

Understanding the Scope of Abuse in Service Provision

Disabled People in Aotearoa Face Disproportionate Risk

- **High Incidence Rates:** Disabled people in NZ experience significantly higher rates of violence compared to non-disabled counterparts.
- **Intersectional Vulnerabilities:** Māori, Pasifika, women, and LGBTQ+ disabled individuals face compounded risks due to systemic discrimination.
- **Legacy of Harm:** Historical institutional abuse and ongoing neglect shape today's safeguarding gaps and public attitudes.



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- It is important that as a service network we understand the depth and complexity of the issue. Disabled people in Aotearoa suffer violence at rates far exceeding those of non-disabled people. This is not merely a statistic—as we've heard it's a crisis demanding systemic attention.
- Intersectionality further deepens this crisis from a service perspective. Tāngata whaikaha Māori, Pasifika, disabled women, and LGBTQ+ people are disproportionately targeted, reflecting layers of discrimination that require tailored responses.
- Compounding this are historical legacies—state and institutional abuse, social marginalisation, and systemic ableism. These factors are not relics of the past but active barriers to safety and justice today.
- It's crucial that providers confront this context to inform responses moving forward.

Initiatives in the Disability Sector Related to Violence Prevention and Response

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- There are a number of Initiatives in the Disability Sector Related to Violence Prevention and Response

Safeguarding through Enabling Good Lives

Principles Guiding Rights-Based Support for Disabled People



Self-Determination

Disabled people lead their own lives, shaping their support and decision-making environments.



Person-Centered Support

Supports are tailored to individual strengths, goals, and needs—building safety through empowerment.



Ordinary Life Outcomes

Safeguarding is integrated into achieving equitable participation in education, employment, and community.

- A key Safeguarding approach in the disability sector is Enabling Good Lives
- At its core, Enabling Good Lives is about transforming systems so that disabled people lead their own lives, not just participate in services. The Enabling Good Lives (EGL) approach offers a transformative framework that strengthens protection against abuse by centering on the inherent dignity and agency of disabled people. Rather than relying solely on institutional safeguards, EGL principles promote environments where rights are upheld naturally through empowerment.
- Self-determination is critical—when disabled people have the authority to make decisions about their lives, they are less vulnerable to coercion and neglect. EGL demands that supports be genuinely person-centered, not generic or prescriptive, which ensures interventions align with each individual's safety and wellbeing. These supports foster resilience by anchoring safety within the person's own goals and relationships.
- Importantly, EGL recognizes that safeguarding is not a standalone service but embedded in achieving ordinary life outcomes: meaningful education, fulfilling work, and inclusive communities. Whether it's education, employment, or relationships—each is a site where dignity and safety can be reinforced.

Sector Actions to Protect and Support

Key Responses from Government and Community



Whaikaha Leadership

Driving disability system reform and inclusion through safeguarding policies and sector engagement.

Strategic Frameworks

Disability Action Plan 2019–2023 aligns with NZ Disability Strategy to uphold rights and access. Currently being refreshed



Safeguarding Services DSS

People for Us
Assisting Change
Disability Abuse Protection And Response (DAPAR)
Audits and Evaluations
Complaints and Feedback
Critical Incident and Death Reporting
Quality Data and Insights



Supportive Tools & Campaigns

Initiatives like 'Are You OK', legal training, PASAT, Neighbourhood Support, and arts advocacy promote awareness and accessible help.

- New Zealand's response to this crisis is multi-faceted, involving both governmental leadership and grassroots advocacy. At the helm is Whaikaha, the Ministry of Disabled People, which champions system reform and meaningful inclusion through its policies and collaborative frameworks. Strategic efforts like the Disability Action Plan and NZ Disability Strategy outline rights-based pathways that guide cross-sector initiatives. These frameworks not only emphasize access and equity but also drive accountability.
- Disability Support Services (DSS, MSD) is commissioning new regionally responsive safeguarding services - People for Us, Assisting Change, Disability Abuse Protection And Response (DAPAR). These are designed to align with EGL values and are driven by community-led, culturally grounded models that ensure robust protections embedded in everyday life.
- Disability Support Services (DSS) also has a national Quality Framework that functions as a key safeguard by ensuring services are safe, consistent, and responsive to the rights and needs of disabled people.
- Complementing policy are community-led tools and campaigns. Online resources like 'Are You OK', advocacy through the arts, and justice sector training sessions collectively raise awareness and empower both disabled individuals and their supporters to act. These measures are part of a holistic

safeguarding ecosystem in development.

