



**Homeshare  
&  
The National Disability Insurance Scheme**

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## **Homeshare & The National Disability Insurance Scheme**

This paper will introduce the concept of Homeshare and discuss its application under the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

Attached to this paper is a recent study of the Homeshare service operated by Community Connections in the ACT which details the processes and average time taken by a coordinator to deliver Homeshare supports.

### **About HANZA**

HANZA is the peak body for Homeshare services. HANZA provides information, advice, and resources about homeshare, and connects homeshare services within Australia and New Zealand, and to international programs. HANZA operates as a clearing house of information for people looking to find a homeshare organization in their community or to help get a program started. Membership includes the following Homeshare providers:

<i>Australian Capital Territory:</i>	Community Connections
<i>Western Australia:</i>	Perth Homecare Services
<i>Victoria:</i>	Uniting Care Community Options Independent Disability Services Geelong Do Care Care Connect Spectrum Migrant Resources Centre
<i>South Australia:</i>	Uniting Communities, Homeshare South Australia CARA Inc., Woodville, SA
<i>Tasmania:</i>	Community Based Support Tasmania

### **Introduction**

Many people with disabilities are able to live independently with relatively simple supports. For example people may need assistance with domestic duties (cooking, washing, gardening, cleaning etc.), companionship, or the security of someone to staying in their house overnight. However, the cost of these supports if provided only by paid workers is often prohibitive. Moreover one can imagine many circumstances where the companionship of a trusted housemate may be preferable to the company of paid workers: eg sharing a meal, going to a football match, staying overnight, etc.

Homeshare is a simple, normative, and effective way of supporting people with a disability to live independently. Homesharing brings together two people:

- The Householder: a person who may require companionship and assistance with some household chores, and
- The Homesharer: who needs somewhere affordable to live. (eg. a student or someone looking to save money for a mortgage).

The Householder provides free/ reduced cost accommodation in exchange for companionship and domestic help provided by the Homesharer.

The role of Homeshare services is to connect Householders with Homesharers, and to safeguard, support and monitor these arrangements. Homeshare services have operated in Australia for over 15 years, and internationally since the early 1970's. Homeshare services in Australia are supported by HANZA (the Homeshare Australia New Zealand Alliance) whose role is to nurture the development of Homeshare through the provision of information, resources and by connecting Homeshare services. Homeshare programs also operate in the USA, the United Kingdom, Canada and in many countries throughout Europe (France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, Spain etc.)

The Homeshare model has been extensively evaluated and found to be a positive and effective way of supporting people to live independently. Homeshare is highly cost effective as it makes use of existing resources: vacant rooms and voluntary labour. Homeshare is mutually empowering as each person is valued for the resources that they exchange. Homeshare is often highly valued by the people who participate in it, because it enhances the relationships and community connections of both people.

There are also many people with disabilities and families who have created their own homeshare arrangements throughout Australia. There are a number of good guides available on the internet to assist individuals through this process (such as the Vermonters Guide to Homesharing). As a consequence, it is not known how many people with disabilities in Australia are supported by Homeshare arrangements. However HANZA would suggest that several hundred such arrangements might currently exist.

It is expected that a number of people will seek to establish or continue Homeshare arrangements under the National Disability Insurance Scheme. This might include:

- Paying a service to recruit a Homesharer, and to support and safeguard this arrangement.
- Managing their own homeshare arrangement.
- Offsetting the cost of the Homesharers rent.

### **Supports offered by a Homesharer**

Homesharing is a voluntary exchange of resources for mutual benefit. The exact nature of what is exchanged will vary from arrangement to arrangement, depending on circumstances and needs of each person, however it is most common that the Home-sharer will be offered a room and shared facilities in exchange for services such as:

- 10 hours of agreed help each week, and
- Staying overnight six nights per week and for three weekends out of four, and
- Staying for a minimum of nine months.

