

Disability Council NSW 2024 year in review

The Disability Council NSW is the official advisory body to the NSW Government on matters relating to people with disability and disability inclusion.

The Council's primary responsibilities under the *Disability Inclusion Act 2014* are to:

- **Monitor** the implementation of Government policy
- **Advise** the Minister on emerging issues relating to people with disability and about the content and implementation of the State Disability Inclusion Plan and disability inclusion action plans
- **Advise** public authorities about the content and implementation of disability inclusion action plans
- **Promote** the inclusion of people with disability in the community and promote community awareness of matters concerning the interests of people with disability and their families
- **Consult** with similar councils and bodies, and people with disability, and
- **Conduct research** about matters relating to people with disability.

Council comprises at least eight and no more than 12 persons as prescribed under section 16 of the Act. The Governor appoints members as individuals for up to four years, and they are eligible for re-appointment. The Act requires that the majority of members are people with disability. During 2024, we experienced a resignation but were also pleased to welcome a new member. We now have 12 members: three leaving the Council at the end of their term, two reappointed for a second term, and five new members commencing their first term in December 2024.

Our members have undertaken considerable work in 2024. We had four Council meetings, represented the Council at other forums and events, prepared three submissions and corresponded with Disabled People's Organisations and Government representatives.

Council Plan and focus areas for 2022-2024

The Council's [2022-2024 plan](#) aligns with the [NSW Disability Inclusion Plan 2021-2025](#). Council is also cognisant of [Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031](#).

The plan includes five focus areas. These are:

1. Accessible communities
2. Ensuring the voice of people with disability is heard
3. Employment
4. Justice and rights
5. Housing.

1. Accessible communities

People with disability continue to face barriers to accessing activities and services in everyday life. While recognising substantial improvements over the years, this is still a vital issue and a key focus for Council activity. This Pillar encompasses a broad view of access, including access to transport, services, facilities, and information.

Key activities

To promote accessibility, the Council advocated in forums, made submissions to inquiries, and met with key stakeholders.

Accessible and inclusive communities

Council attends the regular NSW and ACT National Disability Insurance Agency's (NDIA) Community and Stakeholder Updates. These meetings provide an opportunity for the Council to contribute to discussions, along with other key disability stakeholders, about key NDIS policies and changes. The forum also raises awareness of other disability-related updates, promotes inclusive and accessible programs, shares local events and good news stories and discusses challenges and achievements. These forums are essential for the Council to inform the NDIA of concerns raised through their ongoing communication with stakeholders.

Transport

Council has representation on the Accessible Transport Advisory Committee (ATAC) and provides expert guidance on access and inclusion to Transport for NSW.

The Council continued to engage with Transport for NSW and the Point to Point Commissioner regarding the availability of wheelchair-accessible taxis and assistance animals. A meeting is scheduled for February 2025.

Council has also engaged with Transport for NSW, Sydney Airport and Western Sydney Airport regarding the availability of adult change facilities at transport hubs. The Chair met with the Senior Manager, Stakeholder Engagement & Customer Experience to discuss the Changing Places facilities at Sydney Airport.

Representatives attended the ATAC tour of the Parramatta Light Rail Stop, where staff from the Great River City Light Rail and Transport for NSW demonstrated how feedback from the ATAC was put to practical use in the design of the stop.

Emergency Management

The importance of improved procedures for emergency management was highlighted in 2024 with a range of natural disasters. In February, representatives met with Michelle Villeneuve from Sydney University Emergency Management unit to discuss the scope to build work into the DIAP remit. Ensuring people across all disabilities are considered during emergencies is a very important issue for the Council.

2. Ensuring the voices of people with disability is heard

The voice of people with disability is not heard sufficiently or given appropriate weight generally, particularly concerning service design and delivery and policy and program

development. The Council is interested in ensuring processes for seeking input, and feedback is genuine so that the interests of people with disability are heard and acted on immediately, particularly regarding service delivery issues or complaints.

In February 2024, Council representatives attended the NSW Government Disability Royal Commission First Nations Stakeholder Forum, which was an opportunity for First Nations stakeholders to share their views on the final report of the Disability Royal Commission.

In March 2024, Council representatives attended the NSW Women of the Year Awards Breakfast, where they sat with Simon Draper, Secretary of the Premier's Department, and Michael Tidball, Secretary of DCJ, where they discussed ways to increase the representation of people with disability on boards.

Council undertook a review of 13 randomly chosen local council Disability Inclusion Action Plans to consider their effectiveness in addressing key issues relevant to people at the local government level. Members requested local councils place particular emphasis on meaningful reporting including improved governance and accountability structure and transparency regarding its disabled workforce and the progress against any targets to increase this proportion.

3. Employment

Employment is a critical issue for people with disability as a means for people to live full, satisfying, and independent lives. This is reflected in the Premier's election commitment, which includes a target that by 2025, '5.6% of government sector roles are held by people with a disability'.

Key activities

The Council regularly engaged with the Premier's Department and The Cabinet Office to highlight employment issues for people with disability. Council continues to advise government departments on how to maximise the recruitment, retention and career progression of people with disability in the NSW public service.

The Council participated in the Disability Employee Network (DEN) Connect forum, which brings together different DENs across NSW government. DENs are comprised of people working in the public sector who have disability or who want to champion disability awareness and support.

4. Justice and rights

People with disability face multiple barriers to accessing justice. Some barriers are practical (such as physical barriers in old buildings or a lack of functioning hearing loops), while some relate to the quality of support provided to people with disability in the justice system. This leads to people with disability, particularly those with intellectual disability, being over-represented.

The Chair travelled to Goulburn to participate in the 2024 edition of the Behind the Blue Program, a two-day immersive experience to learn about policing in the state.

