

6 September 2024

Australia's Disability Strategy (ADS) Branch: ADS Review
Department of Social Services
GPO Box 9820
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Delivered by email to ADSReview@dss.gov.au

Dear ADS Review Team

Review of Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031

People with Disability Australia (PWDA) welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission in response to the review of *Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031* ('ADS'). PWDA is Australia's peak cross-disability Disability Representative Organisations (DRO) and Disabled People's Organisation and is funded by the Australian Government to represent the 1 in 6 Australians with disability nationally, including LGBTIQ+ people with disability.

As a member of the initial Steering Committee that developed the ADS with the Department, and as a member of the ongoing ADS DRO Implementation Forum, PWDA broadly agrees with the Strategy's seven Outcome Areas and corresponding Policy Priorities for each Outcome Area. Therefore, this submission will primarily focus:

- Intersectionality and data improvement (Section 1), and
- The implementation mechanisms outlined in the **Discussion Paper** (Section 2).

This submission is also endorsed by the following organisations:

- Children and Young People with Disability Australia
- Disability Advocacy Network Australia
- Family Advocacy
- First Peoples Disability Network

- National Ethnic Disability Alliance
- Physical Disability Australia, and
- Women with Disabilities Australia.

Intersectionality and data improvement

The ADS commits to intersectionality and diversity, in recognition that:

“...a person or group of people can be affected by multiple forms of discrimination and disadvantage due to their race, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, impairment, class, religion, age, social origin and other identity markers [and that] ...intersectional discrimination impact[s] on how these groups are viewed, understood and treated, but it also impacts on how they access, or are unable to access, resources, services and supports.” (p.36)

Further, “...the Strategy recognises the importance of making sure actions taken to deliver on its Policy Priorities are implemented using an intersectional and diversity lens” (p.36). Obtaining and using data is fundamental implementing an intersectional and diversity lens, as well deciding and implementing evidence-based actions to realise Policy Priorities.

As PWDA is the peak body funded by the Australian Government to represent LGBTIQ+ people with disability nationally, the recent Government decision to not fully include questions related to LGBTIQ+ people in the forthcoming 2026 Census will have a direct impact on our ability to provide systemic cross-disability advocacy and develop solutions with governments.

Reporting on progress in meeting Policy Priorities also rely on good data and the improvement in data collection. For example, data is needed to ascertain if the following ADS Health and Wellbeing Policy Priorities have meet realised:

1. All health service providers have the capabilities to meet the needs of people with disability
2. Prevention and early intervention health services are timely, comprehensive, appropriate and effective to support overall health and wellbeing, and
3. Mental health supports and services are appropriate, effective and accessible for people with disability

While we note and welcome recent reports that the Prime Minister may include in the 2026 Census a question about sexuality, the inclusion of a sexuality question is at the exclusion

of questions on gender identity and sex characteristics. We also note that the question on sexuality is contingent on testing results, and therefore its inclusion is not guaranteed.

The exclusion of LGBTIQ+ questions in the 2026 Census will prevent data being collected for this important population group undermining the ability for the ADS to report on outcomes for this population group. This is in addition to the inability to use collected data to recommend evidence-based solutions so LGBTIQ+ people with disability can access, resources, services and supports.

Recommendation 1 – The decision to exclude LGBTIQ+ in the 2026 Census be reversed in full, and the Australian Bureau of Statistics include all LGBTIQ+ Australians in the consultation and planning process for the 2026 Census, and ensures the 2026 Census gathers relevant data on all LGBTIQ+ Australians by including relevant questions in the ABS **Standard** including questions on sexuality, gender identity and sex characteristics.

Implementation mechanisms

The following section responds to the five implementation mechanisms outlined in the **Discussion Paper**. Our responses below complement and/or are in addition to the feedback PWDA has already provided to the ADS Review team.

1. Refining ADS mechanisms to support a nationally consistent approach to implementing the ADS

We agree with the Discussion Paper's Draft Finding 1 that more needs to be done to support a coordinated approach to ADS implementation across governments, and we support refining ADS mechanisms to support national consistency.

We note that the Targeted Action Plans (TAPs) do not involve local government, despite local government agreeing to the ADS and local government having clear roles and responsibilities in achieving Policy Priorities.

For example, local governments have clear roles and responsibilities alongside other levels of government in achieving the Health and Wellbeing Policy Priority 4 (disaster preparedness, risk management plans and public emergency responses are inclusive of people with disability, and support their physical and mental health, and wellbeing).

We welcome dedicated actions for local governments, as they deliver important services, supports and resources that people with disability access. However, we also note that some

local governments, especially local governments in rural, regional and remote areas of Australia, may require additional resources, support and coordination to achieve TAP actions and improve national consistency.

Recommendation 2 – Assess which Policy Priorities have an interface with local government and when developing the next and subsequent versions of Targeted Action Plans (TAPs), ensure there are clear and relevant action/s for local government.

Recommendation 3 – Consider the resourcing, support and coordination needs of all local governments, especially local governments in rural, regional and remote Australia, to support their capacity to achieve TAP actions and improve national consistency.

We also note that the first version of TAPs were highly prescriptive, which has led to actions not being completed by the Australian and state and territory governments and/or governments adhering to existing and/or prior actions in their jurisdiction to demonstrate 'progress' and 'outcomes.' Therefore, we support the Discussion Paper's suggestion that future TAPs exclude existing commitments.

However, we believe that all ADS Outcome Areas should have a corresponding TAP, instead of the Discussion Paper's recommendation to limit the number of TAPs. Progress across all Outcome Areas is vital, and often interlinked. Instead, we recommend that TAPs focus on higher order level objectives with less prescriptive actions to support each objective.

