

Submission to the State Disability Plan 2017-20

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Introduction

About Melbourne City Mission

Melbourne City Mission is one of Victoria's oldest and largest community services organisations. Our vision is to create a fair and just community where people have equal access to opportunities and resources.

Melbourne City Mission has significant expertise in providing support to people with disabilities. Our services:

- span the continuum of early intervention, care and respite, and community participation
- are accessible to people of all ages and life stages
- are part of a broader, integrated service platform that includes Early Years, Education, Training, Employment, Family Support, Housing and Homelessness, Justice Services and Palliative Care.

Our one-on-one work is complemented by the work we do at the systems level to try and mitigate structural inequality. This work is underpinned by a human rights framework, and has a strategic focus on capacity building and social inclusion.

About this submission

Melbourne City Mission welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on *A discussion paper of the Victorian state disability plan 2017 – 2020* (the 'Discussion Paper').

Melbourne City Mission notes that both the Discussion Paper and the Companion Document have been informed by extensive stakeholder consultation, and draw on a rich body of research and public policy work, including the *Parliamentary Inquiry into Social Inclusion and Victorians with Disability* and the *Royal Commission into Family Violence*.

Melbourne City Mission was highly engaged in both these inquiries, and endorsed the findings and recommendations handed down in final reports. Consequently, Melbourne City Mission believes that the Discussion Paper and Companion Document provide a strong foundation for the development of Victoria's next State Disability Plan for the period 2017 – 2020.

Melbourne City Mission particularly welcomes the State's:

- acknowledgement that "*we already know*" that there is a disjoint between legislated rights and the lived experience of people with disability in realising those rights¹, and
- commitment to ensuring that progress can be measured.

Melbourne City Mission's perspectives on each of the four Discussion Paper themes are provided over the page.

¹ State of Victoria, Department of Health and Human Services (2016), *A discussion paper of the Victorian state disability plan 2017 – 2020*, p. 1

Summary of recommendations:

Active Citizenship

- *That the Victorian Government introduces enforceable targets for the appointment of people with disabilities to paid Victorian Government boards, with annual progress measured and publicly reported.*
- *That State Government scopes the range and accessibility of leadership development programs in Victoria, and implements a range of strategies with peak bodies, advocacy groups, philanthropists, not-for-profit and commercial providers to address program gaps as well as barriers to participation. Types of strategies could include scale-up of successful pilot programs (including recurrent State funding) or State Government-funded scholarships to remove financial barriers to participation.*
- *That, where the State Government provides funding for community participation and/or leadership programs that are not disability-specific, future tender processes require potential providers to demonstrate accessibility in their program design and recruitment strategies.*
- *That the Victorian Government implements recommendation 6.6 of the Parliamentary Inquiry into Social Inclusion of Victorians with a Disability – namely “That the Victorian Government develop a strategy on access to elected office for people with disability.”*

Rights and Equality

- *That the State Government advocates to the Commonwealth to support a diverse advocacy sector*
- *That the State Government advocates for increased Commonwealth investment in NDAP to meet projected need under full scheme implementation of the NDIS*
- *That the State Government also increases its investment in advocacy, to help meet increased demand under full scheme implementation of the NDIS.*
- *That the Victorian Government implement recommendation 8.2 of the Parliamentary Inquiry into Social Inclusion and Victorians with Disability.*
- *That the new Victorian Affordable Housing Strategy addresses key gaps and progresses actions relevant to its jurisdiction, as per ‘reform 5’ of the Vote Home policy platform.*

Economic Participation

- *That the operationalisation of the Education State reform agenda includes tighter and transparent accountability measures, and that data is publicly reported and published in an accessible format*
- *That Government helps drive improvements in school culture through broader community education/awareness campaigns.*
- *That the State Government sets enforceable targets for the employment of people with disabilities:*
 - *in the Victorian Public Service*
 - *through government procurement.*

Making the Most of the NDIS

- *That the State Government supports the Victorian sector to maintain and grow a skilled volunteer base that is able to meet community demand in the NDIS environment.*

Melbourne City Mission's perspectives on Theme 1: Active citizenship

This section of the Discussion Paper canvasses such areas as civic participation and community engagement. Melbourne City Mission wishes to make particular comment on the following domains:

Board representation

The Companion Document states that *"in 2015, less than one per cent of public board and committee members identified as a person with a disability"* and that *"the Victorian Government has committed to improving the governance of public boards and improving the makeup of boards to more broadly reflect our diverse community."*²

It goes on to state that: *"This should lead to an increase in the number of people with disabilities on public boards and committees."* Melbourne City Mission does not find this statement satisfactory and advocates for the State's commitment to be quantifiable, so that progress can be measured.

