**HOUSING FORUM: AUCKLAND 26 AUGUST 2017**

**Paula Tesoriero, Disability Rights Commissioner**

E ngā mana, e ngā reo, raurangatira mā

Tena koutou katoa

Ko Paula Tesoriero ahau

ko au te Kaihautu Tika HauAtanga mō te Kāhui Tika Tangata ki Aotearoa.

Nō reira, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa.

Mauri tangata,

Mauri ora

Thank you for inviting me here today and giving me the opportunity to speak. My main interest in being here today is to listen to you about your thoughts on housing issues and solutions.

I am in to week 4 of my role. As the Disability Rights Commisioner, I have a statutory responsibility to protect and promote human rights for people with disabilities. In the context of housing, this means ensuring that NZ gives effect to the obligations made at international law about the right to adequate housing.

I am being deliberate about listening to people for the first couple of months in the role to help inform my understanding of issues and also to help me firm up my priorities in the role. In the discussions I have had to date, housing features as an issue.

Adequate housing has been recognised as a human right since 1948 in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which New Zealand signed up to and promised to help fulfill.

Almost 60 years later, in 2007, New Zealand signed the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, where Article 28 provides the same fundamental right to adequate housing as the Universal Declaration and other UN treaties.

Article 28 requires New Zealand to recognise the right of persons with disabilities to an adequate standard of living, including adequate housing, and to take measures to ensure access by persons with disabilities to public housing programmes.

So we have international commitments to deliver adequate housing, and promises to fulfill those commitments, but the reality is many New Zealanders, and especially disabled New Zealanders, face a number of barriers to accessing adequate housing. Lifemark, a company which offers advice to designers and builders on how to ensure homes are usable by people of different ages and abilities, reports that less than 2% of New Zealand’s current housing stock is accessible. Yet as we know, 24% of New Zealanders identify as disabled, and as the 2013 Disability Survey found, one in six people with an impairment needed some modification to be able to access their homes, meaning there is a significant shortage of accessible homes.

This includes social housing: in fact, a recent report released by the Salvation Army concluded that New Zealand needs to build about 2,000 more social houses per year over the next decade to adequately respond to unmet demand. According to the report, disabled people make up a large proportion – about 45% - of long-term social housing tenants. Furthermore, figures show that some 15 percent of those on the social housing register – those waiting to be housed - have a disability or a member of their family living with one. Based on these figures, a lot of disabled people currently have unmet social housing needs.

For many people, living in inaccessible housing means having to risk their health and safety just to get around their home and having little choice about where they live and who with.

Furthermore, part of having access to adequate housing is about habitability and we know that a higher proportion of disabled people than non-disabled people live in cold, damp homes. Findings from the 2013 Disability Survey showed overall, 24% of disabled people living in rented houses reported both cold and damp, compared with 15 percent of non-disabled people. The Survey also found disabled children were more likely to live in crowded conditions than non-disabled children. Both these situations increase the risk of poor health outcomes.

And it’s not just about disabled people. As we all know, the ageing population is ever increasing and many of those people will require accessible housing as they age. Parents with small children who use prams would also benefit from having more accessible housing. Therefore, the more accessible homes that are built from the start, the more Kiwis will be able to stay in their homes throughout their lives, and the more money will be saved retrofitting homes later.

The conversation needs to include both social housing and housing in the private market, and as well as talking about infrastructure, needs to also highlight and address the issue of discrimination in the housing market. For example, we know people with service animals are sometimes denied housing because many landlords have a blanket ‘no pets’ rule.

Something that could help to address these issues – and that the Human Rights Commission is considering with the help of Community Housing New Zealand – is a New Zealand Homes Accord that will provide all New Zealanders with a pathway to an adequate home. The Accord would be based on international human rights law, including the CRPD, and apply right across the spectrum of housing – from homelessness to home ownership – taking the needs of different groups, including people with disabilities, into account.

In the meantime, we need to keep talking about housing as a human rights issue in forums like this. We need to work together to both highlight the barriers faced by disabled New Zealanders and to strategise about solutions, so that all New Zealanders, regardless of disability or stage in life have access to safe, comfortable, healthy homes. I look forward to hearing your stories and ideas for making this a reality, thank you.