



2024-2025 Pre Budget submission

NSW Treasury

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Who is the Physical Disability Council of NSW?

The Physical Disability Council of New South Wales (PDCN) is the peak advocacy organisation for people with physical disabilities in NSW. We stand up for the rights of people with physical disabilities, advocate for disability inclusion across Government and business, and drive systemic reform around accessibility. The following submission draws on the knowledge and experience of people with lived experience of physical disability.

PDCN also convenes the NSW Disability Advocacy Network, which is a network of organisations that work with, and for, people with disabilities in NSW and is funded by the Department of Communities and Justice. Collectively we deliver systemic, representative and individual advocacy services across the state.

Our core function is to influence and advocate for the achievement of systemic change to ensure the rights of all people with a physical disability are improved and upheld.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Funding to conduct a parliamentary inquiry or review into healthcare accessibility to identify reforms that will improve inclusivity in NSW's health system. This would help ensure people with disabilities receive the same quality and accessible care as others, benefiting individuals, families, and communities.

Recommendation 2: The NSW Government should immediately adopt the National Construction Code (NCC) Livable Housing Design Standards, which require no upfront government investment while delivering significant savings, reducing homelessness, and improving housing accessibility for all.

Recommendation 3: Monitoring the effectiveness of the emergency incentives announced by the NSW Government in December 2024 to increase the number of Wheelchair Accessible Taxis (WATs) on the road and to prioritise implementing a long-term strategy for addressing market failure and increasing the availability of Wheelchair Accessible Taxis in NSW.

Recommendation 4: The NSW Government must make significant investments in the development and delivery of foundational supports. This includes funding to co design foundational supports with people with disability. We are also calling for funding for a navigator function to address the fragmented disability support landscape, ensuring no one falls through the cracks.

Recommendation 5: Improved transparency and communication about future Disability Advocacy Futures Program funding arrangements with funding announced at least 12 months prior to the end of a funding cycle.

Recommendation 6: NSW Disability Advocacy (DAFP) funding should move from 2-year contracts to 5-year contracts.

Recommendation 7: Disability Advocacy funding should be kept separate from Foundational Supports to prevent conflict of interest and protect the quality of disability advocacy for people with disabilities.

Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the NSW Budget pre-submission process. These issues are deeply important to the physical disability community and this pre budget submission allows PDCN to support the government by providing evidence-based priorities that ensure funding decisions and policies effectively address the needs of the physical disability community. This targeted advocacy helps the government deliver equitable investment, meet commitments from the Disability Royal Commission and NDIS Review, and achieve measurable social and economic improvements. By aligning spending with community needs, the government can reduce systemic inequities, improve service delivery, and create long-term cost savings, benefiting both individuals and the broader economy. Our Advocacy Strategy is community led and the recommendations we provide are directly from the physical disability community.

In this document we summarise our recommendations, present the findings of our extensive community research, outline our key budgetary recommendations in the areas of health, housing, transport and foundational supports and make recommendations regarding the funding of disability advocacy in NSW.

Summary of Research Findings: Priorities for the Physical Disability Community in NSW

In 2024, PDCN conducted comprehensive community consultations, including surveys, focus groups, and insights from our Lived Experience Advisory Panel (LEAP), to identify the priorities and challenges faced by people with physical disabilities in NSW. We consulted with over 300 people with physical disability across NSW and these findings reflect a pressing need for change across several key areas.

Accessible Communities

Accessible communities emerged as the most prominent issue, with concerns spanning physical infrastructure, community attitudes, and public amenities. Many people raised concerns about inaccessible pathways, footpaths, businesses, shops, and restaurants, which limit their ability to participate in community life. There was also a call for better community education and awareness around accessibility to promote inclusivity. Another key issue was the limited availability of accessible public amenities, such as toilets, which creates ongoing barriers for people with physical disabilities.

Housing and Accommodation

Housing remains a critical area impacting the wellbeing of people with physical disabilities. Many respondents highlighted the lack of affordable and accessible housing options, which makes finding suitable accommodation difficult. The need for universal design in housing was also emphasised to

ensure homes are accessible to everyone. Challenges in the rental market, particularly regarding accessible options, further exacerbate the housing crisis for people with disabilities.

NDIS Supports and Services

NDIS-related issues featured prominently, with many people sharing their struggles to access the NDIS and navigate its complex system. Insufficient services and a lack of advocacy support were recurring concerns, as were specific gaps in support provision and frustrations with the scheme's direction.

Transport

Transport accessibility continues to be a major barrier for people with physical disabilities. Respondents stressed the importance of independent and inclusive use of transport systems, but many reported long wait times and poor experiences with wheelchair-accessible taxis. The physical inaccessibility of transport infrastructure further compounds these challenges, limiting access to employment, education, and community participation.

