



MDAA response to 'The 5-year TfNSW Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2023-2027 (DIAP)- New Future Transport Strategy.'

**Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association NSW Inc.**

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### **About this submission**

This submission is produced by the Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association of NSW Inc. (MDAA) in response to *'The 5-year TfNSW Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2023-2027 (DIAP)- New Future Transport Strategy.'* By way of participation in this submission, MDAA staff including individual advocacy, systemic advocacy, Multicultural Aged Care Connectors and Disability Royal Commission advocates have used a variety of feedback and data. The feedback was collected from consumer case studies based on the lived experience, from Non-English-Speaking Backgrounds (NESB) / Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds and CALD community groups, with disability, as well as consultations and round tables conducted with consumers throughout the past 6 months in regional and metro NSW.

All names of consumers have been de-identified for privacy reasons.

## **Introduction:**

We thank the NSW Government for the opportunity to contribute to recommendations relating to transport and liveability in NSW to inform the DIAP.

MDAA is a state-wide advocacy service and the peak body for all people in NSW with disability and their families and carers, who are from a culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) and non-English Speaking background (NESB). MDAA aims to promote, protect, and secure the rights and interests of people with disability, their families, and carers in NSW with the view to empower communities through systemic and individual advocacy, advocacy development, capacity building and networking, as well as industry development and training.

Clients and staff often have what is considered an ethnic or migrant background (although not exclusively so). MDAA aims to be inclusive of all ethnicities and cultures in its disability advocacy work.

MDAA is guided in its work by national and state legislation, National Disability Service Standards, the United Nation Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and its membership. This list is not exhaustive. MDAA seriously considers the existing legislation and human rights framework (nationally and internationally) when it comes to its work to combat violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation.

MDAA strives to represent all people with disabilities who come to the organisation for assistance. MDAA's consumers come from a wide variety of families, cultures, and communities.

## 1) The need for viable transport options

People with disability from CALD and NESB and their families and carers need accessible, affordable, and safe transport regardless of where they live, including in metropolitan cities, rural and remote, or regional areas. This is integral and inter-linked to disability related legislation that endeavours to promote full participation in community, civic and economic activities (for example the pending review of the Disability Services Act).

Poor transport options including a lack of transport connectivity diminish people's quality of lives and deny any options that would normally be available for those without disability. Diverse populations have diverse transport needs to remain healthy, active, and independent so government planning and service delivery must also be responsive. For people with disability, accessible, affordable, and safe transport is crucial for travelling to and from their places of employment and to perform their day-to-day activities such as shopping and medical appointments. Transport barriers compound challenges for people with disability and must be lifted to increase fairness, equality, and equity.

Transport planning and consultation must genuinely seek feedback from people with disability and relevant stakeholders and strive to understand the issues in order to find the appropriate solutions. There are different types of disabilities with varying transport needs. To build an accessible transport network, these differences and requirements must be recognised. For example, colour contrast on platforms and main entrances, audio and visual announcements, and shuttle buses for remote areas without common public transport modes are changes in need of consideration by the government. For those from CALD and NES backgrounds, they may need interpreters, bilingual speaking transport staff, multiple modes of communication including plain English, easy read, audio-visual and in-language information.

Similarly, People with disability from CALD/ NESB would benefit greatly from transport information being prepared in simple and easy English as well as being translated into community languages when choosing the Languages Other Than English (LOTE) for translation, it should be based on the largest number of LOTE population with no or

low level of English language skills rather than reflecting just the largest number of populations in general.

When MDAA staff travel to regional areas for group consultations, presentations and to run art workshops, participants tend to cite social isolation, limited public transport, information gap and a lack of access to services when it comes to transport and a lack of social connections as challenges they face. Upon further investigation, the absence of an accessible, affordable, and safe transport network is a major contributing factor to participants facing ongoing transport challenges. For example, while there is only one public bus from Bega to Merimbula Airport, the local transport provider is currently piloting On-demand transport with live demand requests.

The information in this submission will address specific case studies of MDAA consumers with disability from NESB/ CALD backgrounds who face transport issues on an ongoing basis. Recommendations will then be provided for the Government's consideration when implementing further changes to the transport strategy.

## **2) Issues relating to the lack of transport options for people with disability across NSW**

### *Lack of transport- Regional areas*

The meaning of 'disability' is universal and can be applied to medical, societal, social, and human rights contexts.

A Recent consultation with consumers in Wollongong was conducted by MDAA staff in relation to issues faced by people with disability in general. A lack of transport options was raised as one of the main issues of concern:

The participants shared with the consultation group their experiences and difficulties with living alone, and the strains of such on their mental and physical health. This is particularly highlighted in Wollongong, Griffith, and Newcastle areas where there are many migrants and refugees recently resettled into those communities by the Australian government. The group shared that they feel isolated in Griffith, Wollongong and Newcastle as small cities and living alone

had instilled feelings of boredom and social isolation, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic period.

To this, inaccessible transport was a main issue brought up by one member of the group. It was stated that she cannot get around to where she may need to go for activities and community events due to insufficient public transport, having to change buses several times which is not viable for her due to her disabilities. Other participants were also in agreement. Many people with disability have difficulty accessing public transport due to the distance of travel to a station as well as unavailability of direct routes to parts of the city.

Perhaps the feeling of isolation is also a cause of a few available accessible activities in the area that they are in – perhaps they do not know of any if there are. Issues with transport and accessibility are ongoing and contentious and pose the question: if people cannot get around to go to group meetings or meet other people, how would they be able to get themselves out there? This lack of transport makes evident the cause of isolation from the general community as well as impacting on participation and inclusion in various community activities.

