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To Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment and the Regional Skills Leadership Group

Please find attached DPA’s submission on the on draft Wellington Regional Workforce Plan

Disabled Persons Assembly NZ

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**Introduction**

The Disabled Persons Assembly NZ (DPA) is a pan-impairment disabled persons’ 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 Regional Workforce Plan.  We acknowledge and support the emphasis on upskilling and improving the employment prospects of disabled people, amongst other employment-disadvantaged groups, in the area.

There is a disproportionate rate of unemployment for disabled people in New Zealand, with around 290,000 disabled New Zealanders between the ages of 15-64 that are 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,[[2]](#footnote-3) which equates to roughly 114,000 people. However, this number is likely much higher when accounting for population growth. These percentages are much higher for Māori when considering age adjustment, with 32% of Māori adults represented in disability data.

Therefore, any moves to improve the employment status of disabled people through skills development, training/re-training and placement activities will benefit a considerable number of the Wellington region’s population.

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

The Draft Wellington Regional Workforce Plan lists five actions that are prioritised over a three-year plan. DPA supports these actions and recommends Wellington Regional Skills Leadership Group (WRSLG) also:

* 1. remove barriers to employment for marginalised communities, including disabled people, to maximise this underutilised workforce;
  2. fund disabled-led initiatives that enable disabled people to gain relevant skills for entering the workforce in the employment or training of their choice;
  3. provide opportunity for disabled people to connect with employer networks in order to build relationships and promote opportunities in gaining employment;
  4. provide disability responsiveness training to employers to help create inclusive workplaces; and
  5. engage with disabled youth and enable youth-led initiatives
  6. 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.

The plan identifies many of the challenges that the Wellington region’s labour market faces, and it is encouraging to see engagement and consultation with the disabled community continue to take place. DPA believes that the planned actions outlined by WRSLG will help address these challenges. However, it is important to consider self-determination in these actions. Disabled people need to lead actions that impact on our communities.

Most pressing is this need for disabled-led initiatives. There is great power in coming together with people of shared experience. For example, in Mahi Tika – Equity in Employment, the disabled-led employment programme DPA is currently piloting in the Waikato region, 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 WRSLG around its potential implementation in the Greater Wellington region.

In addition, sufficient funding is required for providing networking opportunities so that disabled people seeking employment can gain access to employers and build relationships that lead to employment opportunities, including self-employment.

DPA is also available to discuss other ways of advising on any potential initiatives that prioritise disabled people and work towards increasing equity in employment.

**DPA’s recommendations**

**Recommendation 1:** DPA recommends that WRSLG engages in social procurement with disabled person-led enterprises. It is particularly important to engage with tangata whaikaha / disabled Māori to ensure self-determination in employment outcomes and promote Māori-led enterprises.

**Recommendation 2:** DPA recommends that WRSLG develops an action plan to determine concrete outcomes and milestones for these initiatives and planned actions.

**Recommendation 3:** DPA recommends that WRSLG funds disabled person-led employment initiatives that enable disabled people to gain relevant skills for entering or re-entering the workforce in the employment or training of their choice.

**Recommendation 4:** DPA recommends that WRSLG funds programmes which assist disabled people to connect with employers in order to build relationships and promote opportunities in gaining or re-gaining employment.

**Recommendation 5:** DPA recommends that WRSLG and MBIE fund disabled person-led responsiveness educators to provide disability responsiveness training to employers in order to help create inclusive workplaces.

**Recommendation 6:** DPA recommends that WRSLG engage with disabled youth and enable youth-led initiatives.

**Recommendation 7:** DPA recommends that WRSLG 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.

**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 students, apprentices/trainees and workers. The barriers which prevent us from being full participants in training and employment should be progressively removed. Both the Regional Policy Advisor/Acting Wellington Kaituitui and Kaitohutohu Whakawhanake – Research and Development Advisor are available to be reached out to over this strategy as it progresses through the final approval and implementation stages.

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)