



Australian Government

# Developing a **National Disability Strategy** for Australia

Access Inclusion Participation

Discussion paper for consultation  
October 2008



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# Starting the process

This Discussion Paper sets out why we need a National Disability Strategy (the Strategy) and what might be included in such a strategy. It has been prepared to inform people about the Australian Government's plans to improve support and remove barriers for people with disability, their families and carers, and to ask for ideas about how this can be best achieved.

We would like to hear from people with disability, their families and carers; organisations that represent them or provide services; employers; trade unions; researchers; professionals; philanthropic organisations; artists and indeed anyone with an interest in creating a more socially inclusive Australia for people with disability.

It is intended that the National Disability Strategy will guide government activity and future policy initiatives in this important area. The Strategy will provide an opportunity to make sure decisions relating to disability will be based on sound principles, and have clear goals that will result in plans of action and lasting change and improvements. The development of the Strategy presents an opportunity to influence government policies and initiatives that will follow over the coming years.

You can provide written or verbal input or attend a consultation meeting to express your views. Details of how to contribute to this process are at page 13.

More details about the consultations on the National Disability Strategy can be found at **[www.fahcsia.gov.au/disability/nds](http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/disability/nds)**

# Foreword

Living with a disability in Australia in 2008 is a very different experience from what it was 30 or more years ago. Positive changes have occurred. In the past many people with disability lived in a segregated environment; out of sight and out of mind, excluded from many everyday activities. In contrast, today most people with disability live in the community, contributing in a myriad of ways to Australia's social and economic prosperity. However, people with disability still encounter significant systemic barriers to full inclusion and participation in Australian communities.

The Australian Government's commitment to establish a National Disability Strategy (the Strategy) during the 2007 election was made in the belief that after 17 years of economic growth, our nation must do better to fully include people with disability in the social, economic and cultural life of the country. Achieving better outcomes for people with disability and their families and carers is an important part of the government's new social inclusion agenda.

The aim of the National Disability Strategy is to increase the social, economic and cultural participation of people with disability, to eliminate the discrimination experienced by them and to improve disability support services for them, their families and carers. For those living with profound disability and complex needs, we must ensure support and living arrangements meet the same standards of dignity and choice as all Australians expect.

It is vital that people with disability, their families and carers have an ongoing voice in this work. The new National People with Disabilities and Carer Council (the Council), chaired by Dr Rhonda Galbally, AO, consists of people with an impressive range of experience and skills in this area, including people with disability, their family members, carers and community, business and union representatives. The Council will have a lead role in the development of the Strategy and will be directly involved in the national consultation, the analysis of emerging themes and monitoring progress of the Strategy.

We are also delighted at the involvement of the private sector through the Disability Investment Group, and look forward to the results of their work

identifying opportunities to increase private sector involvement and investment in the funding of disability services and related infrastructure.

Importantly, State and Territory Governments have committed to work collaboratively with us in the development of a National Disability Strategy that includes a monitoring and reporting framework.

We want to know how you think we can best achieve these goals. We would like to hear from you about your experiences and ideas because government doesn't have all the answers.

We invite you to respond to this paper and/or come along to one of the public consultations that will be held around the country.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jenny Macklin".

**The Hon Jenny Macklin MP**  
Minister for Families, Housing, Community  
Services and Indigenous Affairs



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bill Shorten".

**The Hon Bill Shorten MP**  
Parliamentary Secretary for  
Disabilities and Children's Services

# Why a National Disability Strategy?

Nearly four million Australians experience long term impairment, and that number is growing. There is a significant loss to our society if these Australians are unable to fulfil their potential and fully participate in their communities because of barriers and discrimination. The barriers can be physical, such as access to buildings, transport and information but also attitudinal due to a lack of awareness of disability issues. The causes of this exclusion are varied but the effects are disabling and the costs to individuals, families and the community is high.

The good news is that improvements in long term care and rehabilitation of people with disability has resulted in a generation of people with disability living into old age. However, despite these improvements in life span, Australians with disability are more likely to live in poverty, to have fewer educational qualifications, to be out of work, and experience more prejudice and abuse than Australians without disability.

## Commitment to change

The Australian Government's election commitment to implement a National Disability Strategy (the Strategy) recognised the need for a new whole-of-government, whole-of-life approach to disability issues which tackles the social and economic divide between people with disability and those without. The National Disability Strategy is an important element of the government's commitment to promoting social inclusion for all Australians.

The government's recent ratification of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (the Convention) reflects the government's commitment to the rights of people with disability. The National Disability Strategy will be an important mechanism to ensure that the principles underpinning the Convention are incorporated into policies and programs affecting people with disability, their families and carers.

A National Disability Strategy was one of the key recommendations of the 2007 Senate Inquiry into the Commonwealth, State and Territory Disability Agreement (CSTDA). The CSTDA report highlighted the need for a coordinated, high level, strategic policy to address the complexity of needs of people with disability, their families and carers in all aspects of their lives.

