AVI

inviting change

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy

AVI Submission 2023

Contact: Melanie Gow, AVI CEO
E: mgow@avi.org.au
P: 0419 103 898

160 Johnston Street
(PO Box 350) Fitzroy,
Victoria 3065, Australia
ABN: 88 004 613 067

Photo: Members of People with Disability Solomon Islands (PWDSI)

AVI Submission 2023

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy
Co-authored by Karina Kardansjah, Achmad Zubaidillah, and Victoria Langmead.
Endorsed by Melanie Gow, Raine Dixon, and the AVI Disability Inclusion Working Group.

AVI acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia. We recognise the continuing connection that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have to their lands and waters, and we pay our respects to Elders and communities past, present, and emerging.
We would like to specifically pay our respects to the Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nation, as the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which our head office is located.

AVI advances disability inclusion through targeted support and engagement with local Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs), primarily through the Australian Volunteers Program managed on behalf of DFAT. All approaches to disability inclusion are locally led and owned.

Progress towards disability inclusion across our region will be achieved through change that is **locally owned and led**. In the new International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy, Australia has the opportunity to contribute to a more inclusive, and rights-based approach to disability inclusion through coordinated efforts, policy changes, and the support of local organisations to achieve their priorities for disability inclusion and equity. AVI approaches **partnerships with mutual respect** and aims to ensure that people with disabilities are actively involved in the decision-making processes that affect their lives. AVI calls on the Australian government to prioritise local knowledge and genuine equitable partnerships with OPD's and people with disabilities.

Priorities and Recommendations

Equitable Partnerships with OPDs. Commit to fair and equal partnerships with OPDs where outcomes are mutually beneficial and do not solely preference the outcomes of donor governments and programs. It is imperative that expectations on OPDs are commensurate with funding and investments.

Flexible and Accessible Funding. Provide flexible and accessible funding, through grants and core funding, to local and regional OPDs and ensure support is available to manage the administrative and operational burden associated with Australian government funding. The Australian Volunteers Program Impact Fund is an example of flexible funding that suits the needs of OPDs and maintains appropriate levels of accountability and transparency.

Mainstream Disability Inclusion. Require that all in-country programs over $3m have a disability objective, and that 80 per cent of programs effectively address disability equity.

Collaboration. Strengthen existing relationships, establish bilateral cooperation, and support OPDs through direct funding, co-learning models and technical supports as led and informed by local stakeholders. Collaborate with government and international organisations to share best practice and promote disability equity and rights on a regional and global scale.

Awareness, education, and public representation. Support public awareness campaigns to combat stigma, raise awareness about the rights and capabilities of people with disabilities and promote positive and genuine portrayals of people with disabilities in development programs, media campaigns and public communications. Increase awareness and education by promoting disability awareness and education initiatives and sensitivity training across programs.

Targeted Sector Support. Promote inclusive education where children with disabilities have equal access to quality education in mainstream schools. Encourage and support the inclusion of people with disabilities in the workforce. This can be achieved through supporting initiatives such as focused skills training, reasonable accommodations, and anti-discrimination measures. Improve healthcare and support services for people with disabilities, especially in rural/isolated areas, including access to specialised healthcare, rehabilitation, and assistive devices.

Infrastructure and Technology. Mainstream accessibility into the design or redesign of infrastructure and technology and invest in infrastructure and technologies that promote accessibility. This includes ensuring that public spaces, transportation, digital platforms, and information are accessible to all, regardless of their abilities.

Data collection and research: Invest in locally undertaken data collection and research to better understand the needs and experiences of people with disabilities, which can inform evidence-based policies and programs.

Approaches

It is essential that all approaches are determined through meaningful engagement with OPDs and individuals with disabilities, to ensure that strategies, policies, and actions truly reflect the needs and aspirations of people with disabilities.

A twin-track approach. AVI, through the Australian Volunteers Program and Australian Humanitarian Partnerships, encourages an environment where disability inclusion is both a process and an outcome, promoting the full participation of people with disabilities and working directly with OPDs to support their goals. A twin-track approach continues to be the primary approach to promote disability inclusive development.

Nothing About Us Without Us. Through our Disability Working Group, AVI is committed to ensuring our disability inclusion work is informed and led by people with disabilities. This core principle of disability equity and rights extends to supporting local and regional OPDs through straightforward, accessible funding and a partner-led approach to disability inclusion.

