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National Disability Strategy Governance and Engagement Section
Department of Social Services
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To whom it may concern,

Please find attached Western Sydney Community Forum's response to the National Disability Strategy position paper.

Western Sydney Community Forum welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the National Disability Strategy position paper. We have developed eight recommendations for your consideration. These recommendations are intended to ensure that the perspectives and needs of people with disability in Western Sydney are included in the new Strategy.

Thank you for providing the opportunity to make this submission. We look forward to continuing to work with the Department of Social Services to improve the health and wellbeing of people with disability and the communities and agencies that support them.

If you require further information, please contact Camille Derriman, Policy and Projects, on 9687 9669 or camille.derriman@wscf.org.au

Yours sincerely,



Billie Sankovic
Chief Executive

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Acknowledgement of Country

Western Sydney Community Forum would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we work and live, and we pay respect to Elders past, present and future. We promote mutual respect and understanding, and we recognise and pay respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, their cultures and their heritage.

Introduction

Background

In 2019, the Australian Government began the first stage of consultations to develop a new National Disability Strategy to reflect the needs and improve disability reform beyond 2020. These consultations included people with disability, families and carers, advocates and service providers, including consultations led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The Australian Government opened the second stage of consultations on 29 July 2020 and is accepting submissions until 31 October 2020.

About WSCF

As the regional peak for Western Sydney, Western Sydney Community Forum (WSCF) is the social development council representing and supporting communities, community groups and agencies in the region. Western Sydney has a population of 2.4 million people and a community services industry that annually invests \$2.7 billion into the region's economy¹. WSCF has led and shaped social policy and service delivery across Western Sydney for over 35 years. This incorporates the Nepean Blue Mountains, South Western Sydney and Western Sydney districts. As a regional peak, WSCF champions solutions that sustain community resilience, health and wellbeing, works with community organisations, joins with business, and partners with government across all levels and services. WSCF has an active and broad member and subscriber base (2,500+) that includes a mix of agencies that connect with and provide services to people across Western Sydney. Members range from small community-based agencies to large charitable groups, local, state and federal government departments as well as businesses.

¹ Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission, 2016 Annual Information Statement (AIS) dataset, <https://data.gov.au/data-set/ds-dga7e073d71-4eef-4f0c-921b-9880fb59b206/distribution/dist-dga-b4a08924-af4f-4def-96f7-bf32ada7ee2b/details?q=>

Recommendations

WSCF has reviewed the new National Disability Strategy position paper and has consulted with WSCF member organisations and stakeholders in Western Sydney through a survey sent to our entire subscriber and member base across all LGAs. WSCF has responded to the questions proposed in the position paper, supporting the current strategies and offering feedback that will enable people with disability in Western Sydney to thrive and to engage in social, economic and civic life beyond 2020. Eight recommendations are included to ensure that the perspectives and needs of people with disability in the Western Sydney region are considered in the development of the new Strategy:

1. Consider amending outcome areas to include safety such as in shared residential settings
2. Appoint people with disability in management and decision-making roles
3. Use strengths-based language that maintains the dignity of people with disability
4. Use culturally sensitive language and intersectional approaches to better reflect the cultural experiences and needs of people with disability
5. Change physical environments to foster inclusion, to increase the participation of people with disability
6. Develop a media campaign as part of the new Strategy which embeds the experiences of people with disability into mainstream media
7. Have information on accessibility of environment, meaningful employment and careers, and outcomes achieved publicly available and easily accessible, to be reported on an annual basis
8. Integrate short-term and long-term COVID-19 considerations, implications, and support measures into the new Strategy

Rationale

Vision and Outcome Areas

The feedback received from WSCF members and subscribers aligned with the feedback given during the first stage of consultations for the new Strategy, as set out in the position paper. One third of the member organisations and stakeholders agreed that the vision and six outcome areas still reflect the needs of people with disability, however two thirds state that there is not enough representation of Western Sydney, which is one of Australia's fastest growing regions with an annual growth rate of 2.4 percent, and will be home to an additional 1.1 million people by 2036². In Western Sydney, over 129,000 people stated that they needed assistance with core activities such as self-care, body movement and communication. This represents 5.6 percent of the population, contrasted with 4.9 percent in Greater Sydney.³ The new Strategy must take into account this rapid growth, assistance with core activities, areas of concentrated socio-economic disadvantage in the region, and other intersecting social and cultural factors. According to the feedback given by stakeholders, there were concerns for economic security, and the need for ensuring the safety of people with disability at home and in public spaces, including transport.

Recommendation 1: Consider amending outcome areas to include safety such as in shared residential settings.

Guiding Principles

Some organisations have stated that people with disability need to be at the centre of any decision-making process beyond the consultative role, as there has been little change in this area over the last 10 years. It has been suggested that due to this, there is a simplistic view on what people with disability require to engage and thrive in their society. People with disability need to be included at all stages of decision-making to make sure that the new Strategy looks beyond surface-level changes. The feedback from stakeholders outlined that the language currently being used minimises the abilities of people with disability. It was suggested that the language in the new Strategy be empowering and strengths-based.

