

Mr Don Challen AM

Chair

Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council

secretariat.PESRAC@treasury.tas.gov.au

Dear Mr Challen

I am pleased to enclose a Submission to Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council (PESRAC) Stage 2 Consultations from the Premier's Disability Advisory Council Community Members.

In framing this submission, the Community Members have drawn on feedback from people with disability on their experience of the COVID-19 Response and reviewed PESRAC's Interim Report.

Yours sincerely

John Stevens

Community Chair

Premier's Disability Advisory Committee

2 October 2020

Premier's Disability Advisory Council
Community Members
**Submission to the Premier's Economic and Social
Recovery Council**

Stage 2 Consultation

25 September 2020

This submission has been prepared by and represents the views of the Community Members of the Premier's Disability Advisory Council.

Introduction

The Community Members of the Premier's Disability Advisory Council (PDAC) welcome the opportunity to contribute to Tasmania's economic and social recovery following the restrictions introduced in March 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Community Members are pleased to provide this submission for consideration by the Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Council (PESRAC).

This submission has been prepared by and represents the views of the Community Members of the Premier's Disability Advisory Council. It is not intended as an exhaustive list of priorities, but to identify opportunities for linkages with issues the PDAC has previously identified with the recommendations made in the PESRAC Interim report (July 2020).

Background

PDAC is chaired by the Premier and includes the Minister for Disability Services and Community Development as a permanent member. PDAC has up to 11 community members, including the Community Chair and Deputy Community Chair who conduct out-of-session meetings.¹

PDAC was established in 2007. Its primary purpose is to assist the Premier and Government to implement Accessible Island: Tasmania's Disability Framework for Action 2018-2021 (Accessible Island).² Accessible Island is the third whole-of-government framework to guide Tasmanian Government agencies work for all Tasmanians with disability.³

PDAC works with Government and the broader community to promote the inclusion and participation of people with disability in community life. Accessible Island is a whole of government policy that aims to remove barriers and enable people with disability to enjoy the same rights and opportunities as all other Tasmanians.

Accessible Island links to the National Disability Strategy 2010–2020 (NDS), which outlines a ten-year national policy framework for improving the lives of Australians with disability, their families and carers. Accessible Island is Tasmania's NDS implementation plan; the action areas are aligned to the NDS outcomes.

Ten State Government Agencies report annually to PDAC on their progress in implementing Accessible Island.⁴

1

https://www.communities.tas.gov.au/csr/policy/advisory_groups/premiers_disability_advisory_council

2

https://www.communities.tas.gov.au/csr/policy/Policy_Work/accessible_island_tasmanias_disability_framework_for_action_2018-2021_dfa

³ The first Disability Framework for Action (DFA) began in 2005 and was followed by the second DFA, which began in 2013 and concluded in 2017.

⁴ PDAC's 2019 report can be found at:

https://www.communities.tas.gov.au/csr/policy/advisory_groups/premiers_disability_advisory_council

The Community Member's submission to the Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council's (PESRAC) Interim Report is presented in two sections:

- The impacts and priority issues identified by PDAC Community members; and
- The linkages to PESRAC's Interim *Report* and its recommendations.

Tasmanians with Disability

Data from the most recent Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) [Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers 2018](#) shows that Tasmania continues to have the highest rate of disability (26.8%)⁵ compared to 17.7 per cent nationally.

While the national rate fell from 18 per cent in 2015, the rate increased in Tasmania from 26 per cent to 27 per cent or from 131,700 to 140,100 people. Of this, 7.5 per cent of Tasmanians living in households had a profound or severe disability (5.7 % nationally).

As of 30 June 2020, 8,858 Tasmanians are active participants in the NDIS.⁶

Impacts and priority issues

What was the experience of Tasmanians with disability and unpaid carers during COVID-19 pandemic?

A range of experiences was noted:

- Some Tasmanians with disability expressed frustration with the implicit assumption in many COVID information resources that all people with disability are 'vulnerable'.
- During the earlier responses to the pandemic a significant amount of disability specific information appeared to be directed to and focused on NDIS participants, with quite a few references directing people with disability (PwD) to the NDIS website for COVID related information. This is despite NDIS participants only making up a small proportion of all Tasmanians with disability.
- There may have been a perception that the NDIS was best placed to meet their needs, even though many people with disability are not NDIS participants. While the NDIS website included information that was not specific to NDIS participants, it may not have appeared to be a relevant site for non-NDIS participants.

'Ninety per cent of people with disability are not on a NDIS plan, they rely on mainstream services'
Professor Karen Fisher, Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales.

⁵ All persons – living in households and cared-accommodation.

