WORKING TOGETHER TO SUPPORT DISABLED PEOPLE'S RESILIENCE AND ASPIRATIONS THROUGH COVID-19

The poor socio-economic outcomes already experienced by disabled people, and opportunities to exercise choice and control, are at risk to a disproportionate level due to the impacts of COVID-19. They are facing additional barriers and it is crucial we support them through this time.

KEY NEEDS	OUR RESPONSES
Provide accessible communication and information. Timely information that can be understood by all New Zealanders is essential for people to make decisions about how to protect themselves and others.	The Ministry of Health (MoH), the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) and the Office for Disability Issues (ODI) work closely with Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs) to ensure that COVID-19 information is made accessible and available in a timely way. MOH convene a Disability Communications Advisory Group to provide communication in a range of accessible formats.
Remove additional barriers to essential support and participation due to containment measures. Measures to respond to COVID-19 can make access to essential items and community participation more difficult.	MSD is considering what the additional barriers of social isolation, and other on-going impacts of COVID-19, are for disabled people. It is vital to ensure appropriate support is in place for disabled people to continue to access the essential items they need including food and PPE, as well as access to employment and education. The MoH Disability Directorate continues to work with disability providers to improve access to PPE.
Respond to the fact that disabled people will be further disadvantaged. This includes areas of employment, education and housing.	MSD is undertaking wider work on its future direction and resetting the welfare system as alert levels are lowered. In all aspects of this work, the needs of disabled people will need to be considered, whether this is through ensuring mainstream services and supports are accessible, or in developing specialist disability supports and services. At the same time, the NGO sector and DPOs have worked locally with others to ensure disabled people's needs are being met during lock down.
Address lasting impacts of sustained isolation. Some disabled people will need to remain self-isolated for sustained periods due to their greater vulnerability to COVID-19. The impact of isolation on mental health and wellbeing should not be underestimated.	MSD is considering the impacts of social isolation on disabled people who need to self-isolate for sustained periods or who may experience moving through the levels differently due to the impact of a disability. Ensuring appropriate measures are in place to support disabled people's future participation in their community on the same basis as others throughout the COVID response is vital to their wellbeing and inclusion to reduce further disadvantage. The Joint Venture family abuse and sexual abuse work programme will consider the needs of disabled people with support from ODI and advocacy on behalf of disabled people subjected to violence and abuse.
Respond to risks to the financial long-term viability of disability providers. For those who provide essential services, as they reconfigure services, as well as disability employment providers.	Disability providers play an important role in supporting disabled people to participate in their communities, find and maintain employment and access essential services. MSD are working to free up capacity in the disability sector by looking at more flexible individualised funding so that more disabled people and whānau can use it. Wider work within MSD is looking at the future state of government social services.
Collect data and evidence. There is a lack of data to provide information on the needs of disabled people.	The Office of Disability Issues (ODI) has a weekly disability online survey, checking in on how life is going during the COVID-19 event. The results of the survey will help officials to monitor issues such as well-being; access to PPE, COVID-19 information; the impact of changes to services; essential supplies (i.e. food and medication); and how safe disabled people are feeling. This survey is one way to help to fill gaps in data and evidence. Across government senior officials have been maintaining a risk/issues register for disabled people and monitoring the actions to address those risks/issues.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR AN ACCESSIBLE FUTURE

Accessibility is about removing and preventing barriers in areas of life such as the built environment, transport, information and communications, and goods and services. It is a pre-condition to disabled people realising their rights.

Designing for accessibility not only brings benefits for disabled people, but also other groups who may be disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, such as older people, Māori and Pacific Peoples and speakers of English as a second language. A more accessible New Zealand will bring broader social and economic benefits.

We have a unique opportunity to support a more productive, sustainable and inclusive economy through accelerating accessibility in New Zealand. It is also an opportunity to make New Zealand a global leader in this space through a whole of government approach:

- s 9(2)(f)(iv) [redacted]
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IMPORTANCE OF DISABLED PEOPLE'S PERSPECTIVES AND BETTER CROSS GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATIVE DATA

It is crucial to include disabled people and their representative groups in decisions that impact on their lives. As we respond to these unprecedented times, we have an opportunity to include disabled people's perspectives in our decision making about the future. ODI works closely with DPOs on all their work, and I meet regularly with the DPO Coalition. It is vital that all agencies and COVID-19 responses collect data to ensure disable people are accessing services.

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