



**ACT Disability Strategic Governance Group**

**Summary Report of Consultations on  
A Policy Framework for People with Disability in the ACT  
Strategic Priorities 2009-2014**

August 2009

# A Policy Framework for People with Disability in the ACT

## Strategic Priorities 2009-2014

The ACT Government is updating its policy framework to improve outcomes and opportunities for Canberrans who have a disability. The framework will guide priority areas for disability policy and service delivery through to 2014.

This report summarises the views expressed through community consultations conducted on the proposed draft strategic priorities in May and June 2009. This report has been compiled by the Strategic Governance Group as a summary of comments made by participants in the consultations. Full transcripts of the meetings and submissions received were considered in developing this report. The Strategic Governance Group provides advice and strategic direction to the Chief Executive DHCS on the implementation of whole of community responses and the desired outcomes of government funded services and supports for people with disability in the ACT

The Strategic Governance Group consulted on the following six strategic priorities:

1. I want the right support, right time, right place
2. I want to contribute to the community
3. I want to socialise and engage in the community
4. I want to know what I need to know
5. I want to tell my story once
6. I want a quality service system

The Strategic Governance Group initially put forward five draft key strategic priorities that would underpin the framework. These draft priorities were tested over the period November 2008–January 2009 with five key stakeholder groups in the ACT disability sector. From these early discussions a sixth draft strategic priority was developed and added to the list that were proposed for broad consultation in the period May-June 2009.

In May – June 2009, 33 general and targeted sessions consultations were held by the Strategic Governance Group across the ACT were attended by approximately 260 people who were a mix of people with diverse disabilities, families, community, business, service providers and government agencies. Twelve written submissions were also received. [Attachment A](#) lists the sessions conducted. A consultation paper that guided the consultations is available from [www.dhcs.act.gov.au/disability\\_act/sgg](http://www.dhcs.act.gov.au/disability_act/sgg).

The Strategic Governance Group is preparing its response to this report and expects to release its response in September 2009.

## 1 Overview

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Since 2004, significant advances have been made for Canberrans with disability in the form of:

- Increased positive recognition of people with disability by community and business groups.
- An increase in recurrent funding from \$41.5 million in 2002/03 to \$68.6 million in 2009/10.
- Increased funding since 2002-03 has resulted in an increase in accommodation places by 31%, community support places by 55%, community access hours by 70%, centre based respite nights by 11% and flexible respite hours by 96%.

- New service types which are more flexible and responsive to the needs of people with disability.
- A single point of information dissemination established.
- Improved access to government services.

Overall, the consultation feedback supports that the vision articulated by people with disability in 2002 continues to be relevant to people with disability, their families and the agencies that support them. This vision is that:

*“All people with disabilities achieve what they want to achieve live, how they choose to live and are valued as full and equal members of the ACT community”.*

The consultation feedback confirmed however that much more action needs to be taken in order to fully achieve the vision.

In particular, the consultation feedback indicates that many community and government agencies have taken up and are committed to continuing the challenge to improve outcomes for people with disabilities set out by *Challenge 2014*. Numerous examples were provided of sporting, recreational, community, education, business and government groups who have taken practical steps to reduce barriers to people with disability. Participants confirmed that, increasingly, community and government agencies are taking steps to include people with disability for example, by building ramps, modifying transport, installing equipment and modifying programs. However, while many spoke of having greater access to facilities and programs, numerous people said that others within the general community were not necessarily welcoming, particularly of people with ‘invisible’ disability and challenging behaviours. The challenge now is to encourage, support and challenge other individuals and groups to take similar steps to provide and promote inclusive services and activities. The more complex challenge is to change negative community attitudes towards people with invisible disability.

Significant themes to emerge from the consultations include the need for better data to inform planning and resource allocation, more reliable and affordable transport modes (particularly after hours and on the weekend), access to affordable and flexible housing options and support, earlier planning, stronger pathways to employment, and enhanced community inclusion. The strategies and actions identified under *Future Directions: A Framework for the ACT 2004-2008* (extended until 2009) have been effective at focusing action to addressing concerns raised but consultation feedback indicates that more needs to be done. Initiatives established under Future Directions need to be better promoted to people with disability and their families. Further details of actions achieved under Future Directions are available at [www.dhcs.act.gov.au/disability\\_act](http://www.dhcs.act.gov.au/disability_act).

