

6 December 2022

Tēnā koe Mayors, Chairs and Councillors,

Disabled Persons Assembly (DPA) would like to congratulate you all on your recent election. DPA looks forward to working with you and your Council to get the best possible outcomes for disabled people in your respective areas.

Please find below some information about DPA and five key issues facing disabled people in the local government space around the country.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you online to discuss these matters further. For further inquiries, please contact:

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# Introducing Disabled Persons Assembly NZ

**We work on systemic change for the equity of disabled people**

Disabled Persons Assembly NZ (DPA) is a not-for-profit pan-impairment Disabled People’s Organisation run by and for disabled people. Since our formation in 1983, DPA has brought disabled people together and shaped our collective input in a way that drives system level change.

**We recognise:**

* Māori as Tangata Whenua and [Te Tiriti o Waitangi](https://www.archives.govt.nz/discover-our-stories/the-treaty-of-waitangi) as the founding document of Aotearoa New Zealand;
* disabled people as experts on their own lives;
* the [Social Model of Disability](https://www.odi.govt.nz/guidance-and-resources/guidance-for-policy-makes/) as the guiding principle for interpreting disability and impairment;
* the [United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html) as the basis for disabled people’s relationship with the State;
* the [New Zealand Disability Strategy](https://www.odi.govt.nz/nz-disability-strategy/) as Government agencies’ guide on disability issues; and
* the [Enabling Good Lives Principles](https://www.enablinggoodlives.co.nz/about-egl/egl-approach/principles/) and [Whāia Te Ao Mārama: Māori Disability Action Plan](https://www.health.govt.nz/publication/whaia-te-ao-marama-2018-2022-maori-disability-action-plan) as avenues to disabled people gaining greater choice and control over their lives and supports.

**We drive systemic change through:**

* **Leadership** -reflecting the collective voice of disabled people, locally, nationally, and internationally
* **Information and advice** -informing and advising on policies impacting on the lives of disabled people
* **Advocacy** -supporting disabled people to have a voice, including a collective voice, in society
* **Monitoring** - giving feedback on existing laws, policies, and practices about and relevant to disabled people

# Guiding documents relevant to this briefing

## United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)

DPA upholds the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)[[1]](#footnote-2) as the minimum standard for our participation in society. It places an obligation on Government to ensure and promote the full realisation of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all disabled people without discrimination of any kind on the basis of disability.

The implementation of the UNCRPD depends on a partnership between DPOs and the Government. This is highlighted in Article 4.3 which says governments shall consult closely with and actively involve disabled people, including disabled children, through their representative organisations. This partnership goes beyond just consulting with disabled people, it mandates governments to actively involve disabled people and our organisations in everything that affects us.

Key articles of particular importance to this briefing are:

* Article 4.3 - Involving disabled people and our organisations in decisions that affect us
* Article 9 - Accessibility
* Article 19 - Living independently and being included in the community
* Article 20 - Personal mobility
* Article 21 - Freedom of expression and opinion, and access to information
* Article 29 - Participation in public and political life.

## The New Zealand Disability Strategy (2016 - 2026)

The New Zealand Disability Strategy[[2]](#footnote-3) is the Government’s primary vehicle for implementing the UNCRPD. Key outcomes relevant to this submission are:

* Outcome 5 – Accessibility
* Outcome 7 – Choice and Control
* Outcome 8 – Leadership

# Five key issues for disabled people

DPA invites councils to collaborate with us, Disabled People’s Organisations (DPOs) and disabled people in your respective areas to build fully accessible and inclusive communities for everyone.

In this briefing, we focus on five key areas of concern to disabled people: accessibility, public transport, housing, climate change and community engagement.

Below, we outline our insights and recommendations for change as a starting point for dialogue with councils and as a means of generating discussion about the issues facing disabled people in your area.

### 1. Accessibility of Council services, communications and buildings

#### Accessible buildings and services

Local authorities have responsibility for access to the physical and built environment through, for example, district plans, issuing building consents, and designing/engineering roads and streets.

**Recommendation:** that Universal Design[[3]](#footnote-4) principles be adopted for buildings, infrastructure, and community housing across all councils, as for example Auckland City Council has done.[[4]](#footnote-5)

Access to key council services for disabled people means that disabled people need to be able to access waste and recycling services, libraries, art galleries, museums, and animal control services to just name a few.

Therefore, it is vital for Councils to build accessibility into all their planning and service delivery models. For example, so that libraries are fully accessible and inclusive to everyone.