We draw attention to the Victorian Government's excellent work in advancing gender equity, which – as of March 2015 – has included a requirement that no less than 50 per cent of appointments to paid Victorian Government boards and Victorian courts must be women.

When this policy decision was announced, the Premier's media release noted *"an aspirational target currently exists within the Victorian Government to make sure board appointments are balanced. It was implemented in 2009 but it isn't working – because it isn't enforced."*³ In a subsequent media interview, the Premier emphasised: *"It's not a target, it's not an aspiration. It's an assurance."*⁴

Melbourne City Mission considers that Victorians with disabilities also warrant such assurances – in our view, a "commitment" to more diverse boards is meaningless unless that commitment is quantified, mandated, reported and scrutinised.

Recommendation: *That the Victorian Government introduces enforceable targets for the appointment of people with disabilities to paid Victorian Government boards, with annual progress measured and publicly reported.*

² State of Victoria, Department of Health and Human Services (2016), *A companion document to a discussion paper of the Victorian state disability plan 2017 – 2020*, p. 9

³ Premier of Victoria (2015), *Balanced Boards Make Better Decisions*, media release dated 28/03/15, published at <http://www.premier.vic.gov.au/balanced-boards-make-better-decisions/>

⁴ <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-03-28/women-to-make-up-50-pc-of-vic-boards-under-new-rules/6355282>

Leadership development

The Discussion Paper flags “developing the leadership potential of people with a disability and providing pathways for aspiring leaders with a disability” as “one of the important things that could be done over the next four years”.⁵ Melbourne City Mission agrees that this is an area which warrants investment – it is a key enabler for increased board representation and other forms of community and civic engagement (including electoral participation). The knowledge, skills, confidence and networks that come through leadership development can also form an important part of a volunteering and employment participation continuum.

Melbourne City Mission notes that:

- Demand for leadership development programs is likely to grow over the life of the 2017 – 2020 *Victorian State Disability Plan* as the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is fully implemented. The NDIS has a focus on choice and control. Self-determination is a key component of active citizenship. The National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) has expressed its intention to lift the aspirations of people with disabilities in all areas of community life. Melbourne City Mission anticipates that, over time, through the Information, Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) component of the NDIS, increased numbers of Victorians with a disability will seek to engage with leadership development.
- There are already many excellent examples of high-level leadership development programs in Victoria – for example, the ‘Women Leading by Example’ and ‘Enabling Women’ programs run by Women with Disabilities Victoria, and Leadership Victoria’s ‘Fast-Track Leadership Program’. Should the State seek to grow this area of activity, the starting point should be to scope what exists and scale up what works well, rather than reinvent the wheel. This is particularly relevant where leadership programs have been developed by lean, values-based, not-for-profit organisations; funded through time-limited philanthropic grants; and cannot be sustained beyond the grant period, despite evidencing success. Sustainable funding would not only enable continuous quality improvement, but the development of alumni networks. Such networks would build incalculable social capital for participants, particularly in light of research (cited in the Companion Document) in which only nine per cent of people with a disability reported that their social contact needs are fully met, with even fewer, six per cent, saying that their community participation needs are fully met.⁶
- As the Companion Paper highlights: “*There is a growing body of evidence that demonstrates that people with a disability, particularly those with intellectual disability, are excluded from civic participation*”.⁷ **Program diversity is critical. We need a continuum of leadership development programs characterised by multiple entry points, in recognition of people’s different interests, experiences, perspectives, and capacities.**

⁵ State of Victoria, Department of Health and Human Services (2016), *A discussion paper of the Victorian state disability plan 2017 – 2020*

⁶ State of Victoria, Department of Health and Human Services (2016), *A companion document to a discussion paper of the Victorian state disability plan 2017 – 2020*, p. 9

⁷ Ibid.