Further approaches to disability equity and rights include:

- Leadership and Advocacy - Champion disability equity and rights on the international stage by supporting local actors to take leadership roles in advocating for disability-inclusive policies and practices.
- Regional and Global Partnerships - Support collaboration between countries, international organisations, and key national and regional actors to share best practice, coordinate efforts, and create a unified voice in advancing disability rights.
- Capacity Strengthening - Support capacity-strengthening initiatives, such as the Australian Volunteers Program, in partner countries to support the development and implementation of disability-inclusive policies and programs.
- Knowledge Sharing - Facilitate knowledge sharing of experiences, successes, and challenges in advancing disability equity and rights, providing valuable insights and lessons learned.
- Technical Assistance -Offer technical assistance in the form of training, resources, and expertise in areas such as inclusive education, healthcare, and accessible infrastructure. This could take the form of skilled volunteers.
- Research and Data - Invest in research on disability and share findings with the international community to contribute to a broader understanding of the challenges and opportunities for people with disabilities.

Organisations of People with Disabilities

Supporting and partnering with OPDs is crucial for advancing disability equity and rights. OPDs play a vital role in advocating for the rights and well-being of people with disabilities in partner countries.

Equal Partnerships. AVI calls on the Australian government to **work alongside OPDs** and prioritise long-term, **equitable partnerships**. This includes recognising and alleviating the demands on OPDs by donors, often disproportionate to investments.

Funding. Provide core funding and grants to OPDs to support their operations, advocacy efforts, and programs. This financial support can help OPDs reach a broader audience and have a greater impact. In doing this DFAT needs to ensure that funding and grant opportunities are accessible.

Capacity Building. Offer training and capacity-strengthening programs, such as the Australian Volunteers Program to enhance the organisational and advocacy skills of OPDs. This includes providing resources, workshops, and long-term expertise to help them operate more effectively.

Consultation and Collaboration. Engage OPDs in program design and delivery including monitoring, evaluation and learning, actively seek their input and involve them in decision-making processes.

Public Awareness and Education. Collaborate with OPDs on public awareness campaigns and educational initiatives to combat stigma and raise awareness about disability issues.

Access to Information and Resources. Ensure that OPDs have access to essential information and resources to support their advocacy work. This includes providing access to data, research, and legal expertise. Further opportunities to support OPDs include:

- Partnerships on International Initiatives - Partner with OPDs on international disability initiatives to leverage their expertise and advocacy on the global stage. This can include collaborative efforts to promote disability rights globally.
- Disability-Inclusive Development - Include OPDs in development projects and initiatives to ensure that disability considerations are integrated into development goals. This is particularly important in international development and humanitarian efforts All involved OPD's must be appropriately engaged and compensated for their time.
- Monitoring and Reporting - Support OPDs in monitoring and reporting on the implementation of disability-related policies and initiatives. This can help ensure transparency and accountability.
- Accessibility and Inclusivity - Work with OPDs to improve accessibility and inclusivity in public spaces, transportation, and digital platforms. Collaborate on initiatives to enhance the physical and digital accessibility of the country.
- Policy Advocacy - Support OPDs in their advocacy efforts to influence policy changes and legislative reforms that promote disability rights. This can include joint campaigns and lobbying efforts. Assist OPDs in advocacy efforts by providing resources, technical support, and diplomatic assistance to amplify their voices on the international stage.
- Employment Opportunities - Partner with OPDs on initiatives that promote employment opportunities for people with disabilities. This can include job training programs and anti-discrimination measures.
- Research and Data Collection - Collaborate with OPDs on research projects to better understand the needs and experiences of people with disabilities. Share research findings to inform evidence-based policies and programs.

- Cultural Exchange and Representation - Support OPDs in cultural exchange programs that promote a better understanding of disability issues and foster representation of people with disabilities in various sectors.
- Recognition and Awards - Acknowledge the valuable work of OPDs through awards and recognition, which can help raise their profile and inspire further advocacy efforts.
- Regular Communication and Feedback - Maintain open lines of communication with OPDs, seeking their feedback and input on disability-related matters.

In all these efforts, it is essential that Australia recognises the autonomy and expertise of OPDs and respects their leadership in advocating for the rights of people with disabilities. Collaboration and partnership should be based on principles of inclusivity and empowerment.

Challenges and Opportunities

Advancing disability equity and rights is complex and challenging. Understanding these challenges will allow the Australian government to promote meaningful progress through coordinated efforts, policy changes, and social transformation.

