



Disability Voices Tasmania response to the Community Services Industry to feed into Stage 1 - Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council (PESRAC).

Survey questions

- 1. What are the current impacts of COVID-19 on your sector, organisation and/or service users?**
 - Increased and exacerbated income insecurity (people with disabilities have been progressively pushed from DSP to NSA/YA since 2007, now 41% of YA/NSA recipients have a disability, the competition for jobs has become much harder with high unemployment.¹
 - Increased living costs not compensated for by increased DSP (for example, per week, grocery delivery for those unable to safely go to supermarkets \$12, pharmacy deliveries \$6.60, taxi due to public transport being unsafe or inaccessible due to COVID-19 operational changes \$15-\$30, extra electricity due to being at home more \$15)²
 - 10% increase in prices that NDIS service providers can charge but no automatic matching increase in the NDIS budgets of people with disabilities³
 - Higher costs to NDIS participants as group support is replaced with individual support but no extra funds in their plans⁴
 - Higher vulnerability to COVID-19 due to existing health conditions, the type of impairment, barriers to getting and using PPE, and reliance on others for personal and in-home support
 - Lack of safe and affordable housing means people with disability may be living in unsafe situations, with higher risks of infection, particularly people with psycho-social disabilities who may already have had insecure housing or have been homeless.
 - Barriers to online information and services.
 - assumptions everyone has access to technology,
 - that people with disability can use or have the support to use it

1 'Faces of Unemployment 2020', ACOSS, Figure 5 at <https://www.acoss.org.au/faces-of-unemployment-2020/>

2 David Morrell, conversations with various people with disabilities,

3 'Your Plan', NDIS, 7/4/2020 at <https://www.ndis.gov.au/coronavirus/participants-coronavirus-covid-19/your-plan>

4 David Morrell, conversation with a disability service provider (name withheld)

- accessibility of online information and services (issues reported by people who are blind and vision impaired and people with intellectual and other learning disabilities)⁵
- Many informal supports no longer available and community supports are no-longer available and this puts strain on relationships leading to increased vulnerability to violence, as is well known to occur in disasters of all kinds.⁶
- The impact of long-term social isolation; loss of privacy, autonomy, and social connection/support has led to increased stress, loss of confidence and decrease in mental health wellbeing and is expected to create substantial extra demand for mental health support⁷
- Loss of skills due lack of opportunity to maintain training and education
- The increased harassment and discrimination
 - Increased discrimination and targeting. Several people with vision impairment have spoken about having shopping taken from their trolley.
 - People with disability have been pushed out of the way to get things from supermarkets
 - Increased reports of ridicule and humiliation
 - People whose disability is not visible had been harassed when attending the supermarket at the times set for people with disability and elderly people. Comments such as “you don’t have a disability, what are you doing here” were not uncommon.
- The Equal Opportunity Commissioner has written to Tasmanian politicians highlighting the increased discrimination against our marginalised populations and, the majority of discrimination complaints to the EOT are by people with disability.^{8 9}
- Difficulty accessing transport as social distancing constrains access to support workers, taxis are regarded as high risk vehicles due to confined space and potential contamination by other passengers, public transport is regarded as risky, changes to operation of buses make it harder for people who are blind to use them (harder to communicate with drivers),

5 David Morrell, conversations with members of Blind Citizens Australia - Tasmania, observation of SpeakOut support to their members.

6 ‘COVID-19 and Family Violence’, Lookout at <https://www.thelookout.org.au/family-violence-workers/covid-19-and-family-violence/covid-19-and-family-violence-faqs>

7 “These things can build up’: \$48m for COVID-19 mental health plan’, Sydney Morning Herald 15/5/2020 at <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/these-things-can-build-up-48m-for-covid-19-mental-health-plan-20200515-p54te4.html>

8 ‘Coronavirus: The Silent Discriminator’, Equal Opportunity Tasmania, at https://equalopportunity.tas.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/566805/20.04.30-Talking-Point-Coronavirus-The-Silent-Discriminator.pdf

9 Annual Report 2018-9, Equal Opportunity Tasmania, table 4.2 at https://equalopportunity.tas.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/548792/19.09.30-EOT-Annual-Report-2018-19-Accessible.pdf

2. What impacts do you anticipate in the next few weeks and months and what will influence those impacts?

- There is very strong support for not rushing out of social isolation from the majority of the disability community as evidenced in social media and conversations
- We are hearing that people with disability are worried about going into the community too soon as they are concerned that there will not be a consistency with everyone maintaining physical distancing and hand washing
- As 23.7% of people in Tasmania identify as having a disability, there are concerns about the exacerbation of the long-term impact of existing economic insecurity, lack of education, employment, and housing.
- People with disability and their supporters have concerns about the coming winter and increased poverty.
- Continued lack of clear accessible information about accessing supports, processes, and resources.
- We will see and understand the impact of the response to the virus on mental health, financial insecurity, and levels of violence against people with disability.
- Supports for isolated vulnerable persons may diminish as the rest of the community emerges and they become a marginal minority. For example, businesses that had delivered to get through the crisis are likely to withdraw the service due to reduced demand and the shared exposure.

