



Victorian State Disability Plan Discussion Paper

July 2016

The Victorian Healthcare Association

The Victorian Healthcare Association is the not-for-profit peak body supporting Victoria's public health services to deliver quality care. Members of the VHA – established in 1938 – include public hospitals, community health services and aged care providers.

This Submission

The VHA welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the consultation for developing a Victorian State Disability Plan. The VHA supports the development of the plan as well as investment to drive implementation and recommends the development of frameworks to measure and report on progress.

The VHA agrees to this submission being treated as a public document and being cited in any reports that may result from this consultation process. Given the interests of our members, this response will focus on items relevant to the healthcare sector.

Theme 1: Active Citizenship

Being an active citizen is more than just being able to move around. In today's world, being an active citizen means being able to read and understand complex concepts, access digital information, navigate systems designed by people without disability and make informed decisions about life.

It is important to note that some individuals have hidden and less well-understood disabilities; in particular, those with brain injuries, cognitive difficulties and language impairments. Becoming an active citizen when you have a communication disability poses unique challenges and should be addressed with this uniqueness in mind, from initial stages of planning and design through to implementation.

The VHA recommends that the Victorian Government:

- Invest in programs aimed at supporting individuals with communication disabilities.
- Fund initiatives that reduce physical barriers to community access.
- Actively increase the participation of people with a disability in community leadership positions such as community boards and committees.
- Create more opportunities for people with a disability to represent their interests and influence government directions.

Theme 2: Rights and Equality

The VHA supports the Government's commitment to make everyday services more responsive to the needs of people with a disability, and to improve quality and safety.

There are three main areas in which individuals may experience barriers to accessing care in a healthcare setting. These are:

- The environment: Victoria's public health, community health and aged care capital stock varies, with sites supporting a range of different buildings, many of which are more than 50 years old and inappropriately configured to deliver contemporary and accessible models of care for people with disabilities.
- Information Provision: written information is not designed with people with communication, literacy or cognitive issues in mind.
- Interactions: Training of staff to have respectful, helpful and empowering interactions with people with a disability.

The VHA recommends that the Victorian Government:

- Improve accessibility to public transport and other transport services so that people with a disability are supported to transition between service settings, in particular those living in rural and regional Victoria. Funding should also include services for rural and regional Victorians with a disability to access care in metropolitan settings.
- Invest in capital support for Victoria's public health services for the improvement of existing buildings to improve accessibility and to drive the creation of inclusive environments.
- Continue to support platforms that provide user friendly, accessible health and disability material for consumers, and integrate with the work currently being carried out to address health literacy in Victoria.
- Work with the service sector to support the provision of accessible services and develop a framework for recognising best practice and sharing case studies.

Theme 3: Economic Participation

The VHA believes that people with a disability are a vital part of Victoria's workforce and more needs to be done to break down the barriers to ensure public and private workplaces are both inclusive and accessible.

The VHA recommends that the Victorian Government:

- Work in partnership with consumers and the sector in order to develop and fund strategies to increase long-term sustainable employment opportunities in public and community sectors.
- Provide funding for healthcare service providers to prepare their buildings, systems and staff for employment of people with disabilities so that they are able to build and grow their training and employment opportunities for people with a disability.

Theme 4: Making the most of the NDIS

The VHA supports the Government's commitment to make the NDIS a priority during the period of the next State Disability Plan. The transition represents a significant milestone for eligible Victorians and this reform will drive real and positive change in disability services, yet it will have a drastic impact on the Victorian health and disability service system. The VHA believes that it is essential that the Victorian Government monitors the NDIS as it rolls out and commits to maintaining and funding adequate state services to ensure that the health, aged care and disability needs of Victorians continue to be met.

Specific attention needs to be paid to ensure equity of access and outcome for people with communication disabilities. The NDIS is a system that requires an understanding of complex systems, requires people to communicate and exercise choice and advocate successfully for themselves and as such, people with communication disabilities are also at risk of falling through gaps.

Feedback from the sector indicates that the interface between the NDIS and the mainstream health system, and the resulting transition issues are of concern in the roll out of the NDIS in Victoria.

There is much more work to be done to understand the health/disability interface. The roll out of the NDIS thus far has, in some cases, led to a system that treats individuals in a fragmented way and creates artificial barriers between 'health' needs and 'disability' needs- rather than seeing an individual as a whole and providing integrated holistic care. The VHA recommends that the Government continues to cultivate and advocate for stronger links between the NDIA, the health sector and the disability sector so that they can work collaboratively to provide holistic care.

Due to differences in eligibility and service offerings between the NDIS and existing Victorian health, disability, mental health and ageing supports, there is a real risk that some Victorians who currently receive state supports will fall through gaps. The VHA is concerned that the difference in eligibility will result in large numbers of clients losing access to community-based health services and requiring higher acuity and more costly health services. This is a significant risk to both clients and health services and must be addressed as a matter of priority.

The VHA acknowledges the funding that the Government has provided to organisations to deliver NDIS readiness activities and to deliver practical and targeted resources to help people and providers adapt to the way the NDIS will work.

The VHA recommends that the Victorian Government:

- Works to promote effective coordination between mainstream services and the NDIS.
- Continues to fund services for those Victorians with disabilities who are ineligible for the NDIS.
- Informs consumers and the community about the NDIS to equip them for the roll out of the scheme and to ensure that at-risk groups do not fall through the gaps
- Continues to advocate on behalf of the Victorian system and work towards a seamless transition to the NDIS.



Further information

For further information, please contact:

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