- Whilst there is great value in the peer learning, mentoring and relationships associated with leadership programs that are specifically designed for, and led by, people with lived experience of disability, it is also important that ‘mainstream’ leadership development programs are accessible to people with disabilities. Melbourne City Mission contends that the year-long Williamson Community Leadership Program (WCLP), run by Leadership Victoria, is an excellent example of this. Leadership Victoria provides an annual scholarship to an individual with a disability to participate in the WCLP. The WCLP scholarship sits on a continuum that begins with the aforementioned ‘Fast-Track Leadership Program’ that is exclusively for people with a disability. As a ‘culture-setter’, the State (along with other actors) has a role to play in educating the community about conscious and unconscious bias, rights and accessibility. The State can also make a tangible difference through its human services contracting. For example, agencies such as the Office for Youth fund youth participation/youth leadership programs through the Engage! funding stream. Going forward, such tenders could include specific criteria around disability.

Recommendations:

- *That State Government scopes the range and accessibility of leadership development programs in Victoria, and implements a range of strategies with peak bodies, advocacy groups, philanthropists, not-for-profit and commercial providers to address program gaps as well as barriers to participation. Types of strategies could include scale-up of successful pilot programs (including recurrent State funding) or State Government-funded scholarships to remove financial barriers to participation.*
- *That, where the State Government provides funding for community participation and/or leadership programs that are not disability-specific, future tender processes require potential providers to demonstrate accessibility in their program design and recruitment strategies.*

Electoral participation

Citizenship is rooted in community and society. Much of the literature on citizenship is built on the assumption that individuals have capacity for free choice or ‘self-determination’.⁸ Pages 9 to 14 of this submission provide Melbourne City Mission’s perspectives on the way in which “*disabling barriers impose limits on freedom of action*”⁹ (Theme 2: Rights and Equality). However, in the context of Theme 1: Active Citizenship, Melbourne City Mission believes it is important to flag on these pages the issue of autonomy and decision-making capacity, particularly in relation to voting.

Citizenship is not only about participation, but also contribution. Citizens are not just holders of rights, but have responsibilities.¹⁰ Melbourne City Mission notes that the Office of the Public Advocate (OPA) has previously expressed concerns about “*the limited extent to which potential voters with cognitive impairments and mental ill health are encouraged to vote and are educated about their right to vote*”.¹¹

⁸ Morris J (2005), Citizenship and disabled people: A scoping paper prepared for the Disability Rights Commission, published at <http://disability-studies.leeds.ac.uk/files/library/morris-Citizenship-and-disabled-people.pdf>

⁹ *ibid*

¹⁰ *ibid*

¹¹ Office of the Public Advocate (South Australia) and Office of the Public Advocate (Victoria) (2014), *Submission to the Australian Law Reform Commission Discussion Paper Equality, Capacity and Disability in Commonwealth Laws*

To this end, the OPA has previously advocated that “*the Australian Electoral Commission should develop a guide to assessing ability for the purposes of determining whether a person ‘does not have decision-making ability with respect to enrolment and voting at the relevant election’ consistent with the National Decision-Making Principles*”.¹²

The OPA’s recommendation to the 2014 *Australian Law Reform Commission inquiry into Legal Barriers for People with Disability* is relevant to Victoria in respect of the conduct of State and local government elections.

At the other end of the electoral participation continuum, the Discussion Paper notes that there are “*very few people with a disability*” in elected roles. This was also an area of focus for the *Parliamentary Inquiry into Social Inclusion of Victorians with a Disability*. The Committee’s final report included a leading-practice case study from the UK, the *Access to elected office for disabled people strategy*. This initiative, established in 2011:

- provided training and mentoring through the Local Government Association’s *Be a councillor* campaign
- provided paid internships through a Parliamentary placement scheme
- provided online guidance for political parties on their legal obligations towards disabled members and candidates.¹³

Recommendation: *That the Victorian Government implements recommendation 6.6 of the Parliamentary Inquiry into Social Inclusion of Victorians with a Disability – namely “That the Victorian Government develop a strategy on access to elected office for people with disability.”*¹⁴

¹² *ibid*

¹³ Family and Community Development Committee (2014), *Inquiry into Social Inclusion and Victorians with a Disability*, State Government of Victoria, Melbourne, p. 6-57

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. xxxv

Melbourne City Mission's perspectives on Theme 2: Rights and Equality

The Discussion Paper proposes a range of areas for priority action over the next four years. Melbourne City Mission notes a number of proposed areas represent policy and funding commitments already made by the State Government, including some areas where implementation has now commenced. For example:

- The State Government has committed to implementing the *Royal Commission into Family Violence* recommendation to fund training to build the capacity of disability workers, police, judicial officers and others to identify and report family violence.
- As part of the *Education State Special Needs Plan*, the State Government has committed that all newly built government schools and schools undertaking significant building projects will accommodate the needs of students with disabilities and additional needs. A New Schools Public Private Partnership Project is delivering 15 examples of inclusive design in schools, underpinned by Universal Design Principles. These principles are enshrined in an updated *Building Quality Standards Handbook* that will inform new projects at existing schools.
- The *Education State Special Needs Plan* includes commitments to build teacher capability for inclusive education, with mandatory training and professional development spanning early years education and school settings.

