

# PEOPLE WITH A DISABILITY

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY AUSTRALIA INCORPORATED (PWD) HAVE A VISION OF:

“a socially just, accessible and inclusive community, in which the human rights, citizenship, contribution, potential and diversity of all people with disability are respected and celebrated.”<sup>1</sup>



## OVERVIEW

“People with a disability” is a term that includes many people in our community who live with a wide range of disability types, including physical, sensory and intellectual.

People with disabilities have a desire for the same opportunities as most people, which is to regularly participate in community life. This includes having access to meaningful health care, recreation, housing, education for life and stimulating employment opportunities. Furthermore people with disabilities have strong connections with their families and carers.

People with disabilities may find it harder to undertake day to day activities. In events such as the Paralympics and Special Olympics some people with disabilities can demonstrate that through determination and commitment they reach their personal best, become elite athletes and inspire many Australians.



An inclusive community is vital for people with disabilities to function as valuable members of society.

### IN THE BEGA VALLEY

Bega Valley Shire's disability statistics relate directly to need for assistance due to a severe or profound disability. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and the Bega Valley Community Profile.

**1,816 people or 5.7% of the population in Bega Valley Shire report needing help in their day-to-day lives due to disability.<sup>2</sup>**

These disability statistics help in understanding the prevalence of people who need support in the community, and along with information on unpaid care to a person with a disability, how that support is provided. It should be noted that many people living with a disability may not indicate a need for assistance and as such may not be captured in these figures.

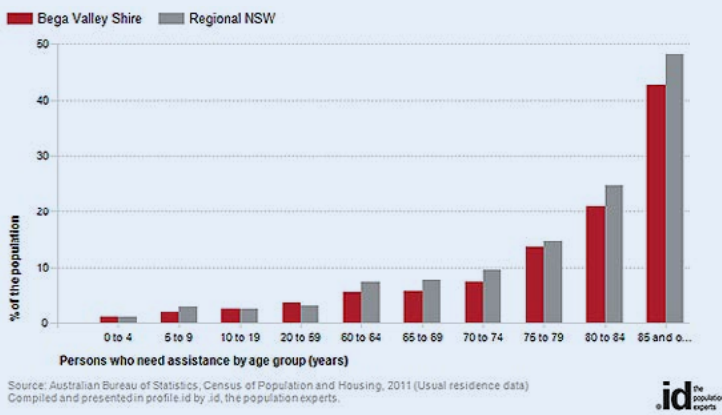
Analysis of the need for assistance of persons in Bega Valley Shire compared to regional NSW shows that there was a similar proportion of persons who reported needing assistance with core activities.

Overall, 5.7% of the population reported needing assistance with core activities, compared with 5.8% for regional NSW. However, for the 65 and over age group, the need for assistance is greater in the Bega Valley than regional NSW as a whole. This is consistent with our ageing population. There was also an increase in the need for assistance for people under the age of 65 from the last census.

**In Bega Valley Shire there are 3,403 carers providing unpaid assistance to a person with a disability, long term illness or old age.<sup>3</sup>**

The proportion of carers providing unpaid care for older people and people with disabilities can be an important indicator of the level of demand for care services

## Need for Assistance, 2011



and facilities. An increasing proportion of carers among the population may indicate inadequate care provision or the need for in-home support, or support for themselves.

### THE CHANGES

The National Standards for Disability Services are being revised during a period of significant reform for disability services in Australia.

In the 2011 report to the Australian Government, the Productivity Commission found that the current disability system is underfunded, unfair, fragmented and inefficient. The report recommended the establishment of a National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

The implementation of the NDIS will significantly change the way that people with a disability access supports and services in Australia. It aims for people to have the opportunity to participate actively in their communities by providing targeted supports aligned to individual need.<sup>4</sup>

As part of the National Health Reforms in 2011, Governments divided the responsibility for aged and disability program funding and operations. From July 2012 the State Government funds services for people with a disability and the Federal Government fund services for people over 65 years.

The Person Centred approach underpins these reforms and according to the NSW Government (Family and Community Services) is focused on enabling people with a disability to identify and realise their goals and aspirations. It is not designed around the specialist disability supports and services that the government funds.

The focus is about first connecting people with supports offered in their community – through their informal networks (family and friends), the mainstream service system (education, public transport and health) and by other providers (such as, family support services).<sup>5</sup>

Many local community organisations receive funding to deliver Home and Community Care (HACC) programs that assist people with disabilities and older people to live independently in the community. Whilst supported in principle, these changes have created a level of uncertainty within the community sector. The introduction of individualised funding may have implications for service delivery in the Bega Valley.





## THE SOCIAL ISSUES

### Infrastructure and Accessibility

Consultations undertaken with the community indicated there was a need to improve the physical access to the built environment. This includes streetscapes, Council facilities and public access buildings across the Bega Valley Shire.

The importance of achieving a connected path of travel or pedestrian network to improve the accessibility in the Bega Valley Shire is critical for people with disabilities. This promotes participation and independence and therefore equality.

Many pathways are difficult to negotiate as they are either too steep, have no kerb ramps or are unsuitable for wheelchairs and people with vision impairments.

There is limited or no use of Tactile Ground Surface Indicators and Braille signage throughout the Bega Valley. This presents barriers for people with vision impairments to live independently with safety.

It has been identified that there is also a need to address equity in the playground.

A number of families, services and children with disabilities have requested an accessible inclusive playground in the Bega Valley. This would be an opportunity to address social inclusion, physical activity and social connection for children with a disability and their families.

### Access to Information and Services

People with disabilities have indicated difficulties navigating their way through the service system to access services such as health, education and employment.

Access to specialist support services, such as paediatricians, speech pathologists, occupational therapist and clinical psychologists is limited. The practice of visiting medical specialists, such as paediatricians, makes it difficult for people to access these types of services at short notice.

