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Please find below the Disabled Persons Assembly NZ submission on the 2021 Budget Policy Statement

Disabled Persons Assembly NZ Inc.

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**Introducing Disabled Persons Assembly NZ**

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

**Submission on the Budget Policy Statement**

DPA would like to make the following comments on the Budget Policy Statement

**Wellbeing and COVID-19 focus**

DPA supports the overall focus of the budget policy statement on wellbeing and on responding to COVID-19, including keeping COVID-19 out of our communities.

**Upholding Disability Rights During a Pandemic.**

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities ( UNCRPD) requires signatory governments to protect and promote the rights of disabled people.

In particular, Article 11[[1]](#footnote-2) requires governments to uphold disability rights in situations of risk and emergency and put in place measures to protect and ensure the safety of disabled people.

In Jan 2021, the Independent Monitoring Mechanism (IMM) released a report that highlighted the realities and challenges disabled people in NZ faced during the COVID-19 emergency. [[2]](#footnote-3) It is clear that overall disabled people have been disproportionally impacted by the COVID pandemic.

The IMM report strongly recommends collaboration in decision making with tāngata whaikaha Māori (disabled Māori). It also makes 23 other recommendations across seven sectors – access to essential goods, services, and spaces; decision making, participation, and data; access to information and communications; education; health; work and employment; and access to justice and disabled people in places of detention.

DPA would like to see Government follow up and implement the recommendations of the IMM report and ensure resourcing in the budget to enable this to happen. A budget that does not mitigate the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on the wellbeing of disabled people will have failed to deliver on its aim.

**Recommendation 1:** DPA urges that there be sufficient resourcing in the budget for the IMM report recommendations to be implemented. In particular, there needs to be significantly improved access for disabled people to food, transport, habilitation services, housing, and public spaces.

**Disabled People and Wellbeing**

We know that wellbeing outcomes are much poorer for disabled people and their whānau across a wide range of measures[[3]](#footnote-4) [[4]](#footnote-5) [[5]](#footnote-6)

There is an opportunity in this budget to both make a real difference to disabled people’s wellbeing and improve outcomes for disabled people and our whānau. A “wellbeing” budget that does not deliver for disabled people, who have some of the poorest wellbeing outcomes in our communities, cannot be said to have delivered on its aim.

In order to effectively improve wellbeing for disabled people, and ensure we are not left further behind, disabled people need to be explicitly included in the budget measures and there needs to be targeted measures to improve wellbeing for disabled people, particularly for disabled Māori, Pacific and children who experience some of the greatest inequality in our communities. Failure to directly address wellbeing for disabled people risks disabled people being left behind and increasing inequality for disabled people and their whānau.

There is strong evidence that unequal societies are more materially competitive, more hierarchical and more stressful for everyone[[6]](#footnote-7). It benefits everyone to ensure that no demographic or group is left behind in poverty or wellbeing outcomes.

For any initiative, the best approach is a partnership one, where disabled people and whānau are empowered, resourced and supported to come up with solutions to improve their lives.

The principles that form the basis of Enabling Good Lives[[7]](#footnote-8), which underpins the current and ongoing transformation of the disability support sector is one way that this approach can be implemented.

Each of the five budget priority areas in the BPS 2021 have the potential to significantly impact on the wellbeing of disabled people and for this reason it is essential that we are included within the delivery of these.

Below we list our recommendations for each budget priority area to address current inequities for disabled people and their whānau.

**Budget Priority 1: Just Transition – Supporting the transition to a climate-resilient, sustainable and low-emissions economy while building back from COVID-19.**

DPA strongly supports investment in the transition to a climate-resilient, sustainable and low-emissions economy with the proviso that this investment is done in a way that does not lock in inequality for disabled people; and recognises us as experts in our own lives and leaders in equitable solutions.

DPA notes that many of the projects that have been flagged for investment in building back from COVID-19 involve transport and housing projects.As we have previously highlighted**[[8]](#footnote-9)**, both transport and housing are areas where disabled people face major barriers to access and where lack of access has a major impact on our lives and ability to live independently in the community.

DPA is concerned that there remains a risk that significant infrastructure projects, especially those that are fast-tracked, will result in infrastructure that is inaccessible for disabled people. This has the unfortunate effect of ‘locking in’ inaccessibility for a significant period of time - often decades.