Melbourne City Mission has been highly supportive of these initiatives and therefore does not seek to provide further feedback on those areas in this submission. Our key areas of feedback, in this section, relate to advocacy, developing strategies to challenge inappropriate and disrespectful public attitudes and behaviours, and increasing accessible housing options. Unequal access to labour market opportunities is canvassed later in this submission (Melbourne City Mission's perspectives on Theme 3: Employment Participation).

Advocacy

Victoria has historically had a strong and diverse advocacy system, enabled by Commonwealth and State funding. The Commonwealth component has typically been funded by the Federal Department of Social Services (DSS) National Disability Advocacy Program (NDAP) and the State component through the Disability Advocacy Program. Some organisations receive funding from one source, while others are jointly funded.

Melbourne City Mission notes that whilst some 'advocacy-like' functions will be found in roles or services funded by the NDIA (such as Local Area Coordinators, Disability Support Organisations or peer support services), the COAG Disability Reform Council has previously determined that systemic advocacy, legal review and representation will be funded outside the NDIS.

Melbourne City Mission is pleased that the Discussion Paper proposes “*strengthening the capacity of the disability advocacy sector to address both systemic and individual issues*” over the life of the next State Disability Plan as we believe, like our peak body the Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS), that:

“disability advocacy should remain the joint responsibility of State and Commonwealth Governments. Both levels of Government have responsibilities that affect the lives of people with disability and combined, can provide more stable and complete coverage of services. Funding from both levels of Government provides advocacy organisations with a greater level of independence, which means people with disability can trust their advocacy service to speak out without fear of de-funding.”

This is particularly critical, given that:

- The NDAP currently funds less than 1 in every 350 people with disability to access disability advocacy annually, or less than 0.3 per cent.
- VCOSS and DAV have also noted that current funding has not been indexed to population growth, or matched with any meaningful measure of demand. Further, based on member feedback from Barwon, they assert that the introduction of the NDIS will further increase demand for disability advocacy services.
- The implication of the Commonwealth discussion paper is that NDAP will be re-tendered, likely with no additional funding, and re-structured to only fund regionally-based generic disability advocacy services, possibly with only a single provider in a region. VCOSS and Disability Advocacy Victoria (DAV) have expressed concern that with no additional funding, these services would remain small, but would be somehow expected to deliver a full suite of individual, group, systemic, citizen, legal, family, carer and self-advocacy, as well as reach a multiplicity of diverse population groups.
- VCOSS and DAV have reviewed the evidence coming out of the Senate inquiries for the Department of Social Services and the Indigenous Advancement Strategy re-tendering processes and consider that wholesale re-tendering of the NDAP would lead to very poor outcomes, destroying much of the existing value and expertise of the sector.¹⁵

Recommendations:

- *That the State Government advocates to the Commonwealth to support a diverse advocacy sector*
- *That the State Government advocates for increased Commonwealth investment in NDAP to meet projected need under full scheme implementation of the NDIS*
- *That the State Government also increases its investment in advocacy, to help meet increased demand under full scheme implementation of the NDIS.*

¹⁵ VCOSS and DAV (2016), *Joint submission to Review of the National Disability Advocacy Program*, published at http://vcoss.org.au/documents/2016/07/SUB_160621_National-Disability-Advocacy-Program.pdf

Developing strategies to challenge inappropriate and disrespectful public attitudes and behaviours

Community level

Discriminatory and/or paternalistic attitudes and behaviours are a significant handbrake to social inclusion. These attitudes and behaviours manifest in a number of ways, including:

- inferiority
- pity
- hero worship (in which people “consider someone with a disability who lives independently or pursues a profession to be brave or ‘special’ for overcoming a disability”)
- ignorance
- ‘the spread effect’ (in which it is assumed that “an individual’s disability affects other senses, abilities and traits”)
- backlash (in which “people believe individuals with disabilities are given unfair advantages”)
- denial (in which people tend to believe that ‘hidden’ disabilities, such as cognitive impairment, are “not bona fide disabilities needing accommodation”)
- stereotypes
- fear.¹⁶

The ‘Every Australian Counts’ campaign made a significant contribution to positioning disability rights as a mainstream community issue. However, the NDIS will not provide “insurance against disabling attitudes”¹⁷.

