



NDIS FOR SUPPORT COORDINATORS

Specialist Disability Accommodation

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LIVING

 **Provider Choice**

Provider Choice is a team of NDIS experts and Plan Managers. We also have an online dashboard for all support coordinators. You can get in touch with us today at planmanagement@providerchoice.com.au.

Content

Content	2
Overview	3
Eligibility	5
How to apply for SDA	8
About Us	11
Helpful resources	12

Overview

Special homes for special needs.

For many Australians with severe and complex disabilities, living in an ordinary home can be a challenge they can only master with round-the-clock care.

Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) offers these people a way to live more independently.

SDA are purpose-built homes designed to make life with a disability easier to manage. They typically come with spacious doorways and level floors, so people with wheelchairs can easily move around. Often, they also feature a range of assistive technology, from sensor-led lights to automated doors and windows.

Demand is outstripping supply.

At the end of 2019, Australia's National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) supported some 13,700 people with funding for specialist disability homes. However, the NDIA – the agency running the scheme – anticipates that the actual **demand could be more than double as high**. It projects that it will likely need to provide SDA for 28,000 people in Australia.

In other words, thousands of Australians with complex disabilities may already be eligible to receive NDIS funding for specialist disability homes, but their needs have yet to be registered in the official planning process. Many have not even applied for SDA funding yet.

What's more alarming, most of the specialist homes that will be needed in the future have yet to be built. Just under 4,000 properties are currently registered with the NDIA as SDA properties in Australia. This is a massive shortfall from the 12,000 disability homes that the NDIA says are needed.

Support Coordinators can help solve the SDA dilemma.

Support Coordinators play a critical role in helping the NDIS achieve its mission to support society's most vulnerable. Support Coordinators are the link between Australians with disability and the agency. They are often the first to flag if a plan fails to meet a participant's needs. They can also alert the NDIA if a participant's circumstances change and an existing living arrangement becomes inadequate.

The strong and growing demand for SDA means that you, as a support coordinator, have the potential to **make an impact in a participant's life** today. You may have

already helped someone apply for SDA. If you haven't, there's a high chance that you may do so sometime in the future.



Figure 1: Floor plan of a typical SDA

How to use this written guide.

This guide will give you some valuable pointers for your work in the NDIS. Use it as a quick reference, a summary of the most important facts and formalities you should know when working with a participant who may need a specialist disability home.

Please note that this guide is not exhaustive. We encourage you to use other external resources to broaden your understanding of SDA.

External experts, such as occupational therapists, can be a great source of knowledge when you need help with a specific case. These experts can review the legislation with you and confirm whether a participant may be eligible or not.

On the following pages you'll find more information about

Who's eligible for SDA
How to apply for SDA funding
How to write a 'housing report'
Which experts to contact

Eligibility

Dream home? SDA funding is reserved for the neediest.

Specialist disability accommodation may sound like a dream come true. Who wouldn't want to move into a spacious, modern, high-tech living space that's designed for special needs and almost entirely paid for by the NDIS?

Residents in SDA only pay a so-called Reasonable Rent Contribution, which equals 25% of their Disability Support Pension and any additional Commonwealth Rent Assistance (if applicable).

However, there's a caveat. Most people with a disability will never be eligible for SDA. Specialist disability homes are reserved for those with "extremely reduced functional capacity", who likely require ongoing person-to-person support.

The NDIA has based its future demand projections on this group of people. They are the ones who the agency considers most eligible for SDA funding. And while it expects their number to increase to 28,000, they still only account for 4% of all participants in the scheme.

Who is eligible?

The [NDIS SDA Rules 2016](#) list a range of criteria that participants need to fulfil in order to be eligible for SDA funding. Typically, the NDIS reserves funding for participants

- ✓ Who have an **extreme functional impairment**, including reduced mobility and the inability to independently complete major daily tasks like eating and getting dressed;
- ✓ Who have a **complex disability**, often require **24/7 care** and who are currently in a nursing home or hospital;
- ✓ Who are living in so-called **legacy stock SDA**, which may not be meeting their current needs;
- ✓ Whose **circumstances have suddenly and dramatically changed** (or will foreseeably change) in a way that would make moving into SDA an urgent priority

The funding decision: is it reasonable and necessary?