**Recommendation:** that all council services should be made fully accessible to and inclusive of disabled people using co-design processes and principles via disability/accessibility advisory groups (see community engagement section below).

#### Accessible information and communications

Councils (both City and Regional) have a responsibility for providing essential information and communications about themselves to their communities, including the issuing of civil defence and emergency messaging.

DPA believes that Councils have a responsibility to ensure all information and communications provided by Councils is accessible. At present this is variable across councils. We welcome the fact that Wellington City Council aims to provide information in accessible formats including New Zealand Sign Language, Easy Read (for people with learning disabilities), plain language, Braille, large print, audio, and video, and urge other councils to follow suit.

**Recommendation:** that all Councils sign up to the Government’s Accessibility Charter (developed by the Ministry of Social Development) and then work with disabled people and disabled people’s organisations to implement improved accessibility to communications and information across all council activities.

### 2. Public transport

While access improvements have been made to public transport services operated and funded by city and regional councils over the years, especially to bus services, there is still much to be done in this space.

A significant body of research has been undertaken on transport accessibility for disabled people, the most recent being the Waka Kotahi-funded report *Transport experiences of disabled people in Aotearoa New Zealand,* in which DPA partnered with transport consultants MRCagney.[[5]](#footnote-6)

The report highlighted the multitude of issues facing disabled people in the transport arena including: limited access to bus and other public transport services, especially in rural areas; not having full access to mobility taxi or passenger service vehicle services on a 24/7 basis; the prohibitive costs involved in using public transport which add to the already high costs of living with disability; and not being unable to access interregional transport services, especially those provided by bus and passenger service vehicle companies.

DPA recognises that regional councils are responsible for the funding and provision of public transport services in their respective regions while city and district councils have responsibility for providing supporting infrastructure in, for example, bus stops.

**Recommendation:** that all regional councils take the lead in improving the accessibility of all transport platforms for which they have responsibility according to universal design and other nationally determined accessibility standards.

**Recommendation:** that all regional councils provide fare free public transport for disabled people as Waikato Regional Council has with their accessibility concession for all BUSIT services. This would be of immense benefit for disabled people, who are a group that face significant transport disadvantage.

### 3. Housing

DPA recognises the important role that some Councils play in providing social housing additional to that provided by central government and non-government organisations for older people and other housing disadvantaged groups.

The lack of accessible, affordable, suitable housing is currently a huge issue for the disabled community nationwide. In 2018 it was found that 7.9% of disabled people were living in unsuitable or very unsuitable homes compared to 3.9% of non-disabled people.[[6]](#footnote-7)

The negative effects of inadequate housing on disabled people’s wellbeing are well documented through both research[[7]](#footnote-8) and in the media. It is clear that disabled people have a great need for more access to the affordable housing that government agencies like Kainga Ora and councils provide.

Disabled people are more likely than non-disabled people to be both low-income earners and face higher living costs due to disability. This is reflected in data that shows that disabled people are more likely to rent than non-disabled people; data from Statistics NZ shows that 38% of disabled people rent compared to 30% of non-disabled people.[[8]](#footnote-9)

**Recommendation:** that all new Council housing in every region is designed and built to Universal Design standards and that any retrofit programmes for existing housing undertake to improve the accessibility of all council housing stock to that standard.

**Recommendation:** that all Councils adopt policies to incentivise private developers to construct accessible housing according to universal design standards as is the case with various financial incentives now available from the Thames District, Hamilton City and Wellington City Councils.

### 4. Climate change

Disabled people will be one of the population groups most severely impacted by climate change and this is already becoming evident globally [[9]](#footnote-10)[[10]](#footnote-11) This is for a variety of reasons including the possibility that some disabled people, particularly those with mobility impairments, will be forced to move as part of any planned retreat, particularly from flat, low-lying communities in the future for example those in South Dunedin, Kapiti Coast, and Wellington being most impacted.

DPA believes that a process like that developed in Bristol, UK be used where their local council has engaged, and continues to engage in, climate change planning and dialogue with the local disabled community. This engagement has taken place through the Bristol Disability Forum, a Disabled People’s Organisation similar to DPA.[[11]](#footnote-12)

**Recommendation:** that Councils engage with Disabled People’s Organisations and disabled people in climate change planning going forward.

