



The Hon Bill Shorten MP
Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children's Services
Parliamentary Secretary for Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction

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ALGA MAIL	
ITEM No:	241
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Geoff
Dear Mr Lake

Thank you for your letter to the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, the Hon Jenny Macklin MP, on behalf of the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) about resolutions from the 2009 National General Assembly of Local Government. As some of the matters you have raised fall within my responsibilities as the Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children's Services, the Minister has referred your correspondence to me.

I note that ALGA's Resolution 44 endorses the adoption of the draft Disability (Access to Premises – Buildings) Standards. Resolution 44 also requests amendments to the Standards to include Class 1 and Class 2 buildings, as well as the coverage of small buildings.

I recognise that access to public buildings is fundamental to a fully inclusive Australian society, and would like to assure you that the Australian Government is committed to addressing disadvantage and reducing social exclusion so that all Australians are empowered to participate fully in all aspects of Australian life. The Standards will harmonise the technical requirements of the Building Code of Australia with the broader accessibility objectives of the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*. These Standards will also provide greater certainty for people with disability as well as industry, and will cover new public buildings and those that are being significantly upgraded.

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs tabled its report of its inquiry into the Standards, titled *Access All Areas*, on 15 June 2009. The Government is currently considering the Committee's findings and recommendations, as it prepares its response to the report.

I am confident that once finalised, the Standards will contribute to one of a series of stages that must be taken towards improving accessibility for people with disability. Furthermore, last year Australia became one of the first western nations to ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (the Convention).

All tiers of Australian government now have an obligation to progressively implement the Articles of the Convention. The Convention aims to enhance opportunities for people with disability to participate in all aspects of life. This includes access to public facilities, buildings and suitable accommodation.

In view of the issues raised in Resolution 44, I have referred your letter to the Attorney-General, the Hon Robert McClelland MP, and to the Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research, Senator the Hon Kim Carr. They will both have an interest in this resolution, given their role in relation to the Government response to the *Access All Areas* report.

Your letter also refers to Resolution 45 about ensuring building and safety standards are applied throughout all Australian communities, and particularly Indigenous communities. I have referred this aspect of your query to Minister Carr, given his department has a key interest in matters relating to building codes. However, I can assure you that all new housing construction and major upgrades that will be built in Indigenous communities under the National Partnership on Remote Indigenous Housing will comply with the National Building Code of Australia (BCA) and that all new components will comply with the appropriate Australian Standards. In addition, the principles outlined in the National Indigenous Housing Guide (3rd edition) will also be adhered to and this will improve housing function, safety and health. Relevant state and territory guidelines and standards will be considered in addition to the above.

The National Indigenous Housing Guide (3rd edition) sets out specific principles for Universal Access for housing in Indigenous communities. These principles take into consideration the fact that houses in Indigenous communities over time will be occupied and visited by different people with a range of needs and different levels of mobility. A recent example of consideration of these universal access principles can be found in the Northern Territory. All new houses built under the Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Program will be constructed to allow future modification for disability access, such as wider corridors and doorways to wet areas.

The National Indigenous Housing Guide (3rd edition) can be accessed online at: http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/indigenous/pubs/housing/Pages/national_indigenous_housing_guide.aspx.

If you would like to receive updates on disability issues, please send a blank email to officeofbillshorten@fahcsia.gov.au with 'subscribe to mailing list' in the subject line.

Once again, thank you for writing.

Yours sincerely



Bill Shorten