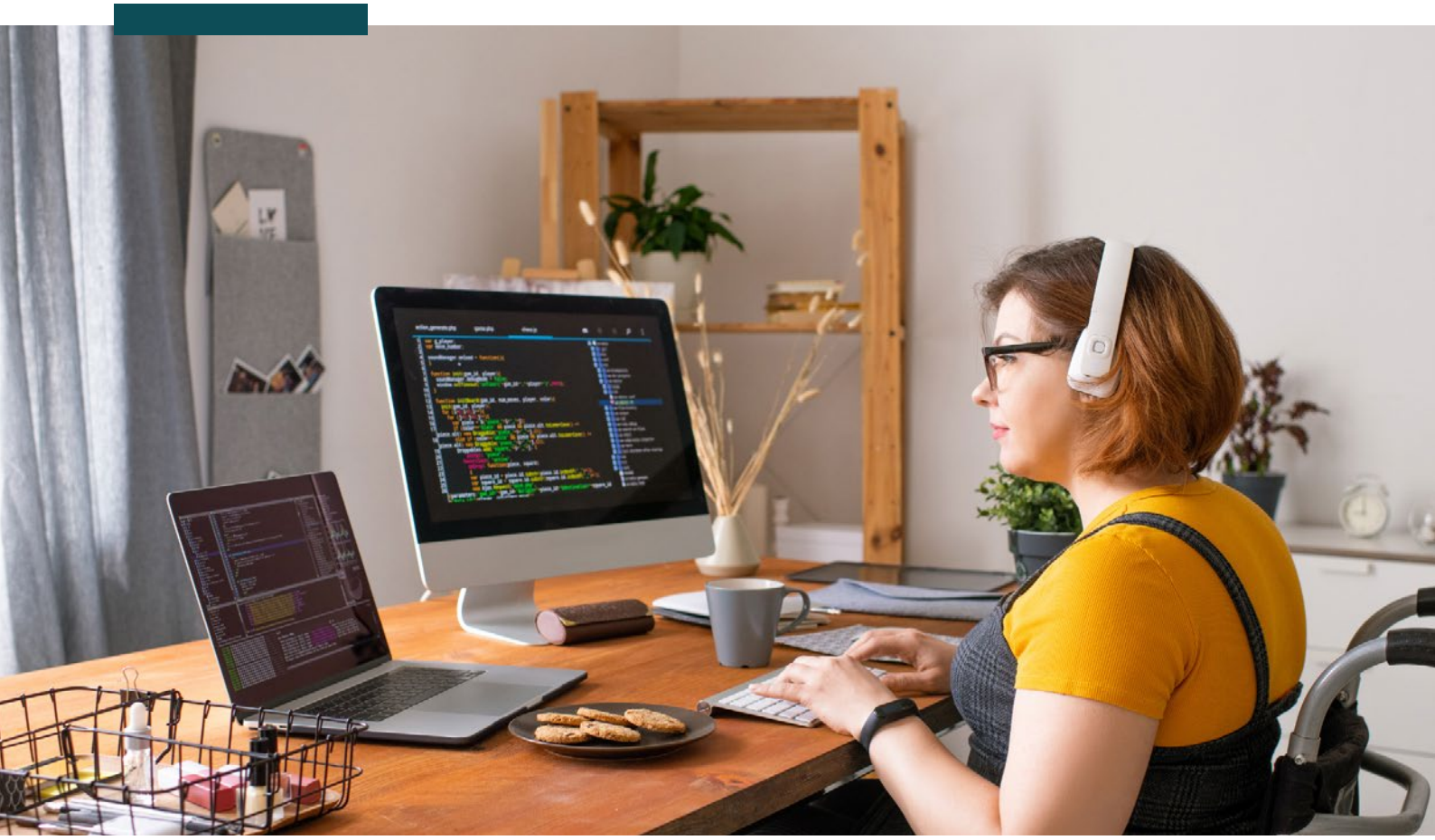
- Industry members highlighted challenges with oversupply of SDA homes leading to high rates of vacancies. As a result, some providers are accepting residents with SIL funding only, meaning they are not receiving a full return on investment.
- For SDA residents and carers, available housing did not always mean suitable housing in the WA market, with barriers around location, sharing, tied SIL, property design, housemate fit, tenure security and support model. Sometimes people end up staying in hospital simply because appropriate accommodation cannot be found fast enough.
- Residents, carers and industry members acknowledged that SDA may not be in a location that is culturally appropriate for a person, or close to their community or family. It may also be far away from key amenities and services. For First Nations peoples, availability of homes and services on Country is essential.
- Regional residents were more exposed to supply and access constraints.



