



## **Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association of NSW Inc**

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### **Submission on the draft National Stigma and Discrimination Reduction Strategy 2023**

Founded in 1995, the Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association (MDAA) is the peak body in NSW advocating for the rights of people with disability and their families and carers, with a particular focus on those from a culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD)/ non-English Speaking (NES) background.

Reducing the prevalence of issues as heavily embedded in society as stigma and discrimination is challenging because the multifaceted reasons for its existence make it a battle that must be simultaneously fought on many fronts. Stigma is something that occurs at every level of society. Thus, an anti-stigma and discrimination reduction strategy needs to take a whole of society approach to addressing the issue. This means there needs to be a national guideline providing organisations and institutions with consistent instructions on how to implement the strategy seeking to ensure a successful response from the broader community.

MDAA highly commends the Australian government for leading the development of this Strategy and for providing the opportunity to contribute feedback. MDAAs feedback below focuses on specific sections in the Strategy that affects their consumers (people with disability from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and their family members and carers).

Stigma and discrimination are issues that exist within a society because there is a culture of acceptance, ignorance, and prejudice. Thus, any strategy to combat this must focus on informing members of that society about the negative impacts of stigma and discrimination, and why such views and beliefs are counter-productive to the aims of Australian society, more specifically cohesion, harmony, and productivity.

The goal must be to change societal attitudes and reduce the culture of acceptance of stigma and discrimination. It is commendable to see that the Australian government has committed to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the National Stigma and Discrimination Reduction Strategy is currently being developed. But most people within Australia, including many with disability are unaware of their rights under this Convention and Strategy.

Many people with disability who access Multicultural Disability Advocacy Service (MDAA) are from CALD/NES backgrounds and do not know that their rights have not been upheld until they engage with MDAAs staff. Advocacy organisations like MDAAs can provide education and support to people with disability regarding their rights, and the services that are available. However, organisations such as MDAAs need assistance with broadcasting

this message to the public, besides outreach programs and social media. There needs to be a more concerted and coordinated approach among government and non-government services, as well as the broader media.

Furthermore, as stigma and discrimination come from a lack of understanding of the experiences and issues faced by others, education is of paramount importance to combating it. So, the Strategy's focus on education of students starting in primary schools and continuing to higher education institutions is excellent. More specifically, the education program needs to focus on providing answers to fundamental questions people are not asking such as what are human rights, what are people with disability entitled to, and what can people with disability do when their rights have been breached?

### **How will this be achieved?**

As stated in the draft, the principles to guide the Strategy are:

- Uphold and protect the dignity and human rights of people with personal lived experience and those who support them.
- Respect and promote the personal autonomy, agency, and voice of people with personal lived experience, and their leadership role in all aspects of the Strategy.
- Value and promote the unique role, needs and experiences of family, friends, unpaid carers, and support people.
- Understand, respect, and respond to culture, spirituality, identity, intersectionality, and community.
- Measure behavioural change to drive accountability.

This will make up much of the messaging of the education program. Additionally, the strategy states that commonwealth and state/territory anti-discrimination laws, as well as other legal and regulatory arrangements can be enforced to support the program. But the Strategy must take into consideration and provide steps to countering stigma and discrimination that actively targets people with disability, and people from CALD/NES backgrounds, including action for cases that do not meet the legal threshold.

### **How does the strategy plan to address stigma within the media?**

The Strategy must address the way people with mental illness/psychosocial disabilities are portrayed in film and television. It is essential to build the capacity of educators (teachers and other education professionals) as well as influencers. These are not just the ones on social media, but the ones in the more conventional media landscape (journalists, television and radio presenters, and social commentators). They must be held to account and conform to a certain code of conduct, and this code must be enforced. By the actions of people like Andrew Bolt, people within the media seem to be held to no standard of anti-stigma and antidiscrimination compliance at all.

### **Compliance Measures**

Reducing stigma and discrimination is foremost about education. But it is also about implementing strong compliance measures that can and will be enforced. Often clear and documented breaches of the rights of people with disability go unchecked by the agencies charged with addressing them, due to a lack of funding and resources, or due to laws and guidelines with no universal influence. This presents a barrier that needs to be addressed within the Strategy, so that compliance is not the weak link that breaks the chain. Such a flaw would reduce the effectiveness of the Strategy and therefore, stricter, and more effective compliance measures need to be incorporated within the Strategy.