



Disability services. Putting you first.

National Disability Strategy: Stage 2 Consultations

31 October 2020

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Foreword

Aruma welcomes the opportunity to provide a formal submission to the development of the next *National Disability Strategy*.

Aruma's purpose is *supporting people to live a great life, the life they want, the life they choose*. Our values are embedded in the BRAVE principle: we are Bold, we are Respectful, we are Authentic, we Value teamwork, and we are Excellent.

We are now one of the largest for-purpose disability services in Australia, operating across New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and the ACT to support over 5,000 people with a disability. Aruma specialises in providing support for people with intellectual disability, autism spectrum disorder and global developmental delay.

In addition to the services we offer, Aruma has a strong focus on innovation, technological advances and best practice.

Aruma is committed to co-designing our internal and external strategic responses with people with disability and this response is no different. The [video submission](https://youtu.be/TsnMLqZNzeA) (see: <https://youtu.be/TsnMLqZNzeA>) has been put together by Aruma customers David Hunter and Erica Halvorsen, supported by our Human Rights Coordinator Judy Topper. The written submission has been crafted with substantial input from customers, staff with disability, board members (including board members with lived experience of disability) and Aruma's Executive Leadership Team¹.

The NDIS has, understandably, been the dominant focus of Australia's policy response to the entrenched discrimination and social exclusion of people with a disability for much of the past decade. Despite a bumpy introduction, it is a huge and positive step forward for people with a disability. However, it is not an answer or an end in itself. Over the coming decade, all agencies across all levels of government must work together much more holistically and effectively to eliminate the political, social, physical and economic barriers that people with a disability still face in their journey to full acceptance and inclusion in Australian society. We urge all levels of government to rise to this challenge as the National Disability Strategy for the next decade is finalised and enacted.

I look forward to the development of a new National Disability Strategy that is meaningful, measurable and actioned by all levels of government.



Andrew Richardson
Chief Executive Officer

¹ An informed consent process was followed with customers who contributed to both the video and written submission. Customers chose the name by which they wished to be identified. One staff member with a disability declined to publish their name.

Towards a new National Disability Strategy: summary of key recommendations

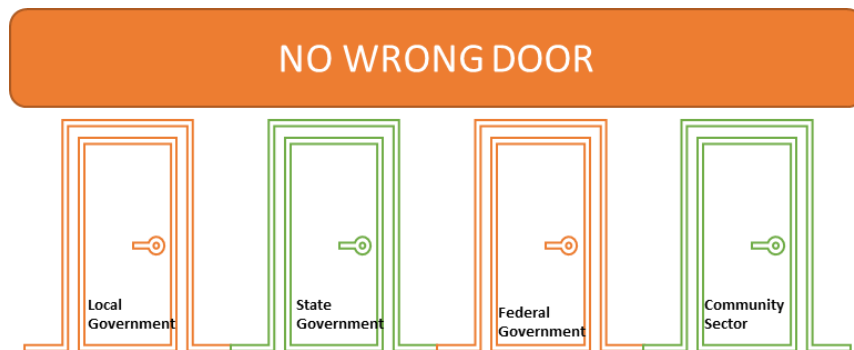
#1 – Nothing About Us Without Us



“Nothing about us without us’ to me means that we are included in everything that concerns us whether it is government policies or basic day to day decisions - and not having other people well intentioned or not, making these decisions without us”

James McCoy, Aruma Customer

#2 – No Wrong Door



“It does not matter if we walk into a NDIS office, Centrelink, local council, advocacy agency or the office of a state member of parliament – we should not be turned away – there should be no wrong door for accessing the assistance we need to fulfil our potential as equal members of the community.”

Aruma staff member with a disability

#3 –SMART

GOALS set for the next National Disability Strategy should be:				
S Specific	M Measurable	A Achievable	R Relevant	T Time-based

“In Aruma our KPIs are framed within ‘success profiles’. Our on-the-job performance is reviewed and assessed accordingly. I would like to see the government aspire to set KPIs around the National Disability Strategy in a similar way. This will include defining what success looks like for the Strategy”.

Aruma Manager

#4 – Led by example

“‘The world is changed by action and example, not opinions’. This common saying is applicable here. All levels of government must lead by example and actually enact the Strategy. It is only through their actions that this next National Disability Strategy will be successful in closing the gap in life outcomes for people with disability”

Andrew Richardson, CEO, Aruma

Towards a new National Disability Strategy: from the Voice of Customers

Aruma strongly believes in working with people with disabilities as co-creators of knowledge. As a result, this submission has been co-created by Aruma customers and staff with disability to ensure that it was informed by the people the Strategy seeks to serve. Customers chose to put together "something unique and innovative" in the form of a video submission. The transcript for this part of our submission is below.

