# Disability Council NSW 2023 year in review

## Background

The Disability Council NSW (the ‘Council’) is a statutory body that provides the Minister for Disability Inclusion with advice on matters that affect people with disability in NSW and their families and carers.

The Council's primary responsibilities under the *Disability Inclusion Act 2014*are to:

* **Monitor** the implementation of Government policy
* **Advise** the Minister on emerging issues relating to people with disability and about the content and implementation of the State Disability Inclusion Plan and disability inclusion action plans
* **Advise** public authorities about the content and implementation of disability inclusion action plans
* **Promote** the inclusion of people with disability in the community and promote community awareness of matters concerning the interests of people with disability and their families
* **Consult** with similar councils and bodies, and people with disability, and
* **Conduct research** about matters relating to people with disability.

Council comprises at least eight and no more than 12 persons as prescribed under section 16 of the Act. Members are appointed by the Governor as individuals for up to four years and are eligible for re-appointment. The Act requires that most members are people with disability. Membership is currently 12 people, with one member’s term expiring in December 2023 and a new member commencing 1 January 2024.

Considerable work was undertaken in each focus area, with Council meeting four times throughout 2023 and representing Council at several other forums.

## Council Plan and focus areas for 2022-2024

The Council’s [2022-2024 plan](https://dcj.nsw.gov.au/content/dam/dcj/dcj-website/documents/community-inclusion/advisory-councils/disability-council-nsw/about/Disability_Council_Plan_2022-2024.pdf) aligns with the [NSW Disability Inclusion Plan 2021-2025](https://dcj.nsw.gov.au/community-inclusion/disability-and-inclusion/nsw-disability-inclusion-plan.html#:~:text=The%20NSW%20Disability%20Inclusion%20Plan%202021%2D2025%20provides%20a%20whole,positive%20community%20attitudes%20and%20behaviours). Council is also cognisant of [Australia’s Disability Strategy 2021-2031.](https://www.disabilitygateway.gov.au/ads)

The plan has five focus areas. These are:

1. Accessible communities
2. Ensuring the voice of people with disability is heard
3. Employment
4. Justice and rights
5. Housing.
6. Accessible communities

People with disability continue to face barriers to accessing activities and services in everyday life. While recognising substantial improvements over the years, this is still a vital issue and a key focus for Council activity. This Pillar encompasses a broad view of access, including access to transport, services, facilities, and information.

### Key activities

To promote accessibility, the Council advocated in forums, made submissions to inquiries, and met with key stakeholders. For example, Council members travelled to Bega in May 2023 to meet with stakeholders across several pillars, including local council representatives and disability services representatives and their clients.

The Council has supported the NSW Government’s response to the recommendations of the Disability Royal Commission, which includes priorities across all the Council’s pillars. In October, our Chair co-chaired the initial NSW Government Disability Royal Commission Final Report Stakeholder forum.

Council members presented at webinars hosted by the Department of Community and Justice for government departments, local councils and other public authorities to support disability inclusion action planning. These forums provided a valuable opportunity to provide guidance about obligations under the Disability Inclusion Act 2014 and DIAPs' role in promoting inclusion.

#### Accessible and inclusive communities

Council continues to attend NSW and ACT National Disability Insurance Agency’s (NDIA) Community and Stakeholder Updates. These meetings provide an opportunity to contribute to discussions, along with other key disability stakeholders, about key NDIS policies and changes; the forum also raises awareness of other disability-related updates, promotes inclusive and accessible programs, shares local events and good news stories and discusses challenges and achievements. These forums are essential for the Council to inform the NDIA of concerns raised through their ongoing communication with stakeholders.

Council has engaged with the Environment Protection Authority regarding the use and restriction of plastics.

Council attended a meeting with the NDIA to discuss choice and control for LGBTIQA+ participants. This included discussing the need for medical practitioners to undergo professional learning related to LGBTIQA+ people and the need to identify safe LGBTIQA+ medical practitioners and disability workers.

Council also attended a proposed CBD Loop Sydney walk meeting where they provided input around access issues for people with disability. This included multiple access points, precise details around the location of accessible toilets, well-maintained lifts, and accessible online information.

#### Transport

Council is a member of the Accessible Transport Advisory Committee and provides expert guidance on access and inclusion to Transport for NSW.

The Council continued to engage with Transport for NSW and the Point to Point Commissioner regarding the availability of wheelchair-accessible taxis and participated in a stakeholder roundtable hosted by the Minister for Transport in November 2023.

Council has also engaged with Transport for NSW, Sydney Airport and Western Sydney Airport regarding the availability of adult change facilities at transport hubs.

#### Safety

Council has been actively engaged in the Women’s Safety Charter meetings, facilitated by the Greater Cities Commission, given ongoing concerns about safety issues for women with disability.

1. Ensuring the voices of people with disability is heard

The Council ensures that processes for seeking input and feedback are genuine so that the interests of people with disability are heard and acted on immediately, particularly regarding service delivery issues or complaints. Council has ongoing engagement with NSW Government agencies and other bodies to raise this matter, including:

* Meeting with the then Department of Premier and Cabinet to discuss the design of a new board recruitment system for state government
* Addressing the Centre for Disability Research and Policy at the University of Sydney, and a number of local councils, to advise them on the role of the Council, and about incorporating voice of people with disability
* Providing a submission to the [Inquiry into the Disability Services and Inclusion Bill 2023 [Provisions] and Disability Services and Inclusion (Consequential Amendments and Transitional Provisions) Bill 2023](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Community_Affairs/DisabilityServices/Submissions)
* Engaging with the Department of Communities and Justice regarding the Independent Review of the Ageing and Disability Commissioner Act 2019, including encouraging the Department to consult with people who have used the Official Community Visitors scheme
* Meeting with members of the NDIS Review Panel to discuss the outcomes of the What We Have Heard report and the challenges identified in the review
* Addressing local councils individually to support disability inclusion action planning.

