

DPO Coalition

by email: us-dpo@groups.io

DPO Coalition Statement | Changes to Whaikaha

The DPO Coalition expresses its grave concern that the Government has failed disabled people by not meeting its obligations to engage with them prior to making substantial decisions about the future role of Whaikaha and the provision of Disability Support Services (DSS). Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations on the Government to engage with Tāngata Whaikaha Māori have not been met. Obligations to engage with organisations that represent disabled people in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD | Disability Convention) have not been met. The fundamentals to work with disabled people and whānau which assisted the establishment of Whaikaha have not been met.

The NZ government has obligations under the UNCRPD to ensure disabled people have their rights in all parts of life. Article 19 living independently and being included in the community, states access to a range of support services. For decades, disabled people have been calling for disability support services to be delivered in a manner that upholds the dignity of disabled people. Article 28 obliges the NZ Government to ensure disabled people have an “adequate standard of living”. The establishment of Whaikaha was seen as an exciting and positive change for disabled people and their whanau because disabled people were supposed to have a major role in assisting determine what the future of disability supports would look like. Disabled people and whanau expected to have a role in assisting the Government to make changes that would ensure that disabled people have the support required and enjoy a decent standard of living.

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The DPO Coalition expects to release findings and recommendations from work conducted by the Donald Beasley Institute concerning Disabled Person-Led Monitoring of the UNCRPD in Aotearoa New Zealand. This will be done in several phases between October 2024 and January 2025. Some initial insights from the research are appended to this statement.

Changing the agency which is responsible for the provision of disability support services does not alter the Government's obligations with respect to the UNCRPD or Te Tiriti o Waitangi. The DPO Coalition will continue to hold the Ministry of Social Development to the same standards of service delivery as we had for Whaikaha since July 2022. The changes in the responsible agency do not affect the aspirations that disabled people and whānau have today and will continue to have. Disabled people have a right to a decent quality of life on an equal basis with the lives of nondisabled New Zealanders.

The DPO Coalition calls on the Minister for Disability Issues to ensure organisations representing disabled people and their whānau are involved in assisting the Government meet the challenges resulting from decades of underinvestment in meeting the needs of disabled people.

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Key findings of the Disabled People Led Monitoring Research, presented to the DPO Coalition by Donald Beasley Institute

Key Findings

“There's very little choice. You have to have a defined ‘what's available’ only to be told - well, you can have support for this, but not for that. And the decisions about what you get are very much in the hands of the professionals for the service providers.” (Home and Community Support Services focus group)

Across the large and diverse group of participants (including disability groups, intersectionalities, ethnicities, funding types, and identity groups), disabled people, families, whānau and close supporters reported a range of challenges when it came to accessing fit-for-purpose disability supports and services that enable them to enjoy their human rights. Key challenges include (but were not limited to):

- A lack of accessible information about where and how to access supports and services.
- Restrictive and inequitable eligibility criteria that exclude disability groups with significant support needs (such as people with FASD and chronic illness).
- Significant disparities between funding allocations and support packages (for example, between ACC, MoH and EGL).
- Needs assessments and services (including assessors, management and frontline support workers) underpinned by

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deficit models of disability, impacting the quality and quantity of available support.

- Limited choice and control over the type and amount of supports and services received.
- Significant underinvestment in disability supports and services.

More positively, participants who accessed EGL principles-based funding had increased choice and control over the support they received, leading to greater enjoyment of their human rights.

Participants also expressed cautious optimism about the potential of Whaikaha - Ministry of Disabled People, and hoped for equitable access to EGL principles-based funding and services for all disabled people as quickly as possible.

As experts on their own support needs, disabled people and their family, whānau and close supporters also recommended improving supports and services in the future to ensure greater alignment with the UNCRPD. The most critical recommendations are:

- Decision-making about the design and delivery of disability supports and services should be inclusive of and led by disabled people and their family, whānau and close supporters.
- Disabled people and their family, whānau and close supporters should be appointed to key leadership roles within government and support service agencies.
- The government should increase investment in DSS and ensure that services are: aligned with the UNCRPD, New Zealand Disability Strategy 2016-2026 and Te Tiriti of Waitangi; delivered from a social and human rights model of disability; based on a model of high trust; and provide greater flexibility to disabled people, their family, whānau and close supporters.

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“[I]t would look like them believing us when we told them what it was like for us. And then putting the support in place that we need.” (Family and whānau focus group)

Ends