Video Submission: Transcript

Slide: Welcome.
Aruma Customer's Video Submission to the National
Disability – Stage 2 Consultation

Slide: Our Guiding Philosophy: You First.
At Aruma, we always put you, our customers, first.

Slide: First up, here's a video we made ...

Video clip: What the world should look like for a person with a disability

Slide: This video submission was put together by David Hunter and Erica Halverson in response to the National Disability Strategy – Stage 2 Consultation

Video by David Hunter and Erica Halverson:

David:

Good morning in this difficult time with COVID we're trying to make a submission for the National Disability Legislation and because we can't see our friends, we thought we'd do something unique and innovative and could use a video submission for the National Disability Legislation.

The current legislation's been around for a number of years, and the government thought it was time for a review to make us update the legislation, to make it fairer. So, who better to talk about the legislation, than a person with a disability such as myself.

My name's David Hunter. I've been at Aruma Disability Services since August 2011, and I've been with the organisation ever since. The organisation has been fantastic. The accessibility has been really, really good. And... I really enjoy it.... But also I've notice a number of my work colleagues and ... often people disabilities struggle with living on the pension, not having enough money and things like that. If we can find ways on how we can maybe increase the, their pension or make it fairer for them to get into high-paying jobs so that when their disability gets not so good, they can actually get, fall back on the pension when their health deteriorates, rather than the two year wait.

Accessibility issues. My support worker has said a number of the people that she's supported in wheelchairs have trouble accessing eftpos machines, which is a useful technology to make it more accessible for shopping. But some of those eftpos

machines are fixed and people in wheelchairs often have to get their support workers to actually get them their eftpos card out the client's purse or wallet to pay for the groceries. Whereas a person in a wheelchair is perfect- in some cases, able to do it themselves, but physically they are not able to reach the eftpos terminal.

And in terms of health, issues with NDIS with- I've had one work colleague had issues with NDIS trying to get orthotics for his feet, with his walking, because of his gait. And so, if we can actually make it fairer and more consistent in terms of the accessing for NDIS. And also, people with disabilities to access services, I think that would be really, really good.

The final thought that I would like to mention is a couple of months ago I saw on the National Press Club of Australia meeting, the head of Deaf Australia was saying, was having a keynote there, and he was- And one of the audience members were saying, wouldn't it be great- the current disability legislation, which is currently written by able-bodied people, the people with disability to actually fit in with the able-bodied, wouldn't it be innovative if the disability legislation was written by people with disabilities so that able-bodied people fit in with the people with disability. To make it more fairer and more equitable for the community. I hope that this submission is provided some insight into people with disabilities lives. Thank you for your time.

Erica:

My name is Erica Halvorsen and I've been working at Aruma, I found out yesterday, 27 years - since 1993.

David:

Now, our first question for today is: Do you feel you're part of society? Erica?

Erica:

Not always. Some people can be very rude.

David:

Yeah, I feel that, for me, I feel that I'm part of society. Got a great support network, with family and friends, church, colleagues and- work colleagues. It's just a thing, I feel that I am part of society.

Erica:

Are you able to learn new things? Yes! Of course, we are, we learn every day.

David:

Yeah, I learned- learn new things everyday too.
Do you think the community is accessible? Erica?

Erica:

Not always, it depends where you go. Lots- Some people had problems with, um, people, like, years ago when they introduced blind dogs. They had the white ones, but they didn't have the black. And they used to fall through the, um, platform, because they didn't wait. Because they didn't think that they were blind dogs and now they, now they do, but some places won't...for long time when they brought the wheelchairs. So, yes, now they're getting a lot better. But years ago and- and the society's getting a lot better, but, yeah, the community has to step-up, I reckon.

David:

I think the community is accessible. We have some, some way to go, but I think we actually getting there. We're almost there.

Now, Erica, do you feel in control of your health and wellbeing?

Erica:

Not always. Not always. The older you get, the longer it takes. And that's- And that's sad. But, you've just got to, to bare and grudge with it.

David:

Yeah, I feel I'm in control of my health and wellbeing. I've got a fantastic support network thanks to the NDIS and the medical professionals. I think I'm doing quite well and in control.

Do people with disabilities get enough money?

Erica:

No! No! No! No! and... I mean no!

