



Preparing a community meal in Badplaas,  
Mpumalanga

## CHAPTER 5

# HOUSING AND LIVING ENVIRONMENT

### 5.1 Housing Policy

The Housing Policy in South Africa is derived from Section 26 of the Constitution, which states that “Everyone has the right of access to adequate housing” and requires the state to take reasonable legislative and other measures to achieve the progressive realisation of this right. The incoming government, in 1994, inherited a huge backlog in the provision of public housing. By December 2001, a total of 1.2 million housing units had been built through the Provincial Housing Development Boards.

Government has established a housing subsidy scheme to provide access to low income groups and indigent people who would otherwise not be able to afford housing. In order to promote the establishment of habitable, stable and sustainable residential environments, a portion of the housing subsidy may be used to acquire land and to secure basic services. The housing subsidy can also be used to consolidate existing infrastructure.

The housing subsidy makes special provision for older persons and disabled persons. Recipients of the Aged Persons Grant or the Disability Grant are eligible for the housing subsidy. From 1 April 2002, the maximum value of the subsidy for older persons and disabled persons will exceed the maximum value of the subsidy to other beneficiaries.

Government has also established the National Home Builders Registration Council to regulate the home building industry and to provide consumer protection in the form of a warranty scheme for houses financed through the housing subsidy. The warranty scheme comes into effect from 1 April 2002 and beneficiaries of the housing subsidy are required to contribute either by participating in the construction of their own houses or by making a financial contribution towards achieving a house that complies with the established minimum norms and standards. The increased subsidy for older persons and disabled people takes into account the introduction of the warranty scheme.

## 5.2 Special Housing for Older Persons

The National Department of Housing has been exploring various concepts of social housing, with the view to integrating the concept of social housing into the national housing programme. The delivery of housing rests with provincial governments and local authorities and some provinces have taken steps to prioritise older persons in the allocation of housing. The Free State Department of Local Government and Housing, for example, in collaboration with the Provincial Department of Social Development, has allocated 1 700 houses to older persons.

The concept of assisted living has been introduced recently into the programmes of the Social Development Departments. The assisted living programme is being piloted in three provinces as a collaborative effort between the Provincial Departments of Social Development and non-governmental organisations. Each project varies in application of the concept, but they retain the same core objective, namely, to provide secure, affordable accommodation to groups of older persons and to assist them in retaining their independence.

### **Neighbourhood Old Age Homes Project, Cape Town**

The project comprises 18 houses run by residents who pool a portion of their social grants to cover the costs. Those residents who become too frail and are in need of special care are moved to an extra care house. The extra care house is run by a house mother with the assistance of volunteers. In this way, older persons are encouraged to continue living in the community. The project also runs community activities such as exercise classes and sewing groups. These activities are open to residents and non-residents, thereby ensuring that residents are integrated with the community.

### **Itireleng Project: Free State**

The Provincial Department of Social Development has piloted an integrated community-based project. The Itireleng Project aims to extend two residential homes for older persons into multi-purpose community centres. These multi-purpose centres offer community-based care and support programmes to older persons, people living with HIV/AIDS, youth and disabled people. The underlying principle of the project is to integrate older persons and residential homes with the rest of the community. Early indications are that the project is progressing well and can be rolled out to other parts of the Province.

The South African National Council for the Aged (now known as Age - in - Action) has pioneered interim houses or safe houses for older persons who have been abused or abandoned. These interim houses provide interim shelter and support until a permanent solution has been found. The establishment of these interim houses was a response to the increasing number of abuse cases reported through HEAL (Halt Elder Abuse Line). One house has been established in Cape Town using an old maternity hospital donated by the Anglican Church. A second house is located in Motherwell in the Eastern Cape.

### 5.3 Residential Care

The promotion of equal access to residential homes for older persons, irrespective of race, continues to be a major challenge. In 1999, sixty percent of homes were exclusively white. The majority of homes subsidised by the government are located in Gauteng and the Western Cape, the two most urbanised provinces. Provinces such as the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal, with the highest concentration of older persons, have fewer homes.

Although the admissions policy requires that residential homes be reserved for those who are frail and in need of care, the policy is not applied uniformly. Also, non-frail residents who were admitted prior to the introduction of the new admissions policy in 2000, cannot be removed.