The NDIA makes its decisions on a case-by-case basis, depending on the complexity of the disability and the participant's functional impairment. This means the NDIA will first and foremost be guided by the question whether a pending request for SDA funding is **reasonable and necessary**.

Needs can differ between participants. For example, a free-standing house built in line with SDA standards may be the most reasonable and necessary support for 3 participants to share, while a 1-bedroom apartment may be the most suitable solution for another who has a goal to live on their own.

The answer is in the design standard

The SDA Design Standard sets out detailed design requirements for newly built SDA. This standard has four categories (not to be confused with the 15 NDIS funding categories):

- ✓ Improved Liveability;
- ✓ Fully Accessible;
- ✓ Robust; and
- ✓ High Physical Support

You can find more details in the [SDA Design Standard](#). It's a good idea to familiarise yourself with these categories. Sometime during the application for SDA funding you will need to make an important judgment call and tell the NDIA which type of disability home (and in which design category) you think will be most suitable for the participant you're assisting.

Could a support worker be enough?

Many people with a disability may need extra supports to help them master everyday tasks, but they could easily continue to live in an ordinary home, potentially just with some home modifications, to achieve a greater level of independence. These people would not be eligible for SDA.

It will be easier for you to gauge if SDA really is the best option for a participant if you compare it with another living option called **Supported Independent Living (SIL)**, and whether this support is sufficient to achieve independent living outcomes. SDA and SIL are easily mixed up and even experts mistakenly use them interchangeably.

SDA and SIL - Where's the difference?

SDA is a physical property in which people with disability live.

SIL refers to the assistance participants get in their home – for example from a support worker – that enables them to live more independently.

You do not have to live in SDA to receive SIL. In fact, only a few participants will receive SIL & SDA together.



How to apply for SDA

Step 1: Check the current plan

If you think a participant you assist would deserve funding to move into specialist disability accommodation, you should first have a look at a participant's plan to see which goals and funding categories it already contains.

Is there enough funding?

A participant will need sufficient funding on their plan for Support Coordination and Occupational Therapy (Therapeutic Supports) in order to effectively start the application process.

This is because you will need to request several health reports and therapist assessments to show the NDIA how a move into SDA would improve a participant's life. The cost of these reports quickly adds up. Ideally, you want to cover these expenses using a participant's plan budget.

Are the goals relating to independent living?

The participant's goals also need to be relatable to SDA, or generally to living independently. Goals that relate to living in an integrated community will also support the move to SDA.

Your options

If you cannot find sufficient funding in an existing plan to pay for the various therapist reports that you need to even start the application process, the participant has three options:

1. **Apply for an unscheduled NDIS plan review** and request additional funding to explore SDA options ([download the pdf form here](#)). In this case, you will likely need to adjust the participant's goals.
2. **Pay privately for the additional support coordination** and occupational therapy costs required to produce supporting health reports.
3. **Pay for and move into SDA privately**, without NDIS funding.

Step 2: Collect necessary evidence

Once you are clear about how to fund the additional expenses you'll face long before you'll even write the application for SDA funding, you can start compiling the supporting evidence.

Contact health professionals

You will need a range of statements from allied health professionals, such as occupational therapists, physiotherapists and psychologists to back up your request for SDA funding. These experts should be familiar with the participant's circumstances and explain, appropriately and in writing, why it would be justified for this participant to move into SDA.

Be mindful of costs

As mentioned before, you will need a substantial amount of **Improved Daily Living funding** to get the necessary health reports/assessments done. Each of these written assessments from therapists and other health professionals can cost in excess of \$1,000.