David:

I think the Disability's legislator, disabilities... can may be sometimes they struggle, but we need to maybe encourage them to get into the workforce more. Make it fair, so while they're able to work they can actually stay in the workforce. So, I think they do get a, they do get a, they can actually- we can actually encourage them to get more money, we just need to figure out, on a legislative thing. So, that they are able to be financially secure.

What is one thing that you would like to tell the government?

Erica:

I'd like to tell them to treat everybody equally.

David:

I'd like-

Erica:

Even if we have a disability, it doesn't matter, we're still a person.

David:

Exactly my sentiments, Erica, well said. But one, one thing that I think would be wise for the government to do is actually have more involvement with people with disability in creating the disability legislation. Therefore, they'd feel more included, rather than the able body people writing the legislation. Thank you.

Erica:

And also look at the person that was in the, was in parliament who couldn't get in because he was in a wheelchair. I think that's disgusting.

David:

Thank you.

Slide: Our Purpose of 'Supporting people to live a great life, the life they want, the life they choose' is why we exist. It's what brings us joy and what will keep us going both now and into the future.

Slide: Aruma is more than a service provider.
We raise the bar higher.
We are human rights warriors.
We are bold and courageous.
We are BRAVE.

Video clip: Aruma's Brave Video

End of Transcript

Towards a new National Disability Strategy: reflections on the current Strategy

Australia was one of the first signatories to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2008, after which time the federal government undertook to develop the *National Disability Strategy 2010-2020*. There have been substantial advances in Australia for people with disabilities over the past decade as a result of this commitment, particularly in relation to the establishment of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). As Erica Halvorsen and David Hunter stated in our Video Submission:

“Do you think the community is accessible?”

Erica: “Not always, it depends where you go... [but] society is getting a lot better, but the community has to step up I reckon.”

David: “I think ... we have some way to go... but we are almost there”

We know that there remains a substantial gap in life outcomes for Australians with disabilities which the next National Disability Strategy (Strategy) must seek to address. The Disability Royal Commission (DRC) has been formed in response to this substantial gap and the outcomes of this commission will be able to further inform the nuances of the Strategy. Aruma's customers are aware of this gap – they live it. In researching for this submission, they spoke to us about the continuous struggles faced across a broad range of dimensions of accessibility including:

- Service accessibility: social services like Centrelink and the NDIS need to be easier to navigate;
- Health accessibility: the health sector needs to be more responsive to our needs and be more informed about disability;
- Housing accessibility: finding homes in central locations which cater to our needs continues to be difficult not just because of a lack of affordability but also because of the attitudinal barriers faced within the private rental market;
- Physical accessibility: navigating footpaths, doorways and buildings continues to be an issue; and
- Workforce accessibility: difficulties arise in finding and retaining employment outside of entry-level programs which inevitably end.

The next National Disability Strategy must focus strongly on taking the needs of people with disability *seriously* by considering the broad range of accessibility issues still faced today.

Aruma recognises that people with disability in Australia continue to be positioned as ‘other’ in many areas of life including:

- healthcare (less likely to receive organ transplants or medical treatment),
- justice (more likely to receive mental health orders, be labelled as deviant),
- education (more likely to be segregated).

People with disability are still more likely to be found in prison, Centrelink queues, public housing and in aged care facilities even when young. They are more likely to be victims of violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation (“human rights violations”) and recipients of restrictive practices including chemical, physical, environmental,

mechanical restraint and seclusion in an effort to “control our behaviour”. They are less likely to be found in our own homes, in universities, in meaningful employment or in paid positions of power including within the disability sector. Relationships for many people with disabilities are still medicalised and commercialised, and if a person with a disability is a woman, Indigenous or a person from a culturally diverse or non-English speaking background, there is an extra level of oppression to deal with.

People with disability make up 20% of the population however they continue to be underrepresented in employment resulting in a comparatively low socio-economic status when compared to our “non-disabled” counterparts. As Erica Halvorsen said in our Video Submission when asked if people with disabilities receive enough money:

“No! No! No! No! and I mean no!”

These are the areas the new National Disability Strategy should be addressing in real, **measurable** terms which goes beyond physical architecture. No one is arguing about the concept – what we do need to establish is the **practical steps** to take towards **achieving the vision of full inclusion**.

Aruma has observed the confusion between the NDIS and the National Disability Strategy, with many people seeing the Scheme and the Strategy as one and the same. While this was understandable in the past, moving forward a clear distinction between systems (which includes the NDIS) and the Strategy needs to be made.

