



**“It’s not only steps  
that keep us out”<sup>1</sup>**

## **A Call to Action at CSW69 from Australian women and girls with disability in all our diversity to mainstream feminist and women’s movements.**

Feminism, at its core, advocates for the equality of all women, yet mainstream feminist and women’s movements have historically overlooked the very particular barriers disabled women face. To be truly inclusive and effective, the women’s rights movement must actively centre the experiences of disabled women, who face overlapping forms of discrimination based on both gender and disability.

Women with disability are underrepresented in feminist spaces,<sup>2</sup> leading to policies and activism that do not reflect our needs. Without disabled voices at the forefront, discussions around workplace rights, healthcare, and gender-based violence often neglect accessibility and inclusivity.<sup>3</sup> The Feminist Accessibility Protocol<sup>4</sup> as developed by **Women Enabled International** is an excellent tool for mainstream feminism to take up to ensure not only physical spaces are accessible but also discussions and dialogues – thus ensuring disabled women’s presence and perspectives are fully integrated in the movement.

**“Feminist and disability rights are born from a similar cloth. They are battles to acknowledge that oppression doesn’t come from a biological reality but a socially constructed inequality. They are concerned with idealised human bodies. They fight the structures and power that wish to control them, in sex, in work, in reproduction”.**<sup>5</sup>

**The CRPD General Comment 6 (2018) states: The Committee is concerned that the laws and policies of States parties still approach disability through charity and/or medical models, despite the incompatibility of those models with the Convention. The persistent use of such paradigms fails to acknowledge persons with disabilities as full subjects of rights and as rights holders.**<sup>6</sup>

**Join Us in Advocating  
for Change**

# Health, Justice and Violence and Women with Disability

## Reproductive Rights and Bodily Autonomy

Feminist movements and women's movements more broadly have long championed reproductive rights, yet women with disability have been historically excluded from these discussions. Many women with disability face forced sterilisation, lack of accessible reproductive healthcare, and are often subject to paternalistic attitudes that undermine their autonomy<sup>7</sup> and their right to decision making about their bodies<sup>8</sup> – the right to make decisions and respect legal capacity is enshrined in Article 12 Equality before the Law, noting that Australia maintains an interpretive declaration on this Article.<sup>9 10</sup>

There has been a determined regression of sexual and reproductive rights over the last decade.<sup>11</sup> Such regression has much broader implications for human rights and cannot be ignored as regression of sexual and reproductive rights perpetuates the very oppression feminism seeks to dismantle.

**"States must ensure that women have access to sexual and reproductive healthcare without any form of discrimination. States should also acknowledge that women's decisions about their own bodies are personal and private and place the autonomy of the woman at the centre of policy and law-making related to sexual and reproductive health services, including abortion care." CRPD + CEDAW Joint Statement, 2018.**

**"The human rights of women include their right to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health, free of coercion, discrimination and violence." The Beijing Platform.**<sup>12</sup>



1. <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2014/05/its-not-only-steps-keep-us-out-mainstream-feminism-must-stop-ignoring-disabled-women>

2. As above

3. Piepzna-Samarasinha, L. (2018). Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice. Arsenal Pulp Press. <https://womenenabled.org/reports/the-feminist-accessibility-protocol/>

4. <https://womenenabled.org/reports/the-feminist-accessibility-protocol/>

5. <https://www.sisofrida.org/disabled-women-feminism-and-other-diverse-communities/>

6. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/general-comments-and-recommendations/general-comment-no6-equality-and-non-discrimination>

7. Lund, E. M., & Lightfoot, E. (2019). Intersectionality, Disability, and Feminist Disability Studies: Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health. Women's Studies International Forum, 77, 102272.

8. Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA) 'WWDA Position Statement 4: Sexual and Reproductive Rights'. WWDA, September 2016, Hobart, Tasmania. ISBN: 978-0-9585269-6-8

9. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/article-12-equal-recognition-before-the-law.html>

# Women and Girls with Disability and Gendered Violence

**The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action**, adopted in 1995, identified "Violence against Women" as one of its 12 critical areas of concern, emphasising the need to eliminate all forms of gender-based violence. Despite this global commitment, women and girls with disability in Australia continue to experience disproportionately high rates of such violence.<sup>13</sup> This violence is perpetrated by a range of individuals and institutions, including intimate partners, family members, caregivers/service providers, and acquaintances.<sup>14</sup> The overlap of gender and disability significantly heightens the risks women and girls with disability face. This risk is considerably increased for Indigenous women with disability who have the highest rates of victimisation of any group in Australia.<sup>15</sup> We need the women's rights movement to acknowledge ableism as a key factor in gender-based violence and include us in dialogues to end all forms of gender-based violence.

## Our call to action

A women's rights movement that excludes or sidelines women with disability is incomplete. To uphold the **Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action** as well as the **Sustainable Development Goals**, the women's rights movement must actively address the specific challenges faced by women and girls with disability in all our diversity. This means amplifying our voices, advocating for policies that support us, and ensuring accessibility in feminist and women's rights spaces. True liberation, equality and freedom from violence is only possible when all women, including women with disability, are included.<sup>16</sup>

### We urge CSW69 delegates to commit to:

- Pledging to the Feminist Accessibility Protocol as laid out by Women Enabled International.<sup>17</sup>
- Prioritise leadership of women with disability in all our diversity in the feminist and women's movements.
- Ensure that women with disability in all our diversity are located centrally in policy and legislation and not as an "aside" cohort.
- Prioritise shared-decision making, representations and special measures to address to needs of Indigenous women, including those with disability.<sup>18</sup>
- Support the CEDAW + CRPD Committee's Joint Statement on Regression of Reproductive Rights.
- Acknowledging that without prioritising the dismantling ableism, oppression will remain for all women.

# Feminism isn't inclusive until it uplifts all women - disability rights are women's rights!

## Join Us in Advocating for Change

Support our mission by engaging with us



People with Disability Australia (PWDA) is a national disability rights and advocacy, non-profit, non-government organisation. We have a cross-disability focus, representing the interests of people with all kinds of disability and our membership is made up of people with disability and organisations mainly constituted by people with disability.

Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA) is the national Disabled People's Organisation for women, girls and gender-diverse people with disability in Australia. Our work links gender and disability issues to a full range of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.

### Contact PWDA

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Or scan the QR code to visit the PWDA website.



### Contact WWDA

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Or scan the QR code to visit the WWDA website.



10. <https://dpoa.org.au/factsheet-legal-equality/>

11. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/statements-and-speeches/2018/09/stop-regression-sexual-and-reproductive-rights-women-and-girls-un>

12. Expert Group Meeting Sixty-ninth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW 69) 'Beijing +30: Emerging issues and future directions for gender equality and women's rights' Virtual, 13-15 August 2024 Three decades of Beijing Platform for Action: A Closer Look at Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights of Women and Girl

13. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/disability/people-with-disability-in-australia/contents/justice-and-safety/violence-against-people-with-disability?>

14. <https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/public-hearings/public-hearing-17>

15. Jones, J., Roarty, L., Gilroy, J., Brook, J., Wilson, M., Garlett, C., McGlade, H., Williams, R., Leonard, H. (2023). Research Report: Wangkiny Yirra "Speaking Up". First Nations

women and children with disability and their experiences of family and domestic violence. Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability.

16. Garland-Thomson, R. (2005). Feminist Disability Studies. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 30(2), 1557-1587.

17. <https://womenenabled.org/reports/the-feminist-accessibility-protocol/>

18. Article 18, Article 21 and Article 22, United Nations Declarations on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples