



Performance and Wellbeing Framework – Consultation Paper (2024)

**Multicultural Disability
Advocacy Association NSW
Inc.**

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About MDAA

The Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association of NSW (MDAA) is the peak body in NSW for all people with disability (PWD) and their families and carers, with a particular focus on those from a culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) and non-English Speaking (NES) background with disability.

Our vision is a society where everyone regardless of background or disability feels welcomed, included and supported.

Our aim is to promote, protect, and secure the rights and interests of people with disabilities.

MDAA works within a cultural sensitivity framework to ensure the safety, comfort, and well-being of our diverse consumers.

At MDAA, we provide support in the form of Individual Advocacy, with the aim to build the capacity of CALD people with disability and ensure that the rights of individuals are promoted, protected, and secured.

MDAAs other services include Systemic Advocacy, NDIS Appeals and Reviews, and ongoing projects including The Aged Care Volunteer Visitor Scheme (ACVVS).

About this Submission

MDAA welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission to the NSW Government's Public Accounts Committee inquiry into a framework for performance reporting and driving wellbeing outcomes. As a peak body representing CALD people with disabilities across New South Wales, MDAA is uniquely positioned to offer insights into the challenges and opportunities that exist in delivering equitable services and supports. Our submission is informed by consultation with our consumers, highlighting key areas where the current system falls short and offering recommendations to enhance performance reporting and wellbeing outcomes.

MDAAs dedication to promoting and protecting the rights of people with disability, includes ensuring that individuals feel safe and supported across all aspects of their life. This paper discusses the common wellbeing themes connected with people with disability from a CALD background including:

- a) Housing
- b) Prosperity
- c) Community
- d) Health
- e) Education

Housing

The cost-of-living crisis has been coupled with a rental crisis over the years, with little to no relief, security, or hope of ensuring a rental in a highly oversaturated market. With rent increasing dramatically month after month, and the poor upkeep of wages with inflation, MDAA support in submitting applications to social housing has increased and so has the inability of many individuals and families to afford rent.

With community and family being a large aspect of many CALD communities, housing is often difficult to navigate due to a restricted choice in social housing areas and inaccessible homes, as highlighted by MDAA consumers. This becomes an issue particularly in instances wherein people with disability require the assistance of family or friends around the home. With family out of reach and the continuous building of inaccessible homes, many remain in unsafe and poor conditions; as seen through the below case,

Selisha, a 58-year-old individual with a physical disability from a Greek background, depends on a wheelchair for movement and has multiple health conditions. Fourteen years ago, she applied for a housing transfer because her property was not accessible, with a narrow bathroom and steps making it difficult for her to enter; a request which was not granted. Selisha was referred to MDAA by her NDIS support coordinator for support in completing a housing change of circumstances' form.

Recommendations

- Ensure that new social housing developments prioritise accessibility, particularly for individuals with disabilities. This should include accessible entrances, wider doorways, and bathroom modifications to accommodate wheelchair users.
- Address the restricted choice in social housing areas by expanding the availability of social housing in diverse locations. This would help families and individuals stay close to their community and support networks, which is crucial for many CALD communities.
- Implement a streamlined and expedited process for housing transfer requests, particularly for individuals with disabilities. Cases like Selisha's, where accessibility is a critical need, should be prioritised to avoid long waiting periods and ensure timely relocations.
- Develop policies that support the housing needs of extended families, particularly in CALD communities where family support is vital. This could include offering larger housing options or enabling co-living arrangements to maintain family connections and support.
- Conduct regular reviews and audits of the housing system to ensure that properties meet accessibility standards and that tenants' needs are adequately addressed. This should include monitoring the condition of social housing properties and ensuring that maintenance is timely and effective.

- Increase financial assistance and support programs for individuals and families struggling to afford rent due to the cost-of-living crisis. This could include rent subsidies or emergency housing grants to prevent homelessness and housing insecurity.
- Engage with CALD communities to develop community-based housing solutions that align with their cultural values and support systems. This could involve partnerships with community organisations like MDAA to better understand and address specific housing challenges faced by these communities.
- Keep housing applicants up to date with progress emails during the waiting period.

Education

Education is an essential tool in the development of children, and children with disabilities and their parents should expect necessary accommodations to be made to ensure equitable education.

Through MDAA's work, our education advocacy team had found that teachers and staff often lack knowledge regarding disability and the accommodations needed for children with disability. This includes neglecting to implement or follow through with interventions and action plans created alongside parents, as seen through the following case study:

Two girls (year 3 and 4, both with Laron Syndrome) were not being adequately provided adjusted curriculum based on their disabilities. One girl had a medical episode in which according to the safety plan, an ambulance was to be called, however this was not done, and the parent felt the school had been negligent to her safety. The parents of the girls felt the response of the principle was disrespectful and diminishing of the incidents.

The family were unable to reach a resolution with the school as they reported several incidents in the past where their raised concerns were not addressed. The parents had come to MDAA for advocacy support where an advocate worked with the parents in submitting a complaint to the educational director of Auburn network of schools. The response of the educational director was highly unsatisfactory as it did not address the behaviour of the school principal or the culmination of issues leading to this incident. The parents opted to not re-enrol their daughters into the school and took on home schooling as the other option.

