Cohort 02 of 08

Sensory-Safe Housing for Neurodivergent Adults

A campus design framework grounded in the HNIS model: addressing sensory architecture, executive function scaffolding, and structured community formation for neurodivergent tenants.

Maggie Hall · Researcher and Founder, Project Humanity · Newcastle NSW
First prepared May 2026 · Revised for publication October 2026

ASD · ADHD · Sensory Processing · Executive Function · HNIS Framework

The Problem With Standard Social Housing

Neurodivergent adults face particular barriers to securing and keeping housing. Executive function differences make bureaucratic processes disproportionately difficult; sensory sensitivities make standard housing environments actively dysregulating; and social communication differences make tenant-landlord relationships fraught from the outset.

The HNIS framework (Hall's Neural Imprint Syndrome; Hall, 2026) proposes that neurodivergent nervous systems encode environmental and relational information differently, with heightened sensitivity to the physical and social environment during periods of stress or transition. Housing design for neurodivergent tenants must therefore address the environment as a therapeutic variable.

> *"The environment is not background. For a neurodivergent nervous system, the environment is the intervention."*

ZONE 1 · RESIDENTIAL: SENSORY ARCHITECTURE

- All units individually controllable: lighting temperature, dimming, and blackout blinds standard
- High acoustic insulation beyond building code: a clinical requirement, not a luxury

- No shared corridors open to communal noise: each unit has a transitional entry vestibule
- Neutral, matte surfaces. Kitchen ventilation prevents smell transfer between units.
- Communal laundries sound-isolated and bookable: no unexpected noise exposure
- Outdoor private space for every unit: decompression zone accessible without passing through shared space
- Stimming-safe interiors: no fragile fittings, rounded edges, robust tactile surfaces

EXECUTIVE FUNCTION SCAFFOLDING

- Visual wayfinding: colour-coded zones, pictogram signage alongside text
- Tenancy support worker with neurodivergent specialisation: supports with forms, inspections, correspondence
- Digital-first communications: all notices via app or email, not phone-primary
- Minimum 72 hours advance notice for all property access: written form
- Inspection redesigned: checklist provided in advance, tenant accompanies inspector
- Maintenance request: photo-based reporting, no phone calls required

ZONE 2 · COMMUNITY HUB: SOCIAL CALIBRATION

- Low-sensory quiet lounge: muted lighting, soft furnishing, no background music
- Structured social activities with clear beginning, end, and purpose
- Interest-based groups: gaming, making, coding, natural history, art
- No mandatory social events. No expectation of small talk in communal areas.
- Social story maps for new residents: visual guides to campus spaces and routines
- Staff trained in direct, literal, non-metaphorical communication where requested
- Noise-cancelling headphone library at reception: borrow at any time
- Dedicated sensory room: bookable, weighted blankets, low lighting, white noise option

Population and Unit Profile

Total units	20 self-contained
Studio/1-bed	10 units: single adults
1-bed + sensory room	6 units: decompression space
2-bed	4 units: couples or carers
Pets permitted	All units

Co-occurring anxiety	Around four in ten autistic adults have an anxiety disorder at some point in their lives (Hollocks et al., 2019)
HNIS framework	Hall, 2026. Preprint, doi:10.5281/zenodo.23334438

Maggie Hall · Researcher and Founder, Project Humanity · Newcastle NSW
Part of Project Humanity's housing work · co-synthesist.com/housing