



Australian Government

Australian Government response to the
Senate Community Affairs References Committee report:

Inquiry into the delivery of outcomes under the *National Disability Strategy 2010-2020*
to build inclusive and accessible communities

March 2018

Introduction

The Australian Government welcomes the Senate Community Affairs References Committee's report to the *Inquiry into the delivery of outcomes under the National Disability Strategy 2010-2020* (the Strategy) to build inclusive and accessible communities. The Australian Government is committed to the Strategy's vision of 'an inclusive Australian society that enables people with disability to fulfill their potential as equal citizens'.

The Australian Government remains committed to supporting communities to maximise participation and inclusion, and acknowledges the Committee's findings in response to the experiences and accounts presented during the Inquiry.

The Strategy is Australia's overarching policy framework for disability reform and the key mechanism for driving more inclusive policy and program design across all levels of government. It is aligned with the principles of the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (UNCRPD) and establishes a framework to monitor the implementation of the Convention in Australia. The Strategy reflects the findings of an extensive consultation process with the Australian community, national disability and carer peak organisations, employers and industry experts. Ongoing engagement and consultation with people with disability and their representative organisations, including the National Disability and Carers Advisory Council (NDCAC), continues to be an important part of the Strategy's implementation.

The Committee's 2017 report examines the accessibility and inclusiveness of the Australian community for people with disability. It covers a number of themes that relate to the Strategy's first outcome area, 'Inclusive and accessible communities', including the planning, design, management and regulation of the built and natural environment; transport services and infrastructure; and communication and information systems, including barriers to progress or innovation in these areas. Consideration is given to the effect of restricted access for people with disability on inclusion and participation in all aspects of life.

The Australian Government's response to this Inquiry supports the Committee's recommendation that all Australian Governments recommit to the Strategy, including contributing to regular progress reporting. In September 2016, the Council of Australian Governments' (COAG) Disability Reform Council (DRC) agreed to reinvigorate all governments' efforts to drive progress under the Strategy. This is particularly important as the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) approaches full scheme rollout. Further reinvigoration efforts will focus on resolving NDIS mainstream interface issues to ensure smooth transitions and continuity of support, improving the evidence base, and raising community awareness of the intent of the Strategy.

The Response recognises the importance of effective cross-system coordination and continues to support DRC in this role. The establishment of a dedicated Office of Disability Strategy is not seen as an alternative coordination mechanism at this point in time. Maintaining close links between the Strategy and the NDIS within the Social Services portfolio are an important priority in the lead up to full scheme rollout. This arrangement will support work that ensures key mainstream systems are meeting the needs of all people with disability, including NDIS participants.

The Response supports in-principle the inclusion of measurable actions and goals within the Strategy's implementation plans, as well as monitoring and reporting on their progress. The Government already has arrangements in place that address these recommendations, including improved data collection and work towards the development of a more robust reporting framework to support a new national disability policy framework for beyond 2020. Similarly, the Response outlines an existing strong commitment to the continuing application of best practice principles for engaging with people with disability, their representative organisations and other key stakeholders and supports the development of best practice guidelines.

Finally, the Response offers in-principle support for recommendations seeking a revised National Disability Strategy. DRC has approved the development of a new national disability policy framework. The new framework will be informed by a strategic review of the current Strategy, involving extensive consultations with people with disability, their representative organisations and other key stakeholders.

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Recommendations made by the Committee

1. The Committee recommends that all Australian Governments recommit to the National Disability Strategy 2010-2020 and meeting associated domestic and international reporting obligations.

Supported.

In September 2016, COAG's DRC, which has as its members all Commonwealth, state and territory disability ministers and ministers of all Treasury portfolios, agreed to reinvigorate all governments' efforts to drive progress under the Strategy, including through the second implementation plan.

