



# Archdiocese of Wellington

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PO Box 1937, Wellington 6140, New Zealand

27 May 2026

Hon Chris Bishop  
Minister of Housing  
Parliament Buildings  
Wellington

Dear Minister Bishop

## **Re: Retention of Universal Design Accessibility Targets in Public Housing**

On behalf of the Catholic Housing Forum Committee of the Catholic Archdiocese of Wellington Ecology, Justice and Peace Commission, I write to express our deep concern following reporting in The Post (09/05/2026) regarding the removal of the target requiring 15% of new public housing builds to meet full universal design accessibility standards.

Our Committee works from the principles of Catholic social teaching, which uphold the dignity of every human person and the responsibility of society to care particularly for those who are vulnerable or disadvantaged. Access to safe, suitable housing is fundamental to human dignity and participation in community life.

In 2019, Kainga Ora adopted an Accessibility Policy committing to ensuring that at least 15% of all new public housing builds would meet full universal design standards, with other homes incorporating as many accessibility features as possible. Universal design includes step-free access, wider doorways, adaptable bathroom and living spaces, and features enabling disabled people and older people to live independently and safely.

We are concerned that removing this target risks further marginalising disabled New Zealanders who already face long waits for suitable housing. Information released under the Official Information Act and subsequently reported publicly indicated that approximately 70 of the 4,775 Kainga Ora homes built between 2020 and 2022 met full universal design standards. The Post reports that this financial year, it has planned for 97 homes to meet the standards, compared with 562 the previous year. This suggests that, while there had been some improvements in the system, the supply of accessible public housing has fallen well short of the needs of disabled people and their families.

We also note that accessible design benefits far more than a small minority. Universal design assists our elderly people, families with young children, people recovering from injury and illness, and many others across the course of life. As New Zealand's population ages, the demand for accessible housing will continue to grow significantly.

Importantly, Kainga Ora itself has acknowledged that incorporating accessibility at the time of construction is considerably more practical and cost-effective than retrofitting homes later. Reducing accessibility commitments now risks creating greater social and financial costs in the future through avoidable modifications, institutional care needs, injury, hospitalisation, and housing insecurity.

As a society, we should aspire to remove barriers for disabled people rather than create new ones. Public housing policy should reflect inclusion, equity, and long-term social well-being, particularly for citizens who already experience disadvantage in accessing housing, employment, transport, and healthcare.

Accordingly, we respectfully urge the Government to:

- retain measurable accessibility targets within all new public housing developments;
- increase investment in universally designed and adaptable homes;
- consult meaningfully with disabled persons' organisations and accessibility advocates before making further changes; and
- recognise accessible housing as essential social infrastructure rather than an optional design feature

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss these concerns further and to contribute constructively to policy conversations affecting disabled people and those experiencing housing need.

Yours sincerely

Lei Solia  
Chair / Catholic Housing Forum Committee  
Catholic Archdiocese of Wellington Ecology, Justice and Peace Commission