In February 2008 the Commonwealth, State and Territory Disability Ministers met in Melbourne and acknowledged the development of the National Disability Strategy as “an historic opportunity for the Commonwealth, States and Territories to work together with the community to ensure the needs of people with disability and their families are addressed through coordinated and comprehensive policy planning - across all government departments and services.”<sup>1</sup>

The Strategy will build on the 30 May 2008 agreement between the Australian Government and States and Territories to deliver a \$1.8 billion funding boost to disability support services across Australia.

This \$1.8 billion will deliver more than 24,500 additional disability places including:

- Approximately 2,300 in-home support services
- 2,300 supported accommodation places
- 9,900 individual support packages, and
- 10,000 much needed respite places in a range of forms across Australia.

This important agreement is on top of the \$100 million in capital funding announced by the Prime Minister on 4 May 2008 which will build new facilities to deliver over 300 new supported accommodation places across Australia.

The Australian Government and States and Territories also agreed on 23 July 2008 to establish a new National Disability Reform Agenda that will place people with disability, their families and carers at the centre of services across Australia.

The National Disability Reform Agenda will drive reform in the key areas of:

- Service benchmarks
- Disability services' quality standards
- Service planning
- Building people centred service delivery
- Early intervention and prevention
- Workforce capacity
- National consistency
- Ageing carers

<sup>1</sup> Communiqué, *Special meeting of Disability Ministers*, Melbourne, Friday 1 February 2008.

## Australians and disability

Australians with disability are a diverse group of people. They include people who were born with disability and those who acquire disability during their life through accident, ageing or illness. The ageing of the Australian population and its increased longevity are leading to increasing numbers of people with disability with a severe or profound limitation.

In 2003 there were an estimated 3.9 million people with disability in Australia. Of these, 2.6 million were under 65 years of age (15 per cent of that population). Among the 3.9 million people with disability, 1.2 million people sometimes or always needed help or supervision with self-care, mobility or communication. Of these, nearly 700,000 were aged less than 65 years.<sup>2</sup>

The projected growth from 2006 to 2010 in the working-age population (15-64 years) with a severe or profound limitation is 6.9 per cent or 37,500 people by 2010.<sup>3</sup>

The prevalence of disability among Indigenous Australians is higher than for other Australians at all ages, and rates of severe disability are at least twice as high.<sup>4</sup> In 2002, 102,900 (37 per cent) of Indigenous Australians aged 15 years or older had disability or a long-term health condition. Of these, 21,800 or 8 per cent of the Indigenous population aged 15 years or older, had a severe or profound limitation.<sup>5</sup>

Unpaid carers are the main providers of assistance to people with disability. Around 2.6 million carers in Australia provided unpaid assistance to people with disability or the aged in 2003. About 473,000 (20 per cent) of these carers identified as the primary carer, and of these 187,500 (40 per cent) had a disability themselves. Most primary carers (71 per cent) are women. The ratio of informal carers to the number of people with disability is projected to fall.<sup>6</sup>

Recent research has identified that carers and families of people with disability experience high rates of mental health problems, poorer physical health, employment restrictions, financial hardship and relationship breakdown.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Australia's Welfare*, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

## Disability inequality in Australia

“... disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.”

Preamble United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Compared to Australians without disability, people with disability are more likely to live in poverty, to have fewer educational qualifications, to be out of work and experience inequality.

### Comparison of people with disability and people without disability in Australia

Measure	People with disability	People without disability
Complete year 12	30%	49%
Left school year 8 or younger	16%	5%
Complete a diploma or higher qualification	14%	28%
Complete a bachelor degree	13%	20%
Labour force participation	53%	81%
Income through wage	35%	63%
Receive government pension or allowance	43%	14%
Home owners with mortgage	33%	43%
Live in public housing	7%	2%
Unemployment rate	9%	5%
Gross median weekly income	\$255	\$501

Data Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Disability, Ageing and Carers; summary of findings, Australia, 2003*

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Australian Institute of Family Studies, *The nature and impact of caring for family members with a disability in Australia*, Research Report No 16, 2008.

Multiple disadvantage can be experienced by people with disability. Other factors besides disability that affect people's quality of life and participation include geographic location, age, gender, cultural and linguistic background, and Indigenous status.

These poorer outcomes for people with disability are not inevitable or unable to be changed. Other countries have demonstrated that significant improvements can be made.

# What should be in a National Disability Strategy?

The National Disability Strategy aims to provide an enduring framework of targeted actions that addresses barriers and promotes a more inclusive and universally accessible society for the benefit of the entire community.

The Strategy will set out a high level vision that will be underpinned by clear outcomes with actions, target dates and performance measures. The Strategy will align relevant policies and initiatives to help improve integration across governments and in related policy areas.

The National Disability Strategy will be an important mechanism to ensure that the principles underpinning the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* are incorporated into policies and programs affecting people with disability, their families and carers.

## Proposed high level structure

### Vision

Equal social, economic and cultural participation of people with disability and their families.

Timely and dignified support for people with disability, their families and carers.

Elimination of discrimination experienced by people with disability and their families.