3. What data or information can you share to demonstrate this impact?

- The Brotherhood of St Laurence Research and Policy Centre's [COVID-19 INSIGHTS Towards Just Futures People with Disability](#) the most useful straightforward policy and actions document we have found to assist understanding the impact of COVID-19 on people with disability and where we need to head in the recovery.

4. What has been put in place so far to address these impacts?

- Disability Voices Tas is committed to having a focus on COVID-19 recovery process. We have begun and been part of conversations with people with disability about their experiences and solutions.
- In terms of employment and education we have a commitment to employ people with disability, provide skill development and have people with disability involved in all aspects of our work.
- Contributing and collaborating with the broader community sector networks including TasCOSS Community Services COVID-19 weekly catch-up and working within a smaller group on violence against women

5. What isn't being addressed?

- Poverty, employment, and accessible housing
- Housing Ministers are currently considering a proposal to introduce building regulations to require a number of universal design access features in all future housing which will both increase the amount of easily adaptable housing stock and allow for ageing in place. This is an opportunity to improve the availability of safe and accessible housing in the future.

- A whole of government communication strategy to ensure that people with disabilities receive information in real time in accessible formats addressing the particular issues they face and including solutions they are capable of enacting.¹⁰

6. Within your sector and more broadly, what do you see as priorities for a response? e.g. What needs to stop, continue, or commence?

- Harassment and discrimination against people with disability needs to stop. It would be very helpful if the government developed a strong communication strategy on the value all Tasmanians have to the recovery process; and that our diversity is a strength. That people with disability need to be leaders in this, along with all marginalised people.
- The knowledge and experience of people with disability need to be valued and viewed as an asset and included all stages of recovery, from planning to implementation.
- We need to be involved as equal, valuable, and knowledgeable players in the recovery.
- This may be achieved by, at a minimum, increasing activity of the Premiers Disability Advisory Council, convening a round table to advise the Minister for Disability and Community Services ahead of the anticipated establishment of a formal arrangement in October
- We need to ensure that plain English, easy read materials, materials in formats accessible to people who are blind and vision impaired and people who are deaf become part of the implementation not an afterthought.
- While materials and strategies have been identified for emergency and disaster planning for people with disability now is the time to re-visit that work with people with disability to co-design a comprehensive strategy and implementation plan.
- An advisory panel or similar arrangement for the State Emergency Management Committee and/or Ministerial Committee for Emergency Management to focus on disability issues including effective implementation of the Emergency Management Framework for Vulnerable People as part of the Tasmanian Disaster Resilience Strategy 2020-2025

7. What can be done to build business/consumer/community confidence?

- This is a perfect opportunity for the Recovery Committee to lead and support concept of inclusive businesses and tourism. With 23% of the population having a disability, businesses are losing a potential market.
- Often assumptions about accessibility and inclusion are only on the cost of physical changes to buildings for people with physical disability, yet there are many ways to invest in being a truly inclusive business.
- Increasing state action on employment of people with disability. Australia is 21 out 29 OECD countries on employment of people with disability.¹¹

10 State communication strategy funding \$65,000 to each of YNOT, COTA & Men's Sheds, \$15,000 for National Disability Services, an unknown small amount for Speak Out Advocacy, nothing to address the issue across all disabilities ('Supporting Tasmanians in need', Tasmanian government media release 27/4/2020 at http://www.premier.tas.gov.au/releases/supporting_vulnerable_tasmanians3

11 'Federal Pre-Budget Submission', 2020, People With Disabilities Australia at <https://pwd.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/SB-20200131-PWDA-Treasury-Pre-Budget-Submission-1.docx> p4

- Investment in community solutions, rather than fitting people, often unsuccessfully into existing work, investment in social enterprises designed and led by people with disability.
- With all solutions this committee considers, factor in people with disability at the design level, not as the passive recipient level. We want to be part of the solutions.

8. What would help your sector or organisation to re-employ people?

- People with disability prior to COVID-19 are 1.5 times as likely to be unemployed than the rest of the community.¹²
- Review the Government Employment assistance fund to ensure funding for workplace accommodations is more readily available and promoted throughout the state.

12 PWDA p4