

Submission – National Disability Strategy

I am the carer of a person with a significant physical disability. I am making this submission based on my experience caring for my husband.

Outcome Areas

Health and Wellbeing

I would like the outcome area of “Health and Wellbeing” to be amended to “Health, Safety and Wellbeing”. There is a need to ensure the safety of all people with a disability during large scale emergencies such as bushfires, cyclones and a pandemic as well as during smaller, more localised disruptions such as storm damage to homes and interruptions to the electricity supply.

Responding to emergencies requires both federal co-ordination and resources as well as state run services on the ground. The National Disability Strategy needs to be linked to a National Emergency Strategy, as well as being connected to state Disability Inclusion Plans. While there needs to be a commitment at a strategic level to meeting the needs of people with a disability during an emergency, policies and plans need to be developed that will actually deliver. In this context I believe the NDIA has a role in relation to participants in the NDIS.

The critical issues for my husband during an emergency are:

1. Availability of a consistent electricity supply
2. Whether it is safe to remain in our home
3. If evacuation is necessary, having an accessible place to go where he has access to all the aids he requires.

My husband is dependant on a wheelchair and needs assistance with all his transfers. He requires a consistent electricity supply to operate his bed and ceiling hoist. He also uses a bi-pap machine when he is asleep to assist him in pushing air in and out of his lungs. He requires a hoist to get in and out of our car.

Any disruption to the electricity supply (whether caused by catastrophic bushfires, storms or localised events) which lasts more than 12 hours, places the health and safety of my husband at risk and would require us to leave our home. Since our home has been modified to meet his needs we need to have alternative accessible accommodation where he can access an accessible toilet, electric bed and hoist. We cannot stay with family or friends since their homes do not have accessible bathrooms and toilets. Hotels with accessible bathrooms may not be suitable depending on the location of the handrail and toilet. Suitable alternative accommodation needs to be identified in advance as well as aids such as electric beds and hoists. Locating alternative accommodation and sourcing aids at short notice is not viable. As a family it is not possible to ensure my husband's safety, without assistance in preparing, co-ordinating and implementing an emergency plan.

I believe that the NDIS could assist participants by ensuring that every participant had an Emergency Action Plan. This could be completed at the same time as the regular Plan Review and any additional funding to support the emergency plan could be included in the participant's annual budget. The NDIS could liaise with accessible accommodation providers and equipment suppliers to ensure that these were available to the participant in an emergency.

Inclusive and Accessible Communities

Universal Design

I note that this has been included as one of the guiding principles. However I think that the Strategy should take a much stronger position on this issue by supporting the inclusion of Universal Design Principles in the Building Code of Australia. How do you measure any improvements in the universal design of buildings if it is not part of the building code?

Exclusion from ordinary family and social interactions is a significant issue for people with a disability. My husband and I cannot visit any family member or friend in their home because their homes are not accessible. This could be changed if universal design principles were incorporated into the Building Code. I reject any suggestion that the cost of introducing universal design outweighs the benefits.

Outlining the roles of government

I support this in principle. I would like the National Disability Strategy to give greater recognition to the crucial role of local government in improving the lives of people with a disability. All councils in NSW have Disability Inclusion Action Plans which focus on a number of outcome areas including liveable and accessible communities. Councils are in a great position to connect to their local communities and influence attitudinal change eg through cultural events. They also have responsibility for local infrastructure that has a significant impact on the way people with a disability can interact with their community. However councils have limited sources of income and need improved and consistent funding from the Commonwealth to achieve change at the local level.

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