⁶ <https://www.ndis.gov.au/understanding/ndis-rollout/tasmania#tasmania-statistics-as-at-30-september-2019>

[As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic] it's been a difficult time many people with disability are questioning how they are perceived by society'
Dr Ben Gauntlett, Disability Discrimination Commissioner. ⁷

While supermarket chains organised dedicated shopping hours for people with disability and their carers, the early start required was impractical and difficult to arrange support for. Additionally, some reported not being allowed to take a carer with them to shop, and others with significant mobility difficulties were forced to cover extra distances when shops restricted customer access/egress as no recognition was given to their disabilities (a form of indirect discrimination).

People with low vision/vision impairment have experienced significant difficulty during the COVID pandemic particularly in relation to accessible information and in negotiating social distancing requirements. For example, feedback from the Premier's Disability Advisory Council included:

- Shops and government services which have reopened to the public are placing hand sanitiser for customers with visual signage to their location and placing distancing tape/stickers, with no tactile element, on floors. This process omits people with vision impairment in making safe distancing decisions.
- There are instances of vision impaired people being verbally abused by other customers or disciplined by security staff because of their inability to proceed to the correct social distancing marker.
- There is also concern as to whether temperature check kiosks can be fully accessible. For example, the temperature check kiosks require users to stand to get their forehead temperature taken. This is not accessible for people with physical disability. People with visual impairment may also experience difficulty using the kiosks.

This 'perception of the 'invisibility' of people with disability carries through the Interim Report where the word 'disability/disabilities' appears four times and 'carer' once - compared to other key cohorts. While people with disability also fall into other cohorts, this lack of recognition of the impacts on the 141,100 Tasmanians with disability is of concern. Word searches of the Interim Report show the following references to population cohorts:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|------|
| • Young people/youth | 33/7 |
| • Women | 26 |
| • Mental health | 23 |
| • Older people / Tasmanians | 6 |
| • Visa/visa holder | 4 |
| • LGBTQI+ | 2 |
| • Carer | 1 |

⁷ Australian Human Rights Commission and the Centre of Research Excellence in Disability and Health, webinar, 24 September 2020.

Accessible websites and information

While the provision of Auslan interpreters at the Premier and State Controller's media conferences is valued, the accessibility of written information in emails or online continues to be variable. However, there is only a small number of accredited Auslan interpreters in Tasmania, most of whom are based in southern Tasmania.

The Coronavirus.tas.gov.au website is accessible. However, a lot of key information both in Government's Departments 'day to day operations' as well as information specific to the COVID-19 pandemic continues to be published in inaccessible formats (eg. uploaded document files).

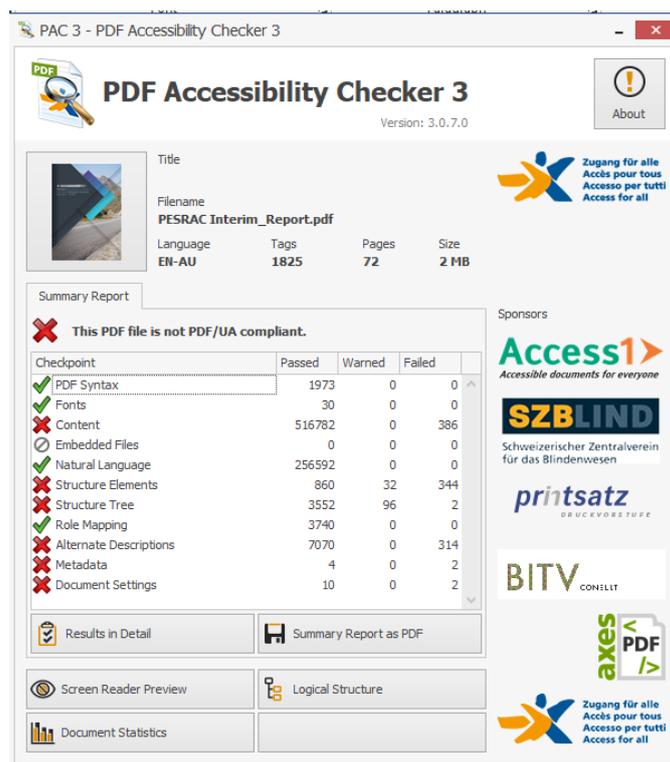
In its 2019 Report, PDAC expressed its concern at the lag in implementing the 2015 Tasmanian Government Communications Policy commitment to 'ensure information published on websites is accessible to all Tasmanian in accordance with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 Level AA accessibility requirements'.⁸

Some key documents were produced directly in design packages rather than being drafted in Microsoft Word. This means that it is difficult to provide a parallel accessible or html-linked document that can be read by screen readers. An example of how this can be easily achieved is at: [Accessible Island](#). Other government documents are prepared in MS Word but are then formatted as a PDF, which is not an accessible format.