The NDIS is just one system – it is not the outworking of the National Disability Strategy. Unfortunately, governments have increasingly identified disability as a ‘federal issue’ relegating most if not all responsibility for “disability” to this one funding model. This transactional approach to disability where the margins are slim, and providers are continually pushed towards providing lower cost services has shifted focus to sector sustainability (which is more immediately quantifiable) and away from community inclusion and quality of life.

The next Strategy must avoid these pitfalls and find a way out of this current state of affairs. Aruma suggests that it must be firmly embedded into all areas of **policy- and decision- making** for all levels of government. Disability inclusion must become a whole of government and whole of community responsibility, embedded in **community life**.

Question 1: What should we carry forward from the current Strategy into the new Strategy?

Here at Aruma we believe that we need to set the bar high!

The **Vision** of an **“inclusive Australian society that enables people with disability to fulfil their potential as equal members of the community”** continues to be as relevant today as it was a decade ago.

To ensure that we are fulfilling this vision there is a need for a strong human rights focus, embedded in the eight guiding principles of the UN CRPD:

1. Respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy including the freedom to make one's own choices, and independence of persons;
2. Non-discrimination;
3. Full and effective participation and inclusion in society;
4. Respect for difference and acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity;
5. Equality of opportunity;
6. Accessibility;
7. Equality between men and women; and
8. Respect for the evolving capacities of children with disabilities and respect for the right of children with disabilities to preserve their identities.

Aruma's Human Rights Coordinator, Judy Topper, recently presented this thought:
"Imagine what it is like to have a curfew, to be restricted in how far and how often you can travel, to be prevented from accessing restaurants and bars because of where you live.

"Imagine not being able to access a workplace, not being allowed to visit your family and being told how many people you can entertain in your own home.

"This has been the reality for over one hundred days for people in Metropolitan Melbourne and colleagues have described this as being awful, feeling 'housebound' and being apprehensive about when these imposed conditions will end.

"Now imagine this being your life.

"For many Australians with a disability, curfews, restrictions on travel and community inaccessibility are experienced on a daily basis.

"This is why we take the application of a human rights lens to what we do at Aruma seriously".

It is time for disability in Australia to be reimagined within this lens.

When Aruma asked our Customers to imagine what the world should look like for people with disability, this is what they had to say:

1. Full and effective participation and equality of opportunity includes being taken seriously in the job market:



2. Respect for inherent dignity and respect for difference includes having our relationships accepted and not judged or medicalised:



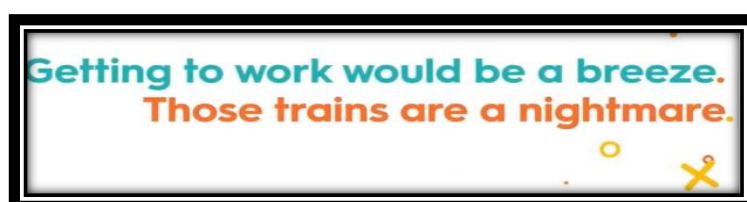
3. Non-discrimination and accessibility includes promoting the principles of universal design:



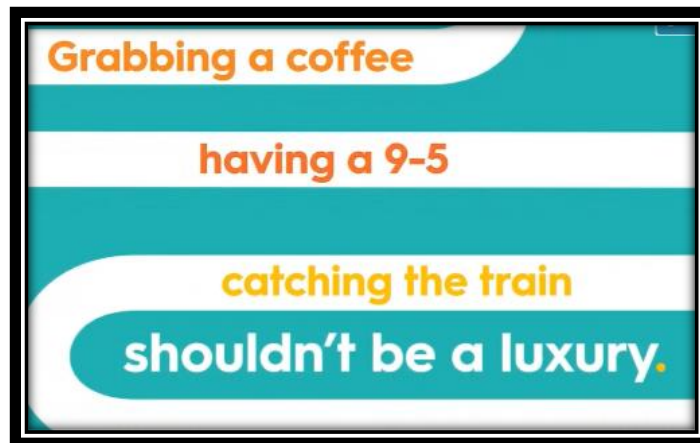
4. Respect for difference and acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity involves not making assumptions about who "we" are based on what you've seen in the movies:



5. Accessibility is more than just physical access. On public transport for example, it means being able to use easy read signs, access hearing loops, accessible timetables and inclusive attitudes of staff. If this all came together, then:



6. Overall, creating an inclusive Australia means that ordinary, everyday activities other people take for granted – like grabbing a coffee, working, and catching a train – would be routine parts of the lives of people with disabilities, not a luxury:



The existing outcome areas within the National Disability Strategy continue to be relevant however we recommend that they should be defined in tangible and measurable ways. The six outcome areas are:

1. Economic Security;
2. Inclusive and accessible communities;
3. Rights protection, justice and legislation;
4. Personal and community support;
5. Learning and skills; and
6. Health and wellbeing.

