

The Hon Jay Weatherill MP
Minister for Housing
Minister for Ageing
GPO Box 2269
ADELAIDE SA 5001

Dear Minister

I am writing on behalf of the Council on the Ageing (SA) Policy Council to enquire about the Government's views on the Australian Standard on Adaptable Housing (AS 4299 – 1995), hereafter referred to as 'the Standard'.

The Standard presents the objectives and principles of adaptable housing. Its purpose is to provide guidelines on adaptable housing to those involved in designing or building new dwellings or undertaking renovations, including :

- project home developers;
- designers, builders, owners and users of private housing;
- developers and designers of specialised housing such as retirement villages; and
- public housing bodies.

COTA held an "Appropriate and Affordable Housing Forum" in November 2007 and heard very forcefully from a range of speakers about the need for housing that allows older people to remain living independently at home and to 'age in place' for as long as possible.

One of the speakers on the day indicated that the former Public Buildings Department had initiated research to compare the costs of a couple living in a conventional home until they needed nursing home care, with the costs of the same couple living in an adaptable home until they too needed nursing home care. The department produced figures indicating that the savings to the individuals and the State of the couple living in an adaptable home was in the order of \$500,000 over 5 years. Given that this research was conducted in the late 1980s/early 1990s, it may be assumed that the potential savings would be greater in today's dollars.

Previous research presented to this Policy Council indicated that any additional cost entailed in meeting the Australian Standard in new dwellings was in the order of only a few thousand dollars.

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This speaker's talk provoked some questions in relation to the standard which I am hoping you will be able to provide answers to. These are as follows :

1. Given the rapid increases in the numbers of older people in this state, why is it not a requirement that all newly constructed dwellings meet the Australian standard?
2. What is the SA Government's view of this standard?
3. What proportion (%) of the total housing constructed within the control of Housing SA is done so in accordance with this standard?
4. To what extent is housing constructed within the control of Housing SA compliant with the standard? (Our Forum speaker has observed that a brochure he was provided in relation to Housing SA housing purporting to meet the standard showed obvious deviations from the standard.)
5. What level of understanding exists within the broader building industry in relation to the standard?
6. Would it be possible for the SA Government to develop and implement an education/information campaign aimed at informing and educating the building industry in relation to the benefits of building homes compliant with the standard?
7. Is it possible to compel, either through SA Government or Local Government initiative, private builders/developers purchasing large blocks of land in metropolitan Adelaide and replacing large older homes with 2 or 3 smaller dwellings to build in compliance with this standard, thereby increasing the supply of senior friendly housing in close proximity to services, shopping and transport?

It would seem to the Policy Committee that the more housing that complies with the requirements of this Standard, the greater the opportunity for SA's increasing older population to age successfully. The Policy Council also notes that housing that meets the adaptable housing standard also meets the needs of people with disabilities and families with young children and is therefore 'community friendly' not just 'senior friendly'.

I await with interest your response to this correspondence, and would appreciate the opportunity when convenient of meeting with you to discuss this and other issues of interest to the Policy Council.

Yours sincerely

Jim Giles, AM
Chair,
COTA (SA) Policy Council

27 February 2008