



Policy Platform: Young People with a Disability Youth Coalition of the ACT

The United Nations, in its *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* recognises that disability is an evolving concept, which results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.¹

A 2011 report on the health of young people in Australia found that the rate of young people with disabilities is approximately 7% of the total population of young people.² Approximately one quarter of the population of young people with a disability has a severe or profound core activity limitation, indicating that they sometimes or always need assistance with daily activities. This proportion equates to approximately 2% of all young Australians, and factors may lead to socioeconomic disadvantage and poverty for some families.³

The most common disabling conditions for young people aged 15 – 24 years include: intellectual or other mental disorders (most common among young males), psychiatric disorders (most common among young females) and musculoskeletal disorders. Intellectual and other mental disorders include ADHD, autism and learning disabilities.⁴ The Youth Coalition notes that government agencies and community services report seeing an increasing number of children and young people entering the education system with ADHD and Autism.

The Youth Coalition believes that all possible efforts should be made to ensure that young people with disabilities are afforded adequate support and equitable access to programs, services and opportunities that allow them to have a 'full and decent life', in accordance with the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*.⁵ The Youth Coalition particularly emphasises this section of *the Convention*, highlighting that current strategies seeking to support young people with disabilities are more often based in minimising disadvantage, and less on supporting young people to aspire to achieve 'a full and decent life'.

The Youth Coalition acknowledges the Future Directions (ACT Disability Plan), which sets out a broad plan for people with disability in the ACT.⁶ It contains four strategic directions for people with disability, their family and carers.⁷ The detail of this plan is further elaborated on in Challenge 2014.⁸ The Youth Coalition supports the intended outcomes of the plan but considers that the implementation mechanisms need to be amended to take account of the launch of Disability Care from July 2014. In particular this will involve a change in role of ACT government in delivering disability services and policy.

The ACT Government also highlights the inclusion of people with a disability as a goal of the broader Canberra Social Plan.⁹ This reflects the need for disability policies to be part of all service provision within the ACT.

However, the Youth Coalition is concerned that despite these policy initiatives, young people with disabilities are likely to continue to experience exclusion and social isolation. Young people with disabilities experience significant barriers to accessing services, programs and opportunities that are available to the broader population of young people. This can occur for a number of reasons, including, but not limited to: inadequate infrastructure, access to public transport, affordability and availability of services, discrimination and stigma. The Youth Coalition believes that it is the responsibility of government, the community sector, and the private sector to work towards removing many of these barriers.

The Youth Coalition commends the Federal government for introducing the National Disability Insurance Scheme, now branded 'Disability Care'. The scheme is designed to provide financial support for people who are born with or acquire a disability.¹⁰ The ACT is one of a series of launch sites for the new scheme.¹¹ The Disability Care is scheduled to commence in July 2014. The Youth Coalition looks forward to working with the ACT and Federal Governments to help ensure the needs of young people with disability are met through the implementation of the scheme. The Productivity Commission's 2011 report states that the current disability support system is underfunded, unfair, fragmented and inefficient.¹² It is important that the amount of funding applied to the scheme meets the requirements of the participants, and that the information gained from consultations and workshops is taken into account and actioned. The expert panel appointed in the ACT to guide its implementation is a significant and important step towards a successful scheme.

The Youth Coalition supports the ACT Policy Framework for Children and Young People with a Disability, which seeks to support children and young people with a disability who are under the age of 18.¹³ While this is an important step in progressing key issues for young people with disabilities, the Youth Coalition advocates for the Framework to also include young people aged 18 – 25 years in the Framework, in line with the broader ACT Government definition of young people.¹⁴ Youth services have identified that transition points for young people with disabilities, particularly after secondary school, are a high priority issue. They have highlighted that post-secondary opportunities can be scarce and lead young people to become disengaged from social, recreational, educational and work-life interactions.

The 2007 report on the health of young Australians reported that 35% of young people with a disability who were aged 15 – 19 years experienced difficulty at school. 33% of young people aged 20 – 24 did not complete Year 12 or participate in further study.¹⁵ In addition, 43% of 15 – 24 year olds reported that they were restricted in the type of job they could do, and 33% reported that they had difficulty changing jobs or getting their preferred jobs.¹⁶

The Youth Coalition strongly believes that mechanisms need to be developed and implemented which support young people with disabilities to meaningfully engage in education and employment opportunities. We applaud the Australian Government for its commitment to implementing the Gonski reforms, in particular the resourcing amounts for students with disabilities. Schools must provide an inclusive educational environment for young people with disabilities to participate in mainstream learning without being isolated and discriminated against.

