



Samaritans

Compassion Integrity Justice



National Disability Strategy

**Response to the Department of Social Services
position paper**

Prepared by Samaritans Foundation

September 2020

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Introduction

Samaritans is a registered charity operating services across many areas of the social sector. Samaritans provides services to thousands of people each year in areas including disability support, homelessness, emergency relief, child, youth and family services, gambling and financial counselling and mental health, among others. Samaritans is an NDIS registered provider and has been operating disability services for 35 years.

Samaritans believes that the dignity, capability and human rights of all people must be recognised and respected, and our submission is reflective of this ethos. This submission has been prepared in response to the *Department of Social Services National Disability Strategy Position Paper July 2020*.

Samaritans' submission reflects on some of the gaps and issues witnessed from a service provider perspective.

Executive Summary

The experiences of people with disability have been under the spotlight recently with the commencement of the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (the Royal Commission) and following the heartbreaking death of Ann Marie Smith. Inquiries and events such as these have brought the pervasiveness of ableism to light for many. However, for people with disability, discrimination in its many forms is a daily experience. We must continue to bring awareness to the community about these issues and start the work of improving community attitudes, assumptions and behaviours.

Samaritans supports a stronger emphasis on improving community attitudes and believes that this work will underpin all activities driven by the National Disability Strategy (the Strategy). As acknowledged in the position paper, this is a vital pre-requisite to reduce barriers and improve opportunities for people with disability.

Response to the position paper

Roles and responsibilities

While each sector and business will have a distinct role in improving outcomes for people with disability, there are fundamental philosophies that form the groundwork for all entities and individuals. Overcoming deeply ingrained cultural norms will take time, however improving awareness and offering tools and supports for businesses and institutions such as education and health care will go some way to starting the process.

As a national framework, the Strategy will be a primary driver of changes across sectors and locations. When representing the roles and responsibilities of the government and non-government sectors, the Strategy should consider ways to improve collaboration and accountability, and support services, businesses, and government departments to achieve outcomes. This work should be based on human rights principles, enabling people to understand the human rights implications of their work and recognise the inherent human rights of all people equally.

Providing distinct responsibilities is essential to reduce duplication, improve accountability and create clarity for the relevant workforces. However, it is also important for there to be streamlined referral pathways which offer a 'no wrong door' approach, so people are not bounced from one service to another without ever getting assistance. The Strategy may play a role in improving service collaboration and clarifying referral pathways.

The Strategy must also consider how it includes people with disability who do not qualify for the NDIS. All elements of the proposed Strategy should be tested to ensure they do not inadvertently exclude those people.

Public progress reporting and accountability

As one area for further exploration, the Strategy may consider the merits of introducing targets for government and non-government sectors. This might include the development and implementation of targets for:

- Enrolment and educational outcomes,
- Employment and representation, including roles on boards and committees,
- The utilisation of disability enterprises (as part of purchasing strategies for example),
- Modifications to curriculums and learning outcomes for particular workforces such as medical professionals and teachers, to ensure that professional training includes disability education and awareness.

Reporting on targets and progress against key initiatives and Targeted Action Plans should occur at least yearly and be easily accessible by the public in a variety of formats. There should be mechanisms in place to report on outcomes as well as outputs.

Some examples of reporting styles may include:

- Explanatory videos,
- Dashboard style reporting (like the Productivity Commission Performance Dashboard¹),
- Easy read, accessible and printable downloads,
- Face to face forums and online webinars, presenting results and inviting questions and feedback.

The Strategy may consider the exploration of the merits of establishing an accountability and recognition system like those for gender equality under the Workplace Gender Equality Agency².

¹ Productivity Commission, *Performance Reporting Dashboard*, viewed 23 September 2020, <https://performancedashboard.d61.io/aus>

² Workplace Gender Equality Agency, viewed 23 September 2020, <https://www.wgea.gov.au/>

Targeted Action Plans

Samaritans is supportive of the proposed use of Targeted Action Plans. The development of specific, measurable, and scheduled actions will strengthen accountability and enable prioritisation. It will also improve the coordination of simultaneous activities, ensuring people with disability start to benefit from realisations in the short term, while longer-term activities are implemented.

Involving people in delivery and monitoring

The proposed Engagement Plan should naturally encompass a variety of feedback mechanisms including community advisory groups, consultation through disability advocacy groups and peak bodies, and a variety of mediums such as public forums/focus groups and electronic and physical surveys. Specific attention should be given to identifying and reducing barriers at every opportunity and ensuring that all people with disability can contribute equally. For example, people with intellectual disability are often under-represented in consultations and reducing barriers to their participation should be explored for every planned engagement.

Advisory committees must be formed under clear terms of reference that provide the group with some weight and affirm the government's commitment to considering and implement recommendations. This is vital to ensure that they are empowered and respected, and that engagement is effective and not tokenistic.

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