Health and Wellbeing

Access to quality healthcare and improved understanding of disability among healthcare providers remain significant concerns. Many people pointed to limited awareness of mental health challenges for people with disabilities and significant barriers to accessing healthcare services. There is a clear need for healthcare providers to improve their knowledge and understanding of disability to deliver more inclusive care.

Foundational Supports Beyond the NDIS

Our research highlights significant gaps in foundational disability supports outside the NDIS, with 86.2% of respondents advocating for state-funded disability services. Additionally, 96.6% of respondents believe they would benefit from more services outside the NDIS, particularly in enhancing choice and control, addressing gaps in NDIS supports, improving quality of life, promoting community inclusion, providing income support, and ensuring safety. In our Foundational Supports survey 56.6% of respondents reported inadequate supports outside the NDIS, citing affordability, inconsistent availability, and an overreliance on informal support. Research from the University of Melbourne supports this, showing that 90% of people with disabilities outside the NDIS lack adequate support due to accessibility, availability, and unreliable information¹.

¹Olney S; Mills A; Fallon L, 2022, The Tier 2 Tipping point: access to support for working-age Australians with disability without individual NDIS funding., University of Melbourne, <https://apo.org.au/node/319016> p13

Our Strategic Priorities

Our research highlights the urgent need for government collaboration, regulatory compliance, and greater community inclusion to strengthen the support landscape for people with disabilities. Over the next three years, these priorities will drive our strategic focus, ensuring meaningful action on the issues that matter most to the physical disability community in NSW.

Previous NSW budgets have underestimated the true costs of inaction. The wellbeing framework offers a critical opportunity to shift towards smarter, more impactful investment. Persisting issues such as homelessness, inaccessible housing, healthcare barriers, and safety gaps for people with disabilities carry significant financial and social costs. Proactively investing in solutions that enhance wellbeing will not only improve lives but also deliver substantial long-term savings for the state.

Health: Improving the accessibility of NSW health systems for people with disability

The Physical Disability Council of NSW is deeply concerned about the care people with disabilities receive in the NSW health system. Stories from the community highlight issues such as poor pressure sore management, waste toxicity, hydration management problems, and the removal of mobility aids, leaving patients dependent. We also hear about staff lacking training on accessible equipment and people with intellectual disabilities being chemically restrained. These issues extend to discrimination and barriers in healthcare facilities.

Health inequities for people with disabilities are systemic, with a higher risk of conditions like diabetes, stroke, and depression. This results from exclusion from public health interventions and barriers such as negative attitudes, inaccessible facilities, and lack of data.

We advocate for a parliamentary inquiry or review into healthcare accessibility to identify reforms that will improve inclusivity in NSW's health system. This would help ensure people with disabilities receive the same quality and accessible care as others, benefiting individuals, families, and communities.

Recommendation 1: Funding to conduct a review or parliamentary inquiry into the accessibility into the NSW Health system.

Housing: Adopting the National Construction Code Livable Design Standards

The NSW Government must adopt the National Construction Code (NCC) Livable Housing Design Standards to address housing accessibility, eliminate discriminatory housing practices, and provide

cost-effective solutions that benefit people with disabilities, older Australians, and the broader community.

Incorporating basic accessibility features, such as step-free entry and level showers, adds less than 1% to the cost of a new build². However, retrofitting homes later is 22 times more expensive³, placing a far greater financial burden on homeowners, renters, and governments. Investing in accessible housing now will significantly reduce long-term costs, particularly by preventing people with disabilities and older Australians from being forced into homelessness, specialist disability housing, or aged care facilities.

Homelessness costs the NSW Government **\$6.5 billion annually**. By investing **\$2.6 billion per year over 10 years**, the government could generate annualised savings of **\$3.91 billion** while improving housing options and outcomes for those in need. Accessible homes also reduce falls and injuries, cutting healthcare costs and enabling people to live independently for longer. This, in turn, frees up hospital beds and decreases pressure on aged care facilities.

Adopting these standards will align NSW with states like Victoria and Queensland, creating consistency for builders and developers, who already have access to transition plans and guidelines. This alignment reduces complexity and streamlines processes across the housing sector. Importantly, universal design benefits everyone – it does not single out "disability housing." In NSW, where 18% of the population lives with a disability⁴ and the ageing population is growing⁵, this change addresses real and increasing community needs. With a 60% chance any home will house someone with a disability during its life, accessible homes meet real community needs.⁶ By incorporating livable design, Sydney alone could add an estimated **42,000 accessible homes annually**, providing housing options for downsizing and ageing in place.⁷

Accessible homes also promote independence, reduce isolation, and enable people with disabilities to remain connected to family, friends, and community. These changes go beyond social housing, where demand alone cannot meet needs, and ensure the private housing market delivers solutions that work for all.