The hours of agreed help provided by the Homesharer might include such things as: shopping, transport, gardening, walking the dog, preparing an evening meal, cleaning, or washing. Homesharers

do not undertake roles associated with paid support workers. Homesharers do not provide personal care, administer medication, or advise on medical treatments.

Assuming the Homesharer provides the level of voluntary services indicated above; each homeshare arrangement could be expected to produce up to 480 hours assistance in the home per annum and approximately 300 nights overnight support. In addition there are a range of other benefits to a homeshare arrangement.

## **Benefits**

### For people with a disability (Householders)

- *Choice and control*  
The Householder chooses who lives with them, for how long, and what supports they will provide. The Householder can end the arrangement if the relationship proves unsatisfactory.
- *Improved safety and security:*  
People are safer living with others. In case of illness or emergency, the Homesharer can help the Householder to seek the appropriate assistance (or vice versa).
- *Consistency in support*  
The Homesharer is a consistent and reliable presence in the person's life.
- *Enhanced relationships*  
Both Householders and Homesharers gain companionship from the arrangement, additionally each person has the opportunity to get to know the other person's network of family, friends, and community relationships.
- *A more typical living arrangement*  
Homeshare offers a more normative approach to meeting people's support needs than is offered by traditional care services.
- *Saving money*  
It is cheaper for both parties to share the costs of such things as utility expenses and the cost of groceries.
- *Improved health and wellbeing*  
Sharing a house, meals and some hours of companionship can have a marked impact on a person's health. Lower stress levels, more regular meal times, better diet, more peaceful sleep, assistance with tasks at home, prompts to take medication, all contribute to better physical and emotional health.

### For Homesharers

- *Improved housing availability*  
Homesharers are able to find accommodation in places that might not otherwise be available, or that they ordinarily would not be able to afford.
- *Saving money*  
Homeshare enables people to save money that they would otherwise spend on rent or a mortgage. In addition it can be cheaper for both parties to share utility expenses and the cost of groceries.

- *Making a contribution*  
Homesharers often report a high degree of personal satisfaction from the Homeshare arrangement. This includes a sense of personal growth, building new skills and experiences and relationships, and making a difference to someone else's life.
- *Safety and security*  
Many people find they feel safer sharing with another person rather than living alone or sharing with other single adults in a shared house. Living in a homelike environment with another person can make all the difference to feelings of safety, wellbeing and even mental health.

#### For families

- *Reduced demands of care*  
The support provided through Homeshare can reduce the amount of support that is needed to be provided by families and other natural carers.
- *Peace of mind*  
Homeshare gives families reassurance that their relative is getting the support they need and has someone around who is able to respond in an emergency.

#### For the community

- *Increased availability of low cost housing*  
Homeshare makes use of housing stock that would not otherwise be available to the community.
- *A better use of resources*  
People supported by Homesharer require less paid services in their lives, freeing up community resources for others in need. Eg: transport, gardening, cleaning, and meal preparation services.
- *Integration and community cohesion*  
Homeshare supports people with a disability to live ordinary lives within our community, and our community is enriched by this experience.

#### **Limitations**

- *There must be sufficient room for a Homesharer*  
A Homesharer must have a separate bedroom, and be able to share the other common areas in the house. The availability of suitable accommodation is the most significant barrier to people with disabilities to participate in Homeshare. The ACT is the only jurisdiction which currently permits people with disabilities to be supported by homesharers in Government housing. (the Homesharer is considered to be a component of the persons support and is not charged rent)
- *It must be desired by the person.*  
It is important that the Householder wants to participate in a homeshare match. A common cause of failure in Homeshare arrangements is when they are set up at the behest of a family or of another service, but have not been desired by the Householder.

