August 2023

To Auckland Council,

Please find attached DPA’s submission on Storm Recovery and Resilience Consultation

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/%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.

**UN 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 3 – General principles**
* **Article 9 – Accessibility**
* **Article 11 – Situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies**
* **Article 19 – Living independently and being included in the community**

**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**

# The Submission

DPA welcomes this opportunity to feedback on Auckland Council’s storm recovery and resilience consultation.

The disabled community are already being severely hit by the impacts of climate change and are expected to be one of the hardest hit population groups going forward, locally, nationally and internationally.[[1]](#footnote-2)

After reaching out to our members in Auckland following the January/February weather events DPA found that while many disabled people were resilient and had withstood the floods well, others had not. We heard stories about the impact that weather-enforced homelessness had on disabled people, exacerbated by the lack of accessible housing.

DPA is supportive of all efforts to both manage and reverse climate change and prevent any further damage to the planet we live on, not only for disabled people but for every one of us. However, we remain concerned that given the fiscal cuts which have been made by Auckland Council that priority may not be accorded to programmes around managing climate change and environmental degradation.

We were also concerned by recent reports that Auckland Council had cut back on stormwater and drainage maintenance prior to the first adverse weather events in February.

DPA commends Auckland Council for wanting to progress improvement and believes that disabled people, amongst other community stakeholders, should be a high priority group to be engaged with around its further development and implementation.

This submission will respond to some of the key areas outlined in the submission document and questionnaire which are:

* How was the disabled community affected by the extreme weather events in early 2023?
* How can Tāmaki Makaurau be better prepared for climate events in the future?
* Our views on the nine proposed initiatives.

**How was the disabled community affected by the extreme weather events in early 2023?**

DPA, in the immediate aftermath of the Auckland Anniversary Weekend flooding events and before Gabrielle struck, reached out to our members in the region to ascertain what their experiences had been like.

The feedback gleaned from these efforts included that while many disabled people were resilient and had withstood the floods well, others had not as we heard stories about the impact that weather-enforced homelessness had on disabled people, especially given the lack of accessible housing.  We also heard that there was some difficulty accessing support especially when it came to assisting with property clean ups and disruption of disability support services and activities.

We note that the new Whaikaha – Ministry of Disabled People initiated a response aimed at Auckland’s disabled community over both storm events by providing essential information and a coordinated response with disability organisations and service providers during these periods. The availability of funding from central government aimed at disabled people and their whānau and disability organisations also assisted during the clean-up and recovery period.

However, these storms reinforced the need from a civil defence perspective for timely information in accessible formats, good support systems, assistance to disabled people and their whānau in planning for disasters, and the ability to have well organised disability support systems and structures in the recovery phase as well.

We say this as one of the impacts of the weather events for some disabled people was the disruption to disability support services which resulted after the storms. Support services including personal assistance, home help and other supports were impacted for a short time and coming on top of difficulties encountered during peak Covid in accessing these same supports caused some additional stress to disabled people. The support received from Whaikaha and other agencies helped with resolving these problems.

Another aspect was the disruption to transport links and accessible transport options including buses and mobility vans. Some disabled people reported being stranded on the Friday evening of the Anniversary Weekend storm as transport routes began to be quickly impacted meaning that people, for example, were stranded at bus stations and train platforms.

We recognise that both disabled and non-disabled people were stranded but the lack of accessible transport options mean that disabled people can be doubly disadvantaged if sudden weather events or other emergencies impact the city’s transport system.

One of the most serious post-weather event impacts was the need for accessible housing to live in if houses were damaged. DPA heard about a wheelchair user needing to sleep in their wheelchair for three nights after their house became flooded as one example of this.

DPA has stressed in various submissions to Auckland Council the need for more universal design, accessible housing to be consented and constructed in Auckland. The early 2023 storms indicated that given the impact of an ongoing housing crisis and the lack of accessible dwellings that when emergencies strike, there are few alternative options for disabled people to turn to, especially if their homes are rendered uninhabitable.

**How can Tāmaki Makaurau be better prepared for climate events in the future?**

DPA has made many submissions on the issue of climate change and its impact on disabled people in recent times to both central and local government.

In each of those, we have emphasised the need for disabled people to be at the centre of climate change discussions going forward. We have been inspired by the model provided by the Bristol Disabled People’s Forum in the UK where the local council in that city has engaged (and continues to engage in) climate change planning and dialogue with the local disabled community through the forum. The city council co-developed a plan with the Disability Equality Forum (a Bristol-based disabled people’s organisation which is cross-impairment based like DPA) around climate change and its impact on disabled people.