Step 3: Produce housing report

Based on the evidence from all the medical statements and therapy assessment you've collated, you as the support coordinator will need to tell the NDIA which **SDA category** you consider most appropriate for the participant (refer to the four categories on page 6).

You will need to make this recommendation to the NDIA in writing. This is what's referred to as the 'housing report' and you will need to submit it together with the allied health reports.

Page count

There is no standard template for the scope of a housing report. They can range from several dozen to only a handful of pages.

Be concise and thorough

There is an emerging preference from the NDIA to receive shorter and more concise housing reports. However, this doesn't mean less content is better. The agency is very thorough in the way they screen and assess the information you include in the final report. After all, they're making a decision about a very

expensive support and want to be certain that SDA funding is justified. So, avoid being sloppy. Even small mistakes could lead to lengthy delays for the participant.

Involve a specialist support coordinator

If you are not a support coordinator with a housing specialty, you shouldn't attempt to write the housing report on your own. Instead, contact a specialist support coordinator – or become one yourself through various training – to ensure the housing report satisfies all the formal criteria.

The role of specialist support coordinators

A **specialist support coordinator** is a support coordinator who is funded where a participant has high or complex needs. Some have a specialty in housing and these specialists can be engaged for a short contract time to produce the housing report.

Step 4: Submit the report

You should submit the final report, including all supporting evidence, to an NDIA Planner. This Planner will come up with a first opinion, usually just a one-page briefing document, that he will then pass on to the actual decision-makers within the agency – the so-called SDA Panel. This internal group of experts within the NDIA determines whether it would be reasonable and necessary to fund a participant's move into SDA.

Unfortunately, this decision making process can take a long time. The rule of thumb is: the clearer you write the housing report and the more concise you are when you argue the case, the better the outcome.

Mind the gap

As always with bureaucratic processes, some things get lost in translation. This can happen to you when you submit a housing report because of gaps in the communication. Not all NDIA Planners are trained in SDA or specialist living options. As a result, some planners may not always “translate” effectively to the SDA Panel what is written in the housing report. The NDIA is working on improvements. We hope that one day in the future participants may be able to submit their report directly to the Panel.

About Us



www.veraliving.com.au

Vera Living are building specialist disability accommodation all around Australia. We are here to help people eligible for SDA achieve their housing goals.

We believe in the human element: a personal touch that defines one-on-one relationships, ongoing accessibility and attention. We believe that people living with disability should be supported to live their life inclusively and independently.

We partner with only the best designers, developers and service providers to bring you a home which ticks all your boxes. Most importantly, we partner with you! We want your input on the home of your dreams to ensure it is not only accessible and compliant, but functional.

Talk to **Vera Living** to find out how we can assist you with the application process and with finding a home designed to your needs. Call (02) 6100 3077 or email info@veraliving.com.au.



www.providerchoice.com.au

At Provider Choice we are more than just plan managers. We want to make sure families know “how to get the NDIS right”. We’re the NDIS expert team they can trust. We do some of the heavy lifting (payments, paperwork and other nitty-gritty) and cut a trail through the bureaucratic jungle (translating line items into simple terms). We help families feel understood and looked after.

By combining our NDIS knowledge and technology skills we build online tools that help people with disability receive more targeted funding, better support and a higher quality of life. It can help them make the most of the talents and skills they were born with.

Get in touch with our NDIS experts and Plan Managers. See our contact details on the last page of this guide.

Helpful resources

Training

[Disability Services Consulting](#)

- Support Coordination: 2-Day Intensive
- Complex Support Coordination
- NDIS Housing for Support Coordinators

[Summer Foundation](#)

- Offers a range of resources to help you compile your housing reports [here](#)

[Support Coordination Academy](#)

Conferences*

- Get Building Conference
- DSC
- One Community (Ready-Set-Connect / Disability Accommodation Convention)
- Nest

*Note that some conferences may be cancelled due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Who is Provider Choice?

We are NDIS experts. We provide plan management services and easy-to-use technology for all NDIS participants.

If you have any plan management questions or queries, please get in touch with:

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