Barriers in the Disability Sector Related to Violence Prevention and Response

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- There are a number of barriers in the Disability Sector related to Violence Prevention and Response

Structural and Systemic Challenges

Barriers Undermining an Abuse-Free Aotearoa

- **Inaccessible Services:** Violence prevention initiatives often exclude disabled people due to poor design and outreach.
- **Lack of Training:** Front-line professionals frequently lack mandatory education on disability and abuse issues.
- **Data and Language Gaps:** Inconsistent terminology and insufficient research hamper effective cross-sector coordination.



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- Despite growing awareness, significant barriers continue to impede the creation of an abuse-free Aotearoa for disabled people. These systemic issues are embedded across service design, education, and coordination frameworks.
- One of the most pressing challenges is the inaccessibility of mainstream violence prevention services. Many are not designed with disabled individuals in mind—both physically and in terms of communication.
- Many disabled people —such as those who are Deaf, have learning disability, rely on alternative communication methods—face **communication gaps** in interactions with professionals. This can lead to misunderstanding and inadequate support, especially in abuse or safety investigations.
- Equally concerning is the lack of mandated training for professionals across healthcare, education, and justice sectors. This results in unprepared responses and missed opportunities for intervention.
- There is a striking lack of **detailed, disability-specific data** on violence and abuse. National statistics often lump disabled people into a single category, hiding how different groups (e.g., people with intellectual, physical, or sensory impairments) experience abuse differently

- While studies indicate that **disabled adults face 1.5 to 2 times more violence** than non-disabled adults, with women and those with learning disability at even greater risk—these figures are likely **underestimated** due to underreporting and poor data gathering
- Add to this the fragmented language and sparse data, and we have a complex landscape requiring strategic, unified reform

Key Focus for NZDSN

Safeguarding Through Inclusive Policy and Practice



Twin-Track Safeguarding

Combine mainstream and specialist responses to address unique needs of disabled individuals.



Mandatory Workforce Training

Equip all frontline staff with disability and abuse awareness to improve detection and support.



Data and Language Standardisation

Adopt shared terminology and robust cross-sector data systems to enhance coordination.



Need for Partnership

Robust Te Tiriti-based collaborations are essential for inclusive and effective solutions.



Specialist communication support

Use of culturally accessible interpreters, communication assistants, easy-read formats, and interpreter awareness.



Primary Prevention

Initiatives that build awareness in families, schools and providers – not just post-incident support.

- To dismantle these entrenched barriers, the sector must take decisive, coordinated action. NZDSN is committed to these actions which are drawn from the voice of disabled people, community input, sector research, and policy guidance.
- First, a twin-track safeguarding approach is essential—mainstream systems must work in tandem with specialist disability services. This ensures both universal access and tailored responses.
- All professionals interacting with vulnerable communities must be trained in disability awareness and abuse prevention. Such knowledge equips them to intervene early and appropriately.
- We need to adopt shared terminology and robust cross-sector data systems to enhance coordination. Standardisation supports policy-making, funding, and evaluation—laying the foundation for sustained, rights-based transformation
- Partnership is key - Robust Te Tiriti-based collaborations are essential for inclusive and effective solutions
- Specialist communication support is essential - use of culturally accessible interpreters, communication assistants, easy-read formats, and ensuring interpreter awareness

- Finally – we need to build a focus on initiatives that build awareness in families, schools and providers – it's not all about just post-incident support.

Thank You | Ngā Mihi Nui

Together, We Can Create a Safer Aotearoa for All

- **Contact NZDSN:** Learn more about disability sector safeguarding efforts at www.nzdsn.org.nz
- **Share the Message:** Use what you have learned from this presentation to raise awareness and spark change in your community.
- **Stay Engaged:** Support ongoing advocacy and sector initiatives centered on disabled leadership.



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- NZDSN and its partners are committed to realising a vision of Aotearoa where disabled people are safe, empowered, and respected.
- Please stay engaged, share these insights, and continue championing inclusive practices wherever you are. Together, we have the power to create lasting change.
- Ngā mihi nui—thank you for your time and engagement with this important kaupapa.