Recommendations

- Make disability awareness training mandatory for teachers and staff, focusing on accommodations and safety plans.
- Strengthen accountability for implementing and following through with action plans and safety procedures.
- Enforce strict adherence to safety plans during medical emergencies, with immediate corrective actions for failures.
- Ensure respectful, professional communication between school staff and parents, especially in handling complaints.

- Provide a transparent, effective process for resolving complaints, with accountability for educational directors.
- Enforce guidelines for tailoring curriculum to the needs of children with disabilities.
- Offer resources and support for families choosing alternative education options like homeschooling.
- Promote collaboration between schools and advocacy organisations to better support children with disabilities.

Community

Social connections are essential to the well-being of communities. In consultation with MDAA consumers, it was found that many felt that there were no spaces for older people to meet, engage, and connect. The lack of social activities, events, and meeting spaces in which older people felt safe congregating highlights a degrading sense of community and opportunities for bonding and recreation.

Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic affected the trust of countless communities largely due to the poor communication between governments and CALD communities. The poor roll out of translated information and advice meant that many relied heavily on online forums and family and friends for information. The vague reporting to the drastic change of a declaration of a state of emergency, induced anxiety and fear in many across Australia. This coupled with a seemingly agonizingly slow vaccine roll out under the guise of 'it is not a race' ignited an immense mistrust in governments for these statements. It is important to note that these sentiments of mistrust remain within Australians, particularly in CALD communities.

Recommendations

- Consistent and accurate translations of information and advice into community languages to ensure that miscommunications are minimised.
- Increased funding of leisure and recreation centres to provide welcoming spaces and encourage community engagement.
- Focus on rebuilding trust in government communications, particularly within CALD communities, by improving clarity, timeliness, and cultural sensitivity in future public health campaigns.

Prosperity

Employment opportunities in areas of Western Sydney are increasingly difficult to come by, leaving many with the only option of travelling further east for work. Through MDAA's work, we have identified that the long travel times and cost are an added stress on individuals who are time poor or have young children. Coupled with the rising cost-of-living crisis, the cost of public transport and petrol is exceedingly high and therefore creates a barrier to access to employment.

Additionally, poor and unreliable public transport pushes many away from job opportunities in the city and further out east. With unreliable public transport, and the high cost of petrol, many struggle to balance employment and a young family, often meaning they settle for lower paid local positions.

MDAA found significant concerns among consumers regarding the rising cost of living and being able to afford education, transport, recreation, and communication expenses, demonstrating the intersection of disability and poverty which is compounded even further when an individual comes from a CALD background.

Recommendations

- Invest in creating more local employment opportunities in Western Sydney to reduce the need for long commutes and alleviate associated costs and time pressures.
- Implement measures to reduce the cost of public transport and petrol, making it more affordable for low-income individuals, particularly those with disabilities and young families.
- Improve the reliability and coverage of public transport in Western Sydney to enhance access to job opportunities and reduce dependency on costly personal vehicles.
- Provide targeted financial and employment support to individuals from CALD backgrounds, addressing the compounded challenges of disability, poverty, and the rising cost of living.

Health

The Disability Royal Commission (DRC) additionally found that people with disability have a lower life expectancy and higher rates of preventable disease (DRC 2023).

Working within a culturally sensitive framework should be essential in effectively engaging CALD individuals with disability with the Australian health systems. Through such a framework and the absence of a 'one size fits all' model, barriers to access can be decreased. The DRC final report highlights the failure of health care professionals to listen to parents and advocates, undermining the role of family and carers in supporting a person with disability. The report found that this failure resulted in individuals not accessing necessary health care services and were dismissive of their concerns (DRC 2023).

Recommendations

- Implementation of cultural sensitivity training to service providers and health practitioners to be better equipped with the tools necessary to ensure equitable access to health care and services.

- Implementation of communities of practice frameworks during development of health policies and strategies to ensure that issues and concerns of people with disability are addressed.
- Strengthen protocols for involving family members and carers in healthcare decisions for people with disabilities. Health professionals should be required to actively listen to and consider the input of those who know the patient best.
- Ensure that health information and resources are provided in accessible formats, including translated materials and easy-to-understand language, to better serve CALD communities and individuals with disabilities.

MDAA strongly believes that an inclusive and responsive performance reporting framework is important for enhancing wellbeing outcomes across New South Wales. By addressing the specific challenges faced by CALD communities and individuals with disabilities, we can foster a more equitable and supportive society. We appreciate the opportunity to provide our input to this inquiry and look forward to working with the NSW Government to ensure that the wellbeing of all residents is effectively prioritised and measured.

References

Royal Commission (DRC), Executive Summary, Our vision for an inclusive Australia and Recommendations <https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/system/files/2023-11/Final%20report%20-%20Executive%20Summary%2C%20Our%20vision%20for%20an%20inclusive%20Australia%20and%20Recommendations.pdf>

Royal Commission (DRC), Nature and extent of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation, Final Report Volume 3 <https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/system/files/2023-09/Final%20Report%20-%20Volume%203%2C%20Nature%20and%20Extent%20of%20Violence%2C%20abuse%2C%20neglect%20and%20exploitation.pdf>