The idea of community outreach programs was discussed in this consultation as well as the idea that services and organisations should do more to ensure there is more outreach within communities they service. A recommendation to the Disability Royal Commission team at MDAA specifically was that there should be more done to offer people with disability options in their transport options at affordable price points. This is to allow them the rights and freedoms of any other able-bodied person of the community.

## Cerebral Palsy and the use of Taxi services in Sydney: a case study

A person with disability: cerebral palsy:

*"I am a manual and electric wheelchair user. I rely on taxi services to travel to my doctors' appointments, and other commitments. I often need to use a taxi service every day of the week. I use an app to book the services I need to get out and about. Having a reliable taxi service is very important to me as it means I can live a normal life*

*I have tried using a few different taxi services over the years. However, despite making bookings in advance I consistently have my bookings cancelled without any notice or alternative offered. This means I am not able to do the things that are important to me.*

*When my bookings are cancelled, I have no choice but to travel to the closest accessible train station to get to where I need to go. Even though my local train station is only 450 metres from my home because it is not accessible, I need to travel much further than other people in my community. My nearest accessible train station is 2 kms from my home. When both legs of my journey are cancelled by taxi providers, I am forced to travel 4kms, which, depending on my battery level could mean I manually push my wheelchair. This is exhausting for me as the journey has hills and difficult to navigate footpaths. This long journey leaves me feeling very vulnerable and entirely exhausted."*

MDAA Consumer

The consumer offered several recommendations to the commission relating to the use of Taxi services for people with disability as per below:

- *Government to introduce a subsidy scheme to cover or reduce the cost of vehicle modifications and upkeep of modifications.*

By subsidising the cost of vehicle modifications more providers will be encouraged to provide services to wheelchair users which will increase the availability of taxis to wheelchair users. This subsidy should be based on the needs in each geographical location to ensure adequate services in regional and rural locations. As part of this scheme, all drivers must have ongoing training in supporting wheelchair users.

- *Increase the number of accessible train stations*

All train stations should be accessible to the community. By not having accessible train stations additional barriers are being imposed on wheelchair users. My local train station is within comfortable walking distance for me, but it is not accessible.

This means I have no choice but to be reliant to taxi services rather than being able to choose my preferred form of transports like other people in my community.

- *Alternative bookings offered to wheelchair users*

If a taxi service is not able to fulfil the booking request of a taxi user, the service is obligated to provide an alternative time to the wheelchair user. In addition, wheelchair user booking request must be prioritised over a regular request in the case of vehicle that have dual uses such as Maxi Taxis.

### *Using Taxi services with physical disability: a case study*

A person with physical disability:

*The consumer frequently requires the use of a taxi service. However, the taxi is often late. This happens regardless of the taxi company he uses. Sometimes The consumer will book a taxi service at 6am for 9.30am the same day, and it will arrive at 11.30am that day. The consumer finds this extremely frustrating and disrespectful, as he feels that his needs have not been considered by the taxi company. The consumer relies on the taxis to transport him to work on time. So, when they are late, he is late for work. The consumer's carers are also impacted by the taxis arriving later than the time of the booking, because their shifts may end while he and they are still waiting for the taxi to arrive. When the taxi is running late, and the consumer calls to find out where it is, he is told, they cannot tell him when the taxi might arrive, or how far away it is. He is often told that he should call back in 5 minutes for an update. But The consumer says he is often not able to do that because he might have run out of credit on his phone, have a flat phone battery, or he might be on another call at that time.*

*Once the booking is made, the company will try to contact the consumer to confirm the booking, but he is not always able to answer, because the consumer does not always have phone service and misses these calls, or he is on another call. So, the booking is sometimes cancelled.*

*The consumer often gives up waiting for the taxi and attempts to catch a train instead. But he is only able to do this when he has his electric wheelchair with him to get to the station. The consumer can't use UBER or other ride sharing apps, because he cannot use his Cab charge vouchers with them.*

Several recommendations were provided by the consumer:

- That taxi companies should have a system for dealing with vulnerable people and ensuring that they are looked after as a priority.
- Every effort should be made to ensure that taxis booked for people with disability, and those who identify as vulnerable arrive on time.



- Taxi companies should provide real-time updates about the expected wait time for drivers and their location when they are running late (this is surely possible with GPS technology).

These issues are exacerbated by vulnerable consumers not having equal access to or skills with technology like mobile phones and internet services. As such, it is vital that transport providers maintain the highest standards of professionalism and punctuality to prevent delays and avoid unnecessary communication through methods the consumer is not comfortable with. A person with disability can have several personal and social issues present at any one time. So, it needs to be the responsibility of the service provider to ensure that everything that can be done to ensure the least stressful and difficult time possible for the consumer is achieved.

The strategy as it currently stands, does not make adequate reference or specific focus to transport users with disability and the access issues that arise from time-to-time, apart from general information relating to access for all individuals.

For people with physical disability, rail travel is difficult as many stations across NSW do not have lifts installed so that people with disability can access platforms or the nearby streets. Major stations like Redfern station have now implemented lift accesses on two platforms, however many other stations are falling behind. As a result, people with disability choose not to travel simply because they cannot.

There is an assumption with travel in NSW that all individuals are literate with the English language to a higher proficiency than is the case. Consumers have reported that there is very little signage, and important transport announcements on the platform are in languages other than English.

MDAA would invite consultations with the government, and with other organisations to address a number of these concerns.