



**Multicultural Disability Advocacy
Association of NSW Inc
PO Box 884, GRANVILLE NSW 2142
10-12 Hutchinson St, Granville NSW 2142
Telephone: (02) 9891 6400
Toll Free: 1800 629 072
Facsimile: (02) 9897 9402
E-mail: mdaa@mdaa.org.au
ABN: 60 737 946 674**

**National Disability Strategy 2010-2020
Third Implementation Plan, Measuring Progress 2019-2020
Proposed Key Action Areas**

15 November 2018

Contact:

Susan Laguna
Executive Director
Susan.laguna@mdaa.org.au

Introduction

The Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association of NSW (MDAA) is the peak body for all people in NSW with disability and their families and carers, with a focus on those from a culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD)/non-English speaking (NES) background with disability. MDAA is funded by the NSW and Commonwealth Governments to provide individual and systemic advocacy, advocacy development, industry development and training. MDAA also receives funding to run capacity building and community development projects.

MDAA has more than twenty years of experience working with people with disability, with a focus on people from CALD / NESB with disability, their families and carers. MDAA supports the active participation of its members and consumers in all aspects of its work. The voices of its members and consumers informs MDAA's systemic advocacy work thereby contributing to positive change for people with disability from CALD / NESB in policies, procedures, practices and service delivery in government and non-government agencies.

MDAA's vision is a society where everyone, regardless of background or disability feels welcome, included and supported. MDAA's vision is based on the social model of disability that calls for change in the physical, social and communication environment to enhance the participation of people with disability in community.

MDAA welcomes the opportunity to continue providing feedback to the Implementation Plan of National Disability Strategy 2010-2020. This response is based on the experiences of people with disability, their families and carers, and their advocates.

Improving employment outcomes and economic security for people with disability

Although some important measures have been taken towards reducing the barriers to inclusion for people with disability in employment, Australia continues to have noticeably low rates of employment for people with disability. In 2015, 53% of working-age people with disability were participating in the labour force, compared with 83% of those without disability¹. The difference becomes increasingly clear when we look at our international standing among other countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Australia ranks 21st out of 29 OECD countries in employment participation rates for those with a disability. This has

¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2017. Disability in Australia: changes over time in inclusion and participation in employment. Cat. no. DIS 68. Canberra: AIHW.

severely impeded the possibility for economic security for people with disability in Australia and many face living in poverty. In this regard, Australia is ranking 27th out of 27 OECD countries, with a relative poverty risk of 2.7 which translates to one in two people with a disability in Australia living in or near poverty (45%)².

According to the results of the consultation MDAA organised, the following act as key barriers to inclusion and opportunity for employment, especially among CALD women with disability:

- The experience of discrimination, stereotypes and negative attitudes towards people with disability.
- Lack of confidence / self-esteem stemming from past discrimination.
- Lack of skills development opportunities.
- Lack of access to accessible transport and support with child care.
- Financial constraints (disability equipment and aids).

MDAA supports our consumers suggestions for Governments to fund greater disability and cultural awareness training to services NGO and government sectors to help prevent discrimination and negative attitudes in the workplace. We also call for the introduction if an employment quota, as seen in countries like Japan, for governments to employ people with disability.

MDAA has assisted over 600 people with advocacy support this year alone. In a recent review of our data assessing the nature of advocacy assistance provided by our organisation, it becomes clear that employment outcomes, and especially economic security, urgently requires further policy development. Our latest yearly report shows that 25% of our work concentrates on assistance with employment and finance. This includes working with clients who are in long term unemployment or living in poverty.

Our consumers continue to request systemic action to address the discrimination and disempowerment they feel when trying to participate in the workforce. This request is not only seen during consultations, but also as a direct request to Individual advocates. It is in this that we see the need for change in the physical, social and

² Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2010), *Sickness, Disability and Work: Breaking the Barriers: A Synthesis of Findings across OECD Countries*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

communication environment to enhance the participation of people with disability in community.

NDIS and mainstream interface

During these early stages of the NDIS we continue to see the need for improved strategies facilitating the interface between the Scheme and mainstream services. Our work in providing advocacy assistance with NDIS appeals for example, have shown that several barriers for access to the NDIS have been as a result to the lack of efficient communication between services. These barriers are exacerbated for people with disability from CALD background who struggle with jargon used to explain the pathways to access the NDIS and their right to services.

A recent example of this, specific to mental health services, can be seen in the following:

Mr 'Y', who is from a CALD background, has Major Depressive Disorder and had previously been receiving services from a State Government funded provider. After being alerted of the fact that access to these services would cease following the roll-out of the NDIS, Mr 'Y' applied for access to the Scheme. His application was denied all the way through to the AAT where it was suggested that he seek the support of an advocate. Following this suggestion, Mr 'Y' sought the assistance of MDAA's NDIS Appeals and Review Advocate. In speaking with Mr 'Y' the MDAA advocate became aware that he had previously received services for his disability. The advocate was able to contact Mr 'Y's previous provider and request they provide a letter outlining the services they once provided to him. Once submitted to the NDIA, Mr 'Y' was granted access to the scheme under the alternative access pathway.

Direct or efficient communication between in the NDIS and mainstream services would have prevented the emotional and psychological toll the appeals process had on Mr 'Y'. It would also have prevented Mr 'Y' from going without necessary services for months while he tried to navigate the system on his own.

We often see cases requiring advocacy that could have been prevented with improved interfaces between mainstream services and the NDIS. The NDIA made a commitment that no-one will be disadvantaged by the scheme. However, with lack of coordination with mainstream services, it is proving to be increasingly difficult to keep

this promise. Importantly, our experiences continue to show the clear necessity for continued funding for independent disability advocacy.

MDAA is grateful for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Strategy's third and final implementation plan. We look forward to seeing the ongoing changes that will ensure fair and culturally responsive outcomes for people with disability. MDAA will be happy to discuss any of these issues in further detail.

Recommendations

- The NSW State Government must commit to long-term ongoing funding for independent advocacy services. CALD engagement in the NDIS is still much lower than expected. Acknowledgement of the need for independent advocacy for both participants and those who are not accessing the scheme is essential to upholding the rights of people with disability.
- Governments to fund greater disability and cultural awareness training to services NGO and government sectors to help prevent discrimination, ignorance and negative attitudes in the workplace.
- The introduction of an employment quota, as seen in countries like Japan, for governments to employ people with disability.
- Improvements to be made to the NDIS and mainstream interfaces. Greater training for mainstream services is needed on their role in aiding access to the NDIS. This will reduce the number of cases requiring an appeal and will also reduce the unnecessary stress to a person with disability and use of valuable resources.