



Submission to Department of Communities

Establishing an office of disability

September 2020

About Carers WA

Carers WA is the peak body representing the needs and interests of carers in Western Australia and is part of a national network of Carers Associations. Carers provide unpaid care and support to family members and friends who are living with a disability, mental health challenge, long term health condition (including a chronic condition or terminal illness), an alcohol or other drug dependency, or who are frail aged. The person they care for may be a parent, partner, sibling, child, relative, friend or neighbour.

Caring is a significant form of unpaid work in the community and is integral to the maintenance of our aged, disability, health, mental health, and palliative care systems.

Some important facts about carers include:

- There are 2.65 million unpaid carers in Australia.
- There are more than 230,000 family and friends in a caring role in Western Australia or approximately 1 in 9 in the community.
- The replacement value of unpaid care, according to a report undertaken by Deloitte, Access Economics, "The economic value of unpaid care in Australia in 2020" is estimated at \$77.9 billion per annum.

Enquiries

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Introduction

Carers WA appreciates the opportunity to comment on the establishment of an office of disability within the Department of Communities. This submission relates to the *“Discussion paper for community engagement – potential roles and functions of the office – July 2020”*. Comments are based on ongoing feedback from carers of people with disability.

Focus on people with disability

How should an office of disability ensure people with disability are at the centre of everything it does?

It has been suggested that the forthcoming *State Disability Strategy 2020-2030* be monitored directly by an independent group of people with disability, inclusive of carers and families. People with Disabilities WA (PwDWA) has developed resources on co-design and recruited and trained a co-design group. The office of disability could use this group or a similar one to guide its operations as well as monitor the implementation of the *State Disability Strategy 2020-2030*.

What functions should an office of disability perform to meet the current challenges facing people with disability, their families and carers?

An office of disability should advocate on behalf of people with disability across government to ensure that all state planning and services are designed in an inclusive way. The office should also be a conduit for people with disability to provide feedback to the Commonwealth government. Currently particular areas of concern for carers of people with disability include:

- Insufficient access to suitable accessible, safe and affordable housing for people with disability;¹
- Difficulties in accessing the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS);
- Difficulties in navigation and management of NDIS plans;²
- Equitable delivery of inclusive education; and

¹ Further information is available in a recent report *Experiences of Western Australians with disability finding a home – June 2020* <https://www.carerswa.asn.au/report-into-housing-for-people-with-disability-in-western-australia-calls-for-change/>

² Further information is available in a recent report *National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) Transition and Interface Issues* https://www.pwdwa.org/documents/Full_print_PWdWA_NDIS_Systemic_Report.pdf

- Planning for the future of people with disability when informal care is no longer available.

NDIS rollout and the disability sector

What role might an office of disability play in ensuring that the NDIS works well in WA?

An office of disability should provide an interface with the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) at a state level and feed issues and solutions back to the NDIA. The office could also play a role in providing access to and analysis of, NDIA data on Western Australian utilisation of the scheme.

The introduction of the NDIS has left a gap in holistic planning support for people with disability. The mini sectors created by the categories within the funding streams in NDIS plans has resulted in a lack of ongoing, overall life planning for people with disability. The office of disability has the potential to fill this gap.

The office of disability should work closely with the division in the Department of Communities responsible for supporting carers. Carers provide significant unpaid care and support to people with disabilities and require support to maintain their role.

The office has a role in ensuring the provision of services such as therapy and support in regional and remote areas where none exist in the private market.

Integration of disability services into the Department of Communities

Are there specific functions or roles that you believe should be included in an office of disability? Tell us why?

The office of disability should continue to monitor and support the requirement for Disability Access and Inclusion Plans (DAIPs) in all public sector agencies.

The office should maintain a role in the development of adequate, accessible and affordable housing for people with disability. This includes a stewardship role in the introduction of Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) in Western Australia and the transition of people with disability, where desired, out of group homes.

In addition, the office should provide support for people with disability who are not eligible for the NDIS.

What are your best ideas about how an office of disability can engage effectively throughout WA?

Engagement with current advocacy organisations across the state is key to identifying ongoing and emerging issues for people with disability.

National and state disability strategies

How do you think the State Disability Strategy can best be implemented through the office?

It is important that the State Disability Strategy has effective and robust reporting mechanisms to ensure the achievement of the outcomes expected from the strategy. An office of disability should be responsible for monitoring the implementation of the strategy, through an independent group with representation from people with disability and carers.

What are your thoughts about how to better engage with people with disability, their families and carers?

Adequate funding to advocacy organisations to undertake both individual and systemic advocacy would contribute to better engagement with people with disability and their families and carers. Formal and informal links between peak organisations and the office of disability are required.