**Communiqué**

**20 November 2020**

The Disability Council NSW (the Council) met on Friday, 20 November 2020 by video conference. This was the final meeting of the Council for the year.

Mr Brian Woods, Director, Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) provided information to the Council on the National Federation reform changes and the relationship between NSW and National Disability governance. Mr Woods provided an overview of the key elements of disability policy governance in NSW, which includes the NSW Disability Board, NSW Disability Directors Forum and the NSW Disability Stakeholders Forum. The Disability Council NSW is a member of the NSW Disability Stakeholder Forum.

The Hon. Gareth Ward, Minister for Families, Communities and Disability Services, attended the Council meeting and thanked members for their support and commitment over the past 12 months, especially during COVID-19. Minister Ward provided the Council information on the state budget, with $112 million for disability advocacy and an additional $17 million over two years for training and employment for disability support. Given the Council had strongly supported the need for the extension of advocacy funding and had raised it multiple times with Minister Ward, this news was warmly welcomed by the Council. They acknowledged Minister Ward’s efforts in ensuring people with disability in the state continue to have their rights protected.

The Council raised concerns about the rate of disability employment in NSW and sought advice from the Minister on the role it could play to ensure disability employment targets are met. Minister Ward acknowledged the Council’s concerns and suggested working collaboratively with the Public Service Commission and Local Government NSW in 2021 to provide additional focus on disability employment in NSW and improve disability employment statistics.

The Council received an update from the DCJ Secretary, Mr Michael Coutts-Trotter, regarding disability employment and career development within DCJ. Mr Coutts-Trotter acknowledged that the department is seeking to further increase its disability recruitment intake and develop additional initiatives and remove barriers to enable DCJ to meet the Premier’s target.

Key highlights reported by the Secretary included:

* DCJ has a strong Disability Employee Network. The network consists of 140 members, including 52 senior leaders.
* DCJ has a central budget available for all workplace adjustments for staff with disability. There is also a new workplace adjustment policy.
* DCJ is working with the Australian Network on Disability (AND) through its mentoring program as well as it's Stepping into Internships program for people with disability studying at university who may want to work within DCJ.

The DCJ Secretary also informed the Council about the work underway to establish a workplace adjustment passport for people with disability working in the NSW public sector. This passport aims to make adjustments easier for the employee who advances in their career or who wants to pursue career opportunities in another department.

The meeting received a briefing from Ms Lisa Short, State Manager NSW/ACT, National Disability Insurance Agency regarding the NDIS Independent Assessment Policy and how the agency selected the assessment tools for independent assessments. Ms Short advised that the accuracy and reliability of the assessment tools have been tested in two pilots, the first in 2018 and the other this year.

Key highlights from the discussion:

* The Council acknowledged the importance of receiving a broad cross-section of feedback and expressed interest in participating in the pilot.
* The Council raised multiple issues concerning the independent assessment process, particularly regarding the budget, thin markets, and the anxiety especially for people who are hard of hearing and/or deaf. The Council also recommended the need for independent assessors to be trained by people with disability.
* The Council highlighted the need for better communication for participants about the independent assessment process. Ms Short acknowledged the importance that people will benefit from communication and advised that more information about the process will be coming out soon.

Ms Ebru Sumaktas, Senior Policy Officer from DCJ discussed the findings of the Disability Employment Report requested by the Council to review successful and sustainable attraction, retention and workplace accommodations in Australia. This report will be presented to the Minister with a number of recommendations.

The last guest speaker, Ms Maria Petrou, Executive Officer, Ageing & Disability Commission (ADC) joined the meeting to consult with the Council on the position paper developed by ADC on the process to monitor implementation of the National Disability Strategy in NSW. Ms Petrou highlighted the questions raised in the position paper and that the ADC will recommend a Standing Review into the Implementation of the National Disability Strategy and sought feedback from the Council.

The Council’s feedback included the:

* importance of transparency, for example – the Report could be provided in the form of a dashboard, available on the Commissioners website. Ensuring the dashboard is accessible.
* importance of consulting with a broad cross-section of people with disability, including people with intellectual disability living in supported living spaces as well as culturally and linguistically diverse communities. The Council also stated the importance for multiple avenues for input.
* report to focus on outcomes, for example - how many complaints were reported to the Commission and what was the outcome.

The Council expressed interest in working collaboratively with the ADC.

This was the last meeting of Mr Mark Tonga and Professor Eileen Baldry as the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Council. Council members took the opportunity to acknowledge the leadership of both Mr Tonga and Professor Baldry and their role in furthering the common goal of an inclusive and accessible NSW.

Both Mr Tonga and Professor Baldry expressed their gratitude and appreciation for being part of the Council and working with its members to improve the rights of people with disability.

The Council will next meet on 26 February 2021.

**Mark Tonga**

**Chair - The Disability Council NSW**