### Principles

(based on the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*):

- Inherent dignity
- Non-discrimination
- Participation and inclusion
- Respect for difference
- Equality of opportunity
- Accessibility
- Equality of women and men
- Respect for the rights of children.

## Outcomes

People with disability and their carers have an enhanced quality of life and participate as valued members of society. Core outcome areas are:

- People with disability achieve economic participation and social inclusion
- People with disability enjoy choice, wellbeing and the opportunity to live as independently as possible
- Families and carers are well supported.

## Actions

The National Disability Strategy will provide a national framework for new and existing work being progressed by the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments. The Strategy will build on the whole-of-government initiatives currently underway in jurisdictions.

States and Territories have agreed to work with the Commonwealth to help develop a clear reporting framework that will align with the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* and the National Disability Agreement.

A number of important national initiatives are already underway that will help achieve the outcomes identified under the Strategy, including:

- Social Inclusion Agenda
- Council of Australian Governments' reform agenda
- The new National Disability Agreement between the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments (replacing the current Commonwealth, State and Territory Disability Agreement) scheduled to commence in January 2009 and including a number of key priority areas of reform
- The National Disability and Mental Health Employment Strategy scheduled for release by the end of 2008
- The National Arts and Disability Strategy being developed by the Cultural Ministers Council
- The Access to Premises Standard being developed under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*
- The Harmonisation of Disabled Persons Parking Scheme
- The National Companion Card Scheme

- The Australian Government White Paper on Homelessness and National Action Plan
- Proposals being developed by the Disability Investment Group to increase private sector involvement and investment in the funding of disability services and related infrastructure
- Outcomes from the Inquiry into Better Support for Carers by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth
- The Inquiry into Australia's Future Tax System by Dr Ken Henry and within that work the review of pensions by Dr Jeff Harmer
- The \$190 million Helping Children with Autism package and six autism specific Early Learning and Care Centres across Australia.

To be successful, the Strategy will need to prioritise the national actions that best tackle the physical, technological and attitudinal barriers that prevent people with disability from realising their aspirations and achieving full participation.

A more developed research agenda could also be part of the Strategy, to ensure it is working from an evidence based framework and to identify critical gaps in Australia's data and knowledge on disability exclusion, participation and innovation.

## Next steps

This Discussion Paper seeks to promote public discussion on what needs to be done to improve support and remove barriers for people with disability, their families and carers and to hear ideas about how this can be best achieved.

There will be public consultations across Australia in all capital cities and selected regional locations to provide feedback on the proposed National Disability Strategy and identify other important issues, ideas and possible strategies.

People will be able to contribute at public meetings, and provide written submissions via email and Australia Post.

The outcomes of the consultations will be summarised in a feedback report in early 2009. The National Disability Strategy is expected to be released in mid 2009.

Some consultation questions are listed at the end of this Discussion Paper to help guide responses. We are also interested in actual examples or stories of inequities faced by people with disability and family members in all areas of life.

We also encourage you to present your ideas for overcoming the barriers you have identified.

# Commenting on the Discussion Paper

The closing date for all comments is **5:00pm AEST Monday 1 December 2008**. Comments sent by post must be post marked no later than 5:00pm AEST Monday 1 December 2008. Submissions sent via email must be received to the NDS email inbox no later than 5:00pm AEST Monday 1 December 2008.

You can put forward your views by:

- emailing **NDS@nationalmailing.com.au**
- writing to **National Disability Strategy, PO Box 7442, Canberra Business Centre, ACT, 2610**
- participating in public consultations.

This discussion paper, and an easy English version, will be available on the Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs website at **[www.fahcsia.gov.au/disability/nds](http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/disability/nds)**

If you are deaf or have a hearing or speech impairment, you can contact us in the following ways:

- TTY users - phone 1800 555 677 then ask for 1800 077 765
- Speak and Listen (speech-to-speech relay) users - phone 1800 555 727 then ask for 1800 077 765
- Internet relay users - visit the National Relay Service website at [www.relayservice.com.au](http://www.relayservice.com.au) and ask for 1800 077 765.

## Public Consultations

To obtain direct feedback from the public, consultations will be held in locations across Australia.

<b>Location</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Time</b>
Darwin	27 October	9am – 12noon
Sydney	5 November	10am – 1pm
Brisbane	6 November	10am – 1pm
Perth	10 November	10am – 1pm
Melbourne	12 November	1pm – 4pm
Hobart	14 November	11am – 2pm
Adelaide	24 November	10am – 1pm
Canberra	26 November	10am – 1pm

**RSVP is essential.**

**Further venue details will be provided when you RSVP.**

Please contact us by phone 1800 077 765 or email [NDS@nationalmailing.com.au](mailto:NDS@nationalmailing.com.au):

- if you would like to attend a public consultation in your capital city
- if you would like to obtain additional copies of this document
- if you would like to obtain a copy of this document in easy English, audio or Braille
- if you would like to obtain a copy of this document translated into a community language
- if you have any other queries.









