



POSITION PAPER

ISSUE: Housing for People with Disabilities

Introduction

The availability of affordable, accessible housing in safe and integrated communities with access to public transportation, employment and home and community based services is inadequate in Pennsylvania. Both in Pa and nationally, these challenges exist in all geographic areas: urban, suburban and rural. Such challenges vary in terms of housing community partners coming together in properly addressing related issues. While there is progress related to community living for people with disabilities and housing options, many people with disabilities still reside in nursing homes and various institutional settings. Many citizens with disabilities depend largely on public funding for housing supports at a time when these resources are being stretched due to cuts and economic challenges. In Pa, there are nearly 2 million people (including children) with disabilities or about 15-20% of the overall population (about 12.44 million as of 2006 US Census estimates)-from all walks of life-and a number who either have no or limited / substandard housing options.

Although **affordability** is a challenge for many individuals and families, people with disabilities tend to remain in lower income levels longer than others. Over 4 million Americans or about 200,000 Pennsylvanians rely on Supplemental / Security Income (SSI) and /or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) for their income and the average income is often less than \$700 per month. Cost Of Living Adjustments (COLAs) are often inadequately addressed for those living on fixed incomes or limited savings, including people with disabilities. Further cuts in Federal housing programs such as HUD's Public Housing and Section 8 resources have limited the pool of community resources.

Accessibility (or visitability) is a challenge shared by the disability and many in the aging community. This means building designs that remove barriers to full use of wheelchairs, scooters and other mobility devices.

Integration is an issue that the disability community and various minority groups have addressed with varying levels of success. People with disabilities want to be an active and equal part of the community by renting or owning their own homes, not living in institutions. Only about one-third of people with disabilities own their own homes compared with over half of the general populace. The Independent Living (IL) philosophy views use of segregated settings as an unacceptable way to address housing needs. Segregated settings include nursing homes, state hospitals for those with mental health (MH) issues; for people with mental retardation (MR), this includes both Intermediate Care Facilities (ICF/MR) and state centers. Personal Care Homes (PCHs) can be considered such a setting, depending on the facility and the access to community supports.

Transportation is a challenge related to housing. If one can find a place that is affordable, accessible, and safe, it is of equal importance that citizens with disabilities can utilize public transportation or to live, work and play in the community. Many members of the disability community require additional assistance when traveling to medical appointments, work, school, stores and other common activities. This tends to be less of an issue in some urban parts of Pa that have more extensive public transportation systems, such as Allegheny County (Port Authority Transit -PAT) and Philadelphia along with much of its surrounding 4 county suburbs due to South Eastern Pennsylvania Public Transit Agency (SEPTA). However, the quality of public transportation, particularly the PWD Shared Ride program, has greater limitations in many rural and other areas. Adequate transportation increases self sufficiency.

Employment is a challenge related to housing. If one cannot work, it further stretches public resources and limits their income. Thus, housing must be in an area either near to employment opportunities and where those of the disability community can access affordable and accessible transportation.

The access to **Home & Community Based Services (HCBS)** is an important part of housing. If a person lives in a home or region where an individual has limited access to community supports, this limits his or her ability to fully participate. Options in HCBS, particularly a wide choice of consumer and agency models for services, is key to a person with a disability moving forward and thriving in the community.

Safety is an issue, particularly for those who live in high crime areas. Along with the elderly, people with disabilities tend to be viewed as more likely as perspective crime victims. Safety also includes having a home that is maintained by the landlord so as to keep tenants in a neighborhood where a reasonable standard of living exists, thereby sustaining higher property values.

PA SILC Recommendations

It is true that not all issues come back to public policy. By embracing the IL philosophy for all aspects of life, everyone can make a positive difference in their communities. Having said that, many issues related to housing and people with disabilities come under the realm of public policy. PA SILC makes the following recommendations to public policy makers:

General:

- Increasing productivity of accessible, affordable, safe and integrated housing in both the private and public sectors.
- Supporting for a minimum of 10% of all new housing start-ups in both the private and public sectors to have full accessibility in accordance with ADA standards.
- Advocating for a 10% minimum of all subsidized housing slots or vouchers be set aside for people with disabilities.