The right of people with disability to be part of the community and to be respected and recognised for their contribution was also a key message from the consultations. People with disability want to be in meaningful employment, to be in affordable housing of their choice, to be part of the social fabric, to build and sustain friendships, to volunteer, and to be part of community activities. People with disability often need access to affordable and reliable transport modes and assistance (paid or unpaid) to be part of the workforce and part of the community.

The key messages from these consultations differ from previous consultations that tended to focus on people with disability as recipients of disability specific services. These consultations attracted more holistic comment about the life aspirations of people with disability and identified whole-of-community and whole-of-government areas for integrated action. Similar to previous consultations, people with disability and their families still want

access to safe, stable and continuous support that is going to meet their individual needs. However they also want to find ways to maximise economies of scale and enable social supports between people with and without disability.

## **2 General comments about the priorities**

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Participants were generally in support of the areas of focus for the six strategic priorities, with many highlighting the need for the priorities to be supported by:

- practical effective action, with clear responsibilities, tasks, measures and performance indicators across Government; and
- resources based on planning, data and a realistic picture of current and emerging unmet need and demand.

The policy framework should also more clearly articulate the overarching vision, and the legislative and policy context in which it sits. It should also identify its relationship to carers, contain a definition of disability and reframe references to “I want” with many in support of a rights based approach. There was some debate about whether the policy should focus exclusively on what the person with a disability wants or whether it should also focus on what their family wants.

Additional priorities were supported in relation to having appropriate accommodation options, a right to be safe, and being treated with respect and as equals in the community. Some people felt that the priorities are not achievable for people with profound disabilities. Specific comments were made in relation to the framing of particular priorities. Some people thought that Strategic Priority 5 (I want to tell my story once) was ambiguous.

## **3 Actions to achieve the priorities**

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### ***Strategic Priority 1 – I want the right support, right time, right place***

The need for the right support at the right time is fundamental to living a normalised life. Different types of supports are needed to respond to the changing needs and circumstances of people with disability and their families. Support and planning is needed at transition key points which include the time of birth, diagnosis of disability, the transition from home to school, the transition from school, moving into and out of employment.

Better long term systemic and individual planning is needed to ensure that resources are available to meet the current and emerging needs of people with disability.

The allocation of funding and availability of supports and services needs to be more equitable across different levels of need, location and gender. Many expressed frustration with the process to apply for funding and want an entitlement based system, where support is automatic and based on a fair needs based assessment.

Access to reliable, safe and affordable transport is fundamental to enabling people with disability to engage in work, socialise with family, friends, be involved in community activities and to access supports and services. There is a need for more available affordable transport options, particularly after hours and on weekends. Specific comments were made on the need to increase the responsiveness, reliability and affordability of transport services including ACTION buses, regional community buses and wheelchair accessible taxis. Concerns were noted in relation to parking availability and accessibility.

Many participants raised concerns about the shortage of independent and supported accommodation options to meet the current and future needs of people with disability. There was widespread support for better planning to meet the current and future accommodation needs of people with disability. Specific comments were made about appropriate accommodation options, information and individual planning for long term housing options, and research into private home ownership and access to finance. The need for adaptable housing and environmental initiatives to make housing more energy and water efficient was noted.

Parents and other family carers are often exhausted from the caring role and need greater access to quality respite.

Support is needed for people with disability who are considering having a child, who are pregnant or who have recently given birth, and for parents who give birth to children with disability.

Concerns were raised regarding the affordability of specialist health care, the cost of accessing specialists interstate, and long wait lists for specialists and dental treatment. A long waiting list for speech therapy is of concern as is the need for greater access to affordable aids, equipment and adaptive technology.

### ***Strategic Priority 2 – I want to contribute to the community***

Improved access to therapeutic equipment and support is needed to support young people's learning at school. There is a need for more and earlier information about special education schools and mainstream schools with inclusive environments. Efforts towards inclusion need to start at an early age and community awareness training should be targeted at primary and high school students. The isolation, teasing and harassment of students with disabilities is an issue that needs to be addressed.

The transition from school for adults with intellectual disabilities was reported by participants to be a particularly stressful time for the person and their parents. There is considerable unmet need for post school options, particularly for people with intellectual disability. Greater effort needs to be made in collaboration and partnerships to form stronger pathways to employment; better planning and resources; early individual advice and planning prior to leaving school; expanding adult education opportunities; expanding work experience opportunities, life long skill learning and development for adults with intellectual disabilities.