Examples include the:

- Road to Recovery May 2020
- PESRAC Interim Report July 2020 (see picture below)
- The email messages from the Head of the State Service to the State Service employees.

⁸ 2019 Report, p.11.



This is not a new problem. PDAC has noted the slow progress in meeting WCAG 2.0 compliance in successive annual reports.⁹ However its impact has been particularly prevalent during the COVID-19 response and recovery.

Participation in the Tasmanian community

Universal Design Principles

The State Government's 'Construction Blitz' announced in June 2020, lists a significant program of public works including

- 2295 new dwellings;
- Regional health centre upgrades;
- Burnie Court upgrade;
- New Child and Family Learning Centres;
- Derwent Entertainment Centre upgrade;
- Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens upgrade; and
- Cascades Female Factory visitor centre.

Action 1.8 of Accessible Island identifies the need to 'Promote the universal design principles in procurement for public and social housing'. PDAC Community Members consider that universal design principles should inform and underpin any public infrastructure projects.

⁹ See

https://www.communities.tas.gov.au/csr/policy/advisory_groups/premiers_disability_advisory_council

Provision of Accessible Adult Change Facilities for Tasmanians and visitors with disability

Accessible Adult Change Facilities (AACFs) provide suitable facilities for people who cannot use standard accessible toilets. They allow people with high support needs to fully participate in the community. This includes people with an acquired brain injury, spinal cord injury, cerebral palsy, multiple sclerosis, spina bifida, motor neurone disease and their carers, as well as many other people with a disability.

The provision of AACFs gives many families and carers the opportunity to participate in family outings and community events, rather than being excluded. AACFs are now provided at major cultural and sporting destinations interstate.

The provision of accredited AACFs has expanded rapidly in other jurisdictions since 2014 (Table 1 below). There are now 147 AACFs across Australia, but only five in Tasmania (and all are within a 13 km radius of the Hobart GPO). In other jurisdictions, the expansion of the AACF network has been supported by State government funding programs.

At 18 September 2020, there were 150 accredited AACFs (known as Changing Places) nationally. However, there are only two accredited Changing Places in Tasmania.¹⁰

Table 1 – Accredited Changing Places by Jurisdiction – 18 August 2020

Accredited Changing Places ¹¹	Sept 2018	June 2019	July 2019	July 2020	Aug 2020
ACT	-	-	-	1	1
New South Wales	4	12	13	22	22
Queensland	5	9	10	10	13
South Australia ¹²	-	2	2	7	7
Tasmania	-	1	1	2	2
Victoria	28	40	47	70	70
Western Australia	25	29	31	31	32
Total	62	93	104	143	147

With the opening of the new Department of Justice building (Barrack Street, Hobart) in July 2020, there are now five AACFs in Tasmania (Argyle Street Carpark, Simmonds Park Lindisfarne, Kingborough Hub, and K Block at the Royal Hobart Hospital). There are no AACFs in other regions of Tasmania, which limits travel options for both residents and visitors to the State.

¹⁰ In the Argyle Street Carpark Hobart and Simmonds Park, Lindisfarne. There is a third yet-to-be accredited site in Kingston.

¹¹ See <https://changingplaces.org.au> for more information.

¹² 2018 - SA Government announced eight locations and two portable AACFs (Marvelous).

Disability advocates, including the PDAC Community Members, have highlighted the lack of AACFs/CPs in Tasmania in contrast to their rapid roll-out in other jurisdictions.

Australia is the first country in the world to regulate for adult change facilities in its Building Code. However, it is unlikely that many new builds in Tasmania will be captured by these requirements.

From 1 May 2019, the National Construction Code (NCC 2019) requires AACFs to be included in certain classes of public buildings.

One unisex AACF must be provided in:

- Class 6 buildings: shopping centres with a design occupancy over 3,500 people.
- Class 9b sports venues with a design occupancy of over 35,000 spectators or contains a swimming pool with a perimeter over 70 m.
- Museum and art gallery (or similar) buildings with a design occupancy over 1,500 patrons.
- Theatre and entertainment venues with a design occupancy over 1,500 patrons.
- Domestic and international passenger airports.

Ideally AACFs are available 24/7 - universal and secure access for families and carers is provided by a special key from the Master Locksmiths of Australia. The Kingston and Lindisfarne sites are 24/7 (ie. external access at the Kingborough Hub complex and a playground in Lindisfarne).