Transitioning into a SDA home

Understanding of tenancy agreement was broad but unspecific – residents need more clarification about length of leases

- While there was a lack of knowledge of the finer contractual details recalled across residents and carers, there was broad understanding that a tenancy agreement was in place.
- SDA providers usually explained the tenancy agreement upon signing.
- When a resident first finds a SDA home, the feeling of relief in securing accommodation could override fastidious examination of the tenancy contract.
- Insights from industry members indicated leases are typically one or two years long, despite some residents understanding that their housing arrangement is relatively permanent. Housing insecurity can create anxiety among residents and carers, undermining their health and wellbeing.
- Long-term tenure helped people feel settled, in control and can strongly contribute to SDA housing feeling like a home, not temporary accommodation.
- Residents and carers reported that SDA providers take them through emergency routes and processes when they first move into the home, noting that these are also displayed in the home.



Living in a SDA home

The right living arrangement is key to residents feeling happy in their homes

- Overall, most residents and carers we spoke with felt happy with their SDA home. This was due to feeling safe and settled, loving living alone or getting along well with housemates if living with others, enjoying the social energy and company.
- Where resident matching was not working well, people are placed into shared arrangements due to funding constraints, supply shortages and a lack of consideration and proper process in resident matching.
- Some people who live alone did not feel they can tolerate living with other people, meaning they expressed a strong preference to live by themselves with control of their own space. For these residents, quiet time, privacy and separation was particularly important in feeling safe at home.
- There was more space and autonomy in SDA shared homes than traditional, government provided disability group homes.

> **"(He) struggles a bit in the group home, just being in that kind of context with others with similar challenges... there's a lot happening in the group home. It's hard to get privacy."**
>
> – CARER

> **"I can't do more. It's taken me four years to start to live with somebody, again, with my PTSD and trust issues and so on. It's taken that long for me to be happy to live with somebody. And even then, I've still got to have space. If I have a meltdown, I've got to be left alone. The SDA's are great in a sense, they are big rooms... so you can be with people or without people basically."**
>
> – SDA RESIDENT

Homes that support personalisation and individual preferences are important factors

- Individuality and self-expression were important to residents, meaning home is a place to build and reinforce identity, not just receive care. The ability for residents to inject personal taste and establish individual routines supported residents' dignity and wellbeing, meaning SDA homes should reflect who the person is, not just what support they need.
- Familiar routines and trusted people, as well as social connection on their own terms, were also important to residents.
- Some residents also valued being outside and close to nature, being involved in sport, movement and physical participation with others and cooking, making, creating and doing.

> **"Having the pet... he's part of the safe space, and what makes home, home."**
>
> – SDA RESIDENT

Relationship and connection between residents and their paid support services can fundamentally impact quality of life

- Support workers also play a critical role in advocating for many residents.
- Several industry members reflected on the importance of connection, community and care in delivering a person with disability a high quality of life in their SDA home. This included SIL support workers who form positive relationships with the people they work with.
- SDA operators do not always get to know residents or understand their needs and communication styles.

Combined SDA and SIL service delivery can risk compromising either of the services a person receives

- One carer reported that the person in their life receives their SIL support from the SDA provider. The carer reported that the resident felt very positive about this arrangement – stating that they have finally found accommodation where the provider understands the resident and his needs holistically.
- No industry members reported that housing and SIL supports are provided together. However, it was noted that in some instances, SDA providers partner with SIL providers and build relationships with them.
- There is a tension regarding a need for housing and SIL providers to work together, while ensuring independence to not compromise a person's receipt of either.

