**National Disability Services**

**2021-2022 NDS Victoria budget submission**

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# **About National Disability Services**

National Disability Services (NDS) is the peak body in Victoria and Australia for non-government disability service providers, with over 280 members in Victoria and 1,100 members nationally. We provide information and networking opportunities to our members and policy advice to State, Territory and Commonwealth governments. NDS has a diverse and vibrant membership, comprised of small, medium and larger service providers that deliver direct and indirect support to people with disability. Our members collectively offer the full range of disability services; from supported independent living and specialist disability accommodation services to respite, therapy, community access and employment. Our platform of National Disability Practitioners has over 15,000 individual members across all aspects of the disability workforce.

NDS is committed to improving the disability service system to ensure it better supports people with disability, their families and carers, and to building a more inclusive community. NDS has a deep commitment to supporting the implementation of a successful National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and is supporting service providers across Victoria as they work to thrive within the new landscape.

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# **Introduction**

In 2021 Victoria’s disability sector has emerged from a period of extreme stress and pressure due to the prolonged pandemic and lockdowns in the state. Disability services are now looking to reset to the new COVID normal.

In 2020, the advent of COVID-19 placed unprecedented strain on the sector. Early on, we battled for governments to recognise that the sector was vulnerable. Disability services rallied and invested time and effort into preparation and prevention activities and came together to share effective ways of dealing with the situation. NDS supported and advocated for the sector and welcomed the stepping up of state and federal government supports for disability services during this time. Through immense efforts, various key decisions at many levels, and collaboration, the spread of COVID-19 was curtailed in disability services, and the sector and the people supported by disability services did not experience the horrific outcomes which have occurred in some countries overseas.

Nonetheless, the pandemic peak and prolonged lockdown has had a profound impact on the sector. Services were closed, rearranged, moved to new formats and settings, and generally disrupted. Multiple new processes were quickly instigated. Communication moved to different formats and accelerated. Developments created major mental health challenges, with fear, anxiety, exhaustion, worry and depression. There was widespread job dislocation and uncertainty. There were many additional costs for services, some of which were not reimbursed. This disruption is not yet over and has had and is still having major impacts on disability services, their staff, clients and communities.

The pandemic comes on the tail of the transition to the NDIS which in itself has created years of adjustment and transformation for disability services. This transition is now almost complete and multiple service providers are now fully-funded through the federal National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). It is noted that Victorian services benefited from the funding from the former Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), which helped smooth the transition to the NDIS and enabled services to be provided to people with disability and those with complex needs. That said, the sector is now facing a particularly challenging time. NDS’s 2020 State of the Sector report identifies that the environment in which providers operate continues to present significant challenges. 69 per cent of respondents believe that the NDIS policy environment is uncertain, over half are concerned that they will not be able to deliver the supports required at current NDIS pricing and 31 per cent report that they will break even or make a loss ([read the NDS State of the Sector Report 2020](https://www.nds.org.au/about/state-of-the-disability-sector-report)).

It is expected that coming months will see real pressure placed on the sustainability of some disability services. JobKeeper payments have been used extensively in the sector and will disappear shortly. There is increased competition, and COVID-19 appears to have accelerated developments in the market, with increases in the numbers of sole practitioners, the entry of large and small for-profit agencies and the continuing trend for organisations to merge. We are also seeing multiple measures being introduced by NDIA aimed at curbing the rising cost of the Scheme, and these have begun having a major impact on organisation finances. The evolving regulatory framework is also placing pressure on an already stretched sector. Ongoing costs of compliance are a major concern for registered disability service providers. The coming months are likely to see an increased focus on compliance, as the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability progresses.

A major issue apparent in 2021 relates to the disability workforce. Disability services are reporting widespread workforce shortages for skilled workers. This is particularly for allied health staff and behaviour support practitioners, but in both regional and metropolitan areas organisations are reporting difficulties in recruiting staff. There appears a major disjuncture between the people displaced through the pandemic and the workforce needs of the sector. Furthermore, there are a range of interconnected factors undermining the quality of training and supervision for the workforce at a time when mental health concerns are rife. This is also at a time when sectors such as aged care and mental health will be moving into major recruitment mode which will potentially undermine interest in disability services.