In summary, the intent of the Strategy is something to preserve and carry forward. However, in doing so we must focus on creating a strategy which is meaningful and actionable. Aruma recommends:

1. The ultimate control of the Strategy should be driven by people with disabilities for people with disabilities, in the spirit of 'Nothing About Us Without Us';
2. The adoption of a 'No Wrong Door' approach when it comes to supporting all people with disabilities to access a truly inclusive society;
3. The establishment of SMART goals to guide the implementation of the Strategy and its six outcome areas; and
4. That governments *lead by example* in the implementation of the Strategy.

Towards a new National Disability Strategy: recommendations for inclusion (pun intended)

1. Nothing about us without us

"Nothing about us without us' to me means that we are included in everything that concerns us whether it is government policies or basic day to day decisions - and not having other people well intentioned or not, making these decisions without us"

James McCoy, Aruma Customer

The new National Disability Strategy should be finalised, monitored and evaluated by people with disabilities. This should not be tokenistic or applied only through submission processes or perfunctory "engagement plans". The **new National Disability Strategy should have a Visible Voice** within the walls of all Australian parliaments.

The mantra of the Disability Rights Movement, 'Nothing about us without us' is not new, but it remains relevant today. Operationalising the essence of this philosophy, as articulated by Charlton², involves understanding the collective and individual needs of people with disability by valuing, prioritising and recognising experiential knowledge; demands self-determination (aka choice and control) and embraces "independence and integration, empowerment and human rights, and self-help and self-determination".³

When we consulted our customers, they described 'Nothing about us without us' as a way to build an inclusive society which included:

- Developing and listening to the voice of people with disability;
- Recognising people with disability as experts in our own lives;
- Helping people with disability to develop our own voice;
- Having the needs of people with disability front-of-mind, resulting in no longer having to fight for access to our community;
- Being included in everything that concerns us from government policies and legislation to strategy to daily decision making;
- Not having decisions being made about people with disabilities without us being in the room;
- Making sure that no one is left out;
- Truly belonging to and being included in the community; and
- Empowering people with disability in society.

Raylene Griffiths, an Aruma customer, provided a fitting summation for this section:

*"'Nothing about us without us' is about "helping someone to be empowered. [It is sending the message:] **You are important to us! Everything you do makes sense.**"*

² Charlton, James I. (2000) Nothing about us without us: Disability Oppression and Empowerment. Berkeley: University of California Press.

³ Ibid, p.17

Question 2: What improvements are we going to make to the new Strategy?

Increased focus on community attitudes

Real change is only possible when the acceptance of disability inclusion is embedded in a multitude of layers across society. Mass media, the polity, the economy, education, family, healthcare, the arts and a variety of social institutions have a role to play here.

From the perspective of a disability service provider, Aruma takes our role of championing the rights of our customers **to live a great life, the life they want, the life they choose** very seriously. This commitment extends beyond paid service provision. For example, in an effort to embed human rights into practice we have a Human Rights Committee which sits directly under the Aruma Board and we employ Human Rights Ambassadors. Human Rights Ambassadors are customers (people with disability) who are employed at an award rate to directly inform and influence our research, policy and practice. We are also investing in research and advocacy to improve our support practices and play a stronger thought leadership role in the disability sector.

We asked our customers for feedback on what the community can do to contribute to building an inclusive society. Their answers were compelling:

- Engage with us and with our worker, our parent or whoever is with us as a default;
- We should not feel invisible because we should not be invisible;
- Stop using derogatory terms to describe us as though it isn't the problem that it is;
- Challenge the community's assumptions and biases about disability - we are just like everyone else; and
- Give us greater access to things that everyone else takes for granted like jobs, education and social events.

Community attitudes will only change when people with disability are visible – which includes being politically enfranchised and embraced as citizens (imagine political parties competing for the 'disability vote' by handing out how-to-vote cards in plain English, braille, and large print, and letterboxing accessibility guidelines for polling centres to accommodate people on the autism spectrum as well as people with physical disabilities).