Where relevant, the indicator for the objective should be contained in the objective itself, to simplify and promote greater awareness of the objective's indicator to drive measurable action. For example, Objective 1 for the first version of the Employment Targeted Action Plan is "Increase employment of people with disability". Including the indicator would change the objective to "Increase employment of people with disability by X%".

Recommendation 4 – Retain Targeted Action Plans (TAPs) for all Outcome Areas, with each TAP containing higher order level objectives and less prescriptive supporting actions than the first version of TAPs. Where possible, the indicator should be contained in a TAPs objective/s, and all TAPs should be agreed to by all levels of government.

2. Developing new Targeted Action Plans (TAPs) on Inclusive Homes and Communities, Safety Rights and Justice and Community Attitudes

We agree with the Discussion Paper's Draft Finding 2 that there should be the development of new TAPs, and that the TAPs need greater coordination and reporting mechanisms. We also agree with the ADS Council's suggestion that the next TAPs be more ambitious. We also note that there was not an Inclusive Homes and Communities TAP in the first round of TAPs developed, and so we welcome its release.

To support the Council's suggestion for ambition, and noting the Strategy and TAPs are agreed to by the Australian, state and territory governments, a key action that needs to be included in the Inclusive Homes and Communities TAP is the implementation of the minimum accessibility standards contained in the National Construction Code. This will also improve national consistency in housing accessibility standards.

Recommendation 5 – Ensure the new Inclusive Homes and Communities Targeted Action Plan (TAP) includes an action agreed to by all state and territory governments to commit to and implement fully the minimum accessibility standards contained in the National Construction Code.

In line with Recommendation 4 above, we support there being a TAP for all Outcome Areas, not just Inclusive Homes and Communities, Safety Rights and Justice and Community Attitudes.

3. Identifying ways to support best practice approaches on accessible communications

We agree with Discussion Paper's Draft Finding 3 that accessible information and communications are critical for the safety, independence, and inclusion of people with disability. Information provided in a variety of formats supports the empowerment of people with disability by ensuring they can make their own choices about the services and supports that best suit them.

We also note that to meet the community needs of people with intersectional identities, there will be times when the procurement of community-driven and accepted formats and modes for communications and information will be needed, particularly to convey cultural meaning. For example, the use of First Nations sign and non-verbal languages.

Recommendation 6 – Ensure all communication modes and formats are accessible to all people with disability, and where relevant and as needed, amend relevant procurement policies and processes to facilitate the commissioning of community-driven and accepted providers that meet specific needs of intersectional groups.

4. Extending ADS data and reporting to improve the visibility of intersectional experiences, and embedding mechanisms that support the early identification of delayed and undelivered TAPs

We agree with Discussion Paper's Draft Finding 4 that current reporting does not support government accountability, implementation compliance or recognising intersectional experiences of people with disability.

In part, as discussed above, this is due to the overly prescriptive nature of TAP actions and jurisdictions reporting existing and/or prior actions. However, it is also due to the disconnect between an objective and the objective's indicator in any given TAP.

To use the example of Objective 1 for the first version of the Employment Targeted Action Plan highlighted above, this objective has 9 supporting actions with each action having a corresponding indicator/s to report against the action. In this example, there are 11 indicators for 9 actions.

This level of complexity for one objective not only makes the completion of actions and reporting more difficult, especially when there is shared responsibility between different levels of government and/or when data sharing arrangements have not been agreed to between different levels of government. Thus, in line with Recommendation 3, we recommend the following:

Recommendation 7 – Reduce the number of indicators for each objective, by ensuring high order level objective/s and less prescriptive actions to support the objective/s.

Recommendation 8 – Publicly release accessible information on data sharing agreements between governments, and report on progress for emerging data sharing agreements. The publicly accessible information should also make it clear who the data custodians are, to improve the awareness of the data that data custodians collect.

We also note and welcome that the ADS Council is broadly representative of the disability community, however DROs like PWDA have trusted networks and structures to engage with people with disability regularly, especially with key population and diagnostic-based groups such as people with disability who are First Nations, culturally and linguistically diverse, women and gender diverse. This expertise can and should be better utilised to in the governance of the strategy, to both improve the visibility of intersectional experiences, and to support the early identification of delayed and undelivered TAP actions.

Recommendation 9 – Create a new mechanism to facilitate periodical information exchange between Disability Representative Organisations (DROs) funded by the Department’s Disability Representative Program and the ADS Council, to strengthen strategy governance and improve the visibility of intersectional experiences who experience multiple forms of marginalisation, including but not limited to people with disability who are First Nations, culturally and linguistically diverse, women and gender diverse.

Lastly, we reiterate Recommendation 1 here to support the visibility of intersectional experiences. Understanding the intersectional experiences of LGBTIQ+ people with disability through the 2026 Census will be vital, as the next Census in 2031 will fall out of the current ADS timeframe.

5. Developing and implementing an ADS Community Engagement Plan, in addition to the existing ADS engagement commitments

We agree with the Discussion Paper’s Draft Finding 5 that it is critical for people with disability to be genuinely involved in the design, implementation and governance of the ADS. We note that awareness of the ADS in the disability community is not as good as it can be, and more action can be taken to improve the Strategy’s visibility.

We also agree with the Discussion Paper’s recommendation to develop and implement a Community Engagement Plan, in addition to existing engagement commitments. To strengthen this recommendation, we suggest the following:

Recommendation 10 – Involve Disability Representative Organisations (DROs) in the design and implementation of the engagement plan, and where relevant, fund DROs to deliver elements of the engagement plan.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this response. If you would like to discuss our submission, please contact my Senior Manager of Policy, Mx Giancarlo de Vera via email at giancarlod@pwd.org.au or on 0413 135 731.



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