

22 May 2016

Office for Disability Issues
PO Box 1556
Wellington 6140

To Whom It May Concern,

Re: A New Disability Strategy for New Zealand

Allied Health Aotearoa New Zealand (AHANZ) is the incorporated society of professional associations that work together to promote, advocate for and support allied health professionals including those working in health related science and technical fields. AHANZ is the recognised connected voice of 28 allied health, science and technical professional [AHST] associations and four strategic partners, representing 30,000 allied health professionals across New Zealand.

The goals of AHANZ are to provide a supportive and effective forum for allied health professional associations; to promote the value of the allied health workforce; and to influence government and key stakeholders in relevant policy development, implementation and evaluation. In keeping with these goals, AHANZ welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the new Disability Strategy for New Zealand. This submission has been developed by AHANZ and reflects the comments and opinions of our overall membership. We trust the comments made in this submission will be given due consideration as part of the consultation process.

AHANZ supports that the Strategy be guided by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, as well as by the Treaty of Waitangi and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Many allied health professionals work within the disability sector. Their work gives them valuable insights to contribute to this submission. They will also be influenced and affected by the consultation and outcomes of the new Disability Strategy for New Zealand. AHANZ acknowledges the efforts of the Office for Disability Issues to gain wide input and specialist opinions from persons with disabilities or impairments, and from their whanau and friends.

Each of the approximately 50 allied health professions has its own distinct, specialised body of knowledge and skills, and actively works with people accessing health and disability services across a range of settings. Allied health professionals have a relevant tertiary (or equivalent) educational qualification, belong to a professional association and have an appropriate code of ethics and standards of practice and a recognised system for monitoring ongoing competence. Many are additionally registered under the Health Practitioners Competency Assurance Act (HPCA) 2003.

In their practice, allied health professionals provide services and engage in activities that may include prevention; assessment/evaluation; identification/diagnosis; treatment; rehabilitation/habilitation; advocacy; promotion of health and wellbeing; education; research; and leadership/management.

Allied health is crucial to supporting people living in the community, as allied health professionals have a strong focus on independence and bringing services closer to home. For a Disability Strategy to be truly integrated, it is essential to consider allied health in any strategy for the health and wellbeing of New Zealanders with disabilities or impairments.

What would make you, or the disabled people in your life, feel more able to participate in the community?

- A focus on holistic biopsychosocial models of wellbeing and care.
- Better individual and community awareness and societal acceptance of disability as diversity.
- Better transport access for people with disabilities or impairments, including, for example, softer curbs on streets that may be more easily negotiated.
- More high-quality respite care available to families of people with disabilities or impairments that is close to their homes and easily and readily accessible for those who require them.
- More integrated healthcare service delivery that is co-located and has easy physical and referral access.

How could we make these changes?

- More information sharing, education (school and public) and publicity to create a culture shift to celebrate disability as diversity. Education campaigns could include how to communicate with people with disabilities or impairments, to break down the current stigma that people who have difficulty communicating therefore have difficulty thinking, and as a result are often talked down to or ignored. This is applicable both to individual people and to businesses and organisations, whose staff may require training in how to interact with people with disabilities or impairments such as dementia or autism. This also applies to communication within the healthcare setting, to ensure that people with disabilities or impairments receive the same high-quality care as able-bodied persons by being informed at an age- and development-appropriate level about their care and any interventions, and spoken to with respect and autonomy.
- Hosting community functions in environments that are accessible to people with disabilities or impairments, ensuring buildings are wheelchair accessible and have disabled bathroom facilities.
- Increasing the value and respect for the role of allied health within an integrated strategy, aiming to improve the health and wellbeing of people with disabilities or impairments.

What would make you, or the disabled people in your life, feel more valued in the community?

- Supporting a culture shift towards disability being celebrated as diversity through sharing positive or 'good news' stories of people with disabilities or impairments to foster public acceptance of, interaction and participation with these people.
- An investment in accessible transport for people with disabilities or impairments.

What needs to change to achieve this?

- Collaboration and integration at a local community and up to government level to make the health and wellbeing of people with disabilities or

impairments a priority in the planning of projects and services. This applies across the board, from small community events that encourage people with disabilities or impairments to attend and participate in, through to city planning of walkways and transport and delivery of healthcare services that include allied health and are delivered closer to home to promote the independence of people with disabilities or impairments.

In ten years' time, what would an ideal future for you and your family look like?

- Equitable access to schools, community events, transport and support services, regardless of socioeconomic status and geographical location, so that people with disabilities or impairments have a voice in and are supported to achieve their potential and participate in the areas they value.

What needs to change to make this happen?

- A culture shift at the personal, community and political level in the value of people and communities, and a celebration of disability as diversity.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide feedback. We hope these comments have been useful. AHANZ is happy to be consulted further on this topic and would welcome any future invitations for feedback or comment on other Office for Disability Issues Strategy and Policy Documents, as they become available.

Yours sincerely,



Georgia Wakefield
Executive Director
Allied Health Aotearoa New Zealand