- Prioritizing people with disabilities at the top of housing lists who are transitioning out of institutions or have emergency relocation issues.
- Increasing of affordable and subsidized housing by limiting rents to 30% of personal income for low incomes (current Pa poverty standards).
- Addressing targeted (re: specific) needs of adults with disabilities: citizens under 60 years old, individuals in the 60 plus age group, younger families caring for individuals with disabilities and those with sensory / communication challenges, blind, mental health, developmental disabilities (MR/ autism) and traumatic brain injury (TBI) among others (list not exhaustive or meant to exclude any disabilities).
- Increasing scattered site housing. Scattered site housing refers to having people with disabilities of all socio-economic and cultural backgrounds residing in different neighborhoods, being geographically spread out, as opposed to being concentrated in specific neighborhoods.
- Educating housing professionals about the specific needs of people with disabilities, including chemical sensitivity issues.
- Increasing advocacy from all groups in the disability community regarding the stock of affordable, accessible, safe and integrated housing for people with disabilities locally, regionally and across PA.
- Rebalancing Long Term Care (LTC) toward a 50-50% split (HCBS-Nursing Homes / State Institutional ratio), continued support for Money Follows the Person (MFP), including continued transitioning of individuals into the community.
- Advocating for continued partnerships with housing related entities and the disability community.
- Continuing support for public incentives toward the private sector: increasing Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LITC) and Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) programs on all levels for developers and builders.
- Supporting a disability policy czar on all levels of government to enforce current laws, statutes and other supportive public policies as well as directing related funding for people with disabilities.

Federal:

- Facilitating cooperation that includes interdepartmental and inter-governmental MOUs (Memorandums Of Understanding) and cross systems groups, including, but not limited to the following: Housing & Urban Development (HUD), United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development, Transportation (DOT), Centers for Medicare & Medicaid (CMS), Health & Human Services (HHS), Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), the President's Cabinet along with bipartisan representation from both bodies in Congress and others to address the housing needs of people with disabilities that include both policy and budgetary recommendations.
- Continuing efforts within the Intergovernmental Council on Homelessness related to housing for people with disabilities.

- Supporting the enforcement of all related Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)/ Section 504 compliance, particularly in reference to Public Housing Authorities (PHA) laws, regulations and other policies by HUD and other agencies.
- Stopping cuts in **Federal** (HUD, Section 811, 202, 236, CDBG, Section 8, Public Housing and other housing programs) programs and supporting increased funding for related community supports (transportation, employment, HCBS, etc.).
- Supporting adequate annual funding of the Affordable Housing Trust Fund portion of the Housing and Economic Recovery Act of 2008 that should increase housing resources, including those for people with disabilities.
- Maintaining medical and dental deductions for people with disabilities in subsidized housing (re: Section 8 Voucher Renewal Act –SEVRA related).

State Government:

- Convening a stakeholder groups to address housing issues related to people with disabilities across departments that includes, but it is not limited to the following departments: Pennsylvania Housing & Finance Agency (PHFA), Department of Community & Economic Development (DCED), Department of Public Welfare (DPW), Office of Long Term Living (OLTL), Aging (PDA), Transportation (Penn DOT), Labor & Industry (L&I), members from the Governor's Office and the 4 Legislative Caucuses and others deemed appropriate that include both policy and budgetary recommendations.
- Supporting passage of a Pa Housing Trust Fund. For 2008, the current versions are moving through the legislature (SB 1400, HB 2600) and specifically note people with disabilities are a group benefiting from its establishment.

Local / County Governments:

- Increasing awareness and advocacy by local and county elected officials and their member organizations related to issues of importance to the disability community.
- Implementing the Vistability Tax Credit (SB 1158 of 2006) by all local (municipalities, school districts) and county governments in PA.