

Question on Notice

No. 832

Asked on 19 November 2013

MR HOLSWICH asked the Minister for Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services (MS DAVIS)—

QUESTION

Will the Minister advise what support the government is providing to Queenslanders who use wheelchairs and what steps the government is taking to encourage better wheelchair accessibility throughout Queensland?

ANSWER

As Minister for Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services, I share with the Australian Government and all state and territory governments, the vision of a more inclusive society that enables people with disability to achieve their full potential.

A key to achieving a healthy and sustainably built environment is to provide places and spaces that can be used in an equitable and accessible way by all people including people who use wheelchairs. Environments that are accessible benefit people with disability as well as the broader community such as parents with prams, older people, people with temporary mobility impairments (for example, through injury) and people with medical conditions.

Barriers within the built environment can have a substantial impact on freedom of movement and therefore freedom of choice.

Australia is a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and is guided by legislation and national agreements in relation to people with disability having a right to achieve access and be included in the community the same as everybody else. The legislation includes the Queensland *Disability Services Act 2006* and the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1991*, the Commonwealth *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*, *Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport 2002*, and the *Disability (Access to Premises – Buildings) Standards 2010*.

The current legislation support a continuous creation of an accessible built environment such as the Transport Standards which establish minimum accessibility requirements that must be met by providers and operators of public transport conveyances, infrastructure and premises and the Premises Standards which clarify how to ensure buildings are accessible to people with disability and meet the requirements of discrimination law.

People with disability should expect to enter and make use of places used by the public if people without disability can do so. Places used by the public should be accessible at the entrance and inside. Facilities in these places should also be accessible (wheelchair-accessible toilets, lift buttons within reach, tactile and audible lift signals for people with vision impairments). The enforcement of these access requirements occurs at the time when a building is being built, as it needs to comply with the relevant codes and standards as part of the development application process, through local government or a private building certifier.

These requirements are also dependent on the age of the building and should not be applied definitively as access standards have changed over time. For example, a building built in 1989 would have met the building standards of the time and may not be as wheelchair accessible as a building built in 2013.

The work towards an accessible future is set to continue. The Queensland Government recently reaffirmed its commitment to the National Disability Strategy which is a Council of Australian Governments initiative that outlines a 10-year national policy framework for an inclusive Australian society.

One of the six key outcome areas outlined in the Strategy is the commitment to enabling inclusive communities so that people with disability can live in accessible and well-designed communities with opportunity for full inclusion in the social, economic, sporting and cultural life of their communities.

The Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services provides funding subsidies for aids and equipment for people with disabilities to improve their access to the community and opportunities for social inclusion. Funding subsidies can be applied for through the Community Aids Equipment and Assistive Technology Initiative for wheelchairs for community access. Funding subsidies can also be applied for through the Vehicle Options Subsidy Scheme to assist with the purchase of wheelchair accessible vehicles or making an existing vehicle wheelchair accessible.

When the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) commences in Queensland from 1 July 2016, eligible Queenslanders with a disability will start entering the scheme. By 1 July 2019, all eligible Queenslanders will be covered. This means that many more people with disability in Queensland will have access to the community and opportunities for increased social inclusion, than is the case now.

People with a disability who enter the NDIS will develop an individualised support plan with a planner from the National Disability Insurance Agency and will receive reasonable and necessary disability care and support. As part of the NDIS, they will have greater choice and control over those services and supports, including access to aids and equipment, such as wheel chairs.

The Queensland Government has committed to release a Queensland Disability Plan in 2013. The Queensland Disability Plan will have a key focus on supporting the social and economic participation of all Queenslanders with disability by improving access to mainstream services and communities.

I encourage the building of a sustainable and liveable Queensland that supports all of our population now and into the future. To achieve this, my department works closely with departments across the Queensland Government to ensure that an environment that is accessible to all is at the forefront of planning. The more barriers we can eliminate at the planning level means better outcomes can be achieved for everyone.