

The impact and experience of moving into Specialist Disability Accommodation

The outcomes for people with disability moving into SDA is being measured by La Trobe University and the Summer Foundation. A new peer-reviewed article presents qualitative findings of interviews with 10 SDA tenants.¹ Interviews were conducted prior to the move into single-resident SDA apartments, and 6-24 months after. Before moving, participants described their housing as *'not a good fit'*. After moving, they described feeling like *'a pioneer'* and that they were *'moving in the right direction'*.

What is the context?

By 2025, 30,000 people are expected to be receiving SDA payments through the NDIS. SDA dwellings are financed by private capital, with investors looking for a financial return alongside a positive social impact.

Group homes are the predominant type of SDA in Australia, but housing for people with disability is moving away from congregated living towards individualised housing. Existing studies find a positive link between individualised housing and positive outcomes for residents.²

The future SDA market will feature more individualised housing, including single-occupant apartments.³ Therefore, building an evidence-base to inform the future supply of SDA is needed.

What is the problem?

Despite the move towards individualised disability housing there is limited research to inform best practice. To develop effective policy and inform the SDA market, the experiences of people moving into SDA must be understood.

What was the study's goal?

The study aimed to understand the experience of moving into SDA for people with acquired complex disability. The study is part of a larger mixed-methods project evaluating the experiences and outcomes of moving into and living in SDA over a 3-year period.

Study participants were 10 NDIS participants living in single-occupant SDA apartments who received a combination of 1:1 support and shared support provided by onsite support workers. In total, 20 interviews were conducted – 10 before people moved into SDA and 10 after they moved in.



What are the main findings?

Analysis of the pre- and post-move interviews revealed 2 overarching themes and several sub-themes.

Theme 1 – Pre-move: “Not a good fit”

Participants described their pre-move housing as largely unsuitable, and not reflective of their unique needs and preferences. For many participants their pre-move housing experience was accompanied by feelings of hopelessness and a lack of control over their future. Three sub-themes were identified:

- **Lacking autonomy and opportunities**

Participants commented on the rigid routines that governed much of their pre-move lives in aged care or group homes: *“They put you on a timetable. And your time to have a shower is at 8.30...you’ve got to have a shower then otherwise you don’t get a shower at all.”*

- **Missing meaningful relationships**

Participants who lived in aged care or group homes spoke about either being unable to have visitors or not wanting visitors to come due to feelings of shame or embarrassment.

- **Limited housing choices**

For many participants, their pre-move housing environment was their only option at the time. Participants spoke about not being aware of more suitable housing options and making the decision to move to their pre-move house in the absence of other options.

Theme 2 – Post-move: “Being a pioneer”

For participants, the first 24 months of living in their new homes were characterised by a period of adjustment navigating new funding, housing and support arrangements. The move into SDA was a positive experience overall but many felt unprepared and insufficiently supported for the transition. Despite the challenges, participants described an overall sense of ‘moving in the right direction’. Three sub-themes were identified:

- **Building a support team**

After moving into SDA participants felt more empowered to make decisions about their own support team.

- **Navigating new responsibilities**

Participants noted that living alone meant adjusting to new responsibilities, like paying bills and other daily tasks unfamiliar to those who had come from group-living situations. However, that change also brought with it greater freedom: *“It allowed me to grow ... I feel like I can do a lot more for myself.”*

- **Making a home**

Having an individual space allowed people to have more control over their lives, including choosing their furniture or controlling their routines. This allowed some to increase their participation in the local community while others valued the opportunity for privacy and having time alone in their own homes.

What are the policy implications?

The findings of this study provide insights into the transition experience of moving into, and living in, newly built SDA apartments.

Better outcomes will benefit people with disability, providers and investors, but also the federal government as it addresses the rising costs of the NDIS.

Equally, SDA that is fit-for-purpose will attract more tenants and minimise the vacancy risk for investors and providers. This will help stabilise the SDA market by improving the experiences of participants and helping secure the ongoing flow of private capital needed to finance new SDA.

Notes

1. Douglas et al. (2024). ‘Being a pioneer: A qualitative study of the experience of moving into individualised housing from the perspective of adults with neurological disability.’ *Brain Impairment*. <https://www.publish.csiro.au/IB/pdf/IB23079>
2. Douglas et al. (2022). ‘Moving into housing designed for people with disability: Preliminary evaluation of outcomes.’ *Disability and Rehabilitation*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09638288.2022.2060343>
3. Aimers et al. (2023). ‘Specialist Disability Accommodation Supply in Australia: November 2023’. <https://www.housinghub.org.au/resources/article/report-sda-supply-in-australia>