Another major concern relates to service quality and prevention of abuse. There is currently widespread community concern about the need for high quality services, with Royal Commissions reviewing quality in various human services sectors, the public dismay at how private aged care services have managed COVID-19, and increasing questioning of whether transaction and market based systems deliver the best quality care for vulnerable cohorts. Whilst governments at federal and state levels appear to be focused on compliance and safeguarding, there is a lack of investment in prevention activities. Key initiatives such as the NDS Zero Tolerance program are currently not funded. The preventative work undertaken by the Victorian Disability Services Commission with its longstanding ‘Its OK to Complain’ campaign, has not been extended. The discussion of the factors associated with high quality service provision, drawn from academic research, appears to have largely disappeared from the current discourse. Furthermore, the current community discussion about consent in intimate relationships and sexual harassment in workplaces has relevance to our sector, and arguably calls for some explicit work building on the Zero Tolerance framework.

Whilst disability services are now largely funded by the NDIA, the sector continues to operate in Victoria and plays a critical role within the state’s community services sector, contributing to local communities, adding social capital and forming part of the network of social supports that strengthen our community. It is important that the voice of disability services continues to be heard at the state level, as well as nationally. Ongoing funding of NDS as the peak body is critical to this. The role NDS has played in supporting the sector during the pandemic illustrates the importance of maintaining two-way information flow and connections between the disability sector and the state government.

The Victorian government is recognising the importance of people with disability in its current review of the Disability Act and State Disability Plan. These review processes provide an opportunity for Victoria to continue to build a framework to drive greater inclusion of people with disability at every level and in every context in Victoria. Current work on infrastructure and housing strategies and jobs creation provides further opportunities to embed the needs of people with a disability as a priority.

NDS urges the Victorian government to continue its activist stance in recognising and funding the disability sector. NDS calls for the Victorian 2021-22 Budget to recognise the importance of the disability sector and to provide funding to address the pressing workforce challenges and build its resilience. We call on the government to continue working to make this a truly inclusive state, for all Victorians. In summary, we recommend that funding be made available for the following:

**Priority 1: Support a resilient and skilled disability sector delivering high quality services**

* 1. Invest in a major three-year Strategy addressing disability workforce supply, skills and support
	2. Invest in Zero Tolerance initiatives to prevent violence, abuse and neglect for people with disability including support for the sector to implement the Disability Royal Commission recommendations
	3. Support for high quality services with streamlined compliance requirements
	4. Appropriate tenancy protection for people with disability
	5. Stepped up funding for NDS

**Priority 2: Continue to build an inclusive Victorian community**

2.1 A new Disability Act and State Disability Plan which drive greater inclusion in Victoria for people with disability

2.2 Increase supply of social housing and accessible housing

2.3 Employment for people with disability

# **Priority 1: Support a resilient and skilled disability sector delivering high quality services**

## **Invest in a major three-year Strategy addressing Disability Workforce Supply, Skills and Support**

NDS calls on the government to develop and fund a major three-year Disability Workforce initiative to address the pressing supply, skills and support needs of this critical workforce.

There is an issue of supply of appropriate skilled workers, with discussion of workforce demand needing to double in coming years. Worker shortages are now reaching crisis levels, as the demand for services continues to grow. This is particularly critical in relation to therapists, behaviour support practitioners, and skilled disability support workers. Whilst the problem of workforce shortages in Victoria has increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, with some workers choosing to leave in the face of additional demands, it also provides us with a unique opportunity to attract people from other industries to the disability sector.

There are also significant issues with the skills of the Victorian disability workforce. Despite various attempts to address this, there continue to be disjuncture between the training sector and disability services, with ongoing problems in the applicability of some accredited training programs to the needs of the sector. The NDIS Disability support worker cost model 2020-21 ([read NDIS Price guides and pricing](https://www.ndis.gov.au/providers/price-guides-and-pricing)) allows for very limited training and supervision of workers. Furthermore, COVID-19 and adaptation to the COVID normal environment is requiring workers to have heightened knowledge and skills relating to infection, prevention and control, and associated literacy demands.

NDS is continuing to hear of widespread and deep concerns about the resilience and mental health of the workforce. This has continued post the initial anxiety and fear associated with the pandemic peak. The recent sudden lockdown in Victoria bought some of the underlying anxiety to the fore. We are also hearing reports that the wider community discourse about sexual harassment and treatment of women in the workplace has further unsettled some of the disability workforce. Disability providers report they are currently trying a range of strategies to build the mental resilience of their workforce, but are seeking more effective strategies and guidance.