Residents in shared accommodation do not always have meaningful choice and control in choosing their SIL supports

- Industry members reported that residents in shared accommodation are typically required to share the same SIL provider, limiting a person's ability to exercise their choice in provider without compromise in some instances.
- Some residents in shared accommodation who want to have different SIL providers could vote on their preferences.
- Several industry members stated that using different SIL providers in the same house can be challenging, for both the provider and the resident. Using multiple providers can also pose a Work Health and Safety (WHS) risk, as it is not always clear who is responsible for what or who is who in the eyes of the participant.
- It was noted that reputable SDA providers built opportunities for residents to change SIL providers into their policies and procedures, suggesting that this measure needs to be applied sector wide.

All residents we spoke to feel safe in their home, and all carers reported that the person in their life feels safe

- Safety for residents is both physical and emotional. Physical safety includes access, mobility equipment, falls prevention and emergency planning. Emotional safety is created through stability, privacy, trusted people and control over who comes into their home, as well as predictable routines. A technically compliant home can still feel unsafe.

"It's also a conflict of interest to have SDA and SIL with the same provider. If you don't like the on-site support, then you lose your home as well."

– SDA RESIDENT

- Insights from residents and carers suggested a home feels safer when it looks and feels like an ordinary home, not a disability home with overt accessibility design features, such as ramps when not needed. This supports dignity, privacy and community belonging.
- It was highlighted that colonial housing systems still shape SDA, often disconnecting First Nations people from Country. There are instances where people live in disability group homes with no other Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, meaning their housemates are not familiar with their culture or customs. This can have an impact on whether a person feels safe.

"Home means a lot to me. It's a safe space."

– SDA RESIDENT

Accessible SDA design features are critical but sometimes fall short

- While SDA homes with purpose-built accessible design features may be compliant, the way SDA is designed does not necessarily make a home livable. This demonstrates the importance of consulting with residents.
- For residents with physical disability, accessible, practical design features within the home such as hoists, rails, cupboards, storage, adequate number of power points, bench heights and outdoor access were especially important to liveability, with small design gaps creating safety risk and/or frustration.
- For someone who is neurodivergent, appropriate lighting in the home is important.
- For some residents, the SDA design category they have been allocated impacted the accessibility features of their home.
- New builds were generally considered of excellent standard by industry members.

"They put both pull handles and push button cupboards in the kitchen. So when I lean against them to try and reach, they pop open on my knees every time. So not really much thought put in there. Yeah, so I have to rely on my staff to cook."

– SDA RESIDENT

"There's not a single cutlery drawer or drawer in the kitchen. So we had nowhere to put cutlery. I had to buy an IKEA set of drawers on wheels so that we had somewhere to put knives and forks and utensils."

– SDA RESIDENT

"They go and put wall cupboard in, assuming all your support workers are going to do the work up and high and stuff, but the problem is the wall cupboards don't drop down. A lot of my stuff has to be stored in the drawers because I can't necessarily have a support worker around all the time…"

– SDA RESIDENT

Residents need prompt action so that the right assistive technologies and modifications are implemented soon after move-in

- Residents and carers described how upon moving into their SDA home, an occupational therapist typically assesses final modifications and assistive technology including hoists, rails, storage, doors, door automation and power points.
- Sometimes the home required retrofitting to cater to individual needs.
- In instances where modifications were required, residents and carers broadly reported that these were typically addressed by SDA providers in good time, although this was not always the case. On occasion residents had to pay for modifications to their SDA home out of their own pocket, such as shutters to keep out the heat and a washing line they can reach.
- Insights from industry members suggested approaches to SDA providers' supply of assistive technologies in the home varies and needs to be approached flexibly.
- From the perspective of industry, there was a lack of clarity of roles when it comes to who pays for assistive technologies.

