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To Christchurch City Council

Please find attached DPA’s submission on the Draft Christchurch Smart City Strategy

Disabled Persons Assembly NZ

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Introducing Disabled Persons Assembly NZ

Disabled Persons Assembly NZ (DPA) is a pan-impairment disabled person’s organisation that works to realise an equitable society, where all disabled people of all impairment types and including women, Māori, Pasifika, young people are able to direct their own lives. DPA works to improve social indicators for disabled people and for disabled people be recognised as valued members of society. DPA and its members work with the wider disability community, other DPOs, government agencies, service providers, international disability organisations, and the public by:

* telling our stories and identifying systemic barriers
* developing and advocating for solutions
* innovation and good practice

## United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

DPA was influential in creating the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), a foundational document for disabled people which New Zealand has signed and ratified, confirming that disabled people must have the same human rights as everyone else[[1]](#footnote-1). All state bodies in New Zealand, including local and regional government, have a responsibility to uphold the principles and articles of this convention. There are a number of UNCRPD articles pertinent to this submission, including:

Clauses 2 g) and 2 h) of article 9 which outline governments responsibility to

* promote access for persons with disabilities to new information and communications technologies and systems, including the Internet;

and

* promote the design, development, production and distribution of accessible information and communications technologies and systems at an early stage, so that these technologies and systems become accessible at minimum cost.

### Article 9 – Accessibility

“States Parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure persons with disabilities access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications.”

New Zealand Disability Strategy 2016-2026

Since ratifying the UNCRPD, the New Zealand Government has established a Disability Strategy to guide the work of government agencies on disability issues. The vision is that New Zealand be a non-disabling society, where disabled people have equal opportunity to achieve their goals and aspirations, and that all of New Zealand works together to make this happen [[2]](#footnote-2). It identifies eight outcome areas contributing to achieving this vision, including:

### Outcome 5 – Accessibility

“We access all places, services and information with ease and dignity.”

# The submission

### DPA is providing this submission for the Christchurch City Council as it consults upon its Draft Smart Strategy.

### DPA agrees with the need for Ōtautahi to become a smart city by adapting to the new information technologies which will enable economic, social, environmental and cultural connection into the future.

**The digital divide and disabled people**

However, the COVID pandemic and regional lockdowns have brought into sharp focus the impact of the digital divide for many disabled people. Increasingly essential information, goods and services, including essential local and central government services, are primarily or only able to be accessed online.

This has posed significant challenges for members of the disabled community especially for those already experiencing digital exclusion. For example, many websites of companies offering online shopping, let alone information about council services, do not meet accessibility standards, thereby making these sites difficult or inaccessible for some disabled people to use.

Enabling internet use can be regarded as a key intervention to improve the opportunities for disabled people to connect with the rest of society and build resilience for major events such as the current COVID pandemic and other events which may transpire in the years beyond.

DPA has identified three priority areas that need addressing for disabled people to improve digital access. These are: affordability of digital access and devices, accessibility of online services, and accessible appropriate support to assist disabled people to gain digital skills and confidence online.

While DPA welcomes Christchurch’s plans to develop a Smart Strategy, it needs to make the stated goal of removing barriers to access a higher priority, and also make explicit in the final document that this applies to removing barriers to digital access for disabled people and other socially marginalised groups within the city.

After all, building digital inclusiveness and accessibility will be essential if the Strategy is to fulfil one of its key objectives of having Ōtautahi become a ‘People Centred Smart City.’ Therefore, if disabled people and other socially marginalised groups continue to face barriers to having full digital access, then the goal of becoming a people centred smart city will not be fulfilled.

**In answer to the consultation questions**

1. **Should we focus on any other key areas other than the ones listed on page 21?**

A focus on accessibility should be added to the focus list on page 21. That includes digital accessibility to council information, services and buildings as well as to local businesses, voluntary organisations and central government. Technological adaptation can be and has been positive for disabled people when added, for example, to the built environment through the inclusion of automatic doors in public buildings, audio announcements in lifts, visual fire alarms in public buildings, visual announcements in New Zealand Sign Language, the use of variable lighting that can be dimmed or brightened to accommodate the needs of a large range of users including neurodiverse and blind and low vision people.

Yet, Councils as well as private businesses and voluntary organisations can sometimes get it wrong too in terms of having inaccessible websites and apps and communications processes which, for example, exclude Deaf as well as blind and low vision people and people with learning disabilities.

That is why it is important that Christchurch City Council investigate signing up to the Government’s Accessibility Charter which requires that all signatories make their digital information and communication processes (including websites and apps) fully accessible. We note that the Christchurch City Council signed an Accessibility Charter initiated by the non-government organisation Barrier Free New Zealand Trust in 2017 but the Accessibility Charter we refer to here is one initiated by central government in 2018, albeit one that uses the same name.[[3]](#footnote-3)

**What initiatives do you think have provided the greatest benefit for Christchurch?**

DPA believes that all of the initiatives outlined in the Smart Strategy have been good for Christchurch, especially those around making the internet more freely available through the adoption of Christchurch Free Wi-Fi, the development of the Sentinel Seismic Network and the New Zealand first roll out of Smart Bins. These initiatives do prove that digital technology can facilitate the desired economic, social, cultural and environmental changes which will benefit everyone in the city.