There is currently often poor or non-existent engagement with disabled people into the design, development and placement of infrastructure. Consultation processes are therefore key to ensuring that accessibility is fully integrated into new projects.

From past experience, when building and infrastructure projects get fast tracked (as happened with some of the early projects post the Christchurch Earthquakes), DPA has seen that accessibility often ends up being seriously compromised.

Getting accessibility built in from the start is particularly important because it is often impossible (or prohibitively expensive) to retrospectively add in accessibility once a project has been built.

**Recommendation 2:** Any funding in the budget tagged for projects and initiatives supporting the transition to a climate-resilient, sustainable and low-emissions economy must meet the highest possible accessibility standards.

**Low-Emissions Transport; Electric Vehicles and Public Transport.**

Currently there is a mode shift underway from petrol or diesel vehicles to low emissions public transport and electric vehicles; both of which, if not done appropriately, can have negative impacts for disabled people.

**Electric Vehicles**

DPA would like to draw attention to the Climate Change Commission’s draft advice to Government[[9]](#footnote-10) which recognises that public transport is not always an option for some disabled people and that such people are heavily reliant on driving or being driven.

While electric vehicles have lower emissions than petrol or diesel vehicles, there are significant issues with them for disabled people:

* They tend to be more expensive and are therefore out of reach for many disabled people who are much more likely to live in poverty,
* They tend to be smaller, making it difficult or impossible for some disabled people requiring larger wheelchairs and other equipment, to use them,
* They are much quieter than conventional vehicles, posing a safety risk to disabled people, older people and children.

**Recommendation 3:** That the budget sets up a grant or subsidy to support disabled people to purchase suitable electric vehicles so that disabled people who need larger vehicles to transport wheelchairs are not disadvantaged by the phasing out of more affordable petrol and diesel versions.

**Recommendation 4:** That, in consultation with disabled people, standards on both the minimum noise level and the type of noise to be omitted by electric vehicles are brought in. This would not only reduce the risk of accident to disabled people but would improve safety across the population.

**Public Transport**

While public transport is not an option for some disabled people, there are other disabled people who are highly reliant on public transport to access work and other commitments because they cannot drive due to their impairment. It is vital that all public transport is fully accessible to disabled people. A co-benefit of this is that older people, people travelling with small children and others with restricted mobility would benefit also.

Last year during lockdown when there was limited or no access to public transport for many disabled people, the total mobility scheme was made free for users (up to a cap). This completely transformed some people’s lives because for the first time some disabled people found they had the ability to participate in society on a more equal basis to others and many disabled people are keen for this access to continue.

DPA notes that both the IMM Making Disability Rights Real report[[10]](#footnote-11) and the IMM COVID-19 report[[11]](#footnote-12) highlight the importance of ensuring access to reliable and consistent transport options nationwide for disabled people and recommend increasing funding for fully subsidised transport for disabled people.

There is also a successful Accessibility Concession scheme implemented in the Waikato[[12]](#footnote-13) that provides free fares on public transport for disabled people who are unable to drive.

**Recommendation 5:** Significantly increase funding in the budget for fully subsidised transport schemes for disabled people who cannot access public transport and ensure access to reliable and consistent transport options nationwide.

**Energy Efficient and Accessible Housing:**

Disabled people are less likely to own their own homes and are more likely to live in rented accommodation so DPA welcomes the recent introduction of standards for heating and insulation in rented accommodation, however we are concerned that the scarcity of affordable and accessible rental housing is putting disabled people in significant hardship.

DPA notes that at the end of 2020 there were more than a thousand New Zealanders on Kainga Ora’s waiting list for accessible state homes.[[13]](#footnote-14) This situation is unacceptable, and breaches disabled people’s right to safe secure housing.

DPA recognises new homes will need to be significantly more energy efficient than current ones and that disabled people will benefit from making energy efficiency improvements to their homes. However, if houses are not accessible to disabled people, then their energy efficiency doesn’t really matter for them.

We urge Government implement legislation to require all new houses to meet universal design standards so that they can be easily made accessible. This would not only mean that disabled people could benefit from warmer, drier, more energy efficient homes, but it would have the added benefit of allowing older people to age in place. This was a key recommendation of the third IMM report: Making Disability Rights Real[[14]](#footnote-15).

