

April 2023

To Otago Regional Council

Please find attached DPA’s submission on ORC Draft Annual Plan 2023-24

For any 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.

**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/), [Whāia Te Ao Mārama: Māori Disability Action Plan](https://www.health.govt.nz/publication/whaia-te-ao-marama-2018-2022-maori-disability-action-plan), and [Faiva Ora: National Pasifika Disability Disability Plan](https://www.moh.govt.nz/notebook/nbbooks.nsf/0/5E544A3A23BEAECDCC2580FE007F7518/$file/faiva-ora-2016-2021-national-pasifika-disability-plan-feb17.pdf) 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:** monitoring and giving feedback on existing laws, policies and practices about and relevant to disabled people.

**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),1 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. 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 particularly relevant to this submission, including:

* **Article 4.3: General obligations – representation of disabled people and our organisations in decision making**
* **Article 8: Awareness raising**
* **Article 9: Accessibility**
* **Article 11: Situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies**
* **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 political and public life**

**New Zealand Disability Strategy 2016-2026**

Since ratifying the UNCRPD, the New Zealand Government has established a Disability Strategy2 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. It identifies eight outcome areas contributing to achieving this vision. There are a number of Strategy outcomes particularly relevant to this submission, including:

* **Outcome 5 – Accessibility**
* **Outcome 6 - Attitudes**
* **Outcome 8 – Leadership**

# The Submission

DPA welcomes the opportunity to submit on the Otago Regional Council’s Annual Plan 2023-24.

Firstly, DPA valued the opportunity to meet and engage in constructive dialogue with key councillors and staff in earlier this year. We would like to reiterate the importance of having DPA around the decision-making table on disability issues as they relate to council given our status as a disabled people’s organisation (DPO) which is recognised under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

Secondly, we emphasise the need to take a disability lens to every issue, including public transport, climate change and responsiveness to civil emergencies. Our submission focuses upon those areas being concentrated on in this draft annual plan and which also flow on from the response provided to us by ORC officials.

Thirdly, we also briefly mention our positions on other areas not being discussed in the plan around the need for council to make its new offices fully accessible, our desire for a disability issues advisory group (as the Dunedin City Council has) to be established, disability responsiveness training for staff, and the accessibility of all council communications.

# Public transport

DPA acknowledges the steps that have been made in improving transport accessibility over the last few decades. The placement of more wheelchair user friendly buses on most routes in Dunedin is an improvement on what went before.

DPA also notes that there have been measures taken by Council in reaching out to the local disabled community on transport accessibility issues in recent years, some of which we have a been part of.

However, there are still issues that need to be addressed and remain of concern to the disabled community including:

* the reliability of bus services,
* the ongoing need for disability training and responsiveness for new bus drivers,
* the inaccessibility of some bus routes,
* lack of accessible public transport options in regional centres and
* working with the Dunedin City Council and other territorial authorities on making our bus shelters and stops fully accessible, comfortable and user friendly.

On the issue of disability training and responsiveness for drivers, we note that this is being currently delivered by Living Well Resource Centre (formerly Disability Information Service).

We note that with the increasing number of new bus drivers being recruited due to improved hourly pay rates and the easing of migration barriers, there will be more drivers who need to have this training.

DPA recommends that Council increase the level of funding for disability responsiveness and awareness training for newly recruited bus drivers and ensure that programmes are delivered in culturally appropriate and accessible ways.

DPA recommends that, in cooperation with the DCC and Queenstown-Lakes District Council, further improvements be made to bus stops and shelters so that all stops and shelters are accessible.

DPA supports the proposal to further develop real-time transport information in Queenstown and Dunedin.

DPA recommends that real-time transport information be accessible and available in both written (i.e., Large Print, Braille) and audio formats as well as New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) to ensure accessibility for everyone.

# Climate change and emergency responsiveness (safety and resilience)

In our last ORC annual plan submission, we touched upon the need for DPA and other locally based disabled people’s organisations (DPOs) to be involved in discussions around climate change given the disproportionate impact that this is having on disabled people both locally and globally.[[1]](#footnote-2)

We outlined our idea around co-designing a Climate Change Responsiveness plan aimed at the disabled community along the lines of that developed in Bristol, UK with the Bristol Disability Equality Forum there.[[2]](#footnote-3)

DPA recommends that there be discussions commenced during this coming year on the development of a co-designed, disabled people’s driven and led Climate Change Responsiveness Plan between the DCC/ORC and DPA and other locally based DPOs including Blind Citizens, Deaf Aotearoa, Muscular Dystrophy Association, and People First. Other disability organisations can be brought into this as well through the Access for All Group.