Nevertheless, as we point out above, access to the internet remains a significant issue for many disabled people in terms of access to devices, gaining digital knowledge and being able to navigate websites and apps.

**How would you like the Smart Christchurch Team to collaborate and communicate with you on their initiatives?**

DPA recommends that the Smart Christchurch Team should engage in co-design outreach initiatives to DPA and other disabled person’s organisations (DPOs) in the Christchurch area. The current members of the DPO Coalition which have representation here in Ōtautahi include People First, Kapo Maori, Balance Aotearoa, Muscular Dystrophy Association, Blind Citizens New Zealand and Deaf Aotearoa.

Through DPOs, disabled people can be engaged with around the development of initiatives and actions which will stem from the Smart Christchurch Strategy, and can, on a co-design basis, help develop an accessibility action plan which could include, for example, goals such as the Council either joining or enhancing its role within the government’s Accessibility Charter.

We would welcome the opportunity to do this either online and/or in person.

**Do you have any other feedback on the strategy?**

Ultimately the Smart Christchurch Strategy should lay the groundwork for improving access to the digital commons for all people, including disabled people. In the disability context, this would mean, for example, Council working with disabled people and our organisations plus other stakeholders, including technology companies, to develop fully accessible websites, apps, and other digital technologies which can facilitate our inclusion in the wider life of Ōtautahi.

Furthermore, Christchurch City Council must, acting as a role model, work alongside central government to fund free and/or very low-cost internet wireless broadband access to all its social housing tenants and other disadvantaged low-income groups whether they reside in public or private housing with ongoing free support and training delivered either in the home or at accessible community training hubs.

Christchurch City Council must make disabled people and older people the two highest priority groups for the provision of either free or low-cost broadband with appropriate support and training provided, wherever possible, by disabled people themselves who are IT specialists/trainers of whom there are currently many on the unemployment queues and/or underutilised.

Moreover, the provision of digital wireless broadband for low-income earners, including disabled people, should be supplemented by the provision of free and/or very low-cost devices via partnerships between central and local government and local technology providers, again with ongoing support and training provided preferably in a peer-based situation with disabled IT specialists.

Council should also use preferential contract tendering to support IT start ups created by disabled people (especially local disabled people) and utilise the direct lived knowledge and skills of disabled IT specialists in the building, testing and maintenance of accessible websites and apps.

In this way, digital initiatives can be created and led by disabled people and utilise the hugely untapped resource of disabled people with IT knowledge and skills thereby creating a win-win situation where disabled people’s knowledge of digital access barriers can be utilised while also creating economic and employment opportunities for disabled people in the digital economy space.

# DPA’s recommendations

The Disabled Person’s Assembly strongly recommends that the Christchurch City Council:

* **Recommendation 1:** Investigate signing up to the Government’s Accessibility Charter around providing accessible communications and information on their services
* **Recommendation 2:** Ensures that the Smart Christchurch Team engage in co-design outreach initiatives to DPA and other disabled person’s organisations (DPOs) in the Christchurch area. The current members of the DPO Coalition which have representation here in Ōtautahi include People First, Kapo Maori, Balance Aotearoa, Muscular Dystrophy Association, Blind Citizens New Zealand and Deaf Aotearoa.
* **Recommendation 3:** Ensures that theStrategy lays the groundwork for improving access to the digital commons for all people, including disabled people. This would mean, for example, Council working with disabled people and our organisations plus other stakeholders, including technology companies to develop fully accessible websites, apps, and other digital technologies which can facilitate our inclusion in the wider life of Ōtautahi.
* **Recommendation 4:** Works alongside central government to fund free and/or very low-cost internet wireless broadband access to all its social housing tenants and other disadvantaged low-income groups with ongoing free support and training delivered either in the home or at accessible community training hubs.
* **Recommendation 5:** Makes both disabled and older people the highest priority groups for the provision of either free or low-cost broadband with appropriate support and training provided, wherever possible, by disabled people themselves who are IT specialists/trainers of whom there are presently many on the unemployment queues and/or underutilised.
* **Recommendation 6:** Supplements theprovision of digital wireless broadband for low-income earners, including disabled people, with the provision of free and/or very low-cost accessible devices via partnerships between central and local government and local technology providers, again with ongoing support and training provided preferably in a peer-based situation with disabled IT specialists.
* **Recommendation 7:** Uses preferential contract tendering to support IT start ups created by local disabled people and utilise the direct lived knowledge and skills of disabled IT specialists in the building and maintenance of accessible websites and apps.

1. United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, December 13, 2006. <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-1)
2. Office for Disability Issues. (2016). *New Zealand Disability Strategy 2016 – 2026*. Retrieved from <https://www.odi.govt.nz/assets/New-Zealand-Disability-Strategy-files/pdf-nz-disability-strategy-2016.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Office for Disability Issues. (2018). *The Accessibility Charter*. Retrieved from <https://www.odi.govt.nz/guidance-and-resources/the-accessibility-charter/#:~:text=The%20Accessibility%20Charter%20was%20launched,signed%20up%20to%20the%20Charter>. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)