**Recommendation 6:** Significantly increase investment in State housing with priority given to greatly expanding the number of accessible state homes so that no disabled person is left homeless or stranded in inaccessible or temporary housing.

**Recommendation 7:** Amend the building act to require all new housing to meet universal design standards.

**Budget Priority 2: Future of Work – Enabling all New Zealanders and New Zealand businesses to benefit from new technologies and lift productivity and wages through innovation, and support into employment those most affected by COVID-19, including women and young people.**

Unemployment rates for disabled people are significantly higher than for non-disabled. [[15]](#footnote-16) The good news is that in recent years, there has been a gradual decline in unemployment rates among disabled people (from 13% in June 2017 down to 8% in June 2020).

However, from June 2020 onwards, it is clear that COVID-19 has negatively impacted on employment for disabled people, with unemployment rates among disabled people (aged 15-64) increasing to 11% in December 2020.

Among disabled women this impact has been even more pronounced, with post COVID-19 unemployment rates rising to significantly higher levels (at 15%) than that of unemployed disabled men (at 8% in December).

In comparison, unemployment rates for the same period were at 5% among non-disabled men and women.

**Recommendation 8:** DPA urges government to recognise that disabled people, especially disabled women, are among those most affected by COVID-19 and ensure resourcing for employment support programmes that target this demographic .

**Budget Priority 3: Māori and Pacific – Lifting Māori and Pacific incomes, skills and opportunities, and combatting the impacts of COVID-19.**

We know that Māori have a higher prevalence of disability[[16]](#footnote-17) . Any measures to lift Māori and Pasifika incomes, skills and opportunities has to include those who are disabled, otherwise up to a third of the demographic intended to be targeted by this priority will be excluded.

We also know that we do not currently distribute support for disabled people equitably. Because of complex application processes Māori and Pacific disabled peoples are often disadvantaged. For example, over the last decade, New Zealand Europeans have received consistently higher amounts from the Disability Allowance than Māori or Pacific Peoples.[[17]](#footnote-18)

It is evident that there is a need to both increase the amount of support to disabled people and distribute it more fairly. To address this, in the short-term, DPA recommends changing the Disability Allowance to a fixed amount of at least $65.36 a week (the current maximum) and simplifying the application process. This is likely to reduce ethnic inequality with the Disability Allowance and reduce income inadequacy amongst disabled people and their whānau.

As income inadequacy is higher amongst disabled people under 65 years of age[[18]](#footnote-19), this change could be brought in first for disabled people under 65 years of age. This would limit the cost of the change (in June 2019, 55.7% of people receiving the Disability Allowance were over 65), while addressing poverty amongst disabled people.

Māori are also more likely to be carers, so included as part of this priority there needs to be measures supporting disabled Māori and Pacific people and their carers. One change that would make a significant difference is fully funding Carer Support payments so that carers, especially those on low incomes, including Māori and Pacific, don’t have to pay a top up out of their own pocket to access respite care.

To lift the incomes of disabled Māori and Pacific people, DPA recommends the budget include the following measures:

**Recommendation 9:**

Change the Disability Allowance to a fixed amount of at least $65.36 a week (the current maximum) and simplify the application process to be more accessible[[19]](#footnote-20) and equitable in its distribution particularly for Māori and Pacific people

**Recommendation 10:**

Fully fund the Carer Support payment, especially for those on low incomes.

**Budget Priority 4, Child Wellbeing – Reducing child poverty and improving child wellbeing**

Disabled children are far more likely to live in poverty and experience material hardship than non-disabled children and children who live in a household where at least one person is disabled are also over twice as likely to experience material hardship than children in households with no disabled people.

Recently released data[[20]](#footnote-21) show that nearly 1 in 5 disabled children live in material hardship (19.9 percent), **this is more than double the rate of non-disabled children who live in material hardship** (9.8 percent).

Similarly, nearly 1 in 5 children who live in a household where at least one person is disabled live in material hardship. **This is more than two-and-a-half times the rate for children who did not live in a household with at least one disabled person** (7.3 percent).

Material hardship is indicated by the number of households missing out on more than 6 of the 17 basic things most people would regard as essentials. Examples of essential items lacked include: the household respondent reporting serious restriction on eating fresh fruit or vegetables, putting off a visit to the doctor because of a lack of money, or not being able to pay the gas or electricity bill on time.

