

PAUL DICKEY:

I just want to talk briefly to add a perspective from the central government on how their disability strategy can reinforce the need for New Zealand to do more on applying a universal design approach.

The starting point for the disability strategy was New Zealand's diverse population. Really great to see other people talking about this point of diversity. We are a mixture of New Zealanders of different genders, ages, ethnicities, cultures, we speak different languages and we have different abilities.

Having some type of mental, physical or sensory impairment is part of the disability registry of New Zealanders, but it also means that New Zealanders on all levels, central government, local authorities, business communities, and ourselves as individuals, need to recognise that our 'one size fits all' approach does not work and will increasingly not work.

Everything we need to do needs to reflect the diversity of New Zealand. That means being flexible, adaptable, focused on the user experience, and future-proofing.

Briefly, to reflect on some of the statistics that have been covered already, thinking about what the population of disabled New Zealanders means, in 2013, 24% of New Zealanders identified themselves as having some sort of functional limitation affecting their ability to carry out daily functions of life.

People over 65 were much more likely to be disabled than adults under 65 or children. Māori and Pacific peoples tended to have a higher than average prevalence of experience with disability.

And for adults, the most common form of impairment is physical disability. Thinking more broadly, the first disability strategy was released in 2001. It focused on New Zealanders as a distinct population which took a rights-based approach.

A lot has changed since 2001. This is the UN Convention for People with Disabilities. Last year, the government agreed that the disability strategy was needed. There's been two rounds of public consultation which found what should go into a disability strategy. The new disability strategy should be released by the end of the year, following agreement by Cabinet.

That will set out a consistent strategy for thinking and acting for government agencies over the next 10 years.

The old and new disability strategies are built on a rights-based approach for disabled people. There has been a long history of only being thought about as people with a problem needing to be fixed, which is the responsibility of the medical profession.

Or they are addressing it as people with a problem, segregation away from the community, going back through history. Modern thinking, taking the diversity approach, acknowledging people were born with the same rights. Everyone starts off with equal opportunities to live their life; it's about the treatment for everyone.

However, what this looks like is that it will be different from individual from individual. Some people may need different treatment to ensure they can exercise their rights, and other people do. They manage support to exercise their rights. At the end of the day, however, everyone has the same rights and people are equal before the law.

In revising the disability strategy, we ran two public consultations around the country to get the involvement of disabled people and families from different areas and organisations on, firstly, what a good life looks like to disabled people. And then, what would be the priority that goes with a disability strategy to give that guidance to government agencies.

We want to set out a consistent direction for government agencies over the next 10 years. To help make this happen, the disability strategy was designed with two parts. One part presents underlying approaches and principles to guide thinking and behaviour towards disabled people.

The second part is eight key outcome areas that contribute towards achieving. The new disability strategy was proposed to have stronger accountability with an outcomes framework specifying indicators and targets, and each of the eight outcomes, which will be measured and reported to the government by the Minister for Disability Issues.

And the other part is a dedicated plan for action which will be updated every two years to ensure its priorities are current and relevant. And there will be public consultation opportunities for each of those as they develop.

It was also proposed there will be alignment with international reporting obligations so that we can make the most of advice that comes from the United Nations to New Zealand.

Public feedback of the disability strategy, agreed with the value of taking Universal Design's approach, particularly in terms of access to the built environment.