The disability sector has benefited from the Victorian Government’s investment in the Keeping Our Sector Strong strategy (KOSS) that largely concluded at the end of 2020. However there is a pressing need to build on this work, and tackle the range of both longstanding workforce issues and those which have been exacerbated or emerged during the past year. NDS is calling for a three year major strategy to address disability services supply, skills and supports. This would need to sit within the frame of the National Disability Workforce Strategy (still to be released) and build on KOSS work. The disability workforce sits within a complex ecosystem of factors, and any effective strategy to address its issues, will need to be wide ranging, comprehensive and multifaceted, and involve multiple government and sector stakeholders. It is particularly timely now with the focus on the aged care and mental health workforces, arising from their respective Royal Commissions, and the potential this will have to detract from the needs of the disability sector.

It is recommended that the next Disability Workforce Strategy funded and implemented in Victoria be led by the sector, in partnership with government, to ensure it addresses the areas of critical need for the disability workforce. NDS would like to see the Strategy include funding for:

* Promotion of the workforce with strategies involving people with disability and providers, and led by the sector
* An adapted version of the NDS Regional Workforce Connector model be re-established in Victoria to oversee activities across regional Victoria that encourages service providers to share good practice and increase recruitment success. The outputs would include leveraging of existing services, workforce innovation, local marketing opportunities and gap identification in areas where they are thin markets.
* Establishment of a project to develop disability sector workforce planning across metropolitan and regional Victoria. Such an initiative would help address recruitment, retention, support and supervision issues impacting the sector.
* Funding to build supervision and leadership capability for the disability sector including an ongoing alumni network to continue leadership development opportunities and reflective practices.

Such funded initiatives will build skills and knowledge in local organisations to address the ongoing workforce shortages for disability support workers and other key staff in Victoria.

## **Invest in Zero Tolerance initiatives to prevent violence, abuse and neglect for people with disability including support for the sector to implement the Disability Royal Commission recommendations**

Victoria has a strong track record in its response to the abuse of people with disability, and commitment to quality and safeguarding. Notably, the government has funded the [NDS Zero Tolerance initiative](https://www.nds.org.au/resources/zero-tolerance), offering a suite of resources and the promotion of these across the sector. The Zero Tolerance Framework outlines practical actions and a suite of practical and portable resources that service providers can use to address abuse, neglect and violence toward people with disability.

The need for the application of the Zero Tolerance framework was highlighted during the peak of COVID outbreaks in Victoria, when some providers may have increased restrictions during shutdown periods that may be identified as regulated restrictive practices. Furthermore, the Disability Royal Commission’s [Statement of Concern: The response to the COVID-19 pandemic for people with disability](https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/system/files/2020-03/COVID-19%20Statement%20of%20concern.pdf), also identified that the wellbeing of people with disability was identified as a growing concern.

The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability will significantly impact the sector. The anticipated stories, which must be heard, will lead to a sector with reduced confidence, impact existing staff and their retention and the ability of the sector to attract new employees. This is at a time when the workforce needs to almost double to meet the forecast demand within Victoria. Improvements in governance and management, training, upskilling, supervision and support of staff will be required to ensure that the Victorian sector is able to respond effectively to the recommendations and findings arising out of the Disability Royal Commission. For many organisations, investment in new systems across their entire operations will be necessary to ensure not only compliance but continuous improvement in how supports are delivered and managed. NDS calls for Victorian government investment in initiatives to support the sector to respond and effectively address issues identified by the Royal Commission.

Note: Reports from aged care providers and the sector indicate that the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety (and its likely findings and recommendations) is having an impact on their ability to retain and attract the workforce required to support older Australians.

The current community discussion about consent and respectful intimate relationships, and the gender lenses in this discussion, is further highlighting the need to extend the work of the Zero Tolerance initiative, with its strong grounding in human rights, and to develop resources to support disability services to enable and encourage respectful relationships between participants. To meet contemporary community expectations such material needs to recognise gender and power issues, and the needs of cohorts such as LGBTQI+ participants.

Zero Tolerance resources with their focus on recognition and prevention of abuse that promotes the embedding good practice require periodic review and development. This is particularly critical now in the context of the shifting environment and community expectations, and the Royal Commission. The resources also need to continue to be actively promoted across all disability services, including to the many new, for profit organisations joining in recent years.