- *It must be similar to other typical community living arrangements.*  
Homesharing works best when the living arrangement is typical to those of others in the community. The more unusual the living arrangement, the more difficult it is to find and keep Homesharers. For example homeshare is unlikely to succeed in group care environments (hostels, group homes etc),
- *Social skills and behaviour can impact on recruiting homesharers*  
The level of a person's disability is not a limiting factor to a person participating in homeshare. However, the social skills and behaviour of the Householder are important factors in recruiting and retaining Homesharers, especially if the Householder acts in highly unusual ways. Examples might include shouting, continual swearing, self-harm, or angry outbursts. This being said, it is the experience of many Homeshare services that when the match between Homesharer and householder is right, that unusual social behaviours can decline or cease to be issues of concern. However matching may take longer in these circumstances.

### **The role of Homeshare services**

A Homeshare service provides support for people to plan, establish, and monitor a Homeshare arrangement. This might include:

- Marketing and recruitment of Homesharers,
- Undertaking initial screening interviews,
- Organising police checks and referee checks,
- Supporting the introduction and meeting of Householder and Homesharer,
- Developing occupancy agreements between Householder and Homesharer, (this is usually for a fixed period, say 9-12 months),
- Monitoring the arrangement, and
- Reviewing the arrangement at the end of the agreement, and enabling the parties either to establish a new occupancy agreement, or to cease the arrangement.

Typically the bulk of the work will occur in the first 3-4 months as the Homeshare arrangement is first set up and to support the relationship during the settling in phase. Once the arrangement is stable and people are comfortable in their roles, the Homeshare service typically reduces its contact from weekly to monthly and then quarterly.

### **Safeguards**

There are a number of safeguards that are undertaken in setting up a Homeshare arrangement, these include:

- police checks on potential Homesharers,
- references are taken on the rental history and living skills of the Homesharer,
- meetings and interviews are undertaken between both parties, and
- a written Homeshare occupancy agreement is developed between both parties.

Where agencies are involved, typically additional safeguards offered including:

- information for both parties on their rights and legal protections,
- ongoing contact with both parties including regular home visits,
- staff are trained in identifying and responding to abuse,
- clear procedures are in place for responding to any complaints or concerns, and
- third party mediation is available for disputes.

## **Homeshare and the National Disability Insurance Scheme**

There are a number of areas that people who have disabilities and families might seek assistance from the NDIS: gaining the assistance of a Homeshare service, and offsetting the private rental cost of the extra room.

### Engaging a Homeshare service

A Homeshare service offers a number of advantages. It:

- Manages the administrative tasks associated with establishing a Homeshare arrangement.
- Provides increased security to the arrangement (ensures that police checks are completed, and monitors and supports the arrangement),
- Develops expertise in creating matches between Householder and Homesharer, increasing the likelihood of a successful homesharing arrangement.
- Offers problem solving and mediation for issues that arise, and work to resolve disputes that may threaten the longevity of the arrangement.
- Provides a safety net for the Householder if the Homesharer becomes unwell or needs to end the relationship suddenly.
- Builds an identity and awareness of the Homeshare model which increases the number of people seeking to be Homesharers.

As detailed in Community Connections process study, it takes approximately **89.5** hours for an experienced Homeshare coordinator to establish and support a new Homeshare arrangement in the first year of a match. Should the match continue in subsequent years, the hours of support required of a Homeshare service reduces to **34.4** hours per annum. Homeshare arrangements will usually last 1 term (9 -12 months) however some Homeshare matches will renew and are then likely to last several years. The Economic Evaluation of Homeshare Victoria (Ben Carstein)<sup>1</sup> indicates that approximately 28% of homeshare arrangements will last more than 1 year.

As detailed above a Homeshare service can be a highly cost effective way of supporting people to live independently. A Homeshare arrangement can be expected to produce annually:

- 480 hours of in home support (cooking cleaning, laundry, etc)
- 300 or more nights overnight support

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<sup>1</sup> [http://homeshare.org/Documents/Homeshare\\_Victoria\\_Economic\\_Evaluation.pdf](http://homeshare.org/Documents/Homeshare_Victoria_Economic_Evaluation.pdf)

There appears to be provision to claim for Homeshare services under the NDIS. In the *Support Clusters Definitions and Pricing* documents, Homeshare appears to be relevant to the: *Assistance in Coordination and Managing Life Stages, Transitions and Supports* cluster, in the support item: *Establishment of Mentoring and Peer Support*.