In terms of developing the proposed Tāmaki Makarau Recovery Plan, we believe that disabled people need to be identified as key stakeholders in this process, which would see Tāmaki Makaurau’s disabled community working with both Auckland Council and central government on this project as co-design partners sitting alongside other community groups.

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| **Recommendation 1:** that Council make Tāmaki Makaurau’s disabled community a key stakeholder in developing the proposed Tāmaki Makaurau Recovery Plan. |

DPA supports the four objectives outlined in the document as underpinning any plan including reducing flooding risks, avoid creating new flood risks, raise people’s awareness of flood risks and being prepared for flooding events.

**The nine proposed initiatives**

DPA supports the nine proposed initiatives to manage future flood risks and support for the most at-risk communities as part of the Making Space for Water programme.

These include:

* Increased maintenance.
* Flood intelligence
* Community-led flood resilience.
* Stream rehabilitation
* Developing flood management solutions for rural settlements.
* Culvert and bridge upgrades
* The creation of blue-green networks.
* Overland flow path management
* Working with property owners in high-risk areas to develop solutions.

DPA believes that increased maintenance in the form of maintaining strong, effective and efficient drainage, stormwater and sewerage systems is vital to stave off the worst-case scenarios which eventuated in early 2023.

As we said at the beginning of this submission, DPA was disappointed to hear alongside other organisations and community members that Auckland Council had cut back on stormwater and drainage maintenance as part of initial budget management efforts before the floods.

DPA raised our concerns around Auckland Council’s proposed cuts in our submission to the Council Budget earlier this year. We also critiqued cuts to environmental programmes which are essential to address the impacts of climate change. As we pointed out at the time, fiscal austerity on the part of both central and local government can have serious consequences and as has proven to be the case, as making essential water system maintenance a lower priority has rebounded on both Auckland Council itself and on the communities it serves.

DPA urges Auckland Council to maintain and increase drainage and stormwater maintenance as being one of its highest priorities going forward. DPA would like to reiterate that disabled people and other marginalised members of our community are severely impacted every time an emergency event, including floods, happen.

Auckland Council should do its utmost to prevent worst case flooding scenarios developing which include emergencies involving mass evacuations, property damage, serious injury and even death.

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| **Recommendation 2:** that Auckland Council prioritise regular stormwater and drainage maintenance in all parts of the city to avoid worst case flooding scenarios. |

DPA supports the creation of community-led flood resilience programmes. We note the proposal to develop community flood readiness advice, tools and resources for Aucklanders, including on how to manage flood risks and what to do before, during and after storms.

DPA has proposed in the draft Civil Defence Emergency Management (CDEM) Plan for Auckland that all emergency awareness programmes (including community flood awareness) be targeted at specific communities including the disabled community and that information and resources are available in accessible formats for disabled and D/deaf people including New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL), Braille, Easy Read, Large Print and audio formats.

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| **Recommendation 3:** that all community flood awareness programmes and resources be targeted at specific communities including the disabled community and made available in accessible formats including NZSL, Braille, Easy Read, Large Print and audio formats. |

Disabled people should also be one of the groups prioritised for assistance in the event of flooding or another emergency. Disabled people should be able to easily register their details online, or if they are not online, through another accessible means with CDEM and any community networks so that they can be prioritised for assistance during an emergency.

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| **Recommendation 4:** that disabled people should be one of the groups prioritised for assistance in the event of flooding and other emergency and any disabled or D/deaf person should be able to easily register their details online or in another accessible way with CDEM and community networks to enable priority assistance in emergencies. |

DPA supports the creation of blue-green networks as a way of creating green open spaces where water can flow through as a means of flood control.

DPA believes that these spaces should be made fully accessible for everyone, including disabled people and that our disabled community should be involved in the co-design of these spaces to ensure that they are.

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| **Recommendation 5:** that blue-green spaces be made fully accessible for everyone, and that disabled people are involved in their design. |

**Working with property owners - housing**

As mentioned earlier in this submission, finding accessible housing can be an issue for disabled people whose own accessible homes are damaged or become unliveable following an emergency.

DPA believes that Auckland Council working with both disabled people and central government should come up with solutions to ensure that disabled people can be re-housed in accessible accommodation (preferably emergency or temporary accommodation) until they can return to their own homes.

If homes are deemed unable to be moved back into then disabled people should be re-housed with support from central government and/or iwi and hapu as soon as practicable.

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| **Recommendation 6:** that Auckland Council work with both disabled people and government to ensure that disabled people can be re-housed in accessible accommodation until they can return to their own homes or permanently re-housed in accessible housing within the shortest possible timeframe if homes are deemed unliveable. |

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)