



Submission

Foundational Supports

For submission to Part 1 of the Foundational Supports consultation (General supports)

4 December 2024

Publishing Information

The moral rights of the authors have been asserted.

Author(s): Women with Disabilities ACT, Women with Disabilities Australia and Women with Disabilities Victoria.

Title: Submission: For submission to Part 1 of the Foundational Supports consultation (General supports)

Language note

This submission reflects the overlapping experiences of marginalisation experienced by women, girls, non-binary and gender diverse people in our membership and broader community. Though these groups all experience gendered discrimination and marginalisation, not all identify as women. Where possible we have disaggregated data and experiences to highlight the specific experiences of trans, non-binary and gender diverse people with disabilities.

This submission uses 'person first' language (for example, women with disabilities). We acknowledge people describe their experience of disability in different ways, and for many people, 'identity first' language is a source of pride and resistance.

Acknowledgement of Country

The authors acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which this publication was produced. We acknowledge First Nations people's deep spiritual connection to this land. We extend our respects to community members and Elders past, present and emerging.

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About this submission

Women with Disabilities Australia (WWDA), Women with Disabilities Victoria (WDV) and Women with Disabilities ACT (WWDACT) welcome the opportunity to respond to the consultation paper on General Foundational Supports.

We welcome the commitment of National Cabinet to fund a system of general supports accessible to all people with disabilities, with funding to fill the support gaps experienced by many in our community. Our organisations advocate on behalf of women, girls, non-binary and gender diverse people with disabilities – a cohort that experiences significant gaps in accessing disability supports, and who make up only 37% of participants in the NDIS¹. A new system of Foundational Supports represents a significant opportunity for all governments to consider the needs of women, non-binary and gender diverse people with disabilities at the intersections of gender and disability, and to fund supports that allow our community to exercise their rights and to flourish.

Our consultation process

Given the significance of this opportunity, our organisations have been engaging with our membership around Australia for several months to gather information on where the support gaps are and to draw together people's experiences. This has culminated in an extensive survey, where we received nearly 200 responses from women and gender diverse people with disability in every state and territory. The survey covered supports that are aligned with 'general supports' described in the consultation paper, as well as targeted supports that are likely to be the subject of future consultation. Many survey respondents gave a significant amount of detail about their experiences, where they see the gaps in support and what they hoped for in a new, more inclusive support system. We thank our members for continuing to engage in these consultation processes in a time of ongoing disability policy and program reform, and in a time of great uncertainty with changes to the NDIS.

Our survey questionnaire was developed before the consultation period for Foundational Supports was announced, and before the consultation papers were released. Some of the ideas and language used to describe categories of supports, and the scope of foundational supports, has shifted since our survey report was designed. Where possible in our report we have aligned our findings with the structure of foundational supports as laid out in the consultation papers. We have also collected information from our members that falls out of scope of the current consultation (for example, on targeted supports, advocacy and employment

¹ National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA). (2021). Quarterly Report to Disability Ministers: 2021-22 Q1; National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA). (2023). Quarterly Report to Disability Ministers: 2022-23 Q1. Supplement E

supports) but that we think is integral to the design of this new system and is valuable information to consider at this stage of the consultation process.

The survey report and recommendations are attached to this submission. We wanted to highlight some of our survey analysis and recommendations in response to key areas outlined in the consultation paper.

Scope of general foundational supports

The scope of general foundational supports as outlined in the consultation paper has shifted from the original conception of general foundational supports emerging from the NDIS review. The original conception included advocacy and employment supports within the remit of general foundational supports.

We have heard that these two forms of support are vital to the disability support system in Australia. However, both advocacy and employment supports are underfunded and are currently unable to deliver supports to all people with disabilities that could benefit from them. We heard through our survey many stories of people being turned away from individual advocacy due to long waitlists and low capacity, and people struggling to access employment supports that were appropriate to their disability and their goals. Many also mentioned difficulties finding systemic advocacy organisations in their local area that were able address overlapping and compounded experiences of marginalisation or likewise, have the capacity to engage with diverse cohorts within the disability community. As systemic advocacy organisations ourselves, we have been struggling to keep up with the pace of reform and consultation whilst engaging with our membership and ensuring we represent the experiences of all women and gender diverse people with disabilities in Australia. Without adequate resourcing for systemic advocacy, the perspectives of many people in our communities will not be brought to the table in this time of policy reform.

