People with disability living in poverty

In addition to research showing that people with disability are more likely to be at risk of homelessness, research has found that more than one in four Australians with a disability live below the poverty line\(^i\). 27.4% of people with disability are currently living below the conservative, internationally accepted poverty line of less than 50% of median equivalised disposable income\(^ii\). The research found that overall, 12.8% of Australians were living in poverty. This suggests that people with disability are more than twice as likely to live in poverty as other Australians.

While there is an urgent need to reduce poverty amongst all groups in Australia it does not reflect well upon us as a nation that such high rates of people with disability are living in poverty. Improving the supply of affordable housing that is accessible and conforms to the principles of universal housing design would be a significant positive step towards reducing rates of poverty and providing increased opportunities for economic and social inclusion by people with disability.

References

\(^i\) ABS, 2009, Disability Australia
\(^ii\) University of Adelaide, 2001, Addressing homelessness amongst persons with a disability: Identifying and enacting best practice
\(^iii\) Miloon Kothari, 2005, Women and adequate housing, Study by the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living
\(^v\) WWDA, 2004, Unjustified Hardship - homelessness and women with disabilities
\(^vi\) ACOSS, 2013, Poverty and Disability report
\(^vii\) ACOSS, 2013, ibid.
People with disabilities can face barriers in accessing homelessness services. Some issues include: not being aware services exist and not knowing how to reach services or how accessible they are. Information on services is usually available in printed format – meaning people with vision impairment may be unable to access it. The lack of Telephone Typewriter (TTY) services in domestic violence and outreach services may mean that women with a hearing impairment only have the option of using a relay service. People with disabilities also face restrictions in relation to their physical environment and access to personal care. Many services may have disability access but not all facilities are accessible.

Women with disabilities

Women with disabilities may be unable to manage daily personal tasks such as cooking and washing and some services may not be able to accept people who require help with personal care.

Women with disabilities face significantly more difficulties in getting adequate housing, health, education, training and employment, and are more likely to be institutionalized. Women with disabilities are over-represented in the main factors that increase the risk of homelessness, including: lack of affordable, secure housing; unemployment & inadequate income; and domestic and family violence.

The following issues contribute directly to the homelessness of women with disabilities or construct an environment in which the risk of homelessness becomes an aspect of the daily life of many women with disabilities:

- Additional costs of living with a disability.
- Discrimination.
- Safety/location.
- Deinstitutionalisation.
- Lack of accurate data.

Housing for people with disabilities

There is a need for more research into the housing pathways of people with disabilities. In recent years, there has been a move towards ensuring that new build properties in the social housing sector conform to the principles of universal design to enable people to stay in them for the duration of their life, including ensuring that they are accessible for people with disabilities and adaptable as needed.

The majority of houses however are neither accessible nor adaptable to house people with physical disabilities and this presents a problem, especially in light of the establishment of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (DisabilityCare Australia) that seeks to provide people with profound and severe disabilities with greater choice and individualised funding packages to facilitate independent living opportunities.

It is difficult to ascertain the exact prevalence of disability amongst people experiencing homelessness. Homelessness Australia’s member services report that a reasonable proportion of people who present seeking assistance may have some level of impaired functioning resulting from either an acquired brain injury or because of a mild or moderate intellectual disability.

More information is needed about the housing experiences of people with disabilities, especially those who fall out of housing and seek assistance from specialist homelessness services. We also need better data to capture the level of housing need amongst people with disabilities in Australia.