NDS is seeking $500,000 to undertake a major upgrade of the Zero Tolerance resources, a comprehensive campaign to promote and embed the resources, and to fund initiatives to support disability services implement changes and respond to the findings and recommendations of the Royal Commission.

## **Support for high quality disability services with streamlined compliance requirements**

The Victorian government contributes substantial funds to the NDIS and continues to shape the Scheme. NDS urges the government to use this leverage to push for Scheme prices and settings which drive high quality services provided by skilled, supported workers. The market based model and investment in NDIS has bought significant benefits to many people with disability, and in particular provided greater choice and control. However there are people who are faring relatively less well, including those with very complex needs, those in the lower socio economic deciles and those less able to navigate the complexity of the system.

The National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) is currently overseeing multiple major reviews of NDIS systems and processes, including Supported Independent Living, Independent Assessments, new group prices, changes to support coordination and plan management, Early Childhood Early Intervention Reset, Home and Living Options, and so on. Such an approach appears sensible, given that we are now several years into implementation of the Scheme, and there are some worrying signals, for example, relating to the inequity of plan funding relating to socio economic status. However, together with a strong focus on curbing Scheme costs, these reviews and changes are causing major challenges for the sector. There is a real potential for rushed changes to the Scheme to have perverse consequences, and undermine the ability of services to provide quality, tailored supports to individuals. The well documented concerns around the introduction of Independent Assessments provide a case in point.

NDS is seeking state government support in actively engaging with the Agency at this time, listening to the voice of the sector, and influencing the amendments to the Scheme, to maintain a focus on quality services delivered by an appropriately skilled and supported workforce. There is a particular need to align amendments in the Scheme with the evidence on what delivers good practice; referencing for example the work of Professor Christine Bigby on what makes a good group home, and the importance of active support and practice leadership ([read La Trobe University Resources and Publications](https://www.latrobe.edu.au/lids/resources)). The current discourse regarding disability services appears to be focused on costs and transactional processes, with little attention to the factors contributing to quality services.

In recent years we have seen a number of new state initiatives and legislation relating to safeguards for people with disability and others. These are well intentioned but have resulted in an environment which is contributing to continued confusion about respective responsibilities, complaints, reporting and jurisdiction. NDS recommends that there is a review of Victorian regulatory requirements on disability services to ensure Victorian safeguards complement rather than impose dual obligations on workers and services. We would also like to see a rebalancing of resources, with less focus on multiple government safeguarding authorities and more investment in prevention initiatives and individual and systemic disability advocacy services.

NDS is seeking strong advocacy by the Victorian government with the Federal government and NDIA to continue arguing for Scheme prices and settings which drive high quality services provided by skilled, supported workers. We are also seeking investment by Victoria of $100,000 pa for three years, for initiatives to showcase and promote good practice across disability services, with a particular focus on translating ‘research to action’ whereby service providers are provided with resources and supported to adopt practices identified in academic research as leading to quality outcomes for people with disability.

## **Appropriate Tenancy Protection for People with Disability**

NDS is also calling for revised tenancy protections, designed to reflect the array of NDIS living arrangements, so that they protect people with disability who are unable to enter into standard tenancy leases. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown Victorians the importance of dwellings and a place to feel safe and secure, and this applies equally for people with disability.

To achieve this, NDS recommends that the Victorian Government consults, reviews and amends state tenancy legislation to offers tenancy protections to NDIS participants in Specialised Disability Accommodation (SDA) whilst also giving participants the choice of living with people without SDA funding and/or living with people who are not NDIS participants. The current Victorian SDA lease arrangements require all residents of a property to be in receipt of NDIS SDA plans. This is not in line with the NDIS SDA Framework which enables people with SDA to choose to live with people who do not have SDA in NDIS plans.

We also recommend that there be appropriate tenancy options for NDIS participants who are not in receipt of SDA funding but are unable to enter into standard Residential Tenancy Agreements. This will benefit not only some people with intellectual disability but those living with psychosocial or dual disability in unsecure housing.

NDS would also like to explore options for some NDIS participants who are not in the 6 per cent of participants eligible for SDA funding to receive greater tenancy protections through lease arrangements. Some people with psychosocial disability, intellectual disability and acquired brain injury fall outside SDA funding, and currently face insecure and inadequate housing options.