Opportunities for the inclusion of AACFs should be considered as part of any community, sporting or cultural facilities being built under the State Government's Construction Blitz. Consideration should also be given to a funding program to support the provision of AACFs by local government and the non-government sector. The Changing Places website provides four design options with project cost ranging from \$153,000 to \$171,000.¹³

Employment in the public sector

As part of the Monitoring and Evaluation framework for reporting on *Accessible Island*, agencies were asked to provide data on the number of employees with disability. As noted above, in 2018, one quarter of Tasmanians reported having a disability while 17.8 per cent of Tasmanians aged 0-64 years reported a disability.

PDAC's 2019 Report¹⁴ noted its concern that employment of people with disability in the State Service appears to be comparatively low, at just 6 per cent in the October 2018 Tasmanian State Service Employee Survey.

PDAC also noted its concerned that implementation of the State Service Diversity and Inclusion Framework 2017-2020 appears inconsistent with several agencies

¹³ <https://changingplaces.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Changing-Places-design-specifications-2020-1.pdf>

¹⁴ 2019 report, p.68.

reporting they are still in the process of developing their policies and workplace adjustment templates.¹⁵

PESRAC's Interim Report noted that there remain 'cultural barriers to women seeking and gaining employment in stable, high-paying and diverse industry roles. The Government has already supported sector-specific projects to encourage and mentor women into non-traditional roles such as the TasICT Women in ICT Program. This approach can be extended more widely'.¹⁶ PDAC Community Members note that there remain significant cultural and attitudinal barriers to people with disability seeking and gaining stable employment.

While agencies have appeared to struggle in the past with the development workplace adjustment policies and templates, the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the agility and flexibility of many employers (including the State Service) in moving rapidly to a 'working from home' mode. PDAC Community Members suggest that this demonstrates the need to 'embed flexible working arrangements ... to support the recruitment and advancement' of people with disability in the State Service.

¹⁵ 2019 Report, page 60.

¹⁶ PESRAC Interim Report page 60.

Response to the Interim Report

While there are limited references to people with disability in the Interim Report, PDAC Community Members have identified a number of recommendations that align to the issues outlined above.

PESRAC recommendation	PDAC Community Members Key Messages	Outcome
<p>#1 and #2 Building Confidence Clear and consistent messaging / future COVID-19 management strategy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concern that many people with disability (non-NDIS participants) and their carers felt invisible during the COVID-19 response. • Like older people, many people with disability found being regarded as ‘vulnerable’ difficult. • Need for specialist communications eg increased Auslan interpreting capacity. Easy English and Plain English information. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No cohort feels ‘left behind’. • All government information/publications are accessible and meet Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 Level AA. • Increased Auslan interpreting pool. • Increased provision of Easy English and Plain English documents.
<p>#52 and #53 Regional Impacts Capital program – Higher weighting for smaller-scale regional projects</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities for the inclusion of AACFs should be considered as part of any community, sporting or cultural facilities being built under the State Government’s Construction Blitz. • Consideration should be given to a funding program to support the statewide provision of AACFs in central locations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusive and accessible communities. • Social inclusion for people with disability to travel and participate in the community through a statewide network of AACFs. • Scope to increase tourism for people with disability, their families and carers.
<p>#54 Regional Impacts Digital inclusion and equity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital inclusion and equity needs to include WCAG 2.0 compliance across all Government websites 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All information published on Tasmanian Government websites is WCAG 2.00 AA compliant.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusive and accessible communities. • Increased employment opportunities.
<p>#47 and #48 People Enhance cultural workplace change and development pipelines for women Traineeship pipelines for women</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment continues to be as significant barrier to Tasmanians with disability. • Similar to women - Significant cultural and attitudinal barriers to people with disability seeking and gaining stable employment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusive and accessible communities. • Economic security and increased employment opportunities.
<p>#49 People Embed flexible working arrangements in the State Service</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is an opportunity to increase the employment of people with disability in the State Service. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embed flexible working arrangements to support the recruitment and advancement of people with disability in the State Service. • Economic security and increased employment opportunities.
<p>#50 Other people Support for vulnerable cohorts who have ongoing disproportionately adverse impacts</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to recognise the adverse impacts on people with disability during recovery. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusive and accessible communities. People with disability, their families and carers have economic security, enabling them to plan for the future and exercise control over their lives.
<p>Construction Blitz</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote the universal design principles in procurement for public and social housing (Accessible Island Action 1.8). • Universal design principles should inform and underpin any public infrastructure projects. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusive and accessible communities.