



The Hon. Martin Foley, MP
Minister for Housing, Disability and Ageing
Department of Health and Human Services
50 Lonsdale Street
Melbourne VIC 3000
statedisabilityplan@dhhs.vic.gov

6 July 2016

Dear Minister,

It is with pleasure that I forward to you Deakin University's submission to the consultation on the Victorian State Disability Plan 2017-2020.

Deakin University believes this consultation, in examining feedback from a range of stakeholders, is addressing a particularly important issue for Victoria and in particular for people with disability and their families who reside in our state.

The new Victoria State Disability Plan will be key not only to guiding how well people with disability will live in Victoria over the next four years but will also help ensure that Victorians living with disability will be better included in the community and have the same rights as other Victorians. Deakin University is committed to supporting people with disability to participate in social, economic and civil life. Teaching and research programs at Deakin aim to be inclusive and to promote the wellbeing of people with disability through our programs that include health, education, innovative technologies, sustainable environments and training of medical and allied health professionals.

Deakin has extensive networks of guaranteed entry pathway arrangements, including our new suite of disability and inclusion post graduate courses. These, along with our deep industry engagement throughout much of regional and outer metropolitan Victoria, means the University is well placed to work with the State Government on developing and fulfilling the aims of the 2017-2020 plan.

I take this opportunity to thank the Victorian Government and in particular the Minister for Planning and the former Minister for Environment for their significant support for people living with disability at our Burwood Campus through their approval of the DDA compliant Burwood Link.

I commend this submission to the consultation and the recommendations and initiatives to government contained within our responses to the specific themes.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jane den Hollander".

Professor Jane den Hollander
Vice-Chancellor



Deakin University

Submission

Victorian State Disability Plan 2017-2020

July 2016

Preamble

Deakin University is pleased to contribute to the Victorian Government's consultation on the Victoria State Disability Plan 2017-2020. Deakin has a strong commitment to the inclusion of people with disability in our community and this involves our staff, students and community networks across the state. Our teaching, research and community engagement programs promote inclusion and we have undergraduate and post graduate programs that are specifically aimed at ensuring our graduates are well fitted to work in the field of disability and make significant contributions to inclusion. Furthermore, many of our research programs across the university are aimed at developing a better understanding of the barriers and solutions to full inclusion of people with disability and building communities that are accessible to and supportive of all members whatever their ability.

Deakin supports the State Government's intention to consult widely on the new State Disability Plan and welcomes the opportunity to comment on those areas that are particularly relevant to a tertiary education institute that is committed to inclusion of all stakeholders.

Deakin takes the welfare of our staff and students with disability and our responsibility to people with disability who live in community seriously. Our University is well placed to comment on the four themes of active citizenship, rights and equality, economic participation and making the most of the NDIS, as we have teaching and research programs that focus on these areas. Through our teaching programs in disability and inclusion, our research in the field of disability and our community engagement, Deakin is committed to delivering education programs, innovative solutions and rigorous research that supports the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). Deakin's contribution to the consultation on the Victoria State Disability Plan 2017-2020 follows under the prescribed headings.

Deakin University's specific responses to the four themes included in the plan

1) Active Citizenship

How should we measure progress?

Progress can be measured by increased membership of people with disability in government, on boards and councils and as members of community groups including sporting and leisure clubs. Further attention should be paid to effective training of how best to support people with disability to engage as active citizens. At Deakin, educators and researchers collaborate with NDIS and advocacy groups such as VALID to measure outcomes of programs such as supported decision making to identify how we can best support not only people with disability but also the community to encourage active citizenship. Supported decision making is a vehicle by which people with cognitive disability can engage as genuine decision-makers within civil society. We view active citizenship as a community issue rather than a disability issue, therefore progress must be measured through a whole of community approach.

What could the government do to make a real difference in this area?

Government should work closely with the Office of the Public Advocate to ensure that government systems are in line with Article 12 of the UNCRPD. Attitude change and willingness to engage with people with disability comes from exposure. Government should provide funding to ensure that people with disability have support to be involved at all levels of government and government supported programs and that they have the appropriate accommodations provided if necessary. Further government funding is warranted to support research that identifies new ways of supporting engagement effectively. The Victorian Government should note that Deakin University is developing specialised educational programs and innovative technology to support stakeholders to work together towards more inclusive communities.

What could the community and business do to make a real difference in this area?

Communities and businesses often require support to engage with people with disability. A good example of this is the *Living Safer Sexual Lives: Respectful Relationships* program, which has demonstrated that people with disability are able to provide leadership to others and engage on equal terms with mainstream services. People with both cognitive and physical disabilities are employed by these Deakin-led training and support programs to link closely with mainstream sexual assault services across Victoria. These important initiatives will shortly be taken up in New South Wales.

2) Rights and Equality

What do you see as the most important equality issues that need to be addressed in this area?

Hate crimes, violence towards people with disability, particularly those who are the most vulnerable because of their level of disability and inability to report violence and bullying are ongoing issues in the community. Lack of accessible transport and a poor understanding of accessibility in the community are also major barriers to people with disability. These issues, along with negative community attitudes towards people with disability and poor health are major barriers to rights and equality for all Victorians.

How should we measure progress?