## **Stepped up funding for NDS**

NDS Victoria has received a modest allocation of funding from the state government over many years to operate as a peak body in the state. We are calling for this investment to be stepped up, to $300,000 pa for the next three years. This will enable the voice of disability services to be heard in the multiple policy and legislative developments which impact disability services in Victoria. The sector continues to operate as a significant element of Victoria’s community services sector, and forms part of the social fabric of the state. Importantly NDS offers a valuable conduit to people with disability and the organisations that support them. The value of connections to the disability sector has been particularly highlighted this year, when NDS was able to speedily articulate key government directions and messages relating to the bushfires and then the developing COVID-19 situation. We are now supporting the sector with timely messaging about the vaccine rollout. The ability of NDS to quickly synthesis and deliver intelligence back to government is also valuable.

There are a multitude of issues, interfaces and adjustments to COVID-19, that require ongoing engagement with the state government, mainstream services and Victorian regulatory bodies. NDS needs to continue to liaise on behalf of the disability sector and to communicate the impact of systemic issues as they arise. Over coming years, NDS will continue to advise the sector on the recommendations of the Royal Commissions into mental health, ageing and the disability sector.

NDS is well-placed to guide the sector as it responds to new infection control measures and other changes due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We have a track record with our members of disseminating information, interpreting policy changes, and advising how best to respond to change. This is illustrated by the leadership role that NDS played in implementing infection control and personal protection equipment requirements to service providers last year. NDS will continue to be a trusted source of information as the COVID-19 vaccine is rolled-out in Victoria.

NDS calls for stepped-up three-year funding from the Victorian Government. We will use this funding to continue to respond to emerging crises and adjust to the changes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. We will also work to promote and support implementation of new government requirements such as the Victorian Portable Long Service Benefits Scheme and the new worker screening process. Such funding will enable the voice of disability services to continue to be heard in Victorian government policy development, and provide a valuable conduit of intelligence to government on emerging issues of concern. The result will strengthen a dynamic and innovative service system that offers quality supports to people with disability in Victoria.

# **Priority 2: Continue to build an inclusive Victorian community**

The Victorian government has a good track record in working to make this state more inclusive for people with disability. However, there is a long way still to go. NDS urges the 2021-22 budget to invest in an array of activities which drive greater inclusion. Specific asks include:

## **A new Disability Act and State Disability Plan to drive greater inclusion in Victoria for people with disability**

All Victorians require an accessible, inclusive and welcoming community that is underpinned by a whole-of-government commitment and approach.

NDS is currently one of many stakeholders contributing to the review and development of a new Disability Act. We support this process, and broad consultation. We ask that the resulting legislation be very cognisant of the landscape for service providers, whereby the national NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission oversees a demanding quality compliance regime applicable to all registered service providers. Additional state based compliance requirements can be confusing and duplicative. We would like to see the new legislation be a driver for a more inclusive community for all people with disability in Victoria.

NDS welcomes a State Disability Plan that is aligned to the National Disability Strategy, informed by sector wide consultations and includes ambitious policy and funding commitments. These need to address the full gamut of sectors including housing, health and wellbeing, education, transport, and employment for people with disability. In regard to the justice system, NDS calls for a focus on rehabilitation and reducing re-offending and mechanisms that recognise that people with a disability are at greater risk of family, sexual and other forms of violence. We also support the recent call by the Public Advocate for every person entering prison to be screened for cognitive disability, alongside other recommendations in her Decision Time report ([read The Office of the Public Advocate Research Report](https://www.publicadvocate.vic.gov.au/resources/research-reports/756-decision-time)). The importance of appropriate access to communications such as the internet was highlighted through COVID-19 and as many significant transactions move to online platforms ensuring that these meet the needs of people with disability becomes more crucial. The State Plan also needs a robust monitoring and outcomes framework, and ownership by a lead government agency with the ability to drive change across diverse areas, including transport, education, infrastructure and health. NDS, providers and the broader sector are keen and willing partners with the Victorian Government to meet the deliverables of ambitious targets and funded initiatives.

Alongside a new Disability Act and State Plan, the government needs to invest in enabling mainstream services to continue to adjust and develop to be fully inclusive of people with disability. Effective interfaces between NDIS and mainstream funded services not only ensure appropriate services for individuals, but reduce risk to the Victorian Government of service gaps and people relying on tertiary and acute responses. Whilst one in five Victorians has a disability, only a proportion are eligible for the NDIS. There are many people ineligible for NDIS who also require appropriate disability supports, and a continuing care system.