As a ‘culture setter’, Government has an important role to play in modelling inclusive attitudes and behaviours (see, for example, Melbourne City Mission’s views on ‘government as a model employer’ in the Employment Participation section of this submission). More broadly, recommendation 8.2 of the *Parliamentary Inquiry into Social Inclusion and Victorians with Disability* asserted the need for a multi-faceted strategy to change behaviours and attitudes, to be developed and led by government. The Committee identified three key pillars, including targeted education to children and young people to **prevent** them from developing negative attitudes, as well as targeted engagement with specific audiences (for example employers and business owners) to **change** negative attitudes. In light of evidence presented on “positive personal interactions”¹⁸, the Committee also recommended that the proposed strategy “encourage interactions and positive personal experiences between people with disability and members in the community”¹⁹.

Recommendation: That the Victorian Government implement recommendation 8.2 of the *Parliamentary Inquiry into Social Inclusion and Victorians with Disability*.

¹⁶ US Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment Policy cited in The National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth, *Attitudinal Barriers for People with Disabilities* published at www.ncwd-youth.info

¹⁷ Leipoldt, E (2009), ‘A National Disability Insurance Scheme – a barrier to service?’ in *Online Opinion*

¹⁸ Family and Community Development Committee (2014), *Inquiry into Social Inclusion and Victorians with a Disability*, State Government of Victoria, Melbourne, p. 8-19

¹⁹ Ibid.

Other opinion leaders and influencers must also step up. The media and entertainment industries, for example, have a critical role in disseminating information to the mass population and have significant influence on community attitudes.

Historically, people with disabilities have been “*marginalised within and through*”²⁰ the media and entertainment industries. Lucy Wood’s critique, whilst focused on the UK, is, by and large, reflective of local conditions. For example, Wood writes that:

- *“The media still tends to use the medical model of disability*
- *The focus is on the impairment more than the individual*
- *Disabled people are under-represented both in terms of employment in the media and portrayal in the media*
- *Lots of media forms are inaccessible and broadcasting tends to be at inaccessible times*
- *Mainstream media do not recognise the disabled art, media culture.*”²¹

In seeking to raise community awareness and shift community attitudes about disability, the ‘Take a Stand’ campaign, established by the *Herald Sun* in July 2013 to raise awareness about family violence, shows how the reach and influence of mass media could be potentially leveraged to help create the conditions for social inclusion of people with disabilities.

Government agencies – such as Victoria Police and the City of Melbourne – were key partners in ‘Take a Stand’, highlighting the importance of partnership between government, media and other institutions in driving cultural change.

Service systems level

Melbourne City Mission wishes to draw attention to the fact that the “*sociocultural realities*” that influence community attitudes to people with disabilities also wash through the broader social services system. For example, during the *Royal Commission into Family Violence*, Melbourne City Mission Disability Services personnel reflected that disability expertise is considered of “*lesser value*” and largely confined to the disability services sector:

*“[The human services sector] looks at mental health, CALD, ATSI, AOD, but rarely includes disability as one of its lenses. The attitude is ‘if you’ve got a disability, go and access disability services. Expertise around disability needs to be more broadly recognised as vital and valuable across the entire human services field. When was the last time you saw a recruitment ad [outside the disability services sector] that said ‘disability expertise an advantage’?”*²²

Additionally, Melbourne City Mission disability staff observe significant ‘buck passing’ by staff in other service systems.

²⁰ Wood, L, *Media representation of disabled people*, accessed at <http://www.disabilityplanet.co.uk/critical-analysis.html>

²¹ Ibid

²² Melbourne City Mission (2015), *Melbourne City Mission Submission to the Royal Commission into Family Violence*, http://www.melbournecitymission.org.au/docs/default-source/position-papers/melbourne-city-mission-submission_royal-commission-into-family-violence.pdf?sfvrsn=0

For example, Melbourne City Mission staff note that mental health, particularly anxiety, tends to sit alongside autism, but *“this comorbidity is little understood and it is sometimes difficult to get holistic care between disability and mental health. If there’s an option [for the person] to sit in another system, the push back is to disability services. Mental health services don’t service ‘our’ people [i.e. people with Autism Spectrum Disorder receiving Melbourne City Mission supports].”*²³

Melbourne City Mission is optimistic that the twin juggernauts of the Royal Commission implementation plan and the National Disability Insurance Scheme will drive cross-sectoral attitudinal change and systems/service transformation. However, there is still a role for the State in reinforcing expectations in funded services and, where necessary, playing an interventionist role (as per the *Education State Special Needs Plan*, which mandates ongoing professional development requirements for teachers across early years and school settings).

