March 2024

**To Parliamentary Health Select Committee**

Please find attached DPA’s submission on Pae Ora (Healthy Futures) (Improving Mental Health Outcomes Bill)

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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/%24file/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.

# The Submission

## Introduction

Disabled Persons Assembly (DPA) New Zealand welcomes this opportunity to get feedback on the Pae Ora (Healthy Futures) (Improving Mental Health Outcomes) Amendment Bill.

**DPA fully endorses this legislation given that it will provide Government with the authority to draw up a Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy.**

**DPA supports recognising the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission as a health entity.**

However, we would like to make some recommendations around possible amendments which could be added to the Bill to further strengthen it.

## Background: Mental health and disability

Mental health touches on the lives of everyone in Aotearoa, including disabled people.

Article 1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (UNCRPD) covers people living with mental impairments.

This means that people living with psychosocial disabilities/mental distress have full human rights under international law, something that these disabled communities (alongside others) did not have previously within the global context.

There is also a great deal of intersectionality in terms of the fact that poor mental health can be experienced by disabled people living with other impairments and that some disabled people also live with multiple impairments including those related to psychosocial disability/mental distress.

According to the Ministry of Health’s 2021 New Zealand Health Survey, approximately one in 10 adults aged 15 years and over (9.6 percent) had experienced psychological distress in the four weeks preceding taking the survey. [[1]](#footnote-2)

When analysed more fully, the survey found that the total number of disabled adults who experienced psychological distress in the four weeks prior to completing the survey was 27.3 percent compared to 7.9 percent of non-disabled adults. After adjusting for age and gender, disabled adults were 4.6 times more likely to experience psychological distress than non-disabled adults.

This highly disproportionate level of mental distress amongst disabled people is due to the numerous barriers that we face through living in a society where our communities encounter high levels of prejudice, discrimination, lack of access to services and supports, high levels of poverty and social isolation.

All the above factors contribute to the strong sense of marginalisation that disabled people experience.

Tāngata Whaikaha Māori - Disabled Māori experience multiple marginalisations due to the combined impacts of racism, colonialisation and loss of cultural identity which are further exacerbated by living in a disabling society.

Multiple marginalisation is also experienced by disabled people in other demographics including Pasifika disabled, ethnic disabled, refugee disabled, disabled women, disabled tamariki/children, disabled rangatahi/youth, disabled older people and disabled LGBTQ+.

When it comes to accessing mental health and wellbeing services, disabled people face numerous issues when doing so.

These include the lack of physically accessible facilities, minimal to no understanding of disability perspectives within the mental health workforce and wider system, lack of accessible information about mental health in alternative formats including New Zealand Sign Language, Easy Read, Braille, large print, audio and visual formats and large-scale inability to seek treatment in the private sector due to cost leaving many disabled people having to rely on an already overstretched public system for support.

The fact that the new Government has proposed the development of a Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy and signalled ongoing support for the Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission through this legislation gives us some hope that these and other issues in the mental health space can still be addressed.

Our proposed amendment to the legislation aims to insert the voices of disabled people, especially those of Tāngata Whaiora/mental health service users and other impairment groups into the legislation.

This would mean that the Bill would then align with Article 4.3 of the UNCRPD which holds that disabled people, and their representative organisations are involved in all government decision making which impacts on disabled people.

## Recommended amendments

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| **Recommendation 1:** that Section 35 is amended through the addition of a new subclause d which would list the priority stakeholder population groups that the Minister must consult over the new strategy. |
| **Recommendation 2:** the population groups to be specifically consulted include Tāngata Whaiora/people with psychosocial disabilities/mental distress, Māori, Pasifika, ethnic communities, women, disabled people, LGBQTA+ people, rural communities and any other population group which the Minister may decide to add from time-to-time. |

## Other issues

While sitting outside the scope of this legislation, we hope that the Bill will provide impetus for government to appoint qualified disabled people to Te Hiringa Mahara Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission, base the new strategy around the social and human rights models of disability, ensure that mental health and addictions are treated as one and that this country’s high suicide rates, especially amongst Māori, young people and disabled people, can be tackled more effectively.

Ultimately, any mental health strategy needs to be underpinned by a well-resourced health system and through governments and all political parties embracing societal changes which celebrate diversity and the need for greater equity as well.

DPA views the creation of a holistic Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy as being one of the most important ways in which we can create a society where mental wellbeing prevails for all.

1. <https://www.health.govt.nz/nz-health-statistics/surveys/new-zealand-health-survey/snapshots-2020-21-new-zealand-health-survey/psychological-distress-disability-status> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)