



Submission on Productivity Commission Inquiry “A fair chance for all - Breaking the disadvantage cycle”

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About us

Imagine Better is an independent disability research, training, and advocacy organisation, governed and staffed by disabled people and close family members of disabled people.

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What are the main aspects of disadvantage that should be investigated in this inquiry?

The inquiry should include a specific focus on the persistent disadvantage experienced by disabled people, their families and whānau in Aotearoa New Zealand. Disabled people are the largest minority group in the country, with 24% of the population identifying as having a disability or long-term health condition.¹ Systematic discrimination and exclusion means that disabled people experience persistent disadvantage and inequity of access to wellbeing opportunities and outcomes.

Barriers to participation in education, employment and wider community life prevents disabled New Zealanders from achieving the same wellbeing outcomes as non-disabled New Zealanders. In Aotearoa New Zealand, disabled people experience poorer health outcomes, lower educational achievements, less economic participation, and higher rates of poverty than non-disabled people.²

We support the holistic interpretation of wellbeing put forward in the consultation paper³ and think the proposed framework ‘He Ara Waiora’ is appropriate. In particular, the four aspects of mana outlined on page 3 have relevance to dismantling the systems that keep disabled people in persistent disadvantage:

- **Mana tuku iho** - a strong sense of identity and belonging: disabled people are often made to feel ashamed, embarrassed and inadequate by discriminatory systems and attitudes. In order that disabled people can thrive, they should be supported to feel a sense of disability pride and connection to their community.
- **Mana tautuutu** - people’s participation and connection with their communities, including fulfilment of their rights and obligations: disabled people experience high levels of social exclusion and are often prevented from participating in their communities because of access, communication, and attitudinal barriers. To thrive, disabled people need access to the same ordinary opportunities of participation as non-disabled people.
- **Mana āheinga** - the capability to decide on their aspirations and realise them in the context of their own circumstance: disabled people often lack the resources and opportunities to

exercise choice and control over their lives and support needs. To thrive, disabled people need opportunities for self-determination and decision-making power.

- Mana whanake - The power to grow sustainable, intergenerational prosperity: disabled people are discriminated against in education and employment systems. In order that they thrive, disabled people should be supported into education and employment.

The reality of disabled people’s lives reflected in the negative demographics of poverty, housing, education, employment, violence / abuse, health outcomes and community participation show that disabled people’s wellbeing is not prioritised in the same way non-disabled people. A specific focus on the experiences of disabled people as part of the inquiry would help shift the dial on reducing persistent disadvantage for a large portion of the population. Better inclusion, participation and wellbeing of disabled people must be a priority for action.

Where should the Commission focus its research effort?

The underlying drivers of disadvantage and poor wellbeing need direct attention. Disabled people experience persistent disadvantage across a range of areas⁴:

Compared to non-disabled people, disabled people have:	
Income	Half the median weekly income
Employment	Half the employment rate; a quarter for those aged 15–24
Education	Half the qualification rate
Housing	Greater likelihood of renting and of damp, weather tightness, and other problems
Health	Less than a third the rate of reporting excellent health
Social connection	Good contact with family and friends but low level of leisure activities
Crime	Twice the likelihood of being a victim of violent crime
Access	Greater likelihood of living in areas of high socioeconomic deprivation with low access to services
Children	Greater likelihood of being in a one-parent home, a low income household, a house that is too small

Persistent disadvantage experienced by disabled people is complex and multi-faceted. Any research effort needs to focus on the interconnectedness of disadvantage, for example, housing disadvantage impacts disabled peoples’ lives and well-being. Inability to access suitable and secure housing compromises the choices available to disabled people within their communities and reduces opportunities for education, employment, community participation, and mobility.⁵

Where should government focus its effort on finding solutions?

Disabled people, their families and whānau are experts on their own lives and community needs. As required by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)⁶ the government needs to work closely with disabled people, including disabled persons organisations (DPOs) to ensure that the voices of disabled people are heard and included in planning, policies, service design and delivery.

The government could usefully draw upon the Enabling Good Lives (EGL) vision and principles as a framework for addressing persistent need experienced by disabled people. The EGL vision and principles form the foundation for how disabled people, their families and whānau want to experience their interactions with social supports and services. It focuses on ensuring disabled people have choice and control over their lives and supports. The EGL vision and principles is an approach that is developed and governed by disabled people, families and whānau. The government has already committed to using the EGL vision and principles in other areas of work. See the EGL website www.enablinggoodlives.co.nz

Is there anything else that you would like to see covered in this inquiry?

As part of a focus on persistent disadvantage experienced by disabled people, attention needs to be directed to addressing the inadequacies of the Ministry of Health disability support system (DSS). The persistent disadvantage experienced by disabled people is reinforced through their interaction with DSS. Chronic underfunding in disability supports by successive governments combined with a system that medicalises and pathologizes disability means that disabled people are disadvantaged by a system that is meant to support them.

There also needs to be a focus on intersectionality and the ways in which disability interacts with other marginalised identities to increase the impacts of persistent disadvantage. Intersectionality means that some groups of disabled people face multiple disparities, for example, 43% of tāngata whaikaha/Māori disabled and 49% of Pacific Island disabled live in the most deprived areas in New Zealand⁷; and gender diverse people with disabilities experience levels of hardship, discrimination, violence and isolation over and above those without disabilities.⁸

¹ Statistics New Zealand (2013) Disability survey: 2013. Stats NZ <https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/disability-survey-2013>

² Health and Disability System Review. 2019. Health and Disability System Review - Interim Report. Hauora Manaaki ki Aotearoa Whānui – Pūrongo mō Tēnei Wā. Wellington: HDSR; Statistics New Zealand. 2020: Measuring inequality for disabled New Zealanders: 2018.

³ New Zealand Productivity Commission (2021) A fair chance for all: Breaking the disadvantage cycle. Scoping the Terms of Reference for an inquiry. Available from www.productivity.govt.nz.

⁴ Health and Disability System Review. 2019. Health and Disability System Review - Interim Report. Hauora Manaaki ki Aotearoa Whānui – Pūrongo mō Tēnei Wā. Wellington: HDSR

⁵ Aplin, T., Canagasuriam, S., Petersen, M., Gustafsson, L. (2020): The experience of home for social housing tenants with a disability: security and connection but limited control. *Housing and Society* 47:1, 63-7; Oldman, C. & Beresford, B. (2000) Home, Sick Home: Using the Housing Experiences of Disabled Children to Suggest a New Theoretical Framework, *Housing Studies*, 15:3, 429-442, DOI: 10.1080/02673030050009267; Soorenian, A. (2013). Housing and transport: access issues for disabled international students in British universities. *Disability & Society*, 28(8), 1118–1131. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2012.758033>

⁶ United Nations. (2006). United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). Retrieved from: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/article-1-purpose.html>.

⁷ Statistics New Zealand (2015). He hauā Māori: Findings from the 2013 Disability Survey. Wellington: Statistics New Zealand. Available from www.stats.govt.nz.

⁸ Veale, J., Byrne, J., Tan, K., Guy, S., Yee, A., Nopera, T., & Bentham, R. (2019). Counting Ourselves: The health and wellbeing of trans and non-binary people in Aotearoa New Zealand. Transgender Health Research Lab, University of Waikato: Hamilton NZ.