Many participants reported the need for more employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Barriers to employment of people with disability highlighted by participants include insurance/ public liability/awards, a lack of employer awareness about the capabilities and strengths of people with disability, and a lack of flexible work arrangements.

Greater effort is needed to create more supported employment opportunities to sustain better outcomes for people with disability. Suggestions include improvements to enhance job searching and matching; strategies to increase employment in the government and private sectors including through traineeships, target setting, seed funding for innovative partnerships to create employment, employer education and incentives and enhancing workplace modifications. Other areas identified for government action include increasing self employment opportunities and volunteering opportunities for people with disability.

### ***Strategic Priority 3 – I want to socialise and engage in the community***

Socialising with family and friends and being part of the community is fundamental to everyone's quality of life. Key barriers to people with disability socialising and engaging in the community include a lack of affordable, reliable transport options, a lack of confidence, a lack of information, a lack of supports to engage in activities, unwelcoming community attitudes, insurance costs and parental beliefs.

Community groups should be more proactive around inviting and welcoming people with disabilities to be part of their activities. Disability specific services and schools should encourage the non-disabled community to be more involved in social activities for people with disability.

For community activities and facilities to be inclusive of people with disability, they need to be accessible by transport, available at the right time, well promoted, appropriately supported, appropriately modified, welcoming, age appropriate, available in the local area and sustainable. People with disability want to engage in more inclusive sporting, recreation and community art activities and facilities for exercise and rehabilitation, healthy living and wellbeing, fun, learning skills and forming friendships.

Government can improve the inclusion of people with disability in sport, recreation and community activity through collaboration with stakeholders to modify activities and engage and sustain volunteers to support participation by people with disability; provide seed funding to establish inclusive activities; encourage and support community grants applications; provide disability awareness training; explore opportunities through other ACT Government frameworks; support volunteering efforts and coordinate and promote community participation activities in its accommodation support services. Participants consistently raised the need for disability awareness education that promotes the strengths and positive contribution of people with disability, and that is developed and run by people with disability.

Specific actions were suggested to enhance opportunities for people with disability to be part of making decisions with government and community agencies about how policies, services and activities can be more responsive to their needs.

### ***Strategic Priority 4 - I want to know what I need to know***

The challenges presented in accessing information about supports and services for people with disability were reported as a key area needing improvement. People report that they don't know what they need to know or who to ask and consequently don't know where to find the information they need.

Participants consistently reported the need for a single point of service access and central points of information about supports and services for people with disability which is available across the ACT and Commonwealth governments and the ACT community sector. Several participants suggested that existing single access points should be strengthened, better promoted and resourced instead of making a new single access point.

Information about services and supports needs to be available at key life points, available at the right place and at the right time, relevant and comprehensive, available in formats other than the internet, communicated in languages other than English, and well promoted. A number of suggestions were made to make better use of technology to disseminate information and social networking between people with disability and their families.

### ***Strategic Priority 5 - I want to tell my story once***

Individuals, families and agencies invest a lot of time and effort in filling in multiple forms and being assessed for funding and supports, often with no resulting service. People do not want to keep proving their disability in order to access basic supports, transport, therapy, aids and equipment and income. Numerous participants said that the current assessment process to target the limited resources to the greatest relative needs improvement, most significantly through a change to an entitlement-based system.

Some participants advocated for a centralised assessment service while others advocated for common assessment questions and improved information sharing between agencies with the clients consent.

In relation to a potential common assessment framework there were diverse views on the scope of which services should be included with suggestions varying between a whole of government/community, whole of department or Disability ACT approach. Participants thoughts that elements of an effective common assessment framework include holistic and comprehensive needs assessment; protects confidentiality; is respectful and involves input from the person, is supported by a generic assessment tool completed by professionals with case management expertise and is able to respond to people's changing needs and circumstances over time. Participants believed that strong interagency relationships between government and community agencies will be key to implementing a common assessment framework.

Many people were supportive of an assessment that is portable or "travels" with the individual. Models for common assessment frameworks and portable information were suggested.

### ***Strategic Priority 6 – I want a quality service system***

Continuous and stable staff, safe environments that are responsive to need, reliable and timely and affordable supports and services were identified as indicators of a quality service system by participants.

