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Review of the SDA Design Standard

The NDIA has engaged KPMG Australia to conduct an independent review of the Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) Design Standard.

It's essential that the design requirements of dwellings intended for SDA keep pace with industry codes and standards, and support the continued delivery of safe, high quality dwellings that meet the needs of eligible NDIS participants. The review of the SDA Design Standard is one of the ways the NDIA is making sure this happens.

Terms of reference

The Terms of Reference define the purpose and scope of the SDA Design Standard Review.

- SDA Design Standard Review - Terms of Reference (PDF 196KB)
- SDA Design Standard Review - Terms of Reference (DOC 81KB)

Updates on the SDA Design Standard

The consultation process has been completed and a Technical Working Group (TWG) has been established.

SDA Design Standard Review Technical Working Group

The TWG has been established as an advisory body to support the review of the next edition of the SDA Design Standard by KPMG.

The group includes independent experts from industry, government, allied health and the disability and housing sectors.

Members include:

- Farah Madon – President, Access Consultants Association AM
- Joe Manton – Director, Access Institute
- Jeramy Hope – Chief Executive Officer, SDA Alliance
- Ben Nurmi – Chief Executive Officer, Canopy SDA
- Max Rafferty – National Manager, Technical Policy, Master Builders Australia
- Mark Whybro – Chair, Home Fire Sprinkler Coalition Australia
- Julie Yule – Occupational Therapist, Greenlight
- Phil Finnimore – Director, Projects and Analysis, Australian Building Codes Board (ABCB).

Consultation

Between October and December 2025, KPMG Australia consulted with a broad range of people about the NDIS SDA Design Standard.

We heard from:

- participants
- families and carers
- the disability sector
- community organisations
- people who design, build and invest in SDA.

More information about the consultation will be available on the NDIS Engage site .

Next steps

KPMG will continue to review the feedback from the consultations, surveys and submissions to help shape the next edition of the SDA Design Standard and how it will be implemented.

This includes seeking expert advice from the Technical Working Group on recommended changes to the current Standard.

Updates on the SDA Design Standard will continue to be available on this page.

Questions

If you have any questions about the review, please email the KPMG team.

SDA design standard

The Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) Design Standard outlines the detailed design requirements for prospective SDA dwellings.

- Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) Design Standard (PDF 8.39MB)

The SDA Design Standard has 4 design categories as set out in the SDA Rules (2020):

- improved liveability
- robust
- fully accessible
- high physical support.

The SDA Design Standard improves clarity about design requirements, provider confidence and compliance by giving:

- participants access to high-quality housing
- providers flexibility to respond to participant needs and preferences
- architects, builders and the community information about how housing for people with disability should be built.

The SDA Design Standard was published in October 2019 and applies to all new and new build refurbished SDA from 1 July 2021.

SDA design standard certification

All dwelling enrolment applications for newly built SDA must include SDA Design Standard certification.

This must be signed by an accredited third-party SDA assessor who is not an employee, associate or otherwise contracted by the provider, developer or owner.

SDA assessors are engaged by the SDA developer, owner or provider to certify compliance of the dwelling with the SDA Design Standard.

The NDIA does not engage SDA assessors to certify dwellings.

An accredited SDA assessor is the only person who can issue SDA Design Standard certification.

There are 2 stages of SDA Design Standard certification. Dwellings are certified at the design stage before construction commences.

Design stage certification by an accredited SDA assessor gives more certainty to providers that what they build will meet the minimum design requirements in the SDA Design Standard for the nominated design category (or categories).

Dwellings are then certified by an accredited SDA assessor at final as built stage.

SDA Design Standard certification doesn't mean that the dwelling will be enrolled as SDA.

The NDIA decides whether to enrol a dwelling when a SDA provider submits a completed application to enrol, after the dwelling is built.

The NDIA won't enrol a dwelling if the provider and the dwelling don't meet all of the requirements for enrolment under the SDA Rules at the time of the decision.

This is regardless of the Design Standard certification by the accredited SDA assessor, or previous assessment, feedback or certification provided by the NDIA or any other party.

SDA helps to stimulate the market to produce high quality, contemporary, accessible, well-designed housing for participants who need SDA.

It's the responsibility of the SDA provider to make sure the dwelling they submit for enrolment is suitable for specialist disability accommodation and fully and clearly compliant with all requirements of the relevant building type and design category.

The SDA Design Standard does not apply to dwellings seeking enrolment as existing or legacy stock SDA. For information on requirements for existing or legacy stock SDA, go to enrolling a dwelling.

SDA design stage register

The accredited SDA assessor is required to lodge their certification with the NDIA. The certification includes their assessment of compliance against the SDA Design Standard.