People with disability continue to live on the margins of Australian society, facing economic and attitudinal barriers to living full, visible lives within the community:



The Voice of Erica Halvorsen:

People are very rude.

If everyone would just look up from their mobile phones once in a while and see people with disabilities ... we are here.

I had a problem with using the steps on the buses. When I had splints on my legs, they started lowering the platform for me to get on. But I have short legs – I've always had short legs – why couldn't they do that for me before? I shouldn't have to ask.

People like Erica should not be made to feel invisible, however this experience was articulated by a number of our customers when they were asked to give input into this submission. Parallel to this were the observations that visibility of disability still too often comes in the form of discrimination, devaluation and disparaging descriptions. James McCoy, an Aruma Customer, had this to say:

“Community attitudes while better than before, still need to improve. People need to stop using the word retard and its derivatives as though it's not a problem.

... there are [still] some people like Peter Singer who say nasty things about people with disability such as not treating people with Down Syndrome as an equal or [that] our lives are inherently less valuable or ones of suffering,.. Ignorance and apathy are just as problematic as a lot of the challenges come from... good intentions [which] can be misplaced”

2. No Wrong Door

“It does not matter if we walk into a NDIS office, Centrelink, local council, advocacy agency or the office of a state member of parliament – we should not be turned away – there should be no wrong door for accessing the assistance we need to fulfil our potential as equal members of the community.”

Aruma staff member with a disability

Everyone should be taking responsibility for implementing the vision for inclusion articulated in the National Disability Strategy – within governments, across governments and throughout the broader service system and community. Raylene Griffiths, an Aruma customer, described inclusion at this level as fostering “a sense of belonging” where we follow a “process of helping someone develop their own voice” and where we “need to look at the person’s needs and take them seriously”.

The No Wrong Door approach is very simple – it is **a collective commitment** by a network of organisations, providers, government departments, etc - to ensure that, people with disability are able to access the support they need to uphold the vision of enabling people to fulfil their potential as equal members of society. It simplifies pathways to support and places the responsibility of closing the gaps in life outcomes

for people with disability on the collective. A No Wrong Door approach takes the needs of people with disability seriously.

Example: housing, which is accessible, affordable and available

For many Australians with a disability, finding a home which is affordable, suitable, secure and free from discrimination is an impossible task. Thousands of young people with complex needs remain in nursing homes as a result, and many thousands more continue to live in inappropriate settings or with ageing parents, with all parties feeling “trapped”. The undersupply of appropriate housing is being addressed in innovative ways by private investors in partnership with the community sector, but without a whole-of-government strategy, gaps in the housing market will remain for many years to come.

The need for a national strategy to address the housing needs of people with disabilities has been broadly canvassed in the past, including in the 2010-2020 Strategy. However, despite projections articulated in, for example, the AHURI report in 2015 which estimated the ‘unmet need in affordable housing for between 83,000-122,000 NDIS participants at full rollout of the scheme’⁴ there remains no coordinated strategy.

The division of responsibility for housing between different levels of government has resulted in a suboptimal system with no real investment being made by state governments (which largely view disability as a federal responsibility) and the federal government (which views housing as a state-based responsibility). Investment and cooperation across governments which includes partnerships with investors and community and disability housing providers would result in not only greater cost-benefit but also in quality outcomes for people with disabilities.

We recommend that the National Disability Strategy promote a “No Wrong Door” approach as a way of **strengthening accountability** across governments and across the wider community. This will involve providing solutions for the long-term good including in the area of housing, rather than minimising individual agency budgets. This kind of problem solving will improve quality of life and save lives. In the context of the recession which we are currently facing, this type of commitment is more important than ever. We must ensure that the needs of people with disability are not overlooked at a time when federal, state and local government budget cuts are being made.

As Linda Justin, Aruma’s Chief Customer and Practice Officer has said:

“To quote Arundhati Roy, ‘There’s no such thing as the voiceless. There are only the deliberately silenced’. This profound quote plays out in terms of how we treat, plan for and speak to (and about) people with disabilities not just in the broader context of society, but also in terms of service provision. We must all be more

⁴ Wiesel, I., Habibis, D. (2015) NDIS, housing assistance and choice and control for people with disability, AHURI Final Report No. 258, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne, <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/258>.

accountable for our actions which includes our language. We must never reduce individuals to a series of transactions which will ultimately frame them as less than”.

Aruma believes that every opportunity, every door and every respect should be afforded to people with disabilities.

