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Neoliberal abandonment in disability housing provision: a look at England and Chile

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ABSTRACT

Public or 'social' housing provision in many nations in the Global North is increasingly being driven by neoliberal strategies that include austerity cuts and market-led privatization. This context raises an important question of how likely the state's reliance on the private sector can ensure that housing remains available and accessible to more disadvantaged low-income groups. To help answer this question, we draw on a comparative study of social housing provision for disabled people in England and Chile; two pioneers of neoliberal reform in this sector. Using interviews with key stakeholders, our findings reveal that the neoliberal reform strategies being employed have tended to dilute the statutory duties of providing accessible housing and to undermine disabled people's choices in finding appropriate homes. Such lessons are timely and important in order to remain cognisant of the spaces of neoliberal abandonment that are leaving many people unable to gain access to appropriate housing.

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Introduction

The decline in state-managed public or 'social' housing provision and the increasing reliance on privatization has become a pervasive feature of neoliberal reform strategies across many nations in the Global North, including the US, Australia and England (Blessing, 2016). England, for example, has recently seen an acceleration of this trend towards privatization of state-subsidized rental housing provision with the recent *Housing and Planning Act 2016* and cutbacks to local authority housing budgets. Policy convergence is evident with the US, where the Department of Housing and Urban Development's Rental Assistance Demonstration programme is handing over public housing to private management (Burns, 2014). While much scholarship has documented the shifting focus towards neoliberal reform of housing policy (Hodkinson *et al.*, 2013), one significant omission from this debate has been the issue of housing access for disabled people.¹ Disabled people have long struggled to access a home of their own with a choice of where to live and who to live with (Power *et al.*, 2013). While significant strides have been made in achieving independent living, it is increasingly unclear how the decline in statutory housing provision is affecting this