DPA wishes to acknowledge that we have had dialogue with the ORC/DCC funded South Dunedin Future project on the impacts of climate change as the suburb contains a relatively high number of disabled people within its population. We plan on continuing this dialogue going forward.

DPA supports funding for additional climate change hazards staff and additional funding for flood protection works due to inflationary pressures as being important investments for both fighting and mitigating the impacts of climate change.

In terms of emergency responsiveness, DPA supports increased planning for emergency management response. DPA acknowledges the efforts that have been made by the Council over this past year including having local disabled community members and service provider representatives presenting at a recent Welfare Coordination Group (WCG) meeting.

DPA recommends that DPA be included in the Regional Civil Defence WCG alongside other disability organisations who have been invited to join including Whaikaha – Ministry of Disabled People and Your Way Kaiaroha.

We welcome and acknowledge the inclusion of these important disability sector organisations on the WCG. However, DPA can add a lived disabled person’s perspective as well as policy and strategic planning expertise, something that is vital when planning for civil emergencies and disasters. DPA, as a pan-impairment disabled person’s organisation, should also be involved given the importance we have as co-partners to all central and local government organisations in decision making under Article 4.3 of the UNCRPD.

# New office building

DPA had a very constructive discussion in February with staff and councillors regarding the ORC’s planned new office building, Whare Rūnaka. We understand that advice has been taken from the Government Property Group on incorporating Universal Design (UD) principles into the build. We welcome universal design principles being included to ensure that everyone, including disabled and older people, can easily access the building from day one.

DPA thanks the ORC for its pledge to consult with DPA over this new build as a starting point.

# Establishing a disability issues advisory group

DPA is very pleased that Council is open to looking at the establishment of a disability advisory group given that the DCC and other local authorities throughout New Zealand already have them.

DPA recommends that Council co-designs a terms of reference for a disability advisory group with DPA and the wider Otago disabled community as a first step in this process with a view to beginning meetings within the upcoming financial year and that funding is set aside for this purpose.

# Disability responsiveness training for staff and employment of disabled people as staff

DPA was also pleased to hear from officials that while disability responsiveness training was currently not offered to staff or councillors, that this could be included as part of a work programme focused on diversity and inclusion slated for the 2023/24 business plan.

DPA recommends that ORC prioritises the incorporation of disability awareness and responsiveness training for both staff and councillors into the diversity and inclusion work programme for 2023/24.

Due to the hiring of extra staff anticipated in this annual plan, DPA recommends that disabled people with suitable qualifications and skills be prioritised for employment by ORC. As discussed with Council in February, our Mahi Tika programme can advise on how to remove the barriers to employment for disabled people.

# ORC communications with the disabled community

DPA was pleased to hear that the contract for the updating of the council’s website has prioritised making it more accessible for everyone, including disabled people.

However, accessible communications are about much more than building an accessible website. DPA was involved in initial discussions during 2020 on an accessible communications policy but the process was never completed due to Covid-19 and concerns raised by the blind community.

DPA recommends that the ORC engages with the local disabled community to progress developing an accessible communications policy by 2024.

# DPA’s Recommendations

**Recommendation 1:** that Council increase the level of funding for disability responsiveness and awareness training for newly recruited bus drivers and ensure that programmes are delivered in culturally appropriate and accessible ways.

**Recommendation 2:** that, in cooperation with the DCC and Queenstown-Lakes District Council, further improvements be made to bus stops and shelters so that all stops and shelters are accessible.

**Recommendation 3:** that real-time transport information be accessible and available in both written (i.e., Large Print, Braille) and audio formats as well as New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) to ensure accessibility for everyone.

**Recommendation 4:** that DPA be included in the Regional Civil Defence WCG alongside other disability organisations who have been invited to join including Whaikaha – Ministry of Disabled People and Your Way Kaiaroha.

**Recommendation 5:** that Council co-designs a terms of reference for a disability advisory group with DPA and the wider Otago disabled community as a first step in this process with a view to beginning meetings within the upcoming financial year and that funding is set aside for this purpose.

**Recommendation 6:** that disabled people with suitable qualifications and skills be prioritised for employment by ORC when hiring new staff.

**Recommendation 7:** that the ORC engages with the local disabled community to progress developing an accessible communications policy by 2024.

1. 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-2)
2. 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-3)