It also includes a proposed building type for the dwelling.

The types are:

- apartment
- villa/duplex/townhouse
- house
- group home.

The features of each building type are set out in the SDA Rules.

Where there is any uncertainty as to whether the features are present, the NDIA encourages a conservative interpretation of the requirements.

For certification at the design stage, the NDIA records the details of the project on a design stage register.

Data from the design stage register is included in data releases to inform the market of the pipeline of work under development, noting that commercial in confidence or identifying information is protected.

Adding a dwelling to the design stage register doesn’t mean the dwelling will be enrolled as SDA, or that it will be enrolled as the same building type and design category as what is on the register.

SDA assessors

The Find an accredited SDA assessor page provides access to all accredited assessors.

Becoming an SDA assessor

Access Institute delivers the only NDIA approved training course to allow qualified assessors to gain accreditation to assess plans and dwellings for compliance with the SDA Design Standard.

Anyone can do the course, however only specified professionals (architects, accesses consultants, occupational therapists and building surveyor) who meet certain requirements can become accredited SDA assessors.

Architects

- must hold current registration in a practicing category with the relevant Architects' Board in their state or territory.
- must provide evidence that they have completed the CPP40811 Certificate IV in Access Consulting or CPP50711 Diploma of Access Consulting nationally recognised qualification.

Access consultants

- must be accredited members of the Association of Consultants in Access Australia (ACAA).
- must be qualified in Access Consulting and provide evidence of completion of CPP40811 Certificate IV in Access Consulting or CPP50711 Diploma of Access Consulting nationally recognised qualification.

Occupational therapists

- must hold current registration in the general registration category with the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA).
- must provide evidence of completion of CPP40811 Certificate IV in Access Consulting or CPP50711 Diploma of Access Consulting nationally recognised qualification.

Building surveyors or building certifiers

- Must hold current accreditation in their state or territory under the National Accreditation Framework, as building surveyor (level 1) or building surveyor limited (level 2).
- Must provide evidence of completion of CPP40811 Certificate IV in Access Consulting or CPP50711 Diploma of Access Consulting nationally recognised qualification.

Additional requirements for building surveyors in areas not operating under the National Accreditation Framework

New South Wales

Building certifiers must have level A accreditation (grade 1 or 2) with the Building Professionals Board.

Victoria

Building certifiers must be registered with the Victorian Building Authority as a building surveyor unlimited or building surveyor limited.

Queensland

Building certifiers must be registered with Queensland Building and Construction Commission as a building certifier (level 1 or level 2) individual building.

Western Australia

Building certifiers must be registered with the Building Commission or Building Professionals Board as a building surveying practitioner level 1 or 2, or be registered as a building surveyor practitioner:

technician.

Tasmania

Building certifiers must be registered with Workplace Standards as a building surveyor, a building surveyor limited, or an assistant building surveyor.

Australian Capital Territory

Building certifiers must be registered with Access Canberra as a principal building surveyor or principal building surveyor employee class; or general building surveyor or general building surveyor employee class.

Building surveyors in areas not operating under the National Accreditation

Must hold professional qualifications that would permit registration in any of the above jurisdictions.

When potential SDA assessors successfully complete the required training, they need to provide the following information to the NDIA to become an SDA assessor and be added to the SDA assessor list:

- completed SDA assessor registration form
- signed SDA Code of Conduct form
- evidence of relevant prerequisites for the approved professions as detailed above
- evidence of Certificate IV or Diploma of Access Consulting completion
- copy of Certificate of Currency for Professional Indemnity Insurance ($5,000,000)
- copy of Certificate of Currency for Public Liability Insurance ($10,000,000)
- other relevant documentation as required or requested by the NDIA from time to time.

Conflict of interest

SDA assessors can’t certify any project where there may be a perceived or actual conflict of interest.

For the purposes of the SDA Design Standard, the NDIA uses the conflict of interest definition in the National Model Code of Conduct for Building Surveyors published by the Australian Building Codes Board in 2020.

For example, SDA assessors can’t certify projects:

- designed by them in their capacity as an architect or building designer
- constructed by them in their capacity as the builder

- assessed by them in their capacity as a building surveyor or building certifier
- where their private interest or those of their immediate friends and family mean they can't carry out their own work impartially and without bias.

Using the SDA Design Standard

The NDIA doesn't provide specific technical advice.

SDA assessors should interpret the Design Standard to the best of their professional ability.

If the Design Standard can be interpreted in different ways, SDA assessors should interpret the information that will lead to the best outcome for the participant and confirm this in writing with the NDIA.

For questions about the SDA Design Standard, email SDAHousing@ndis.gov.au.

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