Melbourne City Mission commends the State Government for its recent support for the establishment of the Future Social Services Institute with VCOSS and RMIT. As part of the Institute’s remit, it will *“design world-best education programs for the social service sector”*²⁴. In particular, the Institute will have a key focus on increasing workforce capacity in the area of disability (and ageing) – as noted by the Minister for Disability and Ageing at the Institute’s recent launch: *“What we’re about to see in the aged care and disability service area represents an industry transformation on the scale of the recent mining boom, but with no end in sight.”*²⁵

Increasing accessible housing options

People with disabilities are likely to have lower incomes than the general population and tend to have fewer housing options.²⁶ While the NDIS will fund a range of in-home and community support services to enable people to live in the community, the NDIS will not, in itself, increase the supply of accessible and affordable housing.

Melbourne City Mission welcomes the Victorian Government’s commitment to developing an *Affordable Housing Strategy* in the later part of 2016. Melbourne City Mission looks forward to providing input to the development of this strategy.

In the interim, as a signatory to the national ‘Vote Home’ advocacy campaign, Melbourne City Mission wishes to draw attention to ‘Reform 5’ of the campaign platform, which calls on the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments to work with the community housing sector to develop a 10-year plan to:

- deliver 16,000 new units of specialist disability housing for people with high support needs, to meet the anticipated demand for such housing in the first decade of NDIS
- improve the capacity of the community housing sector to develop and manage this specialist housing, including developing sector-wide development and management capacity to support local housing organisations as they enter this business

²³ Testimony from staff consultations undertaken by Melbourne City Mission

²⁴ See <http://www.futuresocial.org/>

²⁵ King, E (2016), ‘The ‘jobs of the future’ nobody is talking about’ in *The New Daily*, published at <http://thenewdaily.com.au/news/2016/06/21/jobs-future-nobody-talking/>

²⁶ Beer and Faulkner (2008) cited in Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (2012), *Disability and health inequalities in Australia research summary*

- evaluate the housing aspects of the roll-out in various trial sites in 2016 and beyond, and modify plans, practices and funding strategies accordingly
- negotiate the introduction of targets and processes to ensure universal housing design elements are lifted in the private market.

Along with these specific reforms, the Vote Home platform highlights the importance of promoting and possibly legislating the adoption of universal design standards in private market housing, to ensure that mainstream housing is physically accessible to people with disabilities.²⁷

Recommendation: *That the new Victorian Affordable Housing Strategy addresses key gaps and progresses actions relevant to its jurisdiction, as per 'reform 5' of the Vote Home policy platform.*

²⁷ This content is drawn from the Vote Home campaign platform, published at <http://housingstressed.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/VoteHome-platform-full.pdf>

Melbourne City Mission's perspectives on Theme 3: Economic participation

Create the conditions for employment participation – increase education participation and attainment

For students with disabilities – and their peers who are not disabled – increased participation in education by children and young people with disabilities has a range of **social and personal benefits**, including:

- greater opportunities for encounter and connection, building social capital
- growth in 'soft' skills – for example, interpersonal skills such as flexibility, adaptability, and understanding and respect for human diversity
- learning opportunities and experiences which develop students' knowledge.

Additionally, education is also a key enabler for employment participation.

People with disabilities are less likely to have completed Year 12 and are less likely to hold a post-school qualification than their peers who do not have a disability. Although incomplete education is not the **only** barrier to employment for people with disabilities, low education levels are highly correlated with unemployment.²⁸

Notwithstanding legislative protections²⁹ and associated guidelines and standards which expressly state that all students with a disability should be able to participate in the Australian curriculum on the same basis as their peers through rigorous, meaningful and dignified learning programs, complaints to bodies such as the Victorian Equal Rights and Human Rights Commission highlight that significant barriers persist for students with disabilities.

To provide better support to students with disabilities – thereby, **genuinely** delivering on their **rights** to education and training on the same basis as students without disability – three issues must be addressed: workforce capacity, school culture and resource constraints.

