

Hon Louise Upston

Minister for the Community and Voluntary Sector
Minister for Disability Issues
Minister for Social Development and Employment
Minister for Child Poverty Reduction



22 JUL 2024

Mojo Mathers
Chief Executive
Disabled Person's Assembly NZ Inc.
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Dear Mojo

Firstly, thank you for your important role and advocacy on behalf of disabled people and apologies for the time taken to reply to your letter.

Since 14 May when you wrote the open letter there has been significant activity to address many of the issues raised in your letter.

Importantly, be assured that there has been no reduction to the Disability Support budget. One of the most important responses to the issues that you have raised was a budget commitment of an additional \$1.1 billion over five years for the Disability Support Budget. This has included funding for the 2023/2024 budget as there was real risk that the Disability Support appropriation was going to be overspent to a level that would have contravened the Public Finance Act.

Other urgent decisions have been required to address this issue and ensure that critical supports and services such as access to essential disability equipment could be maintained. The decision to change the rules and restrict the purchases that people could make with their personal budgets was one of the key actions to address the forecast overspend. It was a decision taken to ensure supports could be retained to those with the greatest needs.

The last few months will have been challenging for many as these changes have been put in place. Many of the important issues raised in your letter will be difficult to achieve if the Disability Support System is not fiscally sustainable.

Disabled people and their families need a system that is fair across the country so that disabled New Zealanders can access support based on their needs. It is important those with the greatest needs are prioritised for the support that is available. There is real benefit in people having choice on what supports are

provided and who provides that support, which needs to be balanced with the having a system that is fiscally sustainable and fair.

It was for this reason that an Independent Review of the Disability Support System was put in place to provide insights and recommendations on how the system can be stabilised in the short term as well as consider the medium to long term approaches required.

As the independent review panel has been undertaking their work, I have taken the opportunity to check in with representatives of the disability community, those who use services and those who provide services. I have valued their insights and their generosity providing feedback. There have been diverse views expressed in those meetings and I am certain that this is not the first time that people have expressed these views. Some of the messages from those meetings are:

- The lack of consistency in decision making on eligibility and levels of support across the country
- The complexity of the disability support system
- The importance of continuing to involve disabled people and making sure that the views of grassroots disabled people are sought alongside representative groups
- Choice and control is valued by those accessing supports
- Waste is more likely to occur when funded services are not responsive to disabled peoples' needs
- The need to ensure that we have the right focus on early intervention, which can reduce the need for ongoing high levels of support
- The need to invest in family/whānau
- The changes to flexible funding have been difficult for many
- Some of the systems to manage funding and contracting mean that there is difficulty in managing budgets and knowing what is being achieved for disabled people
- The need for a more consistent approach to driving the quality of services, safeguarding those who are most at risk, and responding to complaints
- Everyone wants to make the system work well for disabled people and their families.

I have welcomed the opportunity to be the Minister of Disability Issues and I do not underestimate the challenges ahead. Once again thank you for taking the time to write and share the perspectives of organisations representing disabled people.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Louise Upston', written in a cursive style.

Hon Louise Upston
Minister for Disability Issues

cc. Hon Nicola Willis
Minister of Finance