



30 October 2020

National Disability Strategy Governance and Engagement Section  
Department of Social Services  
GPO Box 9820  
Canberra, ACT 2601

**Re: Submission to National Disability Strategy (NDS) position paper**

The Whittlesea Disability Network (WDN) appreciate the opportunity to provide the following feedback and reflections on the National Disability Strategy position paper as a part of stage 2 of the consultation process.

WDN is made up of local community members with a disability, service providers and carers of people with disabilities that have an interest in disability within the City of Whittlesea. The monthly meetings, hosted by Council are attended on average by 30 to 40 individuals and with a further 600 people on the mailing list, the network represents, the strong disability voice with the municipality. The network discuss and exchange information on issues and opportunities which impact people with disabilities and their carers.

The City of Whittlesea is a municipality in the northeast of Melbourne and is a designated growth corridor; current population is approx. 230,000 which a further 100,000 new residents expected over the next 20 years.

Feedback for this submission was collected from members of the network that were consulted via the October WDN meeting and email feedback.

**Question 1:**

**Do you have any comments on the vision and outcome areas being proposed for the new Strategy?**

Overall the network agrees with the vision and outcomes. This vision and outcome area fits with the current vision and outcome areas of the Whittlesea Disability Action Plan 2017-21

City of Whittlesea Disability Plan 2017-21 Vision

*An inclusive municipality where people of all abilities are encouraged and enabled to lead satisfying, fulfilling and contributory lives*

*Outcome areas*

1. *Inclusive communities,*
2. *Good health, housing and wellbeing for people with disabilities,*
3. *Respect, equity and safety for all,*
4. *Contributory community living as a right for all regardless of ability*

## **Question 2:**

### **What do you think about the guiding principles proposed here?**

WDN agree with the guiding principles. WDN would also recommend that the Commonwealth work with Local Government (LG) especially LG Disability Advisory structures to support outcomes in each of these principles. LG being the grassroots level of government have strong connections within the community and residents with disabilities. By working with LG and their Disability Advisory structures the Commonwealth may develop a better understanding of the challenges with the NDS and developing ownership and understanding of the Strategy which will follow onto better outcomes from the Strategy

**Involve and engage-** LG can play a strong role in this area with its strong links to its community as discussed above. LG Disability advisory structures have a history of achieving goals in this area for many years.

**Design universally-** LG has a long history on developing and leading the way in universal design for many years. From built environment (i.e. Footpath, community facilities etc) to design of programs (inclusive kindergarten program and school holiday programs) to running of inclusive arts opportunities (Arts shows, community events) to developing of inclusive infrastructure (Changing Places facilities). This extends to the work that LG is doing to develop accessible opportunities in opening the hospitality sector coming out of physical distancing restrictions under Covid.

**Engage the broader community-** As discussed above LG Disability advisory structures is the ideal structure for the Commonwealth government (in partnership with Local Government) to use to connect residents with disabilities and carers with the NDS and be involved in the actions under each of the principles.

**Address barriers faced by priority populations-** Local government already have the contacts with priority populations groups such as Young people, people from aboriginal background, LGBTQI communities and other priority populations. LG can work with the Commonwealth to make sure that the strategic work of the NDS will involve these groups.

**Support carers and supporters-** This is one of the biggest issues that has been raised by WDN; how do we support carers and other informal supports to decrease the need for more formal supports that are provided (especially under the NDIS). This has become a bigger issue when many residents with disabilities needing to rely on informal support more under physical distancing restrictions of Covid.

## **Question 3:**

### **What is your view on the proposal for the new Strategy to have a stronger emphasis on improving community attitudes across all outcome areas?**

Improving community attitudes on disability has been a key objective of LG in Victoria since the Disability Act 2006 required LG to have a Disability Action Plan. Whittlesea has been involved in local awareness projects like "Don't park in the blue spots" campaign. This campaign worked with local school students to increase their knowledge by developing posters promoting why people should not park in Disabled Person Parking scheme spots without a permit. This kind of proactive approach leads to students making their parents think again before parking in the "Blue Spots" while also developing knowledge of future drivers (being the students themselves). With the right structures

and relationships in place between all three levels of government, it will achieve better outcomes in our community in this area.