Funding is critically important, as it determines the level of adjustment that can be made to buildings and facilities, learning materials, curriculum delivery and assessment strategies; access to assistive technology; access to additional personnel such as tutors or aides for personal care or mobility assistance; access to services such as sign language interpreters or visiting school teams or specialist support staff; and access to ongoing consultancy support or professional learning and training for staff.

²⁸ Melbourne City Mission (2015), *Submission to Senate Education and Employment References Committee Inquiry into the current levels of access and attainment for students with disability in the school system, and the impact on students and families associated with inadequate levels of support*, published at http://www.melbournecitymission.org.au/docs/default-source/position-papers/melbourne-city-mission's-submission_levels-of-access-and-attainment-for-students-with-disabilities.pdf?sfvrsn=0

²⁹ Such as The *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* which enshrines the rights of students with disabilities to education and training 'on the same basis' as students without disability.

Melbourne City Mission acknowledges the State Government’s commitment to addressing these issues through the *Education State* reform agenda, which includes:

- Significant investments through the *Special Needs Plan* previously mentioned in this submission
- The *Review of the Program for Students with Disabilities* (the ‘PSD Review’), which will have a staged implementation, to align with other parts of the *Education State* agenda) and
- The *Review of School Funding*, which is pending finalisation and implementation.

In relation to the *PSD Review*, Melbourne City Mission welcomes:

- The State Government’s focus on “*aspirations — not limitations*” in its response to the report³⁰
- A move from a deficit-based model of assessment to a strengths-based model (recommended by the *Review* and supported by the Government)
- The Government’s allocation of \$22 million to “*better support students with learning difficulties including dyslexia and autism who are not eligible for the PSD program*”, “*provide transitional support in 2017 and 2018 for those who received the PSD in primary school but are no longer eligible when moving to Year 7*” and the development and implementation of a new “*dyslexia and learning difficulties strategy*”, as part of its initial response to the PSD recommendations³¹
- The acknowledgement in that report that “*there is a lack of accountability and transparency for outcomes for all students with disabilities, including those students supported under the PSD and for the use of targeted PSD funding provided to schools*” (key finding 9).³²

We are particularly pleased that recommendation 12 – supported by the Government – calls for the State to “*develop and implement a stronger system of accountability for outcomes for all students with disabilities that includes improved data quality and data collection, analysis of data, and reporting and transparency. For students this would include measures for achievement, engagement and wellbeing, and for schools this would include greater accountability and transparency for the use of funds.*”

However, on the issue of transparency, we are concerned that some recommended measures – such as a new “*Inclusive Schooling Index*” to measure inclusivity (recommendation 2) – propose that schools self-assess. Melbourne City Mission believes that it is critical that progress towards inclusive culture is objectively measured, given that, at this point in time, many families we support report an acute disparity between “*the theoretical*” (what parents are told) and “*what happens in practice*”.³³

³⁰ State Government of Victoria (2016), *Inclusive Education for All Students with Disabilities and Additional Needs, The Government’s Response to the Review of the Program for Students with Disabilities*

³¹ Ibid.

³² State Government of Victoria (2016), *The Education State: Review of the Program for Students with Disabilities*, <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/department/PSD-Review-Response.pdf>

³³ For example, see Annie’s story in Melbourne City Mission (2014), *Inquiry into Social Inclusion and Victorians with a Disability*, p. 13, published at <http://www.melbournecitymission.org.au/docs/default-source/position-papers/inquiry-into-social-inclusion-and-victorians-with-a-disability.pdf?sfvrsn=2>

Additionally – although we broadly support the Review findings and recommendations, we are disappointed that a number of recommendations are focused on the development of additional guidelines. For example, key finding 8 states that *“the existing approach to Individual Learning Plans is inconsistent, cumbersome and fails to adequately record the progress of individual students.”*³⁴ The corresponding recommendation – the development of guidelines – addresses part of the problem, but will not, in and of itself, drive the change we want to see. There needs to be an accountability measure built into this recommendation. Further, new guidelines will be meaningless unless schools can resource staff to do the work.

Finally, we advocate for the broader issue of school exclusion³⁵ (which occurs in both mainstream and specialist schools) to be taken up through the *State Disability Plan*.

Recommendations:

- *That the operationalisation of the Education State reform agenda includes tighter and transparent accountability measures, and that data is publicly reported and published in an accessible format*
- *That Government helps drive improvements in school culture through broader community education/awareness campaigns.*

Please note: Although Melbourne City Mission has commented on the issue of funding in this section of our submission, we have not made a specific recommendation about funding, given that the *Review of School Funding* (in which we have engaged) is pending finalisation.