Raising a problem

Residents' and carers' commentary on maintenance processes highlighted the importance of fast responses from providers, a reliable person to contact and regulation to ensure compliance

- Delays in equipment and maintenance could have significant consequences and slow decisions could increase risk, dependence, stress and health deterioration.
- When reflecting on their current home, residents typically felt that day to day maintenance was addressed, even if not immediately.
- Several residents reported considerable issues with current and former homes, including examples where the SDA provider did not help them to rectify a problem.
- Industry members reported that residents make a maintenance request generally by email or phone through the person's care team or through a SDA staff member or property manager. Requests are typically dealt with in a day or two.
- Commentary from some industry members suggested support workers often play a big role as the conduit between the SDA provider and the resident. This can sometimes lead to blurred role responsibilities, suggesting clarity in role definition is needed across the sector.

> **"So when I first moved into this house the first day and I rang them and said, it's not been cleaned. And I said, there's no grab rails. And you promised my occupational therapist (who was on the phone as well). You know, what are we going to do? And they said, not our problem. You know, we organised it. If they didn't show up, it's not our problem that you might have a fault. That's how they talk to you. And, you know, it's sort of, yeah, it shows utter disrespect. Nobody takes responsibility."**
>
> – SDA RESIDENT

While industry members have formal complaint handling procedures, complaints tend to come to them informally

- Residents can report complaints by completing a form on the SDA provider's website or contacting the SDA property manager or engagement team directly (via email or another way).
- Industry members who made any comment on how quickly complaints are dealt with stated that complaints get addressed immediately.

> **"There's usually someone to call, and maintenance is generally pretty responsive."**
>
> – SDA RESIDENT

- Industry members stated that complaints tend to be about support workers, or if in shared living, about other residents due to incompatibility or disturbances (including noise or rarely personal violence).
- Industry members who commented on escalation pathways referenced the NDIS and in one instance the parent company of organisations providing services to people living in SDA. One industry member also stated that they provide information on advocacy services for residents if they need advice.
- Like maintenance requests, it is likely some residents rely on their support workers to make a complaint.
- When reflecting on barriers to complaints, the Advisory Group commented that low rates of complaints does not necessarily mean residents are not experiencing issues. The group questioned how regulatory bodies support accessibility and access in practice, such as whether there are supports for a hearing or vision impaired person, or a person who is non-communicative, to make a complaint.

Escalation processes and knowledge of rights are unclear to residents and carers

- Formal complaints pathways were not strongly recalled by residents and carers, and there was little knowledge of formal bodies or external advocates/legal support mechanisms.
- Members of the Advisory Group explained how there is a fundamental issue in knowing what questions to ask and from whom, emphasising that clarity of tenancy protections matters substantially. It was noted by those who work in the community sector, that many people find it hard to make a complaint, and do not know what outcome to expect if they did raise an issue.
- When describing the process to escalate an issue, residents and carers contact the SDA or SIL provider as the first port of call. There was general trust that providers will manage resolution directly. If there is no resolution from either provider, the support coordinator will attempt to resolve the issue. Residents preferred not to involve family members immediately.
- There was a reluctance to contact the NDIS/NDIA for support or queries as there is an expectation that doing so will be time consuming, will result in inconsistent/ incorrect advice or incompetence resulting in frustration.
- Consumer Protection WA was generally not thought of as an avenue for recourse on outstanding issues.

> **"I think if people are living in SDA, they should have a contact that's outside of the organisation that they're under, that's independent, neutral, and you can go to them and say the things that I've said today, because there's certainly nowhere else."**
>
> – SDA RESIDENT

Family and friends are fundamental pillars of support

- The system is too complex for many participants to navigate alone. Closest personal supports (typically consisting of family and friends) played a particularly fundamental advocacy role in residents' lives. These networks provided practical, emotional and decision-making support.
- Those without support from close networks faced more barriers to accessing complaint pathways and justice.

Industry members were divided when considering how easy and clear SDA laws and regulations are to apply

- Multiple industry members commented that SDA laws and regulations could be ambiguous and unclear, particularly relating to SDA design standards.
- It was noted that the design guide has not been updated and it is difficult to find information and support from the NDIA, with inconsistent information provided from personnel. It was further noted that regulations are open to interpretation in some instances, particularly with regards to SDA enrolment.

Recommendations for Consumer Protection and the Western Australian Government

1. Provide accessible information and support regarding residents' tenancy rights

Formal complaints pathways were not strongly recalled by residents and carers, and there was little knowledge of formal bodies or external advocates/legal support mechanisms. There were also many barriers to making a complaint. Residents may fear retaliation, eviction, disruption to supports or being labelled difficult. Residents and their families need access to confidential and independent ways of reporting issues and seeking advice.