Commonwealth agencies are strengthening their efforts to ensure the needs of people with disability are considered in the development of all policies, programs and infrastructure. Mental health, the broader health system, and the criminal justice system will receive particular attention. These three areas are of critical importance to people with disability, and are crucial to the successful implementation of the NDIS.

At its 20 November 2017 meeting, DRC agreed to further reinvigoration activities, which include a focus on resolving NDIS mainstream interface issues; improving the evidence base in terms of data collection and reporting; and scoping the development of a targeted approach to build community awareness and promote the intent of the Strategy more broadly.

The Strategy's biennial progress reports track achievements under the Strategy, using national trend indicator data. The Australian Government is committed to the development of the Strategy's progress reports, which are important mechanisms for negotiating areas of national focus, and for highlighting areas where more attention is required.

The Strategy is an important mechanism to ensure that the principles underpinning the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (UNCRPD) are incorporated into all policies, services and programs affecting people with disability, their families and carers. All levels of government have an obligation to act in accordance with the rights provided for in the UNCRPD.

Australia's first report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN Committee), outlining the measures that give effect to our obligations under the UNCRPD, was delivered in December 2010. At its 10th Session in September 2013, the UN Committee considered Australia's continued implementation of the UNCRPD. In October 2013, the UN Committee's Concluding Observations commended Australia for many actions, including the adoption of the Strategy and the introduction of the NDIS. Australia's next periodic report is due for submission to the UN Committee in August 2018.

2. The committee recommends that the government takes to the Disability Reform Council for consideration a proposal to establish an Office of Disability Strategy under the oversight of the Disability Reform Council, as a coordination agency for the National Disability Strategy 2010-2020 and for the revised National Disability Strategy after 2020.

Not Supported.

The establishment of a dedicated Office of Disability Strategy is not seen as an alternative mechanism for cross-system coordination at this point in time. COAG's DRC is the key mechanism for coordinating policy and services affecting people with disability, their families and carers, across all areas of the Commonwealth Government and with all state and territory governments. This is critical where, in Australia, all governments have responsibilities for people with disability.

DRC is explicitly responsible for implementing a broad range of reforms through the Strategy to ensure services and systems are inclusive and accessible for people with disability, their families and carers. It is supported by the Senior Officials Working Group (SOWG), which comprises senior level representatives from the Commonwealth and each jurisdiction's department responsible for disability policy, first ministers and Treasury. SOWG is supported by the National Disability Strategy State and Territory Officials Working Group. This working group is chaired by the Commonwealth, through the Department of Social Services, and comprises senior policy representatives from state and territory departments with responsibility for disability services.

In November 2017, DRC demonstrated its ongoing commitment to the Strategy, by agreeing to further activities to reinvigorate it, including resolving issues relating to the interface between the NDIS and other services that assist people with disability. At this meeting, DRC also agreed to commence work immediately on preparing for a new national disability framework for beyond 2020. This work will help ensure service systems work together effectively at the local level to coordinate supports and, as much as possible, support continuity of care within each jurisdiction.

As implementation of the Strategy continues, there will be a particular focus on ensuring that key mainstream systems are meeting the needs of all people with disability, including NDIS participants. Resolving variances in mainstream service provision is essential to the success of the NDIS. Maintaining close links between the Strategy and the NDIS within the Social Services portfolio is an important priority, particularly during transition to full scheme rollout. This arrangement will strengthen and support work that ensures key mainstream systems are meeting the needs of all people with disability, including NDIS participants.

3. The committee recommends that if an Office of Disability Strategy is established, that people with disability are consulted at every stage of its development and implementation.

Recommendation noted. Refer to above response to Recommendation 2. The Australian Government does not support the establishment of an Office of Disability Strategy and remains committed to established coordinating mechanisms across all areas of government.

The Australian Government will continue to engage people with disability through the Strategy via consultations with their representative organisations and government advisory bodies, including NDCAC. To complement this approach, direct consultation with people with disability, their families and carers will be undertaken as appropriate.