DPA finds these statistics absolutely appalling. They confirm what has been known about the link between disability and poverty for years.

“*… if disabled children are more likely to live in poverty, it follows that their siblings and parents are also more likely to live in poverty. Likewise, because disabled adults are more likely to live in poverty, then their children will also be more likely to live in poverty”.*[[21]](#footnote-22)

DPA urges government to step up and address this inequity by lifting incomes of NZ’s poorest families , raising benefit levels and increasing both the disability allowance and the child disability allowance.

If government is serious about lifting children out of poverty, then a key part of this priority has to include targeted measures supporting disabled children and their whānau as well as disabled parents/carers.

To lift disabled children out of poverty and improve their wellbeing, DPA strongly recommends that as a minimum the budget includes the following measures:

**Recommendation 11:**

Substantially increase the rate of the Child Disability Allowance to help mitigate the impact of disability on disabled children and their whānau, and reform the application process to make it more accessible as recommended by the Child Poverty Action Group 2016 report[[22]](#footnote-23).

**Recommendation 12:**

Change the Disability Allowance to a fixed amount of at least $65.36 a week (the current maximum) and simplify the application process to be more accessible[[23]](#footnote-24) and equitable in its distribution (see recommendation 10). This will benefit children living in households where a parent or other household member is disabled.

**Budget Priority 5: Physical and Mental Wellbeing – Supporting improved health outcomes for all New Zealanders and keeping COVID-19 out of our communities.**

Disabled people have some of the poorest health[[24]](#footnote-25) and wellbeing[[25]](#footnote-26) outcomes compared to the general population. Some disabled people are significantly more at risk from COVID-19. Of particular concern is new research that suggests that people with intellectual disability are about six times more likely to die if they contract COVID-19, a higher risk than almost anyone else.[[26]](#footnote-27)

More generally, people with a learning disability have some of the poorest health outcomes of any demographic, so there is an urgent need for measures that specifically target this group.

This is highlighted by the huge gap in life expectancy for people with a learning disability, with data[[27]](#footnote-28) from the Ministry of Health showing that women with a learning disability have a life expectancy nearly 23 years less than the average for all NZ women, while men with a learning disability over 18 years less than the average for all NZ men.

This means that as part of this budget priority there needs to be specific measures to support improved health outcomes for disabled people, particularly those with an intellectual or learning disability without which there is a risk that disabled people and their whānau will fall even further behind.

Work has been underway for many years to transform disability support services to deliver better outcomes for disabled people with localised trials of the Enabling Good Lives [[28]](#footnote-29) approach in Christchurch, Waikato and Mid Central.

The Waikato demonstration reports [[29]](#footnote-30) in particular show vastly improved outcomes for disabled people and their whānau when they are given choice and control over their support systems.

DPA considers that one of the simplest ways to quickly improve wellbeing outcomes for disabled people would be to resource the roll out of the Enabling Good Lives approach across the country.

To ensure that this budget priority includes disabled New Zealanders and to ensure that they are not left behind, DPA would like to see government take the following steps:

**Recommendation 13**:

Prioritise disabled people who are more at risk from COVID-19 for vaccination and follow up care.

**Recommendation 14:**

Resourcing for initiatives to improve health literacy and access to primary health care for disabled people especially for people with a learning disability.

**Recommendation 15:**

Resource the transformation of the disability support services to enable the roll out of the Enabling Good Lives approach across the country which will help improve the physical and mental wellbeing of many disabled people.

**In Conclusion**

DPA supports an overall focus on wellbeing and responding to COVID in the budget, especially since wellbeing and health outcomes for disabled people and their whānau remain much poorer than the general population. DPA is deeply concerned that if the budget does not include measures that directly benefit disabled people and their whānau, we will only end up seeing the wellbeing of our community fall even further behind.

There is an opportunity in this budget to both make a real difference to disabled people’s wellbeing and to improve outcomes for disabled people and their whānau. It is an opportunity that we urge the government to take up.

