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To Wellington City Council

Please find attached DPA’s submission on the Economic Wellbeing Strategy

Disabled Persons Assembly NZ

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# Introduction

The 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 to 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
* celebrating innovation and good practice

# The submission

DPA welcomes the opportunity to submit on the Wellington City Council’s Economic Wellbeing Strategy.

DPA is pleased to see that Council has acknowledged disabled people’s perspectives in the WCC Economic Wellbeing Strategy document., including the barriers we face to our participation in everyday life, such as access to the physical and built environment in, for example, the placement of signs on footpaths and lack of access to buildings, information, and communication. However, Council needs to better acknowledge the role that disabled people play economically as workers, consumers, and entrepreneurs within the city’s economy and should act to facilitate the removal of any remaining barriers to doing so.

The barriers disabled people face to our full economic participation can be seen in the disproportionate rate of unemployment for disabled people in New Zealand, with around 290,000 disabled New Zealanders between the ages of 15-64 recorded as not currently working. Only 22% of disabled people are employed, and 70% of those not working would like to be employed.[[1]](#footnote-2) In the greater Wellington region, 22% are disabled, which equates to an estimated 114,000 people.[[2]](#footnote-3) However, this number is much higher when accounting for population growth. These percentages are even higher for Māori when considering age adjustment, with 32% of Māori adults represented in disability data.

DPA supports the main aims of the Strategy and welcomes references made to the need to improve areas such as skills development and career pathways for disabled people within the local workforce. However, in Part B of the Draft Strategy, there are few references made to other economic issues facing disabled people, let alone women, LGBTI+, youth/students and ethnic peoples as marginalised communities. There needs to be greater reference made under the objective of building a business-friendly city to recognising the role that LGBTI+, youth and disabled-run businesses are already making to the Wellington economy and the need to continually nurture and support them. These groups should be a full part of the economic vision for the city going forward and, therefore, accommodating the specific economic needs and issues faced by these communities is vital if the city is to build a more inclusive economy.

Our focus in this submission is on the needs and interests of disabled people whilst recognising that there are people within our community who identify as disabled and are multiply marginalised, i.e., as disabled LGBTI+, disabled women, or disabled youth/tamariki, etcetera.

Overall, we are supportive of the Economic Wellbeing Strategy’s proposed outcomes of:

* Outcome 1: Sustainable business and career pathways
* Outcome 2: Transitioning to a Circular Economy
* Outcome 3: A Business-Friendly City
* Outcome 4: Centre of creativity and digital innovation
* Outcome 5: Celebrate our Capital City Status
* Outcome 6: A dynamic city heart and thriving suburban centres

More specifically, DPA welcomes the initiatives recommended under Outcome 1 to support disabled people and rangatahi/youth into sustainable and fulfilling careers. We also welcome Council’s commitment to supporting programmes which will open sustainable career pathways into the WCC (Wellington City Council) itself through internship programmes as is the case with the opening of the Skills Centre in partnership with Fulton Hogan. However, there is a need to extend this recognition to mature workers seeking to return to the labour market and whom still have considerable contributions to make. This would assist many disabled people who are seeking to return to the workforce after a period of rehabilitation/training, for example if they have acquired their impairment through injury.

Stemming from this, DPA specifically welcomes the proposal to partner with the new Ministry for Disabled People (working title) to break down employment barriers for disabled people. However, there is a strong need for Council to engage with disabled-led and young disabled people’s led employment and training initiatives as part of this. An example of this is Mahi Tika – Equity in Employment, an employment programme being piloted by DPA in the Waikato region, where disabled people mentor other disabled people on their journey into the employment or training of their choice.

DPA is currently exploring options for a wider rollout of Mahi Tika – Equity in Employment and would be happy to engage in discussions with the WCC around its potential implementation in the Wellington City and Greater Wellington regions.

DPA fully supports Objective 2 in terms of the Transition to a Circular Economy as being important in moves to maintain economic activity but in a way which balances the principles of ecological sustainability and social justice as we navigate climate change. Indeed, disabled people are one of the groups most heavily impacted by climate change and will stand to be more so if it intensifies.[[3]](#footnote-4) Therefore, we believe that Council should involve disabled people and disabled people’s organisations (DPOs) in discussions around developing programmes which will help build the circular economy in Wellington.

DPA believes that if Objective 3 of building a more Business Friendly City is to be realised that the barriers to disabled people to accessing the local economy as both consumers and employees need to be removed. Aligned with this, the Council’s regulatory agencies should work in collaboration with disabled people and our organisations in reaching out to the business community and other associated stakeholders to progressively remove all physical and attitudinal barriers to the participation of disabled people in the local economy. The ultimate objective should be to create a city which is universally accessible and designed for the inclusion of all people, including disabled people. Furthermore, businesses and organisations which are led and/or owned by disabled people should be supported through all phases of their establishment, development and growth through a programme of social procurement led by the WCC and central government and Māori authorities.

