

Department of Family, Housing, Community
Services and Indigenous Affairs
Human Services

National Disability Strategy for Australia

Response to Discussion Paper

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A national voice for families of children with a disability

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Introduction

The Australian Association for Families of Children with a Disability (AAFCD) is a national organisation representing families of children with a disability. We are recognised and funded as a national peak body through the Department of Families, Housing, Communities and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). We are a non-profit, community organisation. We work alongside families of children and young people with disability.

Our guiding principles include –

- ✚ **Children the priority:** that the safety and well-being of children with disability is paramount and consistent with Australia's obligations under the international Convention on the Rights of the Child and the International Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
- ✚ **Respect:** for the views and interests of children with disability and their families.
- ✚ **Recognition:** of contributions made by families to ensure the safety and well-being of children with disability.
- ✚ **Inclusion:** to ensure that children with all types of disability, from all cultural and religious backgrounds and from different family structures are supported by our work.

AAFCD aims to –

- ✚ **Educate** national public policy-makers and the broader community about the needs of families of children with disability.
- ✚ **Advocate** on behalf of children with a disability and their families to ensure the best possible support and services are available from government and the community.
- ✚ **Inform** families of children with disability about their rights and entitlements to services and support.
- ✚ **Celebrate** the successes and achievements of children with disability and their families.

A National Disability Strategy for Australia

AAFCD welcomes the Federal Government's commitment to improving support and removing barriers to full community participation for people with disability living in Australia.

Our Association believes that this Disability Reform Agenda should ensure –

- ✚ That services are planned and provided when and where they are needed.
- ✚ That a culture of continuous quality improvement should be developed.
- ✚ That outcomes are driven by the aspirations of the people who use disability services.
- ✚ That service standards are maintained by ensuring that people with disability are supported by a competent workforce.
- ✚ That adequate resources are available to achieve the best outcomes for people with disability.
- ✚ That all elements are based on the principles of the United National Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The following constitutes our Association's response to the National Disability Strategy's consultation questions -

1.1 What do you think should be included in the National Disability Strategy?

The Strategy should set Australia's disability agenda. The Strategy should encompass a whole of government, whole of community approach, which acknowledges, promotes and celebrates individual ability and contribution of all people with disability living in Australia.

Government

Lead the way in reducing discrimination in education, employment and civic participation.

A Ministry for Disability within the Federal Government and a National Disability Commission would provide the best vehicle to progress the intent of Strategy and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Community

Greater awareness of the rights of people with disability to hold equal citizenship, to live, learn and contribute to the community to their fullest capacity.

Funding

With the distinct purpose of ensuring equitable access to support all people with disability to fully participate as Australian citizens, an expansion of the 2020 Summit recommendation to include all people with disability who require support to fully participate in the Australian community.

Service Co-ordination

People dream of a system that is streamlined, reduces the complexity of eligibility and removes multiple entry and assessment points. A co-ordinated service user driven system that meets individual needs and is portable across jurisdictions.






Complex system – Parent response

“As parent of a child with a severe disability I am afraid that if further changes are not made, my son, will always be dependent on a myriad of different funding arrangements offered by federal, state and local government as well as not for profit, private, and philanthropic organizations to cater for his needs. Consequently as his parent I will have to manage his care and the increasing concern of how he will get along when we are no longer around.”

1.2 What are the greatest barriers that people with disability face to participating fully within the community and what specific local or national actions could be taken to overcome these barriers?

Current levels of support fall far short of what is required to provide basic needs. Access to support that is timely and eliminates long waiting lists is critical to improving the lives of people with disability and their families.

Examples -

-  Aids and Equipment
-  Accommodation
-  Carer Needs
-  Community Access
-  Early Intervention
-  Education
-  Employment
-  Health and Wellbeing
-  Social Inclusion

Attitudinal barriers continue to prevail. Affirmative action particularly in education and employment would determine the benchmark for establishing equity of opportunity for all people with disability.

1.2 What areas of research do you think should be a priority to better inform the National Disability Strategy?

International examples where government/private funding approaches to independent funding models result in benefits for all people with disability.

Further research into the National Disability Insurance Scheme to ensure equity in its implementation.

How to achieve best outcomes for students with disability in a variety of education settings.

Change management for professionals in disability specific and mainstream settings to facilitate services being driven by people with disability and to support authentic social inclusion.

Seeking a solution to the tension inherent in the interface between disability policy based on human rights and individual aspirations and a service system that focuses on "inability" as the determinant for support to realise such aspirations.

2.1 We are interested to know about your personal experience. Please tell us in your own words about any time that you, or someone you care for or support, experienced barriers to participating in a community, social or work event.

Parent response

My son has started school this year. He is attending a specialist school 3 days a week and mainstream 2 days a week. The mainstream school with all the pressures for outcomes have struggled with inclusion and have ended up very stressed. This education model does not allow for much flexibility and true person centred planning was not entered into. Example - when his teachers and aides were sent to professional development, it may have been worthwhile also asking us what information would help them work best with our son. On a positive note there has been much learning and partnerships have been forged to work as flexibly as possible within the current model.

2.2 What local action has made a positive difference to your life or other people with disability, their families and carers?

Parent response

Our family's experience at a community run local childcare centre was testament to true inclusion. The benefit was my capacity to return to part-time work which provided both improvements to my mental health as well as my economic health. The inclusion model worked due to the belief, commitment and willingness of staff, a funding model that supported it and a community that supported inclusion.

Our child was included as well as my daughter without a disability. It has convinced us that inclusion can be a reality in all areas of life.

3. Do you have any other comments, thoughts or ideas about the National Disability Strategy?

Systemic advocacy should be promoted and resourced as it is a critical tool in capturing individual wisdom to collectively identify and progress improvements in the lives of people with disability and their families.

People with disability should have the same rights, choices and control over their lives as those without disabilities. This means helping families in the formative years of their children's lives, to engender a thirst for growth, fulfilment, independence and a healthy appetite for living life to the full.