LG can also play a role in connecting priority population groups in their own communities. This could include population including (but not limited to) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, CALD, LGBTIQI, young people/ children. LG works in their own communities and already has these connections with these residents.

Victorian LG also has a history of working with mainstream providers, (for example Aquatic Centres, Neighbourhood houses, Shopping Centres, Community Centres, Arts Facilities), to be inclusive of people with disabilities. A lot of this work has been done in partnership between State Government and Local Government in the past via the now ceased Building Inclusive Communities (BIC) program. This program had huge outcomes on inclusion of people with disabilities in the community for over 15 years. There is an opportunity for three levels of government to establish a similar program to support the NDS at a grassroots level.

#### **Question 4:**

**How do you think that clearly outlining what each government is responsible for could make it easier for people with disability to access the supports and services they need?**

Since City of Whittlesea (COW) is not a service provider of the NDIS, we have taken a market development approach to support the services and supports in the local area. Currently COW is undertaking a research project looking at the market gaps in the local area. Using the Data that has been produced by the NDIS, working with Local Area Coordinators, local services and residents, we are investigating the gaps in the market in the municipality level but also to a postcode level. The plan is that this work will lead to new and existing service providers being able to fill the gaps that are uncovered from this work. This is a way that LG can support the NDIS at a grassroots level. By doing this it gives NDIS Participants an opportunity to increase utilisations of their plans.

LG has a responsibility to oversee the planning of new housing and communities in its municipality. It can also have an effect in the kind of housing that is developed in the local community. For this reason, LG can influence the developing of new accessible, affordable and appropriate options in its community. The need to accessible, affordable and appropriate housing options for people with disabilities is vital.

LG also has an opportunity to work with Local Area Coordination teams to

- Support residents who don't qualify for NDIS plan,
- Work with the community establish services for residents that don't have a plan
- Work with residents who don't have a plan to go thru the application process

#### **Question 5:**

**How do you think the Strategy should represent the role that the non-government sector plays in improving outcomes for people with disability? (Examples of the non-government sector include big, medium and small businesses, community organisations, employees of these businesses, private research, investment organisations and individuals.)**

There is a need to work at a grass roots level to support the work of the non government sector.. Councils can work with the Non-government sectors in the own local communities. This can include their economic development teams taking a focus on capacity building of local social support services and industries.

**Question 6:**

**What kind of information on the Strategy's progress should governments make available to the public and how often should this information be made available?**

Report to public needs to be made annually. It needs to give the public an understanding on progress that has been made because of the work of the Strategy.

**Question 7:**

**What do you think of the proposal to have Targeted Action Plans that focus on making improvements in specific areas within a defined period of time (for example within one, two or three years)?**

Clear improvements in specific areas in defined periods of times are needed. This was a limitation of the previous plan as many in the community could not see clear outcomes outside of the NDIS. The actions that appear in the action plan need to flow into State Disability Plans and LG DAPs so that they work at all three levels of government can support the outcomes that are aimed for of inclusion of people with disabilities in our communities.

**Question 8:**

**How could the proposed Engagement Plan ensure people with disability, and the disability community, are involved in the delivery and monitoring of the next Strategy?**

One of the easiest way to engage people with disabilities at a grassroots level is via LG Disability Advisory Structures. A large percentage of Victorian local government have some sort of Disability advisory structure for their local area; whether it is a Committee, Network or other structure. A majority of these are made up of residents/ carers. By engaging with these structures on the NDS, it engages the community of residents with disabilities and their carers into the process.

The Whittlesea Disability Network would like to thank the NDS engagement team for the opportunity to feed in to this important Strategy.

If you would like further feedback on topics or comments that have been raised in this document, Please contact Stephen Bell at [Stephen.bell@whittlesea.vic.gov.au](mailto:Stephen.bell@whittlesea.vic.gov.au).

Yours sincerely

**Stephen Bell**

**Chair of the Whittlesea Disability Network**