3. SMART

“In Aruma our KPIs are framed within ‘success profiles’. Our on-the-job performance is reviewed and assessed accordingly. I would like to see the government aspire to set KPIs around the National Disability Strategy in a similar way. This will include defining what success looks like for the Strategy”.

Aruma Manager

Aruma recommends that the next Strategy should be success orientated. This can be achieved through applying the SMART goals framework, articulating goals which are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-based (SMART). A commitment to SMART goals will strengthen accountability and enable the measurement, reporting and evaluation of the six outcome areas across a broad range of stake holders. Intergovernmental investment and commitment will be required to achieve this.



A crucial point to raise regarding increased accountability is the question: what happens when someone is not achieving? Mitigation must be required where targets are not met. A transparent system of reporting across all sectors, including all levels within and across government, must be actioned to ensure an authentic commitment to the new National Disability Strategy’s implementation.

Aruma would embrace the regular evaluation of our service against National Disability Strategy SMART goals. From a service perspective, we believe this would strengthen confidence in the sector and encourage best practice.

The establishment of SMART goals for the next National Disability Strategy will also assist in overcoming systemic issues identified within the disability sector around the lack of transparency in data collection, the lack of consistency in service provision and the absence of real evaluation.

Example: employment outcomes

Employment outcomes for people with disability continue to be limited. While there may be slightly better awareness of inclusion strategies over the past ten years, we are still not seeing significant steps towards closing the gap for people with disabilities in this area. Australia ranks 27th out of 29 OECD countries for relative income of people with disabilities⁵.

Both David Hunter and Erica Halvorsen spoke about difficulties with being fully employed, including the correlating problem of being penalised for working (in reference to the Disability Support Pension). This is a classic example of how the National Disability Strategy's vision is being undermined by government policy. It is also illustrative of the current low expectations surrounding people with disabilities in the workplace. Entry level positions in government may prioritise disability recruitment as one aspect of diversity however we are still not seeing outcomes at a higher level in departments. Schemes such as the 26-week employment supplement have been criticised for their narrow scope and for the way they undermine the goal of permanent, meaningful employment.

There is also a lack of pathway from supported employment to 'open' employment. There is no continuum of supports for people with disabilities seeking employment which restricts their ability to find and retain suitable employment. Greater flexibility needs to be embedded into our systems where supports are not bound by programs but genuinely designed to facilitate real outcomes for people with disabilities.

To articulate employment outcomes in terms of a SMART goal for the next Strategy could include the following questions:

1. Specific: Australia will be in the top ten OECD countries in terms of employment outcomes for people with disabilities.
2. Measurable: Within the next ten years we will double the number of people with disability in the workforce by implementing long-term strategies around education, entry-level positions (not programs), retention incentives and the removal of entry barriers to mid- to high-level careers in the public sector.
3. Achievable: A whole-of-government strategy will articulate the steps to complete this goal.
4. Relevant: Lifting employment outcomes for Australians with disability will assist in achieving the Strategy's vision of creating an inclusive society where people with disability can fulfil their full potential.
5. Time-based: This goal will be achieved within the next ten years, with smaller milestones being articulated in line with #3.

⁵ Australian Human Rights Commission. (2015). Face the Facts: Disability Rights, <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/education/face-facts-disability-rights>

As Raylene Griffiths, an Aruma customer concluded:

“There is still some work needed, but it's getting there...the government is [starting to] make this happen... Education is the key... education [and] exposing people with disabilities to new experiences”.

4. Led by Example

“‘The world is changed by action and example, not opinions’. This common saying is applicable here. All levels of government must lead by example and actually enact the Strategy. It is only through their actions that this next National Disability Strategy will be successful in closing the gap in life outcomes for people with disability”

Andrew Richardson, CEO, Aruma

The implementation of the new National Disability Strategy must be led by example. It should become the responsibility of all levels of government to lead by example to ensure that this next National Disability Strategy is successful in closing the gap in life outcomes for people with disability. Our customers should not feel othered, excluded or marginalised in society, but they so often do. What matters to them is tangible examples, real outcomes and direct advantage. This should not be too much for them to ask!

When we talked with our customers, they described their experience of a society which:

1. does not treat them like everyone else
2. makes them feel invisible
3. does not treat them like a person
4. does not involve them in creating the things that affect them like legislation and the Strategy
5. listens to the voices of people *without* disabilities as a priority
6. is not accessible to them and their colleagues

People with disability are too often an afterthought in government policy and responses. This has been highlighted most recently through the COVID pandemic where the disability sector was not initially prioritised for PPE, not resourced to respond and not supported to implement post-pandemic health and wellbeing provisions for our customers. People with disability will be one of the most disadvantaged groups in the recession which has been caused by the pandemic, however, there has been very little focus on their economic and social recovery. Is it any wonder that people with disability often feel invisible? As one of our customers, Brain Charlton expressed:

“My message [to government] would be to listen more because not every disability is visible and sometimes all you have to do is listen to the people so listen more”.

