



Submission to the National Disability Strategy

By People With Disabilities (WA) Inc

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People With Disabilities (WA) Inc – PWD(WA)- is the peak disability consumer lobby group in Western Australia representing people with disabilities (physical, intellectual, psychiatric and sensory) including children and youth. PWD(WA) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of a National Disability Strategy (NDS).

PWD(WA) strongly recommends that the NDS use the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and the recently ratified Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) as the framework to develop the strategy and associated implementation plans.

When Australia ratified the UNCRPD on 18th July 2008 the Australian Federation of Disability Organisations (AFDO), of which PWD(WA) is a member, stated that 'to be effective, disability policy direction must start with the needs of people with disability, and no-one knows these better than people with disability themselves. That's why it's so important that the Government has signalled its commitment to put into practice the disability sector's core demand: Nothing About Us, Without Us!' PWD(WA) members strongly agree with this.

The UNCRPD will be strengthened through usage and increasing awareness, knowledge, and determination. Similarly, the NDS must be regularly monitored and evaluated to ensure it stays up to date. As issues are resolved or new ones arise, Australia will increasingly comply with UN Conventions, recognising that ratification of a Convention does not of course automatically mean currently full compliance in practice. This will ensure positive actions and outcomes, not purely rhetoric statements.

People with disabilities in Australia continue to experience discrimination and significant systemic barriers to full inclusion and participation within the communities that make up the nation. The NDS must address issues concerning social, economic and cultural involvement. People with disabilities are amongst the most vulnerable in the community and must not only feel, but must be, respected and able to reach their chosen potentials. This includes safe guarded people with disabilities from exploitation.

Members of PWD(WA) regularly express concerns that governments, both state and federal, frequently assert that considerable funding is directed to disability. People with disabilities and their carers just as frequently argue that whilst this may be true, it certainly does not mean that the said funds necessarily reach those vulnerable people who need it. Much funding is consumed by spin doctors, meaningless duplicitous accountability requirements, constant meetings, reviews and bureaucracy, much of which is unnecessary. This funding should be directed to people with disabilities and their family members/carers; the people who should be listened to very attentively by government. The actual needs of people who have first hand experience of disability are often not heard.

Recommendations:

1. Base the NDS on the CRPWD. This will ensure clarity in addressing all state and Commonwealth department and agency's specific responsibilities plus those issues common to all agencies.
2. People with disabilities need to be included in the legislation of federal and state governments. Without such legislation people will never be equal citizens of Australia.

3. Consistently consider the needs of people with disabilities within universal policy areas. These include but are not confined to accessibility of premises, communications, transport, health services, employment, education, and housing.
4. Effective consultation with people with disabilities requires increased Commonwealth and State/Territory co-operation and commitment for agencies and departments to accept and implement national strategies. State and federal government, service providers and the community need to listen to the experts, people living daily with disability. Communications need to be in accessible formats for all including people from deaf cultures, people visually impaired, migrants and people with disabilities from CaLD backgrounds.
5. Include state and national disability representatives, legal and advocacy organisations in developing, implementing and monitoring the NDS during all stages of the process, rather than in a token retrospective manner once the overall the framework has been set. Valuable and accurate extensive consultation across all segments of the Australian community will assist in achieving and modifying requisite targets as needed. Regular monitoring will identify issues as they need addressing.
6. Commit to equitable outcomes across demographics so women with disabilities, Aboriginal people with disabilities and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds with disabilities are automatically included in developing, evaluating and implementing the NDS. This is important as different segments of the population not only share various universal issues and concerns but they also have other vastly differing issues and concerns.
7. Greater transparency around where responsibilities lie for various tasks and support/resourcing, such as between health and disability sectors. Issues to consider include employment practices, seeking and implementing opportunities for -and participation by- people with disabilities, accessible premises and environment, accessible communications, accessible transport and accessible education et al.
8. People with disabilities, like people living without disability, are unique. Each has their own human rights, differing needs and wants. This is reflected by the individual and their family/carer's ability, circumstances, support, location, not to mention a myriad of other diverse factors. It is not simply a case of fitting into a standardised 'one plan fits all' scenario.
9. Address the continuing unmet need for people with disabilities across the nation. All people deserve the same consistent basic resources to enable them to be as independent and empowered as they choose; with the type and amount of support they choose and require to live as equal citizens within the community. State and federal government and service providers need to actively recognise this. It is not unknown for service providers to be unable to provide the amount of care needed by people with disabilities when one or more of their staff is unable to work as scheduled. Unexpected shortfalls in staffing deeply affect the lives of people who deserve the respect and dignity of reasonable care. PWD(WA) members regularly tell us that their carers are undervalued, and that they themselves feel neglected and ignored considering the continual gap in the full range of services they need and deserve to be full citizens.
10. People have the right to make informed decisions themselves, when able, as to how and where they live. People with disabilities may wish to live independently with specific or occasional support services as needed. They may come from a migrant family which expects all family members to remain together under the one roof, or may wish to live in a cluster home or other supported accommodation arrangement. Such factors impact on the individual's basic rights to decent and safe shelter. The shortage of affordable housing is acknowledged across the board. It is especially significant to close the gap for people with disabilities who may or may not find the public housing allocated to them/and their family, suits their specific needs.
11. PWD(WA) members regularly report that the transportation system, whilst greatly improving thanks to the regular reviews of the Disability Standards on Transportation, still has a way to go before people

with disabilities can access suitable transport to go where and when they choose and with whom. This increases the risk of isolation and makes it further difficult to participate in community life; a common thread and deep concern across the country.