Employment Participation

The Discussion Paper and Companion Document highlight the significant barriers to employment participation for people with disabilities.

It is Melbourne City Mission’s experience that Commonwealth-funded employment services, such as Job Active and Disability Employment Services, tend to be most successful in supporting transitions to employment for people with physical disabilities and mild cognitive disabilities. They are not achieving strong results for people with disabilities of a more significant nature.

For people with multiple and complex needs who may only want (or have the capacity) to work reduced hours (for example, a person with an Acquired Brain Injury who is seeking five hours of work per week), there is no incentive for a contracted provider to enable that pathway because the Government does not classify this as an outcome under the current contracts, hence the placement doesn’t generate the payments that the provider needs to sustain its business.

Additionally, the current model does not provide for an intensive level of pre and post-placement support or employer engagement that we know is a critical success factor for sustainable employment for jobseekers with multiple and complex barriers – for example, people with enduring mental illness/psychiatric disability.

³⁴ Op cit.

³⁵ School exclusion occurs when a teacher sends a student home for reasons associated with behaviour. YACVic has recently undertaken significant policy work on this growing issue. Melbourne City Mission also previously documented its perspectives in its submission to the *Review of the PSD*.

For this reason, Melbourne City Mission welcomes the State Government's recent commitment to funding community employment programs that are non-punitive, cognisant of place, are strengths-based, and seek to effect sustainable outcomes by addressing barriers to participation for 'disadvantaged jobseekers', including people with disabilities (for example, through the provision of intensive support), under the Jobs Victoria umbrella.

Additionally, Melbourne City Mission takes this opportunity to highlight the role of 'government as model employer' and the opportunity for the State Government, through the next *State Disability Plan*, to demonstrate leadership in this space.

Recommendation:

That the State Government sets enforceable targets for the employment of people with disabilities:

- *in the Victorian Public Service*
- *through government procurement.*

Melbourne City Mission's perspectives on Theme 4: Making the Most of the NDIS

A diverse disability services marketplace, inclusive of values-based not-for-profit providers

During the staged implementation of the NDIS, there has been a lot of commentary about the 'mature disability support market' for which the NDIS is being designed and the current market into which the NDIS is being introduced. Some of this conversation has centred on pricing policy and market viability.

At the present time, the disability sector is primarily comprised of not-for profit organisations. A major issue is the long-term sustainability and viability of these community service organisations coming into the NDIS environment.

The State has a role to play in supporting values-based not-for-profit providers to transition to the mature disability support market. The potential of the new 'Future Social Services Institute' – detailed earlier in this submission, and which has received seed funding from the State Government – is a welcome example of how the State can meaningfully contribute to sector development, however, we welcome the articulation and implementation of other strategies, through the new *State Disability Plan*.

Volunteering

Victoria's not-for-profit disability services sector has been particularly effective at attracting and retaining skilled volunteers. Volunteer supported service models are an established and effective service offering that:

- Evidence a range of individual outcomes, such as increased participation in social, cultural and recreational pursuits and increased community connection, as well as delivering respite
- Build social capital by creating opportunities for meaningful encounter in the community, thereby contributing to higher-level Commonwealth, State and Territory government strategies to reduce stigma and discrimination experienced by people with a disability.

VCOSS has previously highlighted to the NDIA that *"to be effective volunteers need to be adequately supported and linked to opportunities that align with their skills. There are substantial costs involved in doing this and community service organisations that work with volunteers need to be resourced to recruit, manage, train and develop volunteers, as well as to support the organisations that receive volunteers. This will be particularly important as demand for volunteers grows in other areas such as aged care, which may limit the available pool of volunteers available to support the disability sector."*³⁶

In relation to the costs of volunteer recruitment, management, training and development, Volunteering Victoria has also noted: *"Just as volunteers are being asked to contribute more than ever before, so too are volunteer support organisations (VSOs) and volunteer involving organisations (VIOs) are being asked to do more with their scarce and diminishing resources."*³⁷

³⁶ VCOSS (2015), *Submission to the ILC Commissioning Framework – Draft Consultation Paper*

³⁷ <http://volunteeringvictoria.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/State-Budget-Submission-2016-17-FINAL.pdf>

Recommendation:

That the State Government supports the Victorian sector to maintain and grow a skilled volunteer base that is able to meet community demand in the NDIS environment.