When Erica Halvorsen and David Hunter considered what message they wanted to convey to the government on this Strategy they reacted strongly:

Erica said: *I'd like to tell them to treat everybody equally even if we have a disability it doesn't matter, we are still a person.*

David said: *one thing I think would be wise for the government to do is actually have more involvement with people with disability in creating the disability legislation [National Disability Strategy] therefore they'd feel more included rather than the able bodied people writing the legislation...*

Erica added: *and also look at the person who was in parliament who couldn't get in because he was in a wheelchair – I think that's disgusting!*

The vision to build an **inclusive Australian society that enables people with disability to fulfil their potential as equal members of the community** can only be achieved if all levels of government are actively implementing – then reporting on and showcasing best examples of – outcomes.

On a **federal government** level, all areas of responsibility from telecommunications to immigration, from trade to pensions and from broadcasting to postal services, should be aware of their responsibilities under the National Disability Strategy. Unfortunately, the federal government does not prioritise the needs of people with disability in procurement guidelines and maintains a policy of discrimination against disability within immigration.

The promotion of disability inclusion through the federal government funded ABC is a positive example of how broadcasters can contribute towards improving community attitudes. Paralympian Kurt Fernley's interview series "One Plus One" explores the achievement of excellence by our most successful Australians, such as Dylan Alcott. The series "You can't ask that" has used an innovative format to facilitate an intimate and personal glimpse into the lives of people on the autism spectrum, people who are HIV positive, Deaf Australians, and people with mental illness for example.

On a **state government** level, all areas of responsibility from schools to hospitals, from roads to public transport, and police and justice to industrial relations, should be aware of their responsibilities under the National Disability Strategy. Unfortunately, many people with disabilities still report negative experiences when interacting with the justice system due to a lack of understanding of their communication needs.

Public transport is a positive example of where over the past decade accessibility measures have been put in place. New trains, trams, buses and stations are being built to universal accessibility standards. Disability reference groups are actively involved in informing public transport across most jurisdictions with incremental success being achieved.

On a **local government** level, all areas of responsibility from development to footpaths, parks to libraries, local environmental issues to public health, should be aware of their responsibilities under the National Disability Strategy. Consistency should be achieved in the next Strategy to ensure for example that all libraries are accessible to people with complex disabilities through the installation of a 'changing

place'. A SMART goal could be implemented for this Strategy to say that within the first five years, all public libraries will have an accessible changing facility installed.

There are some local councils who have diligently created a series of social stories to assist people with disabilities to take part in their art galleries, community centres, libraries, playgrounds and parks. These stories contain actual pictures of venues and locations and explain what to expect if they visit or attend these sites. This is a positive step towards inclusion for people with disabilities.

The **NDIS is a ground-breaking realisation** for all Australian governments to get people with disabilities the supports they need to live full and inclusive lives. Governments should energetically drive all their other sectors to catch up, and get on board, and lead by example.

At each level of government, the National Disability Strategy should be considered as a go-to document for direction on inclusion for all. And importantly, to quote David Hunter, "[it] would be wise for the government to actually have more involvement with people with disability".

Concluding Remarks

Aruma's guiding philosophy is **"You. First"**. This philosophy would guide the National Disability Strategy well. It is time to put people with disability first. People with disabilities should be front-of-mind when the federal government writes its budget, when the state government puts contracts out to tender, and when local governments plan new facilities. When, and only when, this happens will we truly be able to close the gap in life outcomes and achieve full inclusion for people with disabilities.

The Last Word: David Hunter



I am best placed to talk about the new Strategy because I have a disability and I know a lot of people with disability. I know that some people struggle to live on the pension, and we need to find ways to help them get more money and get into higher paying jobs without worrying about losing access to the pension when their health deteriorates... It isn't fair that people still can't access eftpos machines in shops despite having the ability to pay for themselves they are excluded from doing so... We also need to make it fairer and more consistent to access health and NDIS services – that would be really good... I'd like to see disability legislation written by people with disabilities so that able bodied fit in – not the other way around – to make it fairer and more equitable for the community.