Specific suggestions were made to increase the responsiveness of universal ACT Government services, including shopfront services to people with disabilities. Participants reported that in the disability services sector high staff turnover is a factor that reduces the quality and the ability to supply continuing service to consumers and continuously improving service. Low wages in the community sector and pay inequity compared to other community sectors (eg. Childcare) and the government sector, a lack of career pathways, low levels of agency funding, high casualisation of the workforce were identified by participants as factors contributing to high turnover.

Areas identified for action to enhance the quality and responsiveness of the service system include disability awareness training for mainstream community and government, a greater investment in staff training and development, higher wages and retention incentives, improved recruitment processes and streamlining administrative burdens on agencies, individuals and families.

Service user feedback systems and audits against human rights frameworks were also suggested as keys to promoting continuous improvement.

A number of areas were identified for legislative review and reform, including potential amendments to the *Discrimination Act 1991* and to guidelines underpinning the *Building Code*.

#### **4 How should we measure success?**

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Participants indicated that the success of the disability policy framework should be measured by actions achieved under the framework and the impact of the framework on people with disability's quality of life. A comparison baseline measure should be established at the beginning of the framework over the five years 2009-2014 to assess whether and how policy actions have impacted on the quality of life of people with disability.

A range of tangible outcome measures were suggested by participants.

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## **Attachment A – Consultation Forums and Agencies Represented**

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### **Community Conversation Forums**

26 May (12.00 and 1.00; and 5.00 and 6.00) - Hellenic Club, Woden  
27 May (12.00 and 1.00; and 5.00 and 6.00) - Burns Club, Kambah  
2 June (12.00 and 1.00; and 5.00 and 6.00) - Belconnen Library  
3 June (12.00 and 1.00; and 5.00 and 6.00) - Ainslie Football Club

### **Targeted Forums**

NDS ACT forum with NDS members – 28 May 2009  
Meeting with ACT Down Syndrome Association - 1 June 2009  
Meet the Director Forum – 9 June 2009  
Meeting with Advocacy for Inclusion – 10 June 2009  
Meeting with Vision Australia - 10 June 2009  
Communities @ Work forum at Weston Creek Community Centre – 16 June 2009  
Meeting with Women with Disabilities ACT – 20 June 2009  
Meeting with ACT Disability Commissioner – 23 June 2009  
Meeting with Black Mountain School P&C committee – 23 June 2009  
Communities @ Work forum at Tuggeranong Community Centre – 24 June 2009  
Meeting with DHCS, Policy and Organisational Services staff – 24 June 2009  
Meeting with DHCS Disability ACT staff – 24 June 2009 and 10 July 2009  
Meeting with Public Advocate – 25 June 2009  
Meeting with Shaw Possibilities – 25 June 2009  
Meeting with Be Active Group – 1 July 2009  
Meeting with Disability ACT – 10 July  
Meeting with Therapy ACT - 13 and 14 July  
Meeting with Catchment and Landcare Association – 16 July 2009

### **Agencies Represented**

ACT Community Arts Office  
ACT Department of Education and Training  
ACT Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services  
ACT Disability and Community Services Commissioner  
ACT Division of National Disability Services  
ACT Health  
ACT Ministers Youth Council  
ACT Sport and Recreation Services  
ACT Territory and Municipal Services  
Advocacy for Inclusion  
ADACAS  
Aged Care and Rehabilitation Service, ACT Health  
Allergies and Intolerant Reactions Association  
Arts ACT  
Belconnen Community Service  
Be Active Group – Belconnen Community Service  
Better Hearing Australia (Canberra Group)  
Black Mountain School Parents and Citizens Committee  
Canberra Institute of Technology  
Canberra Liberals  
Canberra Multicultural Community Forum

Canberra Rape Crisis Centre  
Citizens' Advice Bureau - Access City Hotline  
Communities@Work  
Community Connections  
Epilepsy Association ACT  
Focus ACT  
Human Rights Commission  
Koomarri  
Melrose High School Learning Support  
Ministers Youth Council  
MS Australia  
Pedal Power ACT  
People with Disability ACT  
Public Advocate  
RSI and Overuse Injury Association of the ACT  
Shaw Possibilities  
Stepping Stones for Life  
Straight Talk  
The Salvation Army, Aged Care Plus  
Touched by Disability  
Training and Tertiary Education  
The Big Issue  
Volunteering ACT  
Woden Community Service  
Women with Disabilities ACT  
Youth Coalition of the ACT  
YWCA