## **Increase supply of social housing and accessible housing**

Housing is a fundamental need and right of all Victorians, however, both in the state and across Australia there is a housing shortage. There is currently a waitlist of 82,000 people seeking public housing in Victoria, and over 15 million Australians live in housing stress, spending more than 30 per cent of their household income on paying their rent or mortgage ([read Habitat for Humanity Victoria Housing Crisis Report](https://www.habitatvic.org.au/victorias-housing-crRisis#:~:text=In%20Victoria%20alone%2C%20there's%20a,there%20is%20to%20affordable%20housing.&text=This%20shortage%20is%20only%20expected,Australia%20to%20600%2C000%20by%202030)). The current housing shortage in Victoria impacts many people with disability, with too many people with disability living in dwellings that are not fit-for-purpose. Inaccessible houses prevent people from living with dignity and functioning in a way that is convenient, appropriate and safe. NDS frequently hears how the lack of adequate secure housing impedes progress in other aspects of people’s lives. Only 6 per cent of NDIS participants are eligible for SDA, leaving 94 per cent of participants and those people with disability who are not NDIS participants, reliant on public, social and community housing or the private sectors for housing.

NDS welcomes the government’s plan to create more social and community housing ([read Victoria Governments Social and Community Housing Report](https://www.vic.gov.au/our-plan-create-more-social-and-community-housing)), and calls for people with disability to be prioritised in gaining access to this housing, and for this initiative to be followed with ongoing major investment in the years to come to redress current housing shortages.

NDS is also calling for measures to drive more accessible housing stock. We recently wrote to Minister Wynne seeking support for the inclusion of mandatory accessibility standards in Australia’s National Building Code. For over ten years, the voluntary Livable Housing Design Guidelines have failed to ensure adequate levels of accessible housing in Australia, with only 5 per cent of new home builds complying since it was introduced in 2010. As a consequence, according to a 2020 survey, 73.6 per cent of people with disability are currently living in housing that does not meet their needs.

Accessibility can be achieved through the provision of ramps, stepless showers, wide doorways, touch-free doors and by smooth surfaces. However, for people with disability to have equal access to community services, this needs to extend beyond a purpose-built house or dwelling. NDS recommends that developers make a proportion of new housing available only for people with disability. This is one way of increasing the number of people with disability living in a well-serviced community with ready access to public transport, community services and opportunities to socialise.

NDS calls on the Victorian government to push for universal design principles to apply to all new houses built in Victoria. This will prevent the expensive cost of refurbishments that are required when a new occupant grows old or is a person living with a disability. Retro fitting a property to make it accessible can be up to 22 times more expensive than incorporation of accessibility measures in a new build ([read Australia Housing Needs, ABC News Report](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5Calisa.maxted%5CAppData%5CLocal%5CMicrosoft%5CWindows%5CINetCache%5CContent.Outlook%5C4F33833D%5CAustralian%20housing%20needs%20mandatory%20accessibility%20standards%20to%20create%20%27homes%2C%20not%20just%20accommodation%27%2C%20advocates%20say%20-%20ABC%20News)). We also encourage the Government to include accessibility as a priority criterion within the Big Housing Build initiative.

## **Employment opportunities for people with disability**

People with disability continue to experience disproportionately low levels of employment at only 52.3 per cent compared to over 82 per cent for the rest of the community. This disparity increases for people with more significant disability. NDS recognises that in this COVID normal environment both the state and federal governments are rolling out various initiatives to support people to find jobs. It is critical that such initiatives explicitly include people with disability. NDS welcomes ambitious targets and requests funding to develop targeted programs and campaigns to support employers in their understanding of the benefits of employing people with disability. Targeted programs would educate, encourage and support employers in their consideration and hiring of employees with disability.

NDS also calls for the state government to procure goods or services from Supported Employment services which produce high quality goods and services while providing supportive and meaningful workplaces for people with disability. Procurement from Supported Employment services leverages the government’s buying power to deliver social value above and beyond the value of the goods or services being procured. It is recommended that 0.5 per cent of all applicable purchases be committed to supported employment services.

# **Conclusion**

NDS calls on the Victorian government to recognise people with disability and the disability services sector in its upcoming state budget. The sector plays a vibrant and important role within Victorian community services, and its voice needs to be heard, its workforce expanded and supported, and issues of sustainability and quality addressed. Victoria needs to keep working to make this state truly inclusive for all people with disability, and fund the frameworks and initiatives which will achieve this.