Young people with disability who are employed need to receive the full rights and benefits available to all other employees. The Youth Coalition recognises that the skills of young people develop and change over time and that young people with

disability need to be supported to perform a range of tasks in their employment and education.

Given that more than 99% of children and young people with a disability live with their family, who provide for most of their support requirements;¹⁷ the Youth Coalition also highlights the importance of ensuring that services and policy initiatives support families and carers of young people with a disability. In addition, the Youth Coalition notes the importance of supporting young adults with disabilities who would like to move into independent living, to access appropriate accommodation and services.

Commitments

1. Advocating for the elimination of all forms of discrimination against young people with disabilities.
2. Advocating for the provision of high quality respite programs and services for young people and their families across the ACT.
3. Advocating for improved supports for young people with disabilities who are aged 18 – 25 years, particularly in relation to key transition points; including through an expansion of the definition of young people in the ACT Policy Framework for Children and Young People with a Disability to include 18-25 year olds.
4. Advocating for public transport options that improve access for young people with disabilities.
5. Advocating for inclusive and more flexible educational delivery and resources to support young people with disabilities to engage meaningfully in education and employment opportunities.
6. Advocating for improvements in buildings and other infrastructure to support young people with disabilities to access disability-friendly community and recreational facilities, including youth services.
7. Advocating for workforce development initiatives to support the disability support workforce in the ACT, particularly community-based workers and services.
8. Advocating for the development of more flexible and innovative accommodation options for young people with a disability, including shared accommodation.
9. Advocating for more research to be undertaken about the needs of young people with disabilities and their families.
10. Advocating for the active involvement of young people with disability in designing, planning and evaluating youth policy and service delivery frameworks.
11. Advocating for the active and supported participation of young people with disability in their individual care planning and case management.

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- ¹ United Nations (2007) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, New York.
- ² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2011) Young Australians: Their Health and Wellbeing 2011. Australian Government, Canberra, p. 86. <http://www.aihw.gov.au/publication-detail/?id=10737420537> Accessed 14 June 2013.
- ³ Ibid p. 112.
- ⁴ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2011) Young Australians: Their Health and Wellbeing 2011. Australian Government, Canberra.
- ⁵ United Nations (1989) Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 23.
- ⁶ ACT Government (2009) Future Directions: Towards Challenge 2014 http://www.dhcs.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/79872/final_policy_framework_PUBLISHED.pdf Accessed 28 June 2013; Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services (2003) Access to ACT Government Strategy, Canberra.
- ⁷ ACT Government (2004) Future Directions: A Framework for the ACT 2004 - 2008 http://www.dhcs.act.gov.au/disability_act/future_directions Accessed 28 June 2013.
- ⁸ ACT Government (2009) Challenge 2014 - A ten year vision for disability in the ACT http://www.dhcs.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0015/5334/Challenge_2014.pdf Accessed 28 June 2013
- ⁹ Chief Ministers Department (2004) Building Our Community: The Canberra Social Plan, ACT Government, Canberra.
- ¹⁰ Australian Government (2013) 'Australian Capital Territory (ACT) | National Disability Insurance Scheme' <http://www.ndis.gov.au/ndis-launc/launch-locations/act/> Accessed 15 April 2013.
- ¹¹ Australian Government (2013) 'Australian Capital Territory (ACT) | National Disability Insurance Scheme' <http://www.ndis.gov.au/ndis-launc/launch-locations/act/> Accessed 15 April 2013.
- ¹² Productivity Commission (2011) Disability Care and Support. Australian Government, Canberra.
- ¹³ ACT Government (2009) ACT Government Policy Framework for Children and Young People with a Disability and Their Families, Canberra.
- ¹⁴ Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services (2009) ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014, ACT Government, Canberra.
- ¹⁵ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2007) Young Australians: Their Health and Wellbeing 2007, Australian Government, Canberra.
- ¹⁶ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2007) Young Australians: Their Health and Wellbeing 2007, Australian Government, Canberra.
- ¹⁷ ACT Government (2009) ACT Government Policy Framework for Children and Young People with a Disability and Their Families, Canberra.