While we shouldn't expect residents and their families to have complete knowledge of SDA laws, regulations and consumer protections, residents and their families need clear information on how to get help and the type of help they can expect to receive.

Without resources and help available, the system is set up to fail.

All information must be accessible to be meaningfully usable to the disability community.

Many residents' experiences were also highly dependent on their formal support networks, such as their NDIS support coordinator. Accessible information and support regarding tenancy rights will also benefit support coordinators who are not experts in tenancy rights.

SDA residents and their families also need access to specialist independent legal and advocacy support to understand and exercise their tenancy rights, resolve housing-related issues, and make informed decisions about their accommodation.

Recommendation 1A. Create accessible materials and resources for residents and their families/ carers on their rights

- **Co-design resources and guidance for SDA residents with people living with a disability and work with accessibility experts.**
- **Specific resources that should be created:**
    - **a.** A standalone resource on the website to make information easy to find and navigate.
    - **b.** Clear guidance to inform people of their rights regarding Notices to Vacate and Notices of Temporary Relocation.
    - **c.** Information on SDA provider duties.
- **Test drafts of these materials with the disability community,** ensuring a wide range of people with different types of disabilities are represented.
- When co-designing and testing new content and formats with the disability community, including community and advocacy organisations, remunerate people for their time and advice.
- **Promote resources to the disability community.**
- In line with Recommendation 5 (Take tangible action to improve co-regulation of SDA), **establish a formal pathway of referrals between Consumer Protection WA and the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission.**

Recommendation 1B. Information on how residents and their families/carers can escalate a problem

Many residents and their families/carers were uncertain about how to escalate an issue once living in SDA.

There should be a 'no wrong door' approach for residents and their families/carers wanting to report an issue or seek help. Information materials and supports should clearly point residents to the Magistrates Court at the end of the dispute resolution journey.

Recommendation 1C. Fund independent legal advice, support and advocacy services assisting people in disability housing

The complex intersection of SDA, tenancy law, disability rights and the NDIS requires specialist expertise that is often unavailable in mainstream legal and advocacy services, which are already operating at capacity.

Concerningly, insights from the Advisory Group suggested some residents receive advocacy advice from NDIS providers, meaning advice is not independent.

Funding should support a specialist SDA legal and advocacy service that can provide direct assistance to participants while also building sector capability through training, secondary consultations and ongoing support for tenancy advocates, disability advocates and community legal services. Funding could be provided to an existing organisation that is well set up to perform this role. This would strengthen access to expert advice, improve the resolution of tenancy issues and disputes, and help ensure the rights of people living in SDA are consistently protected.

Recommendation 1D. Invest further in Consumer Protection WA training for frontline staff taking calls from SDA residents and their families

Consumer Protection WA needs to be contactable for people seeking advice and assistance from the regulator.

- Work with the disability community to identify how Consumer Protection WA can best support them and what contact access options they need.
- If not already well established, invest in SDA-specific training for Consumer Protection WA staff answering calls on SDA tenancy matters.
- Implement a dedicated SDA support line which is escalated to staff specifically trained to manage SDA tenancy matters.

Who regulates SDA in Western Australia

Consumer Protection WA	Blurred roles	NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission

2. Make it easier for residents to search for a SDA home

Residents need to be able to reliably search for a SDA home that meets their needs and funding arrangement. Currently advertising can also take place anywhere, including via social media where eligibility requirements are not presented clearly. This can create false hope for people seeking their SDA home.

Recommendation 2A. Consider the development of a 'one stop shop' searchable database of available SDA homes

Consumer Protection WA should build a database of current and verified vacancies to make it easier for residents and their families to search and apply for a SDA home. The database should include the provider's details, location, design category, accessibility features, household composition, whether supports are tied to the dwelling, cultural or sensory features and clear funding requirements.

Providers would need to self-report the requirements they meet, which could also be used as a source of regulatory intelligence.