### 5. Community engagement

DPA acknowledges that many Councils have disability and/or accessibility advisory groups comprised of disabled people. Where these advisory groups exist, there tends to be a greater deal of involvement by local disabled communities in policy making processes based around co-design principles. The existence of advisory groups can aid in ensuring that the voices of disabled people are heard at the Council table.

**Recommendation:** that any councils who have not already established disability advisory groups (both City and Regional), do so.

**Recommendation:** that all disability advisory groups have majority membership of disabled people and that they be either chaired by a disabled person or co-chaired with another disabled person, councillor, or officer.

Ensuring that groups have disability leadership would fulfil the responsibilities that all councils have under Article 4.3 of the UNCRPD to acknowledge the role of disabled people and their organisations in leading discussions on issues which impact upon disabled people.

# DPA’s recommendations

**Recommendation 1:** that Universal Design principles be adopted for buildings, infrastructure, and community housing across all councils, as Auckland City Council has done.

**Recommendation 2:** that all council services should be made fully accessible to and inclusive of disabled people using co-design processes and principles via disability/accessibility advisory groups.

**Recommendation 3:** that all councils sign up to the Government’s Accessibility Charter and work with disabled people and disabled people’s organisations to implement improved accessibility to communications and information across all council activities.

**Recommendation 4:** that all regional councils take the lead in improving the accessibility of all transport platforms for which they have responsibility according to universal design and other nationally determined accessibility standards.

**Recommendation 5:** that all regional councils provide fare free public transport for disabled people as Waikato Regional Council has with their accessibility concession for all BUSIT services. This would be of immense benefit for disabled people, who are a group that face significant transport disadvantage.

**Recommendation 6:** that all new Council housing in every region is designed and built to Universal Design standards and that any retrofit programmes for existing housing undertake to improve the accessibility of all council housing stock to that standard.

**Recommendation 7:** that all Councils adopt policies to incentivise private developers to construct accessible housing according to universal design standards as is the case with various financial incentives now available from the Thames District, Hamilton City and Wellington City Councils.

**Recommendation 8:** that Councils engage with Disabled People’s Organisations and disabled people in climate change planning and dialogue.

**Recommendation 9:** that any councils who have not already established disability advisory groups (both City and Regional), do so to complement those already existing in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, Dunedin, New Plymouth, and other locations around the country.

**Recommendation 10:** that all disability advisory groups have majority membership from disabled people and that they be either chaired by a disabled person or co-chaired with another disabled person, councillor, or officer.

1. United Nations. *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities – Articles*. Accessed from: https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities-2.html [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Office for Disability Issues. *New Zealand Disability Strategy*. Accessed from: https://www.odi.govt.nz/nz-disability-strategy/ [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. The Centre for Excellence in Universal Design. *What is Universal Design?* Accessed from: https://universaldesign.ie/what-is-universal-design/ [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Auckland Council. (n.d.) *Auckland Design Manual.* Accessed from <https://www.aucklanddesignmanual.co.nz/design-subjects/universal_design> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Waka Kotahi New Zealand. (2022). *Transport experiences of disabled people in Aotearoa New Zealand.* Wellington, New Zealand: Doran, B., Crossland, K., Brown, P., Stafford, L. Retrieved from https://www.nzta.govt.nz/resources/research/reports/690 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. https://figure.nz/chart/lIdILLlTfe8pyBYI [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. https://www.donaldbeasley.org.nz/assets/projects/UNCRPD/My-Experiences-My-Rights-A-Monitoring-Report-on-Disabled-Persons-Experience-of-Housing-in-Aotearoa-New-Zealand/My-Experiences-My-Rights-A-Monitoring-Report-on-Disabled-Persons-Experience-of-Housing-in-Aotearoa-New-Zealand.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. <https://figure.nz/chart/ThXaIxtaFP4CSN0j> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Schulte, C. (2020, March 28). People With Disabilities Needed in Fight Against Climate Change. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/28/people-disabilities-needed-fight-against-climate-change#:~:text=People%20with%20disabilities%20are%20at,said%20in%20a%20recent%20report>. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Schulte, C. (2020, March 28). People With Disabilities Needed in Fight Against Climate Change. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/28/people-disabilities-needed-fight-against-climate-change#:~:text=People%20with%20disabilities%20are%20at,said%20in%20a%20recent%20report>. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. Bristol Disability Equality Forum (2020). *Community Climate Action: Let’s Make Change with Bristol Disability Equality Forum*. Retrieved from (https://bristoldef.org.uk/community-climate-action/ [↑](#footnote-ref-12)