1. [Article 11 – Situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies | United Nations Enable](https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/article-11-situations-of-risk-and-humanitarian-emergencies.html) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. <https://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz/resources/making-disability-rights-real-pandemic> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. [Child poverty statistics for households with disabled people released for the first time | Stats NZ](https://www.stats.govt.nz/news/child-poverty-statistics-for-households-with-disabled-people-released-for-the-first-time) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. <https://ccsdisabilityaction.org.nz/assets/resource-files/The-State-of-wellbeing-and-equality-FINAL-ONLINE.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. <http://www.inequality.org.nz/understand/> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. <http://www.enablinggoodlives.co.nz/> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. [https://www.dpa.org.nz/store/doc/DPA-submission-COVID-19-Recovery-(Fast-track-Consenting)-Bill-June-2020.docx](https://www.dpa.org.nz/store/doc/DPA-submission-COVID-19-Recovery-%28Fast-track-Consenting%29-Bill-June-2020.docx)

 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. [Our advice and evidence » Climate Change Commission (climatecommission.govt.nz)](https://www.climatecommission.govt.nz/get-involved/our-advice-and-evidence) [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. See recommendations 57-60 [Disability rights report highlights systemic inequities and opportunities for real change | Ombudsman New Zealand](https://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz/news/disability-rights-report-highlights-systemic-inequities-and-opportunities-real-change) [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. <https://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz/resources/making-disability-rights-real-pandemic> [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. [Accessibility Concession – BUSIT](https://busit.co.nz/fares/accessibility-concession/) [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. [Disabled man enduring 'very stressful process' as wait for accessible house to rent continues | 1 NEWS | TVNZ](https://www.tvnz.co.nz/one-news/new-zealand/disabled-man-enduring-very-stressful-process-wait-accessible-house-rent-continues) [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. [Disability rights report highlights systemic inequities and opportunities for real change | Ombudsman New Zealand](https://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz/news/disability-rights-report-highlights-systemic-inequities-and-opportunities-real-change) [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. [Labour market statistics (disability): December 2020 quarter | Stats NZ](https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/labour-market-statistics-disability-december-2020-quarter) [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. <http://archive.stats.govt.nz/~/media/Statistics/browse-categories/health/disabilities/He-haua-maori-findings-from-2013-disability-survey/he-haua-maori-disability-survey.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. <https://www.dpa.org.nz/store/doc/Post-Election-2020-Briefing-For-MPs.docx> [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. See pages 10 and 11 of this report for more on this: <https://www.ccsdisabilityaction.org.nz/assets/resource-files/The-State-of-wellbeing-and-equality-FINAL-ONLINE2.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. <https://www.dpa.org.nz/store/doc/Post-Election-2020-Briefing-For-MPs.docx> [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. [Child poverty statistics for households with disabled people released for the first time | Stats NZ](https://www.stats.govt.nz/news/child-poverty-statistics-for-households-with-disabled-people-released-for-the-first-time) [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. <https://ccsdisabilityaction.org.nz/assets/resource-files/The-State-of-wellbeing-and-equality-FINAL-ONLINE.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. <https://www.cpag.org.nz/assets/161102%20CPAG%20Otara%20CDA%20report%20CS6-WEB_01.pdf> suggestions to improve accessibility to the CDA included: • Increase promotion of the CDA to families and doctors, especially the eligibility criteria - by Ministry of Social Development and Ministry of Health. • Simplify the application procedure for CDA. • Better funding for culturally appropriate advocacy services by MoH and DHBs. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
23. <https://www.dpa.org.nz/store/doc/Post-Election-2020-Briefing-For-MPs.docx> [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
24. <http://www.donaldbeasley.org.nz/assets/Uploads/publications/primary-health-and-disability-a-review-of-the-literature.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
25. <https://ccsdisabilityaction.org.nz/assets/resource-files/The-State-of-wellbeing-and-equality-FINAL-ONLINE.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
26. [https://www.disabilityscoop.com/2021/03/10/intellectual-disability-among-greatest-covid-19-risk-factors-study-finds/](https://www.disabilityscoop.com/2021/03/10/intellectual-disability-among-greatest-covid-19-risk-factors-study-finds/29234/?fbclid=IwAR0vyDIkp-LXq1OlLsl-hkO3dUXp2FApM0nX4tYvVapx6y_bgLUlmdbDdW0) [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
27. <https://www.health.govt.nz/publication/health-indicators-new-zealanders-intellectual-disability> [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
28. <http://www.enablinggoodlives.co.nz/> [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
29. <http://www.enablinggoodlives.co.nz/assets/Uploads/EGL-Waikato-Phase-Three-Evaluation-Full-Report.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-30)