It was also identified that cultural sensitivity has not sufficiently been addressed by this new Strategy. There can be varying beliefs about disability that are driven by culture; there are many different definitions of disability both within and between cultures and groups, and also as a result of personal history and experiences. Examples include cultural stigma around disability, distrust of government agencies, language barriers, and different views on caring roles and responsibilities in the family.⁴ This makes it difficult to identify the number of people with disability who have a culturally or linguistically diverse background, and also impedes in the person's ability to access the services they may need.⁵ This is especially true for Western Sydney based on its demographics; many

² Western Sydney Community Forum, 2018, Build Beyond Bricks <http://www.wscf.org.au/BuildBeyondBricks/BuildBeyondBricksBundle.pdf>

³ Western Sydney Community Forum, 2018, Communities of Change Report http://www.wscf.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Communities_of_Change_Report_COMPLETED-For-Web.pdf

⁴ Settlement Services International, 2018, Still Outside the Tent: Cultural Diversity and Disability in a Time of Reform - a Rapid Review of Evidence https://www.ssi.org.au/images/stories/documents/publications/Still_Outside_the_Tent_Final.pdf

⁵ Sotnik, P., & Jezewski, M. A. (2005). Culture and the disability services. *Culture and disability: Providing culturally competent services*, 15-36.

parts of the region have a much higher proportion of residents born overseas compared to NSW, such as South Western Sydney.⁶ Since Western Sydney is home to people from many different cultural backgrounds and needs, this intersectionality of experiences needs to be reflected in the policies impacting them.

In terms of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations, Indigenous people in Western Sydney are more likely to need assistance with core activities than non-Indigenous people. With Western Sydney being home to sixty percent of Greater Sydney's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population⁷, this presents a similar issue of the Western idea of disability as a "deficit" being very different to the concept of disability in Aboriginal cultures.⁸

Recommendation 2: *Appoint people with disability in management and decision-making roles.*

Recommendation 3: *Use strengths-based language that maintains the dignity of people with disability.*

Recommendation 4: *Use culturally sensitive language and intersectional approaches to better reflect the cultural experiences and needs of people with disability.*

Emphasis on Community Attitudes

Eighty-three percent of member organisations and stakeholders surveyed agreed that the new Strategy needs to have a stronger emphasis on improving community attitudes. One suggestion raised was to consider the importance and impact of inclusivity in the media on community attitudes, and integrating the experiences of people with disability into mainstream media.

Recommendation 5: *Change physical environments to foster inclusion, to increase the participation of people with disability.*

Recommendation 6: *Develop a media campaign as part of the new Strategy which embeds the experiences of people with disability into mainstream media.*

Clear Roles and Responsibilities, Strengthened Accountability, Role of Non-Government Sector

Thirty-three percent of stakeholders said that the goals outlined would ensure that access to supports and services is improved for people with disability in Western Sydney. Half of the organisations surveyed were unsure that the goals would ensure access. There are ongoing themes from the survey responses which are in line with what the position paper has outlined, such as needing tangible action on existing goals beyond commitments and policy-making, and needing the commitment from all levels of government for these goals to be effective. Further to this, peer review of the Strategy by people with disability or disability peak bodies was a favoured method of stakeholders to keep people with disability active in decision-making roles.

⁶ South Western Sydney Primary Health Network, 2020, Multicultural & Refugee health <https://www.swsphn.com.au/multiculturalhealth>

⁷ Western Sydney Community Forum, 2018, Communities of Change Report http://www.wscf.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Communities_of_Change_Report_COMPLETED-For-Web.pdf

⁸ Avery, S., 2013, Culture is Inclusion, as cited in Berghs, M., Atkin, K., Graham, H., Hatton, C. & Thomas C., 2016, Implications for public health research of models and theories of disability: a scoping study and evidence synthesis, *Public Health Research No. 4.8*

In addition to the new Strategy being reflective of the role that the non-government sector already plays, it also needs to reflect the accountability of the private and corporate sector in the process, as part of a collective effort to improve outcomes for people with disability. Increasing accountability in the NDIS process was also suggested by stakeholders, to better describe how the interests of people with disability are being addressed.

Type and Frequency of Information Available on Strategy's Progress

Disability service providers have been “experiencing a lack of data” especially locally-specific, which was impacting on evidence-based planning as well as delivery of effective services that met client needs.⁹ There were a few suggestions of what kind of information governments need to make available and how often. Information included accessibility of environment, meaningful employment and careers, and outcomes achieved. In terms of frequency, sixty-seven percent recommended annual reporting.

Recommendation 7: *Have information on accessibility of environment, meaningful employment and careers, and outcomes achieved publicly available and easily accessible, to be reported on an annual basis.*

Targeted Action Plans and Engagement Plan

There was unanimous agreement that the Targeted Action Plans should have defined timeframes for making improvements in specific areas. In addition, maintaining the strength of the voice of lived experience in the new Strategy through the engagement and contribution of peak agencies, advocacy organisations, and people with lived experience in the region will ensure it reflects intersectional diversity of the communities of Western Sydney.

COVID-19 Considerations

Given the current circumstances as well as feedback received during WSCF's consultation process, consideration needs to be given to the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact on people with disability. The COVID-19 pandemic presents a serious risk to the Australian population, and an even greater risk to people with disability. Recent research undertaken in May and June 2020 by the Disability and Health unit at the University of Melbourne and by the University of New South Wales (UNSW) Canberra found that ninety percent of disability support workers were not able to physically distance at work. Workers also expressed a need for more Personal Protective Equipment at no cost to them as well as COVID-19 infection control training, to be able to sufficiently protect their clients. The short-term and long-term implications of the COVID-19 on the health, safety and wellbeing of people with disability needs to be taken into account when developing this Strategy, which will guide disability reform for years to come.

Recommendation 8: *Integrate short-term and long-term COVID-19 considerations, implications, and support measures into the new Strategy.*

⁹ Pro Bono Australia, 2019, Disability Providers Held Back by Lack of Data
<https://probonoaustralia.com.au/news/2019/01/disability-providers-held-back-lack-data/>