Recommendation 2B. Introduce requirements for advertising of SDA homes, specifically requiring that eligibility requirements are clear.

Consumer Protection WA should advocate to the WA Government to set regulations relating to key information requirements for SDA home advertising. In the interim, Consumer Protection WA should develop a set of guiding principles of good practice in advertising a SDA home.

3. Work with the Federal Government to improve distribution and suitability of supply of SDA homes, particularly in regional and remote WA

While a person may be eligible for SDA and there may be vacant SDA homes in the SDA market in WA, vacant homes may not meet a person's needs. This situation can arise when the dwelling is in the wrong location, doesn't meet the person's functional, sensory or cultural needs, requires them to leave trusted supports or is incompatible with their funding arrangements.

People may face a choice between a technically suitable property and remaining close to family, community, services or Country. A vacancy is not genuinely available if relocating would disconnect someone from the relationships and culture that sustain them.

4. Strengthen tenancy contracts

In WA, SDA and disability housing residents can be covered by either a standard Form 1AA Residential Tenancy Agreement (regulated by the *Residential Tenancies Act 1987*) or a Boarders/Lodgers Agreement (not regulated by the Act). In some circumstances, there may be no written tenancy agreement, leaving the resident particularly vulnerable to eviction.

Many residents/carers thought of their SDA home as permanent, yet insights from industry members indicated leases are typically one or two years long. This could lead to feelings of worry about security in tenure among residents.

Providers of disability housing need to provide agreements with standard, clear terms and additional, specific protections.

Additional protections to be outlined by the WA Government should take into account that housing security must not be made conditional on using a particular SIL provider or maintaining a particular support ratio where an NDIA funding decision changes. Residents should not risk losing their home because their support funding is reduced or because they seek to change providers.

Recommendation 4A. Review tenancy protections for SDA and disability-specific housing

Consumer Protection WA should work with the WA Government to instigate a review of the tenancy protections for SDA and disability specific housing.

The review should consider requiring all disability housing to use either of the following:

- The standard Form 1AA Residential Tenancy Agreement, with additional protections required above and beyond. This should include drawing on Part 12A of Victoria's *Residential Tenancies Act 1997.*
- A different type of standard agreement, tailored for people in disability housing.

Recommendation 4B. Consider making longer leases the standard

Consumer Protection WA should work with the WA Government to consider amending the requirements so that longer leases, such as three or five years, are proactively offered to SDA residents. Eviction protections should also be clarified for security of tenure. A person on a longer lease should also be able to more easily personalise their home.

5. Take tangible action to improve co-regulation of SDA

SDA in WA is regulated by Consumer Protection WA, alongside the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission. There are many issues in which Consumer Protection WA and the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission's roles are blurred, for example enforcing maintenance and complaints processes. For instance, while the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission regulates internal complaint and emergency management processes and requires homes to be maintained in accordance with practice standards, amid other functions, Consumer Protection WA has a responsibility to regulate provider repair and maintenance obligations relating to a SDA property.

It is important that Consumer Protection WA and the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission share intelligence with one another to identify systemic problems relating to SDA and coordinate regulatory responses. Both regulators need to ensure that isolated misconduct and regulatory gaps are clearly identified, to protect against unintended consequences from regulation, such as removal of flexible and culturally appropriate supports, particularly in regional, remote and First Nations communities.

Consumer Protection WA and the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission need to appropriately refer breaches to one another, as a breach relating directly to the federal regulator may also be a breach of contract regulated through the *Residential Tenancies Act 1987.*

Recommendation 5A. If not already well established, set up a mechanism to share intelligence between Consumer Protection WA and the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission to identify systemic issues and inform regulatory action

A strong regulatory response to ensure home maintenance, modification and complaints processes are able to be carried out and are complied with relies on coordination and communication between Consumer Protection WA and the federal regulator of SDA.

Recommendation 5B.
Lease agreements should ensure residents can request adjustments and modifications to their home where required, with obligations on the SDA provider to respond to the request

Ensuring people can easily modify their home is also central to fulfilling their individual needs, for example, installing hoists or other accessibility features where required. For example, for someone who is neurodivergent, appropriate lighting in the home is particularly important. Personalising the home was critically important to residents' sense of self in their home, promoting feelings of belonging and safety.

