# Disability Council NSW LogoDisability Council NSW

# January - December 2021 Summary Report

## Background

The Disability Council NSW (the ‘Council’) is a statutory body that provides the Minister for Disability Services with advice on matters that affect people with disability in NSW, as well as 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 the majority of the members are to be people with disability.

## Focus areas for 2021

In early 2021, a Strategic Planning Day was held to identify the focus areas for the Council for the year. These were:

1. **Employment**
2. **Education**
3. **Accessible communities**
4. **Providing advice**

## Disability Council resources

The Council faced many challenges in 2021. There were a number of changes to the Minster for Disability Services and as a result of COVID-19 all meetings took place online. There were also several resignations from the Council, including the Chair (July 2021), leaving only seven Council members to deliver on the Council’s Annual plan. Despite these challenges, there was considerable work undertaken in each focus area, particularly in relation to employment.

## 1. Employment

Employment is a critical issue for people with disability as a means for people to live full, satisfying, and independent lives. This is reflected in the Premier’s Priority, *World Class Public Service,* which includes a target that by 2025 ‘5.6% of government sector roles are held by people with a disability'.

### Key activities

To identify the enablers to employment for people with disability, on 18 November 2021, the Council hosted an employment forum with approximately 50 stakeholders. The participants were from 17 community organisations and advocacy groups (including Disabled People’s Organisations), five NSW Government Disability Employee Networks, the Public Service Commission, Transport for NSW and the NSW Carers Council.

Chis Lamb, Deputy Commissioner, Public Service Commission provided a welcome, followed by six presentations, focused around recruitment, retention and career progression.

A report on the employment forum will be published on the Council’s website.

In addition to the forum, the Council regularly engaged with the Public Service Commission about the Premier’s Priority, World Class Public Service, and target ‘ensuring 5.6% of government sector roles are held by people with a disability’ .

The Council participated in the DENConnect forum, which brings together different Disability Employee Networks (DENs) from across NSW government. DENs are comprised of people working in the public sector who have a disability or who want to be a champion for disability awareness and support.

On 7 October 2021, the Council presented to the Cluster Secretaries Board about the work of the Council and, in particular, employment for people with disability.

## 2. Education

Education is a very active domain for the Council and a key concern for people with disability and their families.

### Key activities

The Council engaged with the National Education Standards Authority (NESA) about HSC minimum standards for students with disability. The impact of the Suspension and Expulsion Policy and the need to prepare young people for work were also raised with the Department of Education. Consultation with NESA is ongoing.

The Council also participated in the Department of Education’s DisabilityStrategy Reference group which provides advice on the education of students with disability.

## 3. Accessible communities

There is an ongoing need to raise awareness about improving access to the community, community services and supports for people with disability. This includes accessible housing, accessible transport, and accessible communications.

Recent events have highlighted the need for emergency services to consider how they connect with and inform people with disability in significant events.

### Key activities

To promote accessibility, the Council engaged in many forums, prepared submissions to inquiries, and met with key stakeholders as described below.

### Accessible and inclusive communities

The Council participated in the National Disability Forum: Creating accessible and inclusive communities. The Council was also invited to attend the Physical Disability Council NSW Interagency Policy Working Group and in December presented at the National Disability Summit on ‘*Creating accessible and inclusive communities’.*

### Transport

The Council regularly attended the Accessible Transport Advisory Committee to provide expert guidance on access and inclusion to Transport for NSW.

Concerns were raised with the Minister for Transport and Roads about changes to the wheelchair accessible taxi booking system and the impact on availability and waiting times for people with disability.

### Health

The Council was represented at the NSW Ministry of Health COVID-19 Community of Practice meeetings, where the impact of the pandemic on people with disability was discussed.

Representations were also made to the Minister for Disability and Minister for Health about the impact of COVID and health orders on people with disability, for example, compulsory mask wearing.

### IT accessibility

The Council participated in the Greater Sydney Commission User Experience (UX) research discussions and Revenue NSW User Testing session to promote IT accessibility for people with disability.

### Construction Code

The Council met with the NSW Minister for Better Regulation and Innovation to discuss the proposed changes to the 2022 National Construction Code. The Council, along with many key stakeholders, is seeking a commitment to regulating minimum accessibility at the Silver level in the National Construction Code.

### Recreation

The Council engaged with the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS)about a number of issues. As part of transitioning to a digital system, the NPWS will be limiting free entry passes for pension card holders, to those individuals who have a registered vehicle in their name. The Council is concerned about the impact this will have on people with disability who do not own vehicles.

Feedback was also provided on the NPWS’s Draft Accessible Parks Policy.

The Council was also represnted at a roundtable to explore Greater Sydney Parklands white paper.

## 4. Providing advice

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

### Key activities

In April, the Council, along with key stakeholders, participated in a sector roundtable with Ministers Reynolds and Ward. A range of issues were discussed including the new National Disability Strategy (later renamed Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031), proposed introduction of independent assessments under the NDIS and legislative changes,

In May, DCJ hosted the NSW Disability Stakeholder Forum - Regional Disability Solutions which was attended by the Council. The workshop highlighted a number of issues faced by people with disability. A recurrent theme was the barriers that people with disability, service providers and government agencies faced in accessing and delivering specialist and mainstream services in regional NSW.

The Council also invited to participate in the NDIS Independent Advisory Council State and Territory Workshop to discuss the NDIS reforms, in particular the Independent Assessments.

The Council, in collabortion with the Department of Communities and Justice, presented at the Local Government Ageing & Disability Forum, 28 October 2021, about the role of the Council and Disability Inclustion Action Plans (DIAPs). The forum provided a valuable opportunity to provide guidance to local councils about their obligations under the Disability Inclusion Act 2014 and the role their DIAPs play in promoting inclusion.

In addition to the engagement described above, the Council prepared submissions in response to the following consultations and inquiries:

* National Disability Insurance Agency: Proposed Support for Decision Making Policy
* NSW Legislative Assembly Committee on Community Services: Options to improve access to existing and alternate accommodation to address the social housing shortage
* Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs: Inquiry into the purpose, intent and adequacy of the Disability Support Pension
* Department of Communities and Justice: Assisted Boarding House Consultation
* Department of Social Services: National Disability Employment Strategy
* Joint Standing Committee on the National Disability Insurance Scheme: Inquiry into NDIS Independent Assessments
* Department of Communities and Justice: Persons with Disability (Regulation of Restrictive Practices) Bill 2021
* Royal Commission into the Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability: Quality and Safeguards Issues Paper

The Council also made representations around the following issues:

* Disability Discrimination Commissioner, Australian Human Rights Commission, NSW Minister for Disability, Senator Steele-John Australian Greens and Federal Minister for the National Disability Insurance Scheme regarding unauthorised restraints of clients with disability
* Australian Human Rights Commission, NSW Minister for Disability and NSW Mental Health Commissioner regarding stigma, mental health and media portrayal.