5. Housing

Housing is critical to the wellbeing of everyone, and there is a chronic shortage of accessible and affordable housing. For those on statutory incomes (Centrelink benefits), rents consume an unsustainable proportion of income. Planning instruments (like Local Environment Plans made by local councils) can support change, particularly in changing the settings to support affordable housing. This is a key issue where the Council will play a role in promoting and advocating for change.

Representatives met with Trina Jones, NSW Rental Commissioner, to discuss the exclusion of people with disability from the private rental market, evidence from WA of shorter housing tenure in rentals for people with disability and the refusal of landlords to allow minor modifications and potential changes to the Residential Tenancies Act.

Representatives also met with DCJ consultants ASK Insights to discuss planning for the future of NSW Government-owned Specialist Disability Accommodation properties.

Education

Despite not being a key focus area, education continues to be an active domain for the Council and a key concern for people with disability and their families.

Key activities

The Council continues to engage with the National Education Standards Authority (NESA) to address concerns regarding the HSC minimum standards for students with disability and their potential negative impact on those who opt for mainstream subjects. The Council has also been discussing the qualifications of people teaching Auslan in schools and the importance of Deaf people doing the teaching.

The Council participates in the biannual NESA Disability Education Forum, where relevant topics about the education of students with disability are discussed. This forum offers the Council an opportunity to seek clarification on policies affecting children and young people with disability.

The Council also participates in the Department of Education's Disability Strategy Reference Group (DSRG), which provides advice on the education of students with disability.

Engagement and advice

The Council is a key voice for the disability sector and is essential in advising Government and responding to proposals. The Council will continue to respond to strategically important issues and requests for advice.

Key activities

In October, the Chair co-chaired the NSW Disability Stakeholder Forum convened by the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ). The forum focussed on key issues impacting people with disability in NSW encouraged discussions on best practices for engagement and provided insight on current projects and initiatives and future trends in disability inclusion.

Council met with various peak bodies and organisations, including the National Disability Insurance Agency and DENconnect, the network for NSW public sector disability employee networks.

The Council was also consulted on DCJ's Disability Inclusion Action Plan, which aims to align with Commonwealth and State priorities following the recommendations from the Disability Royal Commission and the NDIS review report, and issues raised by stakeholders.

Presentations

In March, the Chair appeared on a panel at the Guide Dogs NSW Women's Day Event to celebrate International Women's Day. The panel discussed disability employment, women and confidence and bias in attitudes.

In December, the Chair facilitated the Guide Dogs NSW/ACT and Assistance Dogs International's Paws for Access, a sector-wide round table on International Day of People with Disability. This event raised awareness of the support that assistance dogs provide people with disability and discussed how best to uphold the access rights of assistance dog handlers.

Events and workshops attended

As well as the events outlined above, Council members attended events and workshops including:

- Resilient Sydney Risk Assessment workshop
- NSW Woman of the Year Awards Breakfast
- DSC Conference
- Policy Consumer Protection Roundtable
- NDIS Community Roundtable with Minister Shorten
- Physical Disability Council of NSW Annual General Meeting
- Aging and Disability Commission webinar for front-line staff and workers.

Submissions, consultations and representations

In addition to the engagement described above, the Council prepared [submissions](#) in response to the following consultations and inquiries:

- Inquiry into public toilets
- Inquiry into the Children and young people with disability in New South Wales educational settings
- NSW Government response to DRC
- Feedback on NSW TAP actions.

Council members attended the following consultations:

- Digital NSW regarding user testing for disability access and inclusion
- NSW Treasury Performance and Well-being Framework Consultation
- Long-term options for DCJ-owned properties.

The Council made the following representations:

- Parliamentary Secretary Liesl Tesch on employment of people with disability
- Heritage Council, which briefed the Chair on the development process for the new heritage strategy for New South Wales
- The Hon Jihad Dib MP to discuss the refresh of the NSW government digital strategy and the need for ongoing input and feedback from people with disability
- The Hon Kate Washington MP, the Hon Anoulack Chanthivong MP and the Hon Rose Jackson MLC to discuss the Disability Council's Position paper on Housing for People with Disability
- Meeting with the Hon Kate Washington MP and Chairs of the NSW Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing (MACA), NSW Carers Advisory Council, Disability Council, and NSW Ageing and Disability Commission Council
- NCAT Consumer and Commercial Division Consultative Forum Meeting.

Guest speakers

As well as those mentioned above, Council has hosted the following guest speakers at its meetings:

- Synapse NSW and Synapse National to speak on brain injury and disability
- Professor Simon Darcy, UTS, to speak about the National Disability Research Partnerships Agenda
- Secretary Kiersten Fishburn and other officers of the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure to address how the public sector can further support inclusive design and promote access for people with disability
- Spinal Cord Injuries Australia to speak on accessible parking
- Simon Draper PSM, Premier's Department Secretary, to provide an update on board diversity and how the Premier's Department can help drive disability inclusion in NSW
- Rosemary Kayess, Disability Discrimination Commissioner, Australian Human Rights Commission, to discuss her key objectives and priorities, including her work towards a Human Rights Act for Australia, intersectionality and policy neutrality, and a supported decision-making framework
- Kate Boyd, Department Secretary of The Cabinet Office, to discuss key areas of interest, including how policymakers can embed the needs of people with disability, remuneration for board members, and accountability
- Michael Coutts-Trotter, Department Secretary of NSW Treasury, to address the Council on the current environment within NSW Treasury, particularly the number of employees with disability and engagement levels, government and social procurement, foundational supports and the potential for incentives for public authorities to achieve DIAP targets.

To learn more about the Disability Council NSW, [visit our website](#), email us at disabilitycouncil@dcj.nsw.gov.au or call us at 02 9716 2612.