By mandating the NCC Livable Design Standards for all new builds to improve housing accessibility the NSW Government reduce the number of people reliant on social housing at a cost of \$0 to government. Homelessness costs NSW \$6.5B per year - \$65B over 10 years.⁸ Investing \$26B over 10 years- or \$2.6B annually,⁹ a third of the cost, this offers an annualised cost saving of \$3.91B

2 <https://ncc.abcb.gov.au/sites/default/files/resources/2022/Accessible-housing-estimated-cost-impact-of-proposed-changes-to-NCC.pdf> (Accessed November 2024)

3 New Zealand Ministry of Social Development 2009

4 Australian Bureau of Statistics, Disability, Ageing and Carers, 2015 <www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4430.0, which includes the data cubes for tables in NSW (released 12 January 2017)> accessed 20 September 2021

5 NSW Treasury, The population of NSW in 2061, 2021 — 22 NSW Intergenerational Report <The population of New South Wales in 2061 | NSW Treasury.> accessed 26 July 2023

6 Smith, S., Rayer, S., & Smith, E. (2008) Ageing & disability: Implications for the housing industry and housing policy in the United States. Journal of the American Planning Association, 74:3, 289 – 306

7 NSW Government, Department of Planning and Environment, Sydney Housing Supply Forecast, 2023 <Sydney housing supply forecast | Planning (nsw.gov.au) — this is based on 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 figures

⁸ Over 35,000 people in NSW are homeless - Homes NSW, Draft Homelessness Strategy 2025-2035 Presentation, 3 December 2024 and homelessness costs government \$186,000 on average per year NSW Government, Department of Communities and Justice, *Pathways to Homelessness final report* December 2021, last accessed 28 September 2023, <https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/download?file=823631>

⁹ Homelessness NSW, Tip the Scales, last updated March 2023, last accessed 19 October 2023

<https://homelessnessnsw.org.au/campaign/help-tip-the-scales-in-the-2022-23-nsw-budget/the-cost-of-building-5-000-homes-a-year>

Item	2025/6 Investment by Government	2005/6 Cost Saving
Investing in Housing		
Signing up to the National Construction Code	\$0	
Current cost of people in NSW being homeless ¹⁰	\$6,510,000,000	
Building to end homelessness within 10 years ¹¹	\$2,600,000,000	
Annualised cost saving ¹²		\$3,910,000,000

Recommendation 2: The NSW Government should immediately adopt the NCC Livable Housing Design Standards, which require no upfront government investment while delivering significant savings, reducing homelessness, and improving housing accessibility for all.

Transport: Addressing Market Failure in Wheelchair Accessible Taxis (WATs)

Wheelchair Accessible Taxis (WATs) are a vital transport option for people with disabilities who cannot access public transport or private vehicles. However, the critical shortage of WAT services has left wheelchair users at a significant disadvantage, impacting their health, employment, and economic participation.

The unreliability of WATs – including frequent no-shows or significant delays – often prevents people from attending essential medical appointments. This can result in costly non-attendance fees or, more concerning, the worsening of medical conditions that become far more expensive to treat when left unchecked.

Similarly, the lack of WAT availability directly affects employment opportunities for people with physical disabilities. If someone cannot get to work and is unable to work remotely or flexibly, they face income loss through no fault of their own. Transport access remains one of the biggest barriers to workforce participation, particularly for people with disabilities, who already face lower employment rates and incomes. With **18% of the population living with a disability**, addressing this issue is critical to improving economic inclusion and ensuring equitable workforce participation.

The Transport for NSW Key Findings Report on Wheelchair Accessible Services Roundtables (October 2024) provided clear solutions to address this market failure. PDCN welcomes the NSW

¹⁰ Over 35,000 people in NSW are homeless - Homes NSW, Draft Homelessness Strategy 2025-2035 Presentation, 3 December 2024 and homelessness costs government \$186,000 on average per year NSW Government, Department of Communities and Justice, *Pathways to Homelessness final report* December 2021, last accessed 28 September 2023, <https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/download?file=823631>

¹¹ Over a decade ending homeless is projected to cost around a third of the cost of the current rates of homelessness

¹² $6.51B \times 10 = 65.1B$ $2.60 \times 10 = 26B$ $65.1 - 26 = 39.1B$ $39.1B / 10 = \$3.91B$ per year

Government's \$15 million emergency funding to support wheelchair accessible taxis (WATs), as a crucial first step towards a stronger and more inclusive market.

While this funding is a vital first step, deeper analysis is needed to ensure it addresses the market failure of WATs in NSW. PDCN looks forward to collaborating with the government to secure sustainable, long-term solutions including regulatory reforms.