In terms of Outcome 4 around the idea of building Wellington up to be a centre of creativity and digital innovation, DPA welcomes the proposal to support businesses and organisations to make their digital offerings more accessible and inclusive to a wide range of people and customers and this should include to disabled people. To this end, Council, through social procurement and other processes, should seek to support disabled-led and owned digital start-ups whose end goal is to remove the various digital barriers faced by disabled people, amongst others.

DPA welcomes the proposals under Objectives 5 and 6 of Celebrate our Capital City Status and that of building a dynamic city heart and thriving commercial centres. We note that the Strategy proposes the creation of experience precincts and activity spaces which is something that we welcome. However, DPA reiterates that any experience precincts or spaces should be universally accessible and co-designed in partnership with disabled people and our organisations. As part of this process, we would like to see support for experience precincts/spaces and events created by the disabled community that celebrate the disability community.

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

The UNCRPD Articles most relevant to our submission 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 24: Education
* Article 27: Work and employment
* Article 28: Adequate standard of living and social protection

The New Zealand Disability Strategy 2016-2026 outcomes most relevant to our submission are:

* Outcome 1: Education
* Outcome 2: Employment and social security
* Outcome 5: Accessibility
* Outcome 6: Attitudes

### Wider impact on Disabled People

DPA believes that having more disabled people as both earners and consumers will contribute to lifting economic growth as, for example, it was estimated by the NZ Institute of Economic Research in 2017 that the removal of accessibility and other barriers to our economic participation could boost national GDP by an estimated $1.4 billion per year.

That is why having disabled people as full participants within Wellington’s economy and recognising our value will be beneficial for the city in terms of its annual GDP.

Our specific recommendations are designed to help realise this goal.

# DPA’s recommendations

**Recommendation 1:** DPA recommends that Council engage with disabled people's organisations, such as DPA, around the potential role they can play in helping bring disabled-led employment programmes into the Greater Wellington region and in partnering with it as a vocational/employment choice for disabled people alongside existing programmes.

**Recommendation 2:** DPA recommends that disabled people should have the option of being part of paid internship and apprenticeship programmes offered by Council and industry partners. The public sector should set a standard of best practice in the employment of disabled people that encourages the private sector to do so. DPA also fully supports partnering with government agencies, the private sector and mana whenua to better support young people and older people into careers and tailor these services to better serve these communities.

**Recommendation 3:** DPA recommends that Council should include mature/older workers, including those who identify as disabled people, in any initiatives to develop career pathways for disabled people and other employment disadvantaged groups.

**Recommendation 4:** DPA recommends that Council should engage in discussions around the creation of a circular economy with both DPA and other disabled people’s organisations being involved.

**Recommendation 5:** DPA recommends that Council engages in social procurement with disabled person-led enterprises. It is particularly important to engage with disabled Māori to ensure self-determination in employment outcomes for tangata whaikaha and to promote Māori-led enterprises as outlined in the strategy.

**Recommendation 6:** DPA recommends that Council should support disabled person-owned and/or led digital start-up ventures, especially those which are dedicated to removing the digital barriers facing disabled people.

**Recommendation 7:** DPA recommends that Council, working in partnership with disabled people and our organisations, should reach out to the local business community to remove the barriers within the built and physical environment and to also improve the responsiveness of the local private sector towards disabled people as both customers and/or employees.

**Recommendation 8:** DPA recommends that Council create opportunities for disabled people to create experience precincts/spaces and events that celebrate the disability community which celebrate the contributions that disabled people make to both Wellington and Aotearoa.

# Conclusion

Overall, DPA welcomes this strategy as the beginning of a journey towards greater economic participation and prosperity for all Wellingtonians. Disabled people should be involved as full partners in this journey as employees, business owners and customers. All the barriers which prevent us from being full participants in the city’s economy should be gradually removed so that we can play our full role as equal partners and citizens. Both the Regional Policy Advisor/Acting Wellington Kaituitui and Kaitohtohu Whakawhanake – Research and Development Advisor are available to be reached out to over this strategy and for any hearings associated with it.

1. Ministry of Social Development. (2020). *Working Matters: An Action Plan to ensure disabled people and people with health conditions have an equal opportunity to access employment.* Retrieved from: <https://www.msd.govt.nz/documents/what-we-can-do/disability-services/disability-employment-action-plan/working-matters-2020-spreads.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Statistics New Zealand. (2013). *New Zealand Disability Survey.* Retrieved from: <http://archive.stats.govt.nz/~/media/Statistics/browse-categories/health/disabilities/2013-disability-survey-results/2013-disability-survey-word-version.docx> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. 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-4)