This highlights the importance of including advocacy and employment supports in the scope of general foundational supports reform, and especially to ensure that funding is allocated to these areas.

The consultation paper also asked for feedback on the intended 'outcomes' of a new general foundational supports system. What is missing from this broad overview is an intersectional lens.

When thinking about outcomes for people with disabilities, an intersectional focus toward systemic reform is required. The new system should aim for everyone to have access to culturally safe and appropriate supports for their needs. People with disabilities should be able to engage in their communities, and supports should be made available to groups that are often left behind. This particularly includes, but is not limited to, women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people of colour,

culturally and linguistically diverse people, parents and carers, LGBTQIA2S+ community members, people in regional and remote areas, and people with an intellectual disability. This must be one of the core outcomes of an expanded system of general foundational supports.

In terms of outcomes for organisations, groups, and non-government community services, a new system of general foundational supports should aim to increase the capacity of Disabled Person's Organisations (DPOs) which are governed and run by people with disabilities and Disability Representative Organisations (DROs) which are led by people with disabilities. People with disabilities should be enabled to provide supports and services within their own communities. This should be a key goal and outcome for a new system of general foundational supports that can upskill the disability community.

Information, advice and referral

In our survey we asked our community how they received information and advice, what works for them and what is missing.

Overwhelmingly, most respondents said they find out about disability supports, information and advice through word of mouth, or through trusted peer groups and community organisations. Very few relied on centralised government support lists or referral services, such as the one proposed in the consultation paper.

Information and advice for people with disabilities needs to be available in a number of accessible formats, through many different organisations, and available to 'meet people where they are', rather than relying on people with disabilities to source them independently. Reforms to the way information and advice are distributed and maintained should move beyond a 'centralised hub' model and instead adequately resource existing local organisations and information networks. A centralised hub can be a good first step for some people to learn about supports, but should not be the primary focus of increased information and advice under general supports.

Community organisations require increased funding for outreach, collaboration and promotion. This is essential to develop the capacity to collaborate, co-ordinate resources and share up-to-date information about supports they offer. Given the prevalence of gendered issues, women with disabilities peaks should be funded to maintain localised lists of supports and referrals; along with other trusted organisations (often made up of people with disabilities). Organisations run for people with disabilities by people with disabilities are a preferred source of information for many compared to government or provider lists.

Please see our recommendations in the section 'finding out about supports' for additional information for this area of consultation.

Capacity building

In our survey we asked about a range of capacity building supports, including self-advocacy, peer support and supported decision making. Although many of our respondents had access to some of these supports, an overwhelming majority (73%) indicated they were unable to access the full range of general foundational supports they required.

We heard that there were barriers to accessing capacity building supports, particularly for those experiencing overlapping forms of marginalisation such as culturally and linguistically diverse people with disabilities or LGBTQIA+ community members. We heard from cohorts in the disability community such as neurodiverse people and people who were newly diagnosed or undiagnosed, who struggled to find supports that were safe, appropriate to their goals and addressed their needs.

We also heard about gaps in people's capacity and knowledge, particularly in disability rights and in the specific experiences of violence faced by women and gender diverse people with disabilities. Accessing education in these areas is integral for people with disabilities to have the tools to advocate for themselves.

We heard that continuity of supports is important, and that the current support climate has time-limited programs and a high turnover of staff within organisations. It is important to resource the community services sector to implement a stable system of general foundational supports and ensure that staff are adequately compensated and incentivised to remain in the sector.

Our key recommendations are:

- design, develop and deliver a system of foundational supports that is responsive to the specific needs of women, girls and gender diverse people with disabilities, and the issues and barriers that have particular meaning and relevance for this community
- design capacity building supports with a gendered lens, addressing the systemic gaps to ensure that women, girls and gender diverse people have access to the supports they need
- fund capacity building activities that are tailored to those who are newly diagnosed or undiagnosed
- fund capacity building supports that deliver disability rights education
- fund training and education on violence against women and gender diverse people with disabilities
- fund and upskill people with disabilities to design supports for their own communities, especially for underrepresented populations
- increase support to Disabled Peoples' Organisations to provide capacity building and peer support

Please see the attached survey report for a comprehensive set of recommendations about accessing capacity building supports.