



People with Disability

Last year Australia was one of the first countries to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, but for many people with disability in Queensland these rights remain out of reach.

People with disability have a right to a home of their own, family and friends, meaningful work, education, connection to the community and freedom of choice about their lives. Yet people with disability continue to struggle to obtain the supports that help make these things a reality.

People with disability and their families are still experiencing significant systemic disadvantage.

Issues range from inadequate funding to address the unmet needs of people with a disability in Queensland, a lack of flexibility in support options, lack of accessible housing options and a system that is often only responding to crisis situations. This can result in persons with a disability receiving no support or having to accept unsuitable shared accommodation models of support or experiencing housing stress as a result of high rental cost¹.

Many people with disability also find it difficult to access the everyday built environment. This serves to exclude them from many public spaces, public transport options, work places and educational opportunities.

There is also a need for greater specialist supports for persons with a disability within the education system, more training for support staff and the promotion of the benefits of social inclusion.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability continue to experience some of the worst outcomes in Australia. This includes extreme poverty; lack of specialist care and supports; difficulty obtaining suitable housing and accessing education and work opportunities².

“The right to be treated with dignity and to have the same opportunities as other members of the Australian Community – should not be too much to ask”

Shut Out: The experience of People with Disabilities and their Families in Australia.

Multiple Disadvantage

Some Queenslanders are far more likely to suffer poverty and social exclusion. And the effects are multiplied when individuals and families belong to more than one group.

QCOSS recognises the serious disadvantage faced by:

- *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities*
- *People in rural and remote communities*
- *Culturally and linguistically diverse communities*
- *People with a disability*
- *Young people*
- *Older people*
- *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender communities*

Key Issues

- In 2009, Queensland saw the launch of the **Blue Skies** future vision which outlines an alternate future vision for people with disability and their families. This innovative strategy was widely supported by Minister for Disability Services, the state and local government, disability groups, service providers, advocates and people with disability and their families and friends.

Blue Skies clearly envisions by 2019 people with disability are able to create their lives according to their own best interests and personal choices. Important components of achieving this vision include Disability Services producing a ten year plan for people. The vision also includes the development of a Diversity Charter as a rally point for change. As well as comprehensive engagement with the community sector to develop a real understanding of what an *inclusive community* means for Queenslanders³.

'By 2019, the community is strong and vibrant and embraces diversity...wherever a person with a disability lives whatever their choice of lifestyle, their experience is one of rich inclusion and a sense of belonging'

Blue Skies 2009.

- There is significant disparity between the proportion of people from a culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) background who have a disability accessing services and supports, compared to those from English speaking backgrounds⁴.
- People with a disability who are from CALD backgrounds experience additional systemic barriers to having their most basic needs met and do not have equitable access to information, services and supports. They often lack access to information about their rights and the availability of services, and have limited access to fee-free qualified interpreting services. As a consequence they are also very much under represented in accessing services and supports for people with disability.
- The push for a **National Disability Insurance Scheme** is not new, but this year saw an increase in momentum in lobbying for the scheme, many organisations around Australia joined the call for a scheme that is similar in form and function to workers compensation and superannuation schemes.

This no-fault insurance scheme is designed so everyone who has, or acquires a significant disability can receive the financial support that they need. For many the current model of funding sees some people receive individual funding packages while others have to rely on other funding sources and family support. A National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) would be a landmark social and economic reform, transforming the lives of Australians with disabilities and their families.

- The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) received overwhelming support from those consulted as part of QCOSS Social Policy Report consultations in 2009, and we welcome the federal government's consideration of the scheme that will ensure people with disability receive the certainty of funding they need.
- **Co-tenancy for people with a disability** is a significant issue as some Queenslanders with disability are denied the fundamental right to choose where and with whom they live. To receive housing and support, often a vacancy in a group home is the only option. In other situations a person's basic care needs will not be met unless they 'agree' to another person with disability moving into their home so support can be shared⁵.

When funding programs (block funding) are delivered in ways that force individuals to live in group situations not of their choosing they are often then ineligible to access individual

funding to move out of the group situation. Further, group living situations are often not in the best needs of the person, especially if that person is experiencing challenging behaviour⁶.

Article 19(a) of the United Nations *Convention on the Human Rights of People with Disability* states that 'Persons with disabilities have the opportunity to choose their place of residence and where and with whom they live on an equal basis with others and are not obliged to live in a particular living arrangement.' A person's right to live where they chose and be supported as they chose is often compromised by tensions between lack of funding and the current models of service provision.

'When people with a disability take control of their housing and their lives, just like everyone else, they create better solutions'

Community Safeguards Coalition.

- **Rural and Remote Service Provision** - QCOSS consultation with the social service sector across Queensland reveals that despite funding increases, more access to services for people with disability is required in rural and remote areas with reports of limited services and challenges around funding arrangements including:
 - Lack of flexibility - There is an ongoing need for more flexibility in funding arrangements across governments, although federal government service agreements were generally seen as providing more flexibility in service arrangements. In particular, funding models are often not flexible enough to suit the needs of regional, rural and remote communities.
 - DSQ fund 'community access' hours, but not transport hours, and packaged funding in general was seen as a barrier to client's accessing support for their self-identified needs.
 - Competitive tendering is major challenge in metropolitan and regional communities to achieving greater cooperation and collaboration between services which ultimately impacts on the level of service integration that is achievable for clients⁷.

Funding and service coordination, and the number and sustainability of regional advocate positions are also an issue that has been identified through QCOSS consultations. An overriding concern for regional areas is the lack of coordination of all services. There is a need for area-based coordination and advocacy bodies to assist families/service users to access services and coordinate care.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability in remote communities experience significant levels of disadvantage. This includes poverty, housing stress, lack of supports for personal care, reduced specialist medical services, and limited access to education and meaningful employment. There is a definite need for more specialist and culturally appropriate services to support in rural and remote communities⁸.

'Rigid funding models that suit metropolitan areas don't often translate to models that work for regional and rural areas'

QCOSS Social Policy Forum Report 2009

Recognising Progress

2009 has promisingly seen progress made at federal and state level towards improvements to funding in the disability sector. There has also been wide consultation by the federal and state government with people with disability and their families and friends, service providers,

disability groups, advocacy networks and other key stakeholders to inform significant new policy developments expected to be release in 2010.

- The Queensland Government’s 2009-2010 Budget allocated \$1.4 billion for Disability Services and the disability sector was prioritised in the \$414 million sector wages funding increase⁹.
- The previous Disability Services Queensland has committed to extensive consultation that will be used to develop a ten year plan for disability in Queensland.
- The Queensland Disability Services Minister, along with key advocacy and disability service providers, people with disability, and their family and friends, supported the 2009 launch of Blue Skies – a new future vision for people with disability in Queensland.
- The Federal Government announced a \$5 billion investment for specialist disability services through the National Disability Agreement.
- 2009 also saw the federal government release results of the nation-wide consultation with people with disability, their family and friends. The ‘Shut Out’ report will inform the National Disability Strategy due for release in 2010.

Recommendations

1. Recognise community-based organisations’ expertise, flexibility and capacity to respond to the needs of people with disability with appropriate levels of funding, and more flexible funding arrangements that support needs-based planning of services and individual choices.
2. Implement a form of National Disability Insurance Scheme so that people born with or who acquire a disability have the funding they need.
3. Increase implementation of the principles of Universal Design in the built environment so people with disability can have improved access to public and private spaces.
4. Identify and address the gaps in service provision, with an emphasis on early intervention. In particular, continue to increase programs that support children with disabilities and their families, to ensure they do not fall through the cracks, particularly in their transition into adulthood and, importantly beyond.
5. Increase the capacity of service provision to ensure the needs of the individual remain at the ‘forefront of service provision without loss of service viability’¹⁰.
6. Increase funding to existing services in order to address limited availability of places, particularly in regional, rural and remote areas.
7. Recognise people with disability as the experts in their own lives by respecting their right to choose where and with whom they live, and providing them with adequate individual funding packages to live their life and participate in the community as free citizens.
8. Improve availability of advocacy and services to CALD and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities by providing culturally appropriate education programs including information about disability services, rights, options and choices available, and ensuring that mainstream services meet the needs of CALD and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients in culturally appropriate ways.

9. Adopt a whole-of-government commitment and approach to guarantee the provision and use of fee-free qualified interpreting services to community organisations in Queensland.¹¹
10. Ensure the sustained development and implementation of cultural competence in service provision.
11. Support meaningful participation of people with disability in continuous quality improvement in the disability services sector with investment in appropriate programs and strategies.

¹ The Blue Skies Scenario: A community response to the call for an alternate future for people with disability, their families and supporters, A Vision for an Inclusive Community. 2009.

² Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2008.

³ The Blue Skies Scenario: A community response to the call for an alternate future for people with disability, their families and supporters, A Vision for an Inclusive Community. 2009..

⁴ Language and Culture Matter: Remove the Barriers Now. December 2008

⁵ My Life my Home, My Solution 2009, Community Safeguards Coalition

⁶ Challenging Behaviour and Disability: A Targeted Response, report to Hon W Pitt MP (Minister for Communities Disability Services and Seniors), July 2006.

⁷ QCOSS Social Policy Forum Report, 2009, page 11.

⁸ QCOSS Anti-Poverty Weeks Statement 2009.

⁹ Queensland Government Budget Papers 2009-2010.

¹⁰ Queensland Accessing Interpreters Working Group, Access to Interpreting Services in Queensland. April 2008

This paper is part of QCOSS's 'policy platform' that contains over 20 policy papers.

Go to www.qcoss.org.au for other papers including – Mental Health, Violence Prevention, and Social Inclusion.



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