**Table: Subsidised Homes for Older Persons**

<b>Province</b>	<b>All Homes 1999</b>	<b>White Homes 1999</b>	<b>All Homes 2000</b>	<b>Number of Places 2000</b>
Eastern Cape	62	51	54	3470
Free State	47	41	48	1426
Gauteng	197	129	103	18320
Kwazulu-Natal	81	41	44	3781
Limpopo	7	7	7	557
Mpumalanga	21	19	19	1558
Northern Cape	42	8	33	1500
North West	18	14	27	1417
Western Cape	96	34	139	10924
<b>Total</b>	<b>571</b>	<b>344</b>	<b>474</b>	<b>42953</b>

There are seven state-run homes for older persons nationally, with a total capacity of 794 places.

The Ministerial Committee into the Abuse, Neglect and Ill-Treatment of Older Persons

found that homes in disadvantaged communities were in a precarious financial position. Although subsidies were equalised in 1993, the subsidy formula based on a monthly unit cost means disadvantages black homes, which historically have had to operate on very low budgets. Furthermore, black homes did not have the finances to attract skilled staff and because the majority of residents are recipients of Old Age Pensions, they can only make a modest financial contribution. The Committee also noted the dramatic decline in the number of homes and complaints from residents about the quality of care they received. The Department of Social Development has instituted an audit of all subsidised and state-run homes to investigate the concerns raised by the Committee. The results of the audit are being analysed and can be expected by May 2002.

While the government's policy is to encourage older persons to remain within the community, it is recognised that there are instances where institutional care is in the best interests of the older person. It is therefore imperative that the system of residential care be transformed so that those who are in need of residential care can access such care.

## **5.4 Other Basic Services**

### **Water and Sanitation**

The government has a constitutional obligation to ensure that all people in South Africa have access to clean running water. Since 1994 the community water supply programme has delivered clean water to 7 million people. Although many people have been connected to clean water supplies, with the high levels of poverty, water is not always affordable. Local authorities are empowered to apply an indigency policy in respect of older persons and provide rebates. As the application of the policy is dependent on the resources of the particular local authority, the poorer local authorities are least able to apply the policy.

In February 2001 the government announced the introduction of free basic water. The intention of the policy is to ensure that no one is denied access to water supply because they are unable to pay for services. Underpinning the policy is the recognition that access to water assists in poverty alleviation, improves community health and relieves women of the burden of collecting water. The basic level of free water is based on the World Health Organisation's standard of 25 litres per person per day, translating into 6000 litres per month for a household of eight people. Local authorities, which are responsible for the implementation of the programme, have some discretion to vary the

amounts to meet local conditions (for example, the minimum amount may not be feasible in arid areas). Local authorities may also decide to provide free basic water to all residents irrespective of income, or may target the poor.

By March 2002, 57 percent of the total population was in receipt of free basic water. The programme is in its early stages and the initial data suggest that implementation is uneven, with the larger municipalities implementing at a faster rate than smaller or poorer municipalities. It is expected that once the programme is fully implemented it will benefit the poor, including older persons.

Access to adequate sanitation is a problem for many poor households, especially those in rural areas and in informal settlements. According to the 1996 Census, 49 percent of households did not have access to adequate sanitation and the majority of these households are African. The lack of adequate sanitation poses a serious health risk to older persons. The implementation of the National Sanitation Strategy commenced in 1997, and although some progress has been made, implementation of the strategy needs to be accelerated.

#### **Access to Electricity**

In 1994, only 30 percent of households in South Africa had access to electricity. By December 2000, 70 percent of households had access to electricity through the National Electrification Programme. As is the case with water, access to electricity does not benefit those who cannot afford electricity. The inability to pay electricity bills is a major source of stress for older persons and the Ministerial Committee on the Abuse, Neglect and Ill-Treatment of Older Persons received numerous complaints about inexplicably high electricity bills. In July 2001 the government announced its intention to provide free basic electricity (50 kilowatt hours per household per month) to meet basic needs. The proposals are being piloted, with the view to implement, in priority areas during 2002/2003.