

New housing and renovations

THE ENVIRONMENT AND DEMENTIA

Renovating or moving to a new house can present many extra challenges for a person with dementia, their family and carers. This Help Sheet discusses some design features for consideration when renovating or moving house.

Moving to a new house or neighbourhood can present disadvantages for someone with dementia. A familiar home environment with supportive neighbours and appropriate modifications promotes orientation, a sense of identity and helps the person to retain their independent living skills. For a person with dementia a move can sometimes change all of this.

Nevertheless, it may be necessary to move house for a variety of reasons which may include inappropriate layout or location, or the physical condition of the house. People on farms sometimes need to move to town to be closer to medical and community services. In building or selecting a new house, there are a number of special design features which would be very helpful to someone with dementia and their carer. Some of these features are dementia-specific and others are associated with frailty and difficulties with mobility generally.

Adaptable Housing Design

In 1995 Australian Standards published the Australian Standard: Adaptable Housing AS 4299-1995. This Standard provides guidelines on how to build housing with design features that are flexible enough to respond to the changing needs of people such as the recommended width of doorways and corridors and the size and layout of the bathroom and toilet which will allow wheelchair access should it be required at a later time.

Among the many advantages of adaptable

housing is the low initial cost, estimated at 5% of the total construction cost. If people become frail, develop dementia or become disabled, subsequent modifications to housing which already has the adaptable design, can be done at minimal cost and inconvenience.

Adaptable housing features are not dementia-specific but rather relate to access, mobility and safety. Many of the features would significantly support caring for someone with middle to late stage dementia when mobility deteriorates and need for personal care increases.

The following are examples of features included in the Standard:

- Level or gently sloping site with up to 1:14 gradient
- Continuous, slip-resistant and hard-surfaced paths and walkways with specified gradients
- Pathway lighting positioned at low height to avoid glare
- Landing to allow wheelchair manoeuvrability
- Accessible entry and door with specified clearance
- Specified clearance of internal doors and corridors
- Minimum width of internal corridors
- Accessible bathroom area
- Slip-resistant floor surface in bathroom, toilet, balconies and external paved areas
- Shower recess with no hob and of specified size

- Recessed soap holder
- Provision for adjustable, detachable hand held shower
- Provision for grab rail in shower and toilet

Carers of people with dementia who are considering building a new house or planning major renovations would find AS4299 useful and may wish to engage an architect who is familiar with the Standard.

Case Study: Selection of New Housing

After Peter was diagnosed with dementia, he and his wife Fay decided to move house. At the time they were living on a large rural property isolated from medical and community services. They decided to make the move as quickly as possible so that Peter could be involved in the selection of the new house and the process of renovating. It would also give him more time to settle into the new environment while he is mobile and independent.

They moved to a house in town which already had a number of the features they required and the potential for further renovation and modification.

- Central location - although Peter is still driving, they chose a house which has a bus stop right outside and is in walking distance to: shops and services; a social club which Peter attends; and a respite day centre and hostel which they may use in the future. It is also one street away from the beach where Peter enjoys walks and fishing
- Access - the house is single level with no steps, the doorways and toilet will allow wheel chair access and they are adding an extra shower room without a hob
- Outside. Having lived on a property, Peter is used to a lot of space. The house is on a large double block, the yard is level and they are installing walking paths, secure colour bond fencing and a colour bond gate which can be padlocked. Fay has planted lots of trees and shrubs around the

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perimeter and there is a covered outside area to sit and eat in. They call it 'Peter's park'. There is a work shed for Peter to continue with his welding and carpentry for as long as possible. Fay is also planning to install a shed for herself to keep her hobbies in and to provide a 'carer's retreat' in future years

- The bedroom has plenty of storage so that unseasonable clothes can be put away
- Safety - they have installed an electrical safety switch, hard-wired smoke alarms, and a lockable cupboard for medicines and toxic substances. They have also bought an iron with an automatic cut-off switch
- The shower room will have non-slip tiles on the floor and grab rails will be installed in both the shower and toilet
- There is an enclosed back porch with a big window with a view of the garden which they will be very comforting for Peter now and in the future
- The lounge room has a sturdy chair with an electronic lifter as Peter has difficulty getting out of chairs

Case study and names have been printed with the permission of Peter and Fay