4. The committee recommends that specific measurable goals for implementation of the National Disability Strategy 2010-2020 are created, that these are routinely monitored, and data is collected and reported biannually to the Disability Reform Council, the Office of Disability Strategy (if created) and presented to parliament.

Supported in principle.

COAG's DRC recognises the importance of monitoring and reporting progress against the Strategy as a means of determining whether life is improving for Australians with disability. The Strategy also provides a mechanism for contributing to reporting requirements under the UNCRPD. The Strategy's implementation plans seek to guide policy development across all levels of government to improve the accessibility of mainstream programs and services. Implementation aims and goals are outlined across the Strategy's six outcome areas and key actions are identified, including areas of national cooperation where further effort is required.

The Strategy's biennial progress reports track achievements under the Strategy. The first two-yearly progress report was presented to COAG in December 2015 and a second is being finalised. These reports detail specific implementation achievements of COAG partners and the extent to which the Strategy has driven reform in the design and delivery of mainstream services. They make use of national trend indicator data, and include the views of people with disability and their representative organisations. While achievements may not be immediately measurable because of the Strategy's long-term focus, a key feature of the first progress report was the inclusion of baseline population trend data to monitor and track national progress against the Strategy's six policy outcome areas.

In November 2017, DRC agreed to improve the evidence base relating to people with disability through improved data collection and the development of a more robust reporting framework to support a new disability policy framework for beyond 2020. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), in consultation with the Department of Social Services, is undertaking preliminary research, including an analysis of data gaps, as a first step towards the development of a comprehensive disability data plan for the future. This work will contribute to the development of a more robust reporting framework. The project will engage stakeholders and assess the capacity of various data sources to answer key questions about the experience of people with disability. The project is due for completion in mid-2018.

5. The committee recommends the development of best practice guidelines for detailed consultation with people with disability and their advocates under the National Disability Strategy 2010-2020.

Supported.

In accordance with the UNCRPD, the Australian Government is committed to engaging with people with disability, their families, carers and representative organisations. It is important to ensure the expressed views, lived experience and ongoing advice of people with disability are reflected in the development of policies and programs that affect their lives.

The Australian Government is currently considering the best approach to the development of best practice consultation guidelines.

6. The committee recommends that a revised National Disability Strategy, with an extended timeframe of operation, be devised in consultation with people with disability, including consideration of the critical role of advocacy in this process.

Supported.

In November 2017, COAG's DRC agreed to commence a program of work to develop a new national disability policy framework for beyond 2020. This process will involve a strategic review of the Strategy and extensive engagement with key stakeholders, including people with disability, their families, carers and representative organisations; state, territory and local governments; and national, state and territory advisory councils, including NDCAC.

The Australian Government recognises the important contribution that independent advocacy continues to make in support of the Strategy's implementation, particularly in terms of assisting people with disability to access both mainstream and disability-specific services, including the NDIS. Independent advocacy will continue to play an important role in the implementation of a new national disability policy framework beyond 2020.

7. The committee recommends the revised National Disability Strategy should include development of solutions to the barriers identified to this committee.

Supported in principle.

A strategic review of the Strategy will be undertaken in 2018 to inform the development of a new national disability policy framework for beyond 2020.

The review will consider whether there has been an improvement in outcomes for people with disability, including how effective the Strategy has been in promoting, driving and embedding an inclusive response to disability across key mainstream support systems. This will be measured in accordance with national trend indicator data, together with the views and experiences of people with disability and their representative organisations.

As well as considering information provided to the Senate Community Affairs References Committee for this Inquiry, the review will seek input from the National Disability and Carers Advisory Council and other key stakeholders including families and carers, advocacy and other organisations, academics and governments. The review will also draw upon the findings of key reports on Australia's progress in relation to the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*.

The new national disability framework for beyond 2020 will build on existing actions that are driving improved outcomes for people with disability and will identify new ways for improving the inclusiveness of essential services, infrastructure and support systems.