Challenges

- **Partnership Challenges.** Increasing demands on small or emerging OPDs from donors and development organisations with expectations disproportionate to funding. In many cases, people with disabilities may be underrepresented in decision-making processes and leadership roles.
- **Inconsistent Funding.** Limited core funding and inconsistent or piecemeal funding results in limited organisational strengthening and a lack of sustainability. Australia must ensure that OPDs have access to long-term funding and technical support that provides stability and long-term capacity development.
- **Stigma and Discrimination.** There is often a lack of awareness and understanding of disability issues, leading to misconceptions and negative attitudes. Deep-seated societal stigma and discrimination against people with disabilities can be a significant barrier to advancing their equity and rights.
- **Barriers to Inclusion and Access to Services.** Many people with disabilities face limited access to healthcare, education, employment, and other essential services. People with disabilities are more likely to experience poverty and social exclusion due to limited opportunities and discrimination. Physical, communication, and attitudinal barriers can hinder the full participation of people with disabilities in society. People with disabilities often face disparities in healthcare, including access to specialised services and preventive care. The lack of available, appropriate services is particularly concerning in the Pacific.
- **Legal, Policy, and Data Gaps:** Inconsistent or inadequate disability-related legislation and policies can impede the realization of rights and equity. Insufficient data and research on disability issues can hinder evidence-based policymaking and program development.

Opportunities

- **Advocacy and Activism.** Supporting strong advocacy and activism of people with disabilities and OPDs has led to positive changes and increased awareness.
- **Inclusive Education.** Support for inclusive education practice is expanding, promoting the inclusion of students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms.
- **Technological Advancements.** Investing in technology to enhance accessibility, making digital content, transportation, and communication more inclusive.

- **Employment Initiatives.** Supporting initiatives to promote the employment of people with disabilities.
- **Disability-Inclusive Development.** Ensuring that all DFAT programs are inclusive in design and implementation.
- **Research and Data.** Supporting disability research to inform policies and programs.
- **Collaboration.** Bilateral cooperation and partnerships among countries, organisations, and advocates are facilitating the exchange of knowledge and best practices.
- **Legal Reforms.** Strengthening development and implementation of disability-related laws and policies to protect and advance the rights of people with disabilities.
- **Empowerment.** Empowering people with disabilities and OPDs to be active participants in decision-making processes can lead to more inclusive and effective policies.
- **Innovative Programs.** Innovative programs and initiatives that focus on the abilities and strengths of people with disabilities.

(Case study 1) The Mongolian Association of Sign Language Interpreters (MASLI) is based in Ulaanbaatar and represents the interests of Mongolian sign language interpreters. Learning in an all-deaf, signing environment with access to role models is a powerful experience for people who are deaf. This project aims to strengthen knowledge and leadership skills of Deaf women in Mongolia through learning, training, and mentoring. With the support of the Australian Volunteers Program Impact Fund, this project supported the attendance of three Deaf women and a sign language interpreter at the World Federation of the Deaf Congress and World Association of Sign Language Interpreters Conference in South Korea, in July 2023. It also supported the four delegates to share what they learned at the conferences with 50 Deaf women through seven workshops, and with 40 sign language interpreting students and interpreters through eight workshops.

(Case study 2) Disabilitas Kerja Indonesia (DKI) is a start-up social enterprise which specialises in finding employment for people living with disabilities.The Australian Volunteers Program Impact Fund helped DKI deliver a two-day Disability Job Fair Walk-In Interview event. Through this event 100 people living with disabilities attended face-to-face job interviews with eight hiring companies and undertook monitoring and evaluation with candidates and companies to assess the successfulness of the event. The objective of the project was to find employment for at least 30 people. DKI's work is a pertinent example of the ongoing process of collaborating with companies in Indonesia to encourage compliance of government regulations for employing people with disabilities. DKI continues to advance equal employment opportunities for people with disabilities through running job fairs and their Work Ready Disability Skills Development Program and Disability Entrepreneurship Program.

(Case study 3) The Australian Volunteers Program Disability Inclusion Working Group is a highly effective cross-team collaboration with AVP staff from a number of countries, as well as former volunteers with lived experience who bring strong community connections. The group meets monthly and advises the program on policy, activities, and partnership opportunities. They also advise on accessibility matters across the program, addressing barriers for a diverse range of volunteers to boost participation. The Working Group builds staff capability and understanding of disability, promotes disability inclusion and raises public awareness of our work through public diplomacy efforts. They also help international staff to engage with OPDs and disability networks in their countries.