Ensuring people with disability and experts are actively involved in all platforms addressing rights and equality will indicate that there is increased opportunity for people with disability to be included, for example, in safeguarding themselves from abuse or demanding better health

services. An increase in reporting of violence and abuse and complaints about access barriers will indicate progress for people with disability and the community gaining a greater understanding of their rights along with finding a voice to demand equality. Currently it is estimated that approximately 93% of women with little or no functional speech will face abuse at some time, yet rarely is this reported. Furthermore, recent research that Deakin has conducted in collaboration with Newcastle University in New South Wales indicates that people with disability and severe communication impairment are more likely to have multiple adverse events when in hospital, go to hospital five times more often than their nondisabled peers and stay there longer with an increased likelihood of early readmission.

What could government and the community and business sector do to make a real difference in this area?

Increased funding to improve access to:

- disability aware services (e.g, disability trained police personnel, a disability liaison staff member in every hospital)
- new assistive technologies
- strong disability advocacy programs.

Government, community and businesses should also consider engaging with the university sector to help ensure that there are a range of appropriate education programs for all stakeholders and that these are effective. Furthermore, there should be ongoing consultation to ensure that the outcomes of educational programs and results of research demonstrating effective solutions to these major equity issues are translated into practice. Recent evaluations at Deakin have demonstrated that prior to undertaking post graduate education many of those employed in the disability sector have limited knowledge or understanding of UNCRPD and other key disability related legislation including the Victorian State Disability Plan.

Public health and planning researchers at Deakin have demonstrated that better urban planning and implementation of universal design principles benefit all the community, not only people with disability. Universal design needs to be understood in a broader context not only in terms of building and public space but also in access to and use of all facilities that are available to a community including services. This means that the community needs to promote inclusion beyond physical presence, to include initiatives that are both socially and communicatively inclusive.

3) Economic Participation

What do you think should be done to promote economic participation for people with disability?

Currently there are very few employer-focused strategies and no practical support available for small to medium enterprises, which comprise 90% of Australian businesses, to implement strategies to improve employment and retention of people with disability.

Research indicates that the single largest predictor to attitudinal change in employing people with disabilities is trusted support to employers and customised information to address fears, supported by practical strategies.

Deakin University is currently implementing one such strategy in the Geelong region; a Disability Field Officer program in collaboration with the NDIA and a range of disability organisations, such as AFDO. The program covers multiple industries including professional services, ICT, wholesale, health and fitness, education and training, technology, occupational rehabilitation, medical, tourism, hospitality and catering, aviation, aged care and entertainment, with businesses

predominantly employing fewer than 50 employees. The program includes three micro businesses and a number of businesses with more than a 100 employees in the Geelong region (including the Geelong Football Club, Avalon Airport and the Costa Group). In just six months, more than 95 per cent of participating businesses have committed to two or more recommendations related to the employment of people with disabilities. This is significant considering the short time spent building a trusted relationship with the business (between one and five months), the lack of formal procedures and human resources support for almost all of the small businesses and significant changes in employment prospects in the region. A further nine businesses are about to commence with this program. An expansion of this program will have measurable impact on improving the economic participation of people with disability and will benefit employers and people with disability alike.

4) Making the Most of the NDIS

What do you think are the most important ways in which government can assist Victorians to get the most from the NDIS?

The Information, Linkages and Capacity (ILC) function of the NDIS is critical to its success. Deakin University's Chair of Disability and Inclusion, Professor Susan Balandin and her team, believe that a key role for the Victorian Government is to support local government, people with disability and their families to work together to build capacity to support choice and inclusion.

The delivery of best practice ILC across Victoria has the potential for social and cultural transformation with respect to building 'disability confidence' in communities. It should be underpinned by best practice research to improve inclusion outcomes for people with disability and develop a set of models of promising practice. Deakin advocates a participatory and capacity building approach targeting local government peak bodies and councils, as the most effective way of furthering the aims of the NDIA and its ILC policy and commissioning framework in Victoria.

As a trial site for the initial roll out of the NDIS and home to the NDIA, Geelong is well placed to act as a hub for educational program development and innovative support programs to address national workforce requirements. The Victorian Government, through DET, could support the development of vocational and higher education suites tailored to meet NDIS service providers' human resources and training requirements.

The University has developed cloud and campus-based postgraduate courses that are open to people who are pursuing or intending to pursue a career with NDIS or in other fields of disability. Those in government and other organisations that work with people with disability might benefit from a range of easily accessible 'master classes' that could be offered on line or face to face to ensure that they have an understanding of contemporary theory, research and evidence based practice. In addition the University is regarded as above world standard in assistive technology development (e.g., 3D printing), analysis of large data sets, specifically targeted employment initiatives, and public health, areas of expertise that support Geelong as a significant region in the ongoing optimisation of the NDIS.

Conclusion

Deakin University commends the Government on the development of the Victorian State Disability Plan 2017-2020 and offers its support for its implementation. In a world where young people will change career pathways at least three times in their working life and where people with disability have a right to expect a life that is fulfilling, inclusive, safe and equal to that of their non-disabled peers, Deakin University has an important role to play in supporting and implementing the plan over the next four years with respect to education, research and knowledge translation.