1. Employment

Employment is a critical issue for people with disability, with people with disability significantly overrepresented in unemployed and under employed cohorts. The Council strongly supports the NSW Government target of 5.6% of government sector roles to be held by people with disability and is looking forward to the NSW Government response to the relevant recommendations of the Disability Royal Commission.

### Key activities

As well as attending DENconnect meetings to ensure awareness of the issues facing public servants with disability, Council has engaged with NSW Treasury regarding government procurement practices, as these both directly and indirectly contribute to the employment of people with disability.

Council continues to engage with the Public Service Commission regarding the employment of people with disability in the public sector, including the results of employee surveys, as well as with the Department of Communities and Justice on how accessible infrastructure supports the employment of people with disability.

Churchill Fellow Donna Purcell also addressed the Council on her research on leadership models that remove barriers to employment for people with disability.

The Australian Network on Disability addressed the Council on its work towards inclusive employment by engaging business, NGOs and the government sector.

1. Justice and rights

Council remains concerned about the over-representation of people with disability in the criminal legal system, and has heard from Professor Eileen Baldry, Emeritus Professor of Criminology at UNSW, regarding this matter. Professor Baldry’s research has contributed to the Council’s ability to respond to the recommendations of the Disability Royal Commission.

Council has met with representatives of Corrective Services NSW to discuss work underway to address the overrepresentation of people with disability in the justice system and break down barriers to accessing justice.

1. Housing

Housing continues to be an issue of critical importance to people with disability, with a chronic shortage of accessible and affordable housing, particularly for people on limited incomes.

Council regularly attends Australian Network for Universal Housing Design Committee meetings to ensure the voice of people with disability is heard in the context of accessible housing. Council continues to seek a commitment from NSW government to regulating minimum accessibility at the Silver level in the National Construction Code.

The Ageing and Disability Commission has prepared a paper on *Housing issues for older people, people with disability and carers in NSW*, for and with the Chairs of the Disability Council, the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Ageing, Carers Advisory Council, and the Ageing and Disability Advisory Board.

Representatives from the three Councils and Board met with the relevant Minister to discuss the recommendations.

## Education

Despite not being a key focus area, education continues to be an active domain for the Council and a key concern for people with disability and their families.

### Key activities

The Council continues to regularly engage with the National Education Standards Authority (NESA) and attended the NESA Disability Education Forums in March and September. Council has discussed issues such as the HSC minimum standards for

students with disability and the potential negative influence on young people with disability who choose mainstream subjects; the lack of professional learning opportunities for teachers related to students with disability; and access to reasonable adjustments for HSC examinations.

Council is represented on the Department of Education’s Disability Strategy Reference Group and has also met with the Department regarding access to qualified interpreters for signing deaf students, and to gather more information on the work the Department is undertaking to fulfil the NSW 2023 election commitment to create pathways for people with disability to become teachers and support staff.

Council also participated in a performance audit – Supporting students with disability in NSW public schools.

## Engagement and advice

The Council is a key voice for the disability sector and is essential in advising Government and responding to proposals. The Council will continue to respond to strategically important issues and requests for advice.

### Key activities

Council members attended NSW Disability Stakeholder Forums convened by the Department of Communities and Justice. These forums focus on key issues impacting people with disability in NSW. They also provide an opportunity to create connections to collaborate to respond to these issues.

Council met with various peak bodies and organisations, including the Council for Intellectual Disability, the Australian Institute of Company Directors, the network for all state and territory Disability Councils, the National Disability Insurance Agency, and DENConnect, the network for NSW public sector disability employee networks.

A Council member attended a Safe Medicines Administration for Disability Service providers session, which covered strategies and issues involved with assisting people with disability with administering medication.

Council continues to engage with other ministerial advisory bodies on matters of mutual interest, such as the NSW Ministerial Advisory Committee on Ageing and the NSW Carers Advisory Council.

#### Presentations

As well as presenting at the events outlined previously:

* In May, Council members presented on Disability Inclusion Action Plans at the TAFE Opens Doors: A focused discussion on access and equity TAFE Directors Conference
* In November, the Council Chair participated in a panel discussion on Sourcing our Future Workforce from under-employed markets at the Local Government NSW conference
* In December, the Deputy Chair participated in a staff forum at DCJ on lived experience as a customer of government services.

#### *Events and workshops attended*

As well as the events outlined previously, Council members also attended:

* 2023 NSW Women of the Year Awards
* Accessible and Inclusive Early Children's experiences meeting
* Public Sector Disability Leadership & Allyship conference
* NESA Education Forum
* Down Syndrome Awareness month event
* TfNSW Disability Compliance Strategy - Workshop
* Guide Dogs NSW/ACT Report launch
* 2023 NDIS Annual Conference

To learn more about the Disability Council NSW, [visit our website](https://www.dcj.nsw.gov.au/community-inclusion/advisory-councils/disability-council-nsw.html), email us at [disabilitycouncil@dcj.nsw.gov.au](mailto:disabilitycouncil@dcj.nsw.gov.au) or call us at 02 9716 2612.