Recommendation 5C.
Introduce enforceable standards around maintenance, with specific wording and examples regarding 'urgent' and 'non-urgent' maintenance/ repair needs

Insights from residents and carers demonstrated that day-to-day maintenance requests were not always addressed swiftly. As an example, the WA Government could introduce requirements around specific timeframes for repairs and maintenance requests to be addressed, such as within 24 hours for urgent repairs/matters and within a few days for non-urgent. Legitimate carve outs could be made for instances in which these timeframes cannot be met, for example inability to source a trade.

Recommendation 5D.
Require SDA providers to give residents and families/carers contact details for requesting repairs and maintenance, and complaint processes

Residents and carers did not always know who to contact to report a maintenance issue or complaint. Consumer Protection WA should require SDA providers to communicate this information to residents and carers and make it readily available and accessible.

Recommendation 5E.
Clarify the conduit role responsibilities of support workers across the sector

Support workers often play a big role as the conduit between the SDA provider and the resident. This can sometimes lead to blurred role responsibilities, suggesting clarity in role definition is needed across the sector.

Consumer Protection WA should consider developing practical guidance that clearly outlines what is within the remit of the support worker when it comes to raising maintenance, modification and complaints on behalf of the resident. Guidance should be developed in consultation with the sector including SDA residents and their families/carers.

6. Enhance access to justice

The WA Government should enhance tenancy protections and access to justice by following through on legislation publicly announced, and ensuring all residents have clear rights outlined in legislation, as well as access to external dispute resolution.

Recommendation 6A. Implement law reform underway and ensure reforms are sufficiently enforced

In particular, the WA Government should follow through with:

- Banning no grounds evictions in line with most Australian states and territories
- Introducing tenancy protections for people governed by a Boarders/Lodgers Agreement

Recommendation 6B. Enhance transparency by publishing outcomes data on Magistrates Court decisions relating to disability housing tenancy

Access to justice would be strengthened by introducing an affordable and accessible complaints forum, such as a tribunal, to deal with tenancy matters, and by publishing court outcomes data.

Recommendation 6C. Establish a tribunal or another affordable and accessible forum that can make binding decisions about complaints to deal with tenancy matters specifically

To ensure residents and families have a clear pathway to escalate a problem, the WA Government should establish a tribunal or alternative external dispute resolution mechanism to deal with tenancy matters including those relating to SDA and disability housing.

7. Explore issues further through consultation and co-design

Many of the issues identified in this research would strongly benefit from further in-depth research and consultation, including with people living in SDA and in particular residents in other disability housing arrangements like SIL homes.

While the Advisory Group included multiple people working in the disability sector, this research was also unable to capture the broader perspectives of people who work in frontline community sector, disability and housing advocacy roles. People in these roles hold a wealth of information and insight into the experiences people with disability face in navigating their tenancy rights. Their day-to-day work gives them a distinctive understanding of the issues, challenges and potential solutions. Future research and engagement relating to SDA and disability housing would benefit from including these perspectives.

- Ensure any reforms to SDA are informed by lived experience and co-designed. Lived experience must include participation from the start to end of any process, and be broad in scope to ensure a variety of voices and perspectives are highlighted.
- Noting limited First Nations representation in this research, prioritise Aboriginal-led co-design, culturally safe engagement, connection to Country and involvement of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations.
- Ensure any consultation and research respects Indigenous Data Sovereignty.
- Continue consultation with frontline workers operating in disability legal, advocacy and tenancy roles.

Reforms needed at the Federal level

Issues with the NDIS were front of mind for many residents and carers. Many of these problems are well documented, including most notably through the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability, and most recently through research published by the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI).[3]
There is considerable opportunity for the Federal Government and specifically the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission to improve its services, systems and policies.

Consumer Protection WA should remain across these issues and potential solutions, and raise them with the Federal Government.

