



PROTOCOLS

for engaging with people with disability in the development and delivery of DVA business

PURPOSE

The purpose of these protocols is to inform The Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) staff of their obligations to actively consult and engage with people with disability and their representative organisations when developing its policies and programs. This applies to DVA clients, DVA employees and the general public. Consultation will ensure that departmental policies and programs are inclusive of people with disability, their families and carers.

OVERVIEW

DVA along with all government departments, has obligations under the National Disability Strategy (the Strategy) to involve people with disability in the development and implementation of government policies and programs. The Strategy was developed in consultation with people with disability and reflects the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to which Australia is a signatory.

The Strategy has been agreed by all levels of government. This means that for the first time in Australia's history, all governments have committed to a unified, national approach to improve the lives of people with disability, their families and carers.

DVA has a long history of consulting with the veteran community, some of whom have an acquired disability or age related disability. The point of these protocols is not simply to satisfy a requirement agreed under the Strategy but to provide practical information for staff about achieving effective engagement and policies and programs that do not inadvertently exclude people with disability.

Existing DVA consultation arrangements can be used to meet the requirements of the protocols.

THE DVA PROTOCOLS

The DVA protocols are based on the Strategy priorities and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). It is the responsibility of all DVA staff to consider and observe the DVA protocols to ensure that commitments to people with disability are met.

PROTOCOLS

- 1** DVA will consult with and actively involve people with disability either directly or through representative organisations in the development and decision making processes about policies and programs that directly concern them.
- 2** DVA will ensure that people with disability, wherever practical, will have equal access to events and published materials and other resources provided or sponsored by the Department.
- 3** DVA will take into account the needs of people with disability when planning and designing consultations. This includes documentation, presentations, fully accessible premises, reasonable timeframes and making any reasonable adjustment to maximise participation (hearing loops, Auslan interpreters).
- 4** DVA will undertake to include balanced representation of people with disability on advisory bodies.

HOW CAN DVA **COMPLY** WITH THE PROTOCOLS?

DVA OVERVIEW

There are three groups that DVA needs to consider when dealing with people with disability:

- DVA clients;
- DVA employees; and
- the general public.

The need to consult with people with disability applies equally to our external responsibilities as policy makers, administrators and to our responsibilities as an employer.

DVA CLIENTS

DVA is the primary service delivery agency responsible for developing and implementing programs that assist the veteran and defence force communities. Consultation with our clients is fundamental in developing programs that meet their needs.

DVA EMPLOYEES

DVA, as an Australian Public Service (APS) agency, is committed to maintaining a workplace that promotes inclusion and equity. The Public Service Act 1999, Disability Discrimination Act 1992 and Fair Work Act 2009 set out DVA's obligations to provide a workplace that is free from discrimination, promotes equality of opportunity in employment and recognises the diversity of the Australian community.

THE GENERAL PUBLIC

In addition to providing income support, rehabilitation, health and community care programs, DVA conducts commemorative programs to acknowledge the service and sacrifice of Australian servicemen and women. It is important that members of the general public with disabilities have access to information, DVA buildings and sites where DVA activities such as commemorations are being performed.

WHAT IS DISABILITY?

For the purposes of the protocols, the term 'people with disability' refers to people with all kinds of impairment from birth or acquired through illness, accident or the ageing process that restricts their everyday activities. It includes cognitive impairment as well as physical, sensory and psycho-social disability.

The majority of DVA's clients' disability is Australian Defence Force (ADF) service or aged related. The level of disability ranges from serious impairment such as quadriplegia to minor hearing loss.

CONSULTATION

THE IMPORTANCE OF CONSULTATION

People with disability continue to lobby governments for a voice and greater influence in the development of policies and programs that affect their lives. The UNCRPD, to which Australia is a signatory, requires governments to consult with and actively involve people with disability through their representative organisations.

DVA will take all reasonable steps, where practical, to ensure that clients' disability status remains confidential when the client is involved in consultative activities.

CONSULTATION WITH THE EX-SERVICE COMMUNITY

DVA has a long history of consulting with our clients. Working with the ex-service community is an important objective and DVA will continue to consult through appropriate avenues to comply with the protocols.

More information is available on DVA's website:

www.dva.gov.au/ex-Service_organisations/consultation/Pages/consultation_framework.aspx

WHAT TO DO WHEN CONDUCTING A CONSULTATION PROCESS

The following are some practical suggestions to improve access for people with disability when undertaking consultation in DVA.

- Ensure that the selected participants represent the perspective of people with disability and also their family and carers.
- Ask participants if they have specific accessibility needs or require assistances (such as Auslan interpreter and hearing loops) to participate in different stages of the consultation process such as documentation and venues.
- Comply with APS Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 (WCAG). Pay particular attention to the use of plain English and readability in preparing documents and presentations. Vision Australia provides Legibility Guidelines to guide communication.
- Provide details of telecommunications devices for the deaf and interpreter services.
- Explore use of technologies that can increase participation (online surveys, social networking).
- Ask if there are any arrangements that can be made, such as starting later, to assist those travelling and ensure that meetings and events do not require last minute changes to travel arrangements.



NATIONAL DISABILITY STRATEGY 2010-2020

People with disability often experience difficulties obtaining the same life outcomes as other Australians. As policy makers and program managers, we are all responsible to support the principles of the National Disability Strategy 2010-2020 (the Strategy) which was agreed by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) in 2011.

The Strategy aims to ensure that people with disability have the same opportunities as other Australians. The Strategy outlines a ten year national policy framework to improve the lives of people with disability, promote participation and create a more inclusive society. It guides public policy across all levels of government and drives change in all mainstream and specialist programs, services and community infrastructure to better meet the needs of people with disability, their families and carers.

The Strategy requires all governments to work collaboratively with people with disability, their respective organisations, families and carers, community service providers and advocacy and other organisations in the development of programs and systems that affect people with disability.

USEFUL RESOURCES

**UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION
ON THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES UNCRPD**

www.un.org/disabilities/convention/conventionfull.shtml

NATIONAL DISABILITY STRATEGY

www.dss.gov.au/nds

DVA ACCESSIBILITY WEBPAGE

www.dva.gov.au/help/Pages/accessibility.aspx

AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION – EMPLOYMENT ADVICE ON DISABILITY

www.apsc.gov.au/aps-employment-policy-and-advice/disability

DVA'S WORKPLACE DIVERSITY POLICY AND ACTION PLAN 2011-2015

www.dva.gov.au/aboutDVA/publications/corporate/Documents/Workplace_Diversity.doc