### Self-managed homeshare

There are a number of individuals and families who have created their own homeshare arrangements. These are often successful and highly personalised arrangements. There are good online resources and tools that guide people through the process. Should people elect to manage their own homeshare arrangement they may, none the less, wish to purchase assistance with some of the administrative aspects of the process (eg: recruitment and set up) either from an existing Homeshare service, or from a trusted person/agency they already have a relationship with.

### Reduced rent for the Homesharer.

At present there is no option under the National Disability Insurance Scheme for people to use their funding to offset the cost of providing an additional bedroom room for a Homesharer.

For a person with a disability to participate in a Homeshare arrangement, they must currently:

- reside in a property that has a vacant bedroom (rented or purchased), and
- be able to offer free or reduced rent to the Homesharer.

The costs of providing a vacant bedroom usually falls to the person with a disability or their family. With the exception of an ACT public housing pilot initiative<sup>2</sup>, HANZA is not aware of any other Government or community programs that assist people with disabilities to offset the cost of renting an extra room for a Homesharer.

HANZA recommends that the NDIA consider broadening the Scheme to include a contribution to the rental costs of the Homesharer. In considering this option HANZA would like to make the following points.

- In doing so, the NDIA will increase the equity of the availability of Homeshare as a service option. Presently, Homeshare is only available for those people who have the resources to offer an extra bedroom in their home. People who do not have these resources are unable to access this support. Permitting NDIS funds to be used to offset a Homesharer's rent would enable a much larger number of people to benefit from this service.
- The NDIS already effectively funds the cost of renting bedrooms for other types of services. For example, most accommodation services provide sleepover rooms for their staff who work

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<sup>2</sup> The ACT is the only jurisdiction that permits Homeshare to occur in their social housing properties. This is on a trial basis and is limited to 10 properties. In this trial the ACT Government considers the Homesharer to be a component of the person's disability support service. The Homesharer resides in the property as an occupant (not a tenant) and they do not pay rent.

in group houses and hostels etc. The cost of renting this extra bedroom is built into the total unit cost of that service.

- Making a contribution to rent is considerably more affordable than the cost of formal care. Although rent prices vary considerably across Australia, a contribution of up to \$250 per week towards renting an extra bedroom would make homesharing an affordable proposition to most people. When compared to the cost of “Inactive Overnight Care” which in the NSW *Support Clusters Definitions and Pricing* is benchmarked at \$161 per night, paying for rent becomes a highly cost effective option should someone require overnight support more than one night per week..

### **Further information about Homeshare**

Further information about homeshare and homeshare services may be found at:

#### About Homeshare

- [www.homeshare.org.au](http://www.homeshare.org.au) HANZA’s website
- <http://homeshare.org/> the Homeshare International website
- [www.nationalsharedhousing.org](http://www.nationalsharedhousing.org) The National Shared Housing website (USA)
- [www.homesharevermont.org](http://www.homesharevermont.org) Homeshare Vermont (USA)

#### Australian Homeshare Services (both people with disabilities and people aged over 65)

- [www.comcons.org.au](http://www.comcons.org.au) Community Connections (ACT)
- [www.ucco.org.au](http://www.ucco.org.au) Uniting Care Community Options (Vic)
- [www.idsa.org.au](http://www.idsa.org.au) Independent Disability Services (Vic)
- <https://www.wesley.org.au/> Wesley Homeshare (Vic)
- <http://www.docaregeelong.com.au> Geelong Do Care (Vic)
- [www.careconnect.org.au](http://www.careconnect.org.au) Care Connect (VIC)
- [www.phcs.org.au](http://www.phcs.org.au) Perth Homecare Services (WA)
- [www.unitingcommunities.org/homeshare](http://www.unitingcommunities.org/homeshare) Homeshare South Australia
- [www.cbssouth.com.au](http://www.cbssouth.com.au) Community Based Support Tasmania