



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY INCLUSION
Mr Michael Pettersson MLA (Chair), Miss Laura Nuttall MLA (Deputy Chair),
Ms Nicole Lawder MLA (Member)

Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into Disability Inclusion Bill 2024

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Education and Community Inclusion Committee
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Dear Mr Pettersson

The ACT Disability Reference Group (DRG) wish to provide a submission for the Disability Inclusion Bill 2024 (the Bill) which was presented in the Legislative Assembly on 8 February 2024 by Private Member Ms Suzanne Orr MLA, and referred to the Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion, per Standing order 174.

The DRG is a diverse representation of people with disability, people with lived experience of disability, and carers. We are the ACT's existing advisory group which works to ensure the ACT Government and its Ministers are aware of the issues which affect people with disability in the ACT and advises on ways in which the ACT can be a more inclusive community for people with disability. The current workplan of the DRG is underpinned by the seven policy areas of *Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031* (ADS).

The potential introduction of the *Disability Inclusion Bill 2024* (the Bill) in the ACT Legislative Assembly holds particular significance and impacts for the DRG and our work. Particularly, the Bill's proposal to introduce a suite of 10-year strategies with 'priority inclusion areas' derived from the outcome areas of the ADS, has key overlaps with the current DRG workplan and objectives. Additionally, the establishment of a 'Disability Advisory Council' with similar make-up and function to the current DRG would clearly necessitate an analysis or review of the ongoing role and purpose of the DRG should a disability advisory council be established.

It is worth noting that many current and past DRG members have, or do also, contribute to other ACT Government disability advisory groups, including the Disability Justice Reference Group, the Transport Canberra and City Services Accessibility Reference Group, the ACT Health Strategy Reference Group and the Disability Education Reference Group, which are contributing to the implementation of the existing *ACT Disability Justice Strategy 2019-2029*, *ACT Health Strategy 2024-2033* and *ACT Inclusive Education Strategy 2024-2034*. The DRG would be keenly interested to understand how these advisory groups and existing strategies would be impacted and/or aligned, should the Bill be introduced by the ACT Government.

I wish to draw your attention to some recent and highly significant work undertaken by the DRG, through the co-design and support provided to the ACT Government's public consultation for the 10-year ACT Disability Strategy. Through this process, the DRG led and

supported a range of consultations, including open forums, focused conversations with diverse communities and targeted conversations on topics known to be of priority or particular interest to people with disability in the ACT community. We held 33 public consultation events which were attended by 415 people. Of the events held, 31 were facilitated by people with disability and 2 were facilitated by family carers. The results of the consultation have been captured in the [Towards a 10-year ACT Disability Strategy — A listening report 2022](#).

Through this process, we heard from the disability community they want a strategy that can address the systemic issues by:

- making it easier for people with disability to navigate mainstream systems;
- reducing social isolation and lack of inclusion;
- ensuring people with disability have more of a voice in policies and decisions;
- overcoming negative community attitudes, stigma and discrimination;
- addressing the lack of disability awareness and knowledge across many sectors; and
- putting actions in place to reduce financial hardship for people with disability.

Of particular note, the implementation of more Disability Action and Inclusion Plans (DAIPs) was heard repetitively as an idea, or a way in which government could implement meaningful change for people with disability in the ACT community. DAIPs are similar in purpose and function to the disability inclusion plans described in the Bill.

The DRG also wish to note the public consultation undertaken with the DRG for the ACT Disability Strategy provides a practical and local demonstration of how the consultation requirements outlined for strategies and disability inclusion plans developed under the Bill can – and has already been – operationalised by the ACT Government.

With the ACT Disability Strategy consultation, consultation opportunities were available in a variety of formats, to ensure there was a method available to suit every person's needs or preferences (including online survey, written, artistic or other submissions, public forums, targeted/focus discussions, and kitchen table conversations). Consultations were accessible, with government officers capable of being responsive to specific requests (such as large print paperwork, space for assistance animals) and with a range of accessibility considerations built into the consultation planning and process (including choosing accessible venues, provision of captioning, interpreting and ensuring the availability of hearing loops, etc). There was a targeted effort to ensure the consultation heard from people who represented the full diversity of the ACT community, including women, young people, people who are ageing, carers, culturally diverse people, LGBTIQ+ and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The DRG also recognise the value of the experiences and expertise of people with disability. The DRG have noted there is no specific reference to remuneration in the Bill, but would advocate for the ongoing recognition of this by the ACT Government through its remuneration mechanisms or community participation payments – to people who are providing their time and expertise as a member of a DRG or disability advisory council, or as a community member contributing to an important and valuable consultation process.

The DRG strongly believes in '*nothing about us, without us*', which is a catch-phrase aligned with the UN Convention on the Rights of Disabled People, and is used by people with disability globally to advocate for their right to be involved in decisions which impact them. However, the DRG also recognises there needs to be a balance. Noting the large amount of consultation undertaken with the disability community in recent years, the DRG wish to caution the impacts of over-consultation and the potential for consultation fatigue, factoring the significant consultation requirements in the Bill.

Consultation fatigue and burnout will be felt more acutely if people with disability don't feel their contributions are being heard or addressed effectively. There can also be a significant emotional impact for people with lived experience, and this is something that must be considered through the process of planning and introducing the suite of work should the Bill come into effect.

The public consultation undertaken with the DRG for the ACT Disability Strategy covered a wide range of focus topics with broad alignments to the 'priority inclusion areas', or the outcome areas of the ADS. The DRG believe the findings remain relevant and as such, the introduction of a suite of strategies that leverage off this recent and robust consultation (summarised in the [Towards a 10-year ACT Disability Strategy — A listening report 2022](#)) is something that may be taken into consideration in operationalising commitments in the Bill.

Through the ACT Disability Strategy consultation and the broader work of the DRG, the DRG are confident there is a clear and positive indication the ACT disability community would welcome the implementation of the Bill in the ACT – the suite of strategies, the development of disability inclusion plans for all government agencies, the robust and accessible consultations, including the establishment of a representative disability advisory council - if they will collectively and meaningfully instigate the change the Bill outlines it intends to do. In the absence of any enforcement or non-compliance clauses in the Bill, a very large element of the success of the Bill will be derived from the attitudes, knowledge, awareness and disability confidence of the government officers, Executives and Ministers tasked with implementing the various requirements of the Bill.

Thank you for taking the time to read and consider our submission. I would welcome the opportunity to provide further information to the Committee in person should I be invited.

Sincerely,

Renée Heaton

Chair, ACT Disability Reference Group

