

New Disability Access Regulations will affect rooming house stock

The new Disability Access requirements introduced into the Building Code of Australia (BCA) on 1st May 2010 will have an adverse impact on housing availability for low income and the disadvantaged community and add more pressure on the homelessness sector in Victoria.

The new Regulations are producing an unexpected consequence which is inhibiting new low cost housing stock being created.

Many new potential investors in the private rooming house sector are balking at taking the next step to open new rooming house facilities. They state that having to comply with the new disability access legislation is a disincentive to enter the sector and become registered

The new regulations are affecting three categories of rooming house operators and potential operators.

1. RAAV is encouraging existing unregistered rooming house operators to become registered. However when they are advised by councils that they will require council approval and compliance with the new disability access regulations before they can be registered, many have indicated that they will not proceed with registration. RAAV is concerned that this may drive them further under the “radar” rather than seek registration.

These circumstances will lead to a loss of some existing unregistered including those that are well run.

2. Potential rooming house operators who are considering establishing Class 1b rooming houses are reevaluating their proposals when they are informed that they will need to incorporate the new disability access requirements into Class 1b rooming houses. The “Access All Areas Report” issued by the Commonwealth Government, the cost of changing a Class 1a residence to a single storey Class 1b rooming house could be up to \$45,000 to comply with the disability access provisions. This is resulting in the loss of new rooming house stock.
3. Some RAAV members have also advised us that their proposed new projects are not proceeding due to the additional cost and compliance burdens. This is affecting the conversion of existing Class 1a houses to Class 1b rooming houses and creating new facilities for the homeless and disadvantaged group.. The new regulations are also putting on hold construction of purpose built Class 1 b and Class 3 rooming houses.

Consequently, the new Disability Access requirements will have a serious impact on availability of low cost housing in the private sector for those who need it most.

RAAV believes that the introduction of the new Disability Access requirements is an unexpected consequence arising from the new Disability Access requirements in the BCA.

RAAV has sought an amendment to the BCA via the Building Codes Board (Victoria) to exempt rooming houses from the new legislation by removing reference to Class 1b, other than those that are used for short-term holiday accommodation - such as bed and breakfast type accommodation. This would still enable short-term holiday accommodation still to be covered by the amendments introduced last May.

RAAV will continue to raise this important matter in various forums to seek relief for the rooming house sector from these new regulations