Establish dedicated resources for support workers, NDIS participants and family members to navigate SDA in the first instance

Finding a home could take a significant time, with experiences varying considerably based on experience navigating the system and the level of support available to the person. The pathway depended heavily on advocacy, with better outcomes for those who have skilled support coordinators, occupational therapists, hospital staff, informed carers or advocates who know how to push the system.

The strongest pathways had skilled navigators, especially people who understood SDA evidence, NDIS language, functional assessments, provider options and escalation routes.

Funding issues were front of mind for residents, their families/carers and industry members. Evidence gathering and burden of proof often came at significant cost and emotional load to residents and their families due to the extensive coordination.

Many residents were also underfunded to fully support their needs. Some were unaware that they were receiving funding for SDA, or could apply for funding. A smoother pathway requires clearer guidance, specialist navigation, faster decisions and more human assessment, with the person's full life context considered – not just eligibility paperwork.

- **Establish dedicated resources such as a helpline for NDIS support workers** to upskill workers, improve information provision and make the process easier for residents and their families.
- **Provide clear and accessible information on the SDA application process** that is designed specifically for residents, family members and other carers.
- **Improve searchability functions for SDA homes** through a database of providers, to make people aware of their options.

Issue clear documentation to show a person has SDA funding

From the perspective of SDA providers, an important step in the application process was identifying funding arrangements. Providers' visibility of a participant's NDIS plan to confirm their SDA funding was inconsistent. It was noted by several providers that not having visibility of the plan can create issues and challenges. NDIS participants' plans do not always show a person's funding, even if they've received approval.

Information provided should be limited to SDA funding only.

The Federal Government should mandate the NDIS to issue a straightforward letter to SDA providers (separate to a participant's NDIS plan), to confirm in simple terms that a person has SDA funding, and the amount of the funding.

Review SDA design standards to ensure homes are built to support resident needs and quality of life, including through the ability to modify homes

As any standardisation needs to ensure flexibility for resident needs and care must be taken to ensure homes do not feel clinical or institutional, ensuring modifications are able to be accessed and actioned is critical (see Recommendation 5 – Take tangible action to improve co-regulation of SDA).

People with lived experience should be involved through co-design from the initial planning, location scoping and foundation of the design stage.

Review standards for SDA homes, to ensure essential resident needs like storage and soundproofing are included as 'minimum standard' design features

For SDA residents and carers, available housing does not always mean suitable housing. There are some key features of SDA homes that make a big difference in supporting residents in daily life. This includes features like outdoor space, ensuites and second living rooms in shared homes, adequate storage and attention to acoustic design to minimise noise.

Establish clear pathways for how SDA operators should handle a situation where residents in shared housing do not wish to use the same SIL supports

There is an issue with residents in shared accommodation not always having meaningful choice and control in choosing their SIL supports. Operational complexity should not override meaningful resident choice and control.

Some residents in shared accommodation who want to have different SIL providers can vote on their preferences. Several industry members noted that using different SIL providers in the same house can be challenging, for both the provider and the resident.

The Federal Government should consider developing clear guidelines that cover:

- the need for transparent decision-making processes
- ensuring the suitability of support workers currently employed in a shared housing arrangement
- understanding what other support may be needed at the intake process, and
- how best to ensure the right cultural fit for the resident.

These practices are already evident among reputable SDA providers who build opportunities for residents to change SIL providers into their policies and procedures. This confirms that this measure needs to be applied sector wide.

Endnotes

1. NDIS, 2026, *What is specialist disability accommodation (SDA),* **https://www.ndis.gov.au/participants/home-and-living/types-home-and-living-supports/what-specialist-disability-accommodation-sda**.

2. NDIS, 2026, *Supplement P Specialist Disability Accommodation 2025-26 Q3 (XLSX 1MB), Quarterly report supplements*, **https://dataresearch.ndis.gov.au/reports-and-analyses/quarterly-report-supplements**.

3. Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability, 2023, *Final Report*, **https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/final-report**; AHURI, 2026, *Improving housing outcomes for people with disability: Policy and practice initiatives*, **https://www.ahuri.edu.au/sites/default/files/documents/2026-07/AHURI-Final-Report-462-Improving-housing-outcomes-for-people-with%20disability_Policy-and-practice-initiatives.pdf**.

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