

Aide-mémoire

Cabinet committee meeting

Date: 8 May 2020 **Security Level:** IN CONFIDENCE

For: Hon Carmel Sepuloni, Minister for Disability Issues

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Working together to support disabled people's resilience and aspirations through COVID-19

Cabinet Committee	Cabinet Social Wellbeing Committee 10.30am-11.30am, Wednesday 13 May 2020, Cabinet Committee Meeting Room 8.5 EW
Purpose of meeting	You will present an update to SWC committee members on the issues the disability community are facing during the COVID-19 epidemic.
Talking points	<p><i>Introduction</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The purpose of this item is to make sure disabled people are front of mind, while we continue to make decisions at pace to respond to COVID-19. • Over the past few weeks, I have been meeting regularly with key groups in the disability sector, including the Disabled People's Organisations Coalition, the Disability Rights Commissioner, as well as a mixture of providers. I have also been receiving regular reports from Ministry of Social Development, Ministry of Health and Office for Disability Issues (ODI) officials. • The A3 I have provided you with gives an overview of the key needs we must ensure are met while we respond to COVID. The A3 also includes some of the responses that have been developed by government agencies, Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs) and other NGOs in the disability sector. • I will quickly talk you through some of the key needs of disabled people, as well as the anecdotes I have heard from the sector. <p><i>Accessible information</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing accessible communications and information such as Easy Read, NZSL translations and accessible formats for

blind and low vision citizens have been a challenge throughout the COVID-19 lockdown.

- DPOs have been working through the All of Government Communications hub to develop information in accessible formats.
- The move from Level 4 to Level 3 was challenging, with a lack of “real time” information being available for disabled people and their families, creating greater uncertainty in what is already an uncertain time
- Additionally, DPOs feel that this delay puts the reputation of both themselves, and the others involved in this work, at risk.
- I understand that the communications for the transition from Level 3 to 2 have been a lot smoother, with multiple agencies feeding into this guidance. It is heartening to hear that this is improving.
- It is also important for our agencies to think about how we are communicating with people who are unable to access digital media, and to make sure we are reaching all the people who require information.

Removing barriers to essential support and participation measures

- It is critical to ensure that appropriate measures are in place to support disabled people in the community, employment and education.
- Minister Martin, Minister Salesa and I met on Friday to discuss the barriers preventing disabled children, particularly those with high and complex needs from returning to school, and from accessing the education supports they need at home.
- I continue to hear from disabled people, providers and carers that they are not able to access the Personal Protective Equipment they need to feel safe, and that they are also unable to access the services they need, such as supermarkets and GP appointments.
- We need to make sure that the right supports are in place for people who want to return to the wider community, but also that the supports are available for people who need to isolate for longer.

Respond to the fact that disabled people will be further disadvantaged

- As we continue to respond to COVID-19, it is important to recognise that disabled people often earn low incomes, are underemployed and have poorer health outcomes.
- It is important to remember when developing new ideas and policies to help support people during the COVID-19 response, that we think how we can ensure disabled people are able to access these.

Collect data and evidence

- There has been no way of identifying whether disabled people are accessing across government COVID-19 0800 helplines and supports.
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- This information would have been useful to give confidence that the needs of disabled people are being met, for example, responding to the additional vulnerabilities of disabled women subjected to family violence and sexual violence.
 - I am aware that there is still out-calling and surveys being undertaken related to COVID-19. It is not too late to include a question that asks if those participating in a survey or accessing a service are disabled.

Office for Disability Issues' online disability survey

- One of the ways that we have been able to hear from disabled people during this time is through an online survey.
- ODI developed this survey to assist in understanding the issues associated with the COVID-19 pandemic being experienced by disabled people and their family and whānau.
- The survey will be repeated several times so that progress on risks and issues for disabled New Zealanders can be tracked over time. I will be releasing the first high level summary of the survey results to the disability sector in the coming weeks.
- Over the first week, 655 disabled people and 112 service providers responded.
- The survey has provided useful insights on how those who participated in the survey are coping in the COVID-19 context. We know that most people who have responded to the survey are doing okay, or very well.
- The survey results speak to the resilience of disabled people and those organisations providing services and support. There are ongoing issues for the disability community requiring decisive action by Government.
- To enable more people to participate, ODI has funded representatives of DPOs and other NGOs to phone disabled people without internet access to participate in the survey.
- However, we also know that the survey results do not speak to a group of disabled people who are without internet access, or who are not linked in with their DPO.