By implementing these measures, the reliability, accessibility, and coverage of WAT services will hopefully be significantly improved, ensuring better outcomes for wheelchair users across NSW.

Recommendation 3: Monitoring the effectiveness of the emergency incentives announced by the NSW Government in December 2024 to increase the number of Wheelchair Accessible Taxis (WATs) on the road and to prioritise implementing a long-term strategy for addressing market failure and increasing the availability of Wheelchair Accessible Taxis in NSW.

NDIS and Foundational Supports

Given that the NDIS serves only a small proportion of people with disability, it is critical to ensure that foundational supports outside the scheme adequately meet the needs of the physical disability community. There is growing concern that changes to the NDIS are resulting in people being removed from funded supports without appropriate foundational supports in place, leaving them at risk of falling through the cracks. Our organisation is well-placed to support as a sector coordinator, connecting people with appropriate services through initiatives such as a triage-focused website or other navigational supports.

Through our consultation with people with physical disability in NSW, we have developed some key principles for the development of Foundational Supports in NSW:

- 1. Equitable Provision:** Foundational supports must be delivered equitably across all disability cohorts – physical, neurodiverse, psychosocial, and intellectual. Despite physical disabilities being the most reported (75.3% in Australia), they are often overlooked. Supports must address accessibility gaps across life stages, disability types (temporary, dynamic, permanent), functional abilities, and co-existing disabilities.
- 2. Co-Design with People with Disability:** Supports should be co-designed with people with disabilities, families, and stakeholders to ensure services meet user needs. Significant NSW Government investment is needed to build trust, confidence, and sustainability.
- 3. Choice, Control, and Quality:** Supports must be accessible, flexible, and high-quality. Professionalising roles like 'Linkers/Navigators' and disability support workers through education, training, and regulation will improve service standards and empower individuals.
- 4. Professional Navigators:** Building on Recommendation 4 of the NDIS Review, trained 'Navigators' should assist individuals in identifying, accessing, and assessing services. Navigators, equipped with local knowledge and experience, provide both practical and social support to ensure services are effective and tailored to individual needs.

Recommendation 4: The NSW Government must make significant investments in the development and delivery of foundational supports. This includes funding to co design foundational supports with people with disability. We are also calling for funding for a navigator function to address the fragmented disability support landscape, ensuring no one falls through the cracks.

Funding for the NSW Disability Advocacy Sector

Disability advocacy gives people with disabilities a voice and allows government agencies to make better decisions for our community. Disability advocacy is also crucial for promoting equal rights, preventing and challenging discrimination, improving rules and systems to give people with disabilities choice and control over their lives, improving support services and promoting community integration.

Disability advocacy plays a crucial role in giving people with disabilities a voice and enabling governments to make more inclusive decisions. Advocacy promotes equal rights, prevents discrimination, improves systems, enhances support services, and fosters community integration. However, the sector faces significant challenges due to short term funding periods.

The first priority is improving transparency and providing long-term funding. Funding announcements need to occur at least 12 months before the end of a funding cycle to ensure stability and prevent organisations from operating in precarious positions. Short-term funding cycles and transitional arrangements create insecurity, leading to high staff turnover and reduced services for people with disabilities. For every dollar spent on advocacy, governments receive \$3.50 in benefits across health, housing, and justice systems¹³. Lack of advocacy support leaves people with disability in crisis, with their supports for housing, health, and disability daily living being at risk.

A move to five-year contracts is essential to provide stability and enable organisations to deliver stronger outcomes for people with disabilities.

Recommendation 5: Improved transparency and communication about future funding arrangements with Disability Advocacy Futures Program funding announced at least 12 months prior to the end of a funding cycle.

Recommendation 6: NSW Disability Advocacy (DAFP) funding should move from 2-year contracts to 5-year contracts.

Protecting the independence of disability advocacy is equally important. Advocacy organisations play a vital role in holding governments and service providers accountable, which requires independence from funding tied to service delivery. Combining advocacy funding with foundational supports risks creating conflicts of interest that could undermine the impartiality and effectiveness of advocacy organisations. Advocacy requires specialised expertise, and merging funding could dilute this focus. Additionally, people with disabilities often seek advocacy support because of its independence. If advocacy organisations are financially tied to service providers, trust in their ability to represent individuals without bias may erode, leaving people without an effective avenue for support. To protect the quality and independence of advocacy, funding must remain separate from foundational supports.

¹³ A Cost Benefit Analysis of Australian independent disability advocacy agencies. (Daly, Barrett and Williams) [Microsoft Word - Disability advocacy CBA.docx \(dana.org.au\)](#) p41

Recommendation 7: NSW Disability Advocacy funding should be kept separate from Foundational Supports to prevent conflict of interest and protect the quality of disability advocacy for people with disabilities.