Transport is a major barrier. Accessing specialists in Canberra can be stressful, expensive and disjointed for the family and child with additional needs. Similar difficulties are experienced within the Bega Valley Shire for families located in outlying areas.

Disability service providers in the Bega Valley have highlighted a number of gaps in service provision. More respite is needed for people caring for younger children and family members with a disability or mental health issues.

According to local service providers, isolated older men with intellectual disabilities are currently in need of additional social support and independent living skills to improve their quality of life in the Bega Valley Shire.

A need for an Interagency for additional networking, support, information and collaboration within service provision has also been identified.

## Employment & Education

People with disabilities also value increased meaningful opportunities in education and employment, for example, in career pathways, apprenticeships, and traineeships.

Research shows that in December 2005 there were 499,000 disability support pensioners (DSP) in Australia and by 2007 this grew to 723,424. Just over 2% (16,894 people) were able to find paid employment and move from government pensions.<sup>6</sup>

There are a wide range of barriers for people with physical disabilities and those with mental illnesses to gain and maintain employment. A lack of transport options, availability of carers, lack of accessible workplaces and employer attitudes are some of those barriers.

## Transport

Consultations with people with disabilities and their carers have identified that transport is still an issue in the area. The dispersed pattern of settlement and distances between towns creates difficulties for people with a disability who do not have a driving license, or who are unable to drive. The local bus companies have increased their accessible fleet over the last few years however, the timetables for these buses are limited. Accessible taxis provide service within school hours, on evenings and weekends, however cost and distances needed to be travelled at times are an issue.

Community Transport provides an important service to its target group, particularly for medical appointments. However limited resources and the reliance on volunteers restricts its capacity to meet the needs of the community for after hours and weekend transport.

Lack of transport increases social isolation for people located outside of major townships.

## Community Housing

There is a need for independent and shared accessible housing for people with disabilities to actively participate in community life. Several disability services provide supported accommodation options. However, consultations suggest there is a lack of flexibility and identified funding to adequately meet the needs of people with disabilities and their carers.

## Health

*“Despite the overall improvement in population health, the gap between Australians with disability and those without disability remains large. The prevalence of physical long-term health conditions was higher for people with both mental health problems and severe or profound disability than for those with mental health problems but no disability.”<sup>7</sup>*

Disability service providers have indicated over the last five years there has been an increase in people presenting with mental health issues across the Bega Valley. This is further compounded by the prevalence of drug and alcohol use





problems. People with mental health issues have a higher rate of alcohol and drug use than the general community.

Women with disabilities are more vulnerable to violence and often have fewer pathways to appropriate support or options to escape violence particularly when perpetrated by partners and/or carers.<sup>8</sup>

### **STRENGTHS IN THE BEGA VALLEY**

There is a general acceptance for people with disabilities to be socially included in the Bega Valley. Most people have a connection to someone with a disability due to the nature of our small community. This environment has encouraged several services, preschools, schools and businesses to develop a commitment to social inclusion and equal opportunity.

There is a network of disability service providers across the Bega Valley working in the areas of accommodation support,

employment/training, respite, early intervention, advocacy and community access. These organisations in the Bega Valley are strong advocates and have a commitment to improve the quality of life for people with disabilities and their families.

There is also a history of innovative programs for people with a disability, such as International Day of People with a Disability celebrations and the Art in the Garage Project, which demonstrates the value people with disabilities bring to the broader community. The Art in the Garage Project provides a safe and supportive environment for artists with a disability to foster unique creative artwork with the support of talented artists.

In 2011 the Community Connections Program within Workability was enhanced and has increased social inclusion and independent living options for people with disability. This program funding aimed to address the long term gap in local service delivery.

## THE CONSTRAINTS

ACCORDING TO SHUT OUT: THE EXPERIENCE OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AND THEIR FAMILIES IN AUSTRALIA:

**“Many people with disabilities said they face a constant struggle to obtain what the rest of the community would consider to be an ordinary life. They do not want special treatment—they just want the barriers removed so they can get on with living.”<sup>9</sup>**

In the Bega Valley Shire there is limited choice for people with disabilities and their families for employment, care options, respite, transport and health services.

It is a relatively isolated rural community, with a large geographical spread of small towns. Small rural towns are often more affordable and therefore people with disabilities and their families choose to live in these areas. The distance to travel to town is a constraint if people live on a rural property. This may increase social isolation and cause some challenges for care and transport.

There are physical barriers accessing some essential services such as banks, newsagencies, shops and doctor’s surgeries in all the major towns. This lack of access into public buildings reduces participation and independence for people with disabilities and their families.

Limiting access or placing unnecessary barriers within the community can create or reinforce this social isolation.

## THE OPPORTUNITIES

The major reforms outlined earlier aim to provide people with a disability, their families and carers, with greater choice and control over their support and service arrangements.

This provides an opportunity to enhance services in the area and to gain financial support targeted at best practice models that work for people with disabilities and their families.

This enabling approach allows more flexibility for people with a disability to work collaboratively with people in the community to make these goals a reality. Consequently this will build personal confidence, self esteem and social connections in the community.

From July 2011 children with certain disabilities have access to funding and new Medicare items under the new Better Start for Children with Disability initiative provided by the Federal Government. Families of children with disabilities can access additional funding for early intervention services.

The Regional Hospital in Bega is an excellent opportunity coming to the Bega Valley for many residents in 2016. It is expected that this will improve access to health services for people with disabilities and their families in the future.

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### SOCIAL ISSUES PAPERS

This document is part of a broader Social Issues Paper produced by the Bega Valley Shire Council. To read the document in its' entirety go to [www.begavalley.nsw.gov.au](http://www.begavalley.nsw.gov.au)

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