Ongoing whole of government action required to meet the needs of disabled people

- Although the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated many of the barriers that disabled people face in our society, it also provides us with an opportunity to do things better.
- The COVID-19 response is an opportunity to make tangible progress toward a more accessible New Zealand right now. We have a unique opportunity to support a more productive, sustainable and inclusive economy through accelerating accessibility in New Zealand.
- s 9(2)(a) [REDACTED]

s 9(2)(a)

It is an important reminder that frontline mainstream services are too often unprepared to provide for disabled people.

- Designing for accessibility brings benefits for disabled people, and other groups who may be disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, such as older people, Māori, Pacific Peoples and speakers of English as a second language.
- The best way to do this is to make sure disabled people are at the decision-making table and that we remember the mantra “nothing about us, without us”. We need to ensure government agencies are working with disabled people and their representatives when developing new policies and strategies.
- We are seeing the emergence of positive partnerships between disability sector representatives and government agencies. This is encouraging for future collaboration.

Conclusion

- I am deeply committed to improving disabled New Zealanders' socio-economic outcomes so that they can enjoy a good quality of life like other New Zealanders.
- Thank you, colleagues, for your attention.

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Responsible Manager: s 9(2)(a) Director, Office for Disability Issues

Appendix 1: Key messages from “How is life going for the disability community?” survey, Week 1

- The purpose of the survey is to understand the issues associated with the COVID-19 pandemic being experienced by disabled people and their whānau/families. The survey also collects information from service providers and others in the disability sector.
- The survey results speak to the overall resilience of the disability community and those who provide services and support despite the additional barriers and risks to well-being, choice and control, and economic well-being that are exacerbated within the COVID 19 context.
- The survey results are one important view on the lives of disabled people in the COVID 19 context. These results sit alongside the issues that have been highlighted through disabled people’s representative organisations, other non-government organisations, the Disability Rights Commissioner and service providers who are in regular and direct contact with disabled people and their families.
- Although close to 30% of the respondents felt lonely some of the time, missing extended family and friends, they also spoke of a supportive environment during the period of enforced seclusion.
- Feedback from respondents shows that, for a majority, systems in place in both the public and private sectors are working to ensure they have access to food. 68% of respondents reported it was easy or super easy to access supplies. Systems like priority slots for supermarket deliveries and food box companies were cited as helpful.
- Access to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) was seen by respondents to be an issue when it came to feeling safe. Care workers were especially affected by this. Perceptions of equipment being sold out or not available in correct sizes match reports from other communities. The Ministry of Health is continuing to work to ensure that PPE is available to all those who need it.
- Amongst respondents, over half said it was very easy to access critical information about COVID-19. The number of respondents indicating that it was “hard” to find information about COVID-19 was low for all survey respondents. The overall theme of the comments was that they accessed information primarily online and by watching television. We will continue our work to make sure that information is in accessible formats and easy to understand.
- It is important to recognise the inherent bias in this survey, as the majority of responses were completed online. Digital exclusion is around 17% in the disabled community, as opposed to 5% in the general population. For this reason, and because of the self-selected nature of survey participation, we regard this survey as a snapshot of life, rather than perfect data.

Appendix 2 – Issues raised by the Disabled People’s Organisations Coalition during the COVID-19 pandemic

Various concerns of disabled people in the COVID-19 context have been conveyed to the Disabled People’s Organisations Coalition. These concerns include:

- *Lack of accessible communications and information* - There continues to be a lack of understanding that accessibility includes the placement of information on government websites when it is made available in a range of alternate formats. The lack of understanding of the need for hard copy alternate formats to be available for disabled people without internet access/digital technology is also a matter of serious concern.
- *Accessing GPs* (eg, via telephone appointments) for treatment for physical ailments unrelated to COVID-19 is a challenge. As a result, there are disabled people not seeking medical treatment who need it.
- *Social isolation* - For those without internet access, being unable, for example, to attend community social groups and meetings, visit family/whānau and friends etc is distressing.
- *Accessing services face-to-face* - Lack of face-to-face time with service providers and government agencies like Work and Income.
- *Stress and anxiety* - Finding appropriate methods of coping with stress, anxiety, anger and social isolation is a challenge, given that the usual community networks are unavailable.