12. Similarly, sharing knowledge and experience of disability amongst upcoming teachers along with resourcing schools better would radically alter the education system. The benefits of the relatively recently released autism packages are vast and similar programs are welcomed in other areas. Support for more early intervention is a must to ensure later demands on the system are reduced and people with disabilities have the same chance in life to meet their potential as those living without disability.
13. Streamline all State and Commonwealth commissions, departments and agencies to ensure reporting arrangements comply with the UNCRPD. Removing unnecessary duplicate multiple layers of accountabilities across state and federal level, and using standardised key performance indicators to regularly audit all State and Federal departments, will ensure States and Commonwealth comply with UN Conventions and existing national frameworks and strategies.
14. Establish consistent Disability Access and Inclusion Plans (DAIPs) nationwide, eg along the lines of the Western Australian experience. Aligning these with the UNCRPD will streamline existing, plus help develop new action plans across departments, taking into account the needs and concerns of people with disabilities.
15. Changes to the Building legislation are needed to align it to the Disability Discrimination Act. The built environment ought to facilitate people with disabilities becoming more active in the community rather than preventing this. Training upcoming architects in universal rights would ensure these needs are taken into account automatically and not retrospectively. A more accessible built environment will promote further togetherness and unity across the community.
16. The federal department responsible for disability services requires the capacity to coordinate NDS administrative tasks and work effectively in consultation with disability representative, community law agencies, advocacy organisations and advisory bodies for ongoing actions across departments and states. This will require effective strategies across jurisdictions, government, the private sector and other organisations to be implemented, evaluated and reported on as required by UNCRPD. A new separate entity is not required to administer the NDS, however it is recommended all government departments take into account disability issues rather than leaving it to one specific department. This must be reflected in their practices of employment as well as service provision. Hearing loops for example, are not always present in public meeting venues.
17. Prevent unnecessary duplicity. Acknowledge existing critical policy and program reviews to ensure the development of the NDS and incorporating of relevant policies and programs does not need to start afresh unnecessarily. A significant amount of work and consultations has occurred which will be useful for the evolving NDS, for example, the Henry tax system and Harmer pensions and welfare reviews. Further broad policy and program reviews will evolve from the newly ratified Conventions.
18. See lifelong experiences of people with disabilities as a whole, not in segments. Aids and equipment services (including continence aids) are an example of current frustrating and expensive fragmented systems, with large waiting lists for basic needs to be met for the whole of life span of children and adults with disabilities. Disability does not magically disappear as a person gets older. Clarity for the responsibilities in services and resources for the Aging and older people with chronic illness and disability must be addressed. Similarly, due acknowledgement needs to be given to people with disabilities who need to access the general health system along with everyone else for universal conditions. People with disabilities do not only experience health issues related to their specific condition(s). They also need access to general and other specialist services eg breast/prostate cancer screening.

19. The general health system needs to increase accessibility for people with disabilities be it via accessible examination tables, access to interpreters or advocate support, plain English details on a condition or other issues.
20. Along side this, universal services, such as the education and justice systems, must better consider the needs and concerns of citizens who have a disability and their specific needs. Current proposed changes to Bench books in WA show this is becoming understood. However the system still has a way to go across the nation. Greater alternatives to further education, and the supports around accessing these need to exist.
21. An understanding of what 'work' entails also needs to be addressed. Voluntary work provides meaning and builds just as much confidence in someone as does a paid job. The Migration Act, recently under the scope with the German doctor and his family wanting to stay in Australia, demonstrates a need to be flexible and to take into account the contribution people with disabilities and their families can give to the nation. It is simply not good enough to say that the cost of supporting people with disabilities prevents them and their family from living here.
22. The disparity in services available in the city versus remote and rural areas needs addressing as does equality between state services according to whether people with disabilities lives on the east or western side of the nation. Easy transportability of services also requires addressing when people with disabilities and their families move from one state to another. Currently services in one place are not always forthcoming in another so the idea of a NDS is greatly welcomed to over come this.
23. Address, reduce and prevent extensive waiting lists. Service demand must equitably and realistically be reflected in policies and budgets allocated to services. Multiple assessments, year in year out, are bureaucratic and cause unnecessary stress on families and individuals. This is especially concerning and invasive when conditions are congenital or unchanging, eg quadriplegia, Down Syndrome, Spina Bifida, Cerebral Palsy et al. Many people require support in far more than one area of their lives, a fact rarely recognised so many people fall through the gap. This is particularly concerning in the disparity between health service/responsibilities and disability service/ responsibilities. People must often wait in conditions which increase stresses and health risks with the result that more tax payer money needs to be spent than would have been the case if earlier intervention had occurred.
24. People need to be able to find their way in the maze of disability services easily so they get the support they are entitled to in a timely, efficient and suitable manner, be their condition from birth or a condition which develops later in life.
25. Parents and families have often told PWD(WA) that they learn the most from others in similar situations. Community and service development funding needs to focus on enhancing the lives of people with disabilities and their carers and families as well as educating the community and providing the necessary supports for people with disabilities to be citizens in their community of choice. Developing further leadership from people living with disabilities is to be applauded and encouraged.

Yours sincerely



Further information

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