

## **MOD.A 2017 Conference**

The MOD.A 2017 Going for Gold conference was held over two glorious days in August 2017, at ANZ stadium, Homebush Bay, Sydney. The stadium, spectacular as the host of the 2000 Olympics, also turned out to be an excellent venue for MOD.A's second conference, easily accommodating our sponsors, exhibitors and the 180 delegates who came from across the country and from New Zealand and the UK to attend.

The first day began with a welcome to country from Uncle ?, after which MOD.A's Chairperson Bryan Molan gave an opening address and then the Minister for Aged Care, the Hon. Ken Wyatt MP opened the conference via a pre-recorded video address. Our first keynote speaker, Dr Rachel Russell from Salford University in the UK, set the scene for the conference by throwing out the challenge of what exactly we mean by "quality" when it comes to home modifications, and how this is not only about the finished product but much more about systems which promote collaboration amongst professionals and are inclusive of consumers. Our second keynote speaker, Dr Andrew Martel from the University of Melbourne, provided a thorough critique of how the building and construction industry operates in Australia, and how the various government funded home modifications programs, in particular the NDIS, are not in their current form capable of garnering market forces in such a way as to guarantee supply and enhance quality.

Day One also saw two panel sessions, the first providing an opportunity for the three major national (Australian) funding schemes, the NDIS, aged care, and the Department of Veterans Affairs, to address the sector with their current and future plans for the procurement of home modifications. Alongside them was Scott Ambridge, General Manager of Enable New Zealand, whose company has run the specialist advisory service which assists the NZ Accident Compensation Commission to effectively manage its home modifications for people who have experienced traumatic injury for over ten years. Delegates were impressed with the capacity of the NZ model to address quality issues, including the inclusion of the consumer throughout the process, and the maturity of that approach contrasts with the varied procurement processes in Australia which continue to be developed without reference to each other. The second panel at the close of Day One, was a Q&A session, hosted by our MC Glen Sorensen, that addressed the topic of "Creating the conditions for suitable housing." An excellent panel of guests, the Hon Susan Ryan, Kristin Brookfield from the HIA, Professor Roberta Ryan from UTS, and Dr Andrew Martel, debated issues of accessible housing policy and how home modifications could be utilised as the next economic stimulus for a building and construction industry in decline.

Day Two kicked off with two excellent presentations, the first from Judy Gregurke of COTA Australia, who talked about aged care reform and where it was likely to head, and urged the home modifications sector to keep on raising its voice to government to ensure it had a future once reform was completed in the early 2020s. Our second speaker, Joseph Connellan, gave a warts and all critique of the NDIS, the "\$22bn washing machine", acknowledging that currently it is chaotic and barely working at all in terms of establishing systems which will consistently support complex processes like home modifications, while at the same time urging us to remain engaged as far as we can, as there is no plan B, and we all need to make this bold experiment work.

Both days had concurrent sessions from speakers who had submitted abstracts and from invited guests, and thanks are due to all those who gave their time so generously to contribute in this way. One important concurrent session on Day Two was the one which addressed our sector's concerns about the NDIS, and how difficult it is currently to deliver quality home modifications under the system which has been put in place. A summary of this session has been provided by Glen Sorensen:

There is an overall need for the home modifications sector to speak with one voice with NDIA Head Office and/or the Minister to discuss what's happening and not happening in the system, why and how key issues could be resolved. Key issues include:

- plans involving home modifications usually require highly specialised input from OTs and builders that is often ignored by those without this expertise
- inconsistency of approaches to home modifications across regions and states/territories
- misunderstandings from planners and the NDIA about what can be re-used in a home mod and the need for the sector to constantly justify why things cannot be re-used. Re-use of toilets in bathroom modifications were cited as a good example of misunderstandings supply is a real issue due to delays in approving quotes.
- many suppliers do not consider it's worth the time and cost to provide quotes that sit long periods without decisions. In addition, quotes can become outdated quickly, particularly for parts.
- getting more than one quote in regional areas
- the tension between encouraging and funding best practice and innovation with an insurance business model based on the lowest cost.
- if Home Modifications are fundamentally aimed at increasing independence, then this should flow through to other aspects of support plans. As we don't see the total plan, it is difficult to align with desired independence goals.

Suggested strategies include:

- target the review of home modifications and the NDIA to major/complex modifications \$10K and over.
- a consistent procurement method which includes a project manager. Suggested as vital. guidelines/information for planners and NDIA about re-use of fixtures and fittings
- providing the NDIA with an assessment process that works and is more cost efficient (e.g. OTs and builders collaborating on the assessment of complex home modifications to reduce recommendation of works that cannot be done)
- benchmarking costs of with appropriate caveats for major modifications (e.g. Bathrooms, kitchens) within certain agreed ranges could negate the need for multiple quotes.

MOD.A staff and Board members, and MOD.A members and other delegates all came away from the conference with a strong sense that there is much work to be done in the immediate future to ensure that quality home modifications are available to those who require them in whatever funding program is available to them in Australia, and to those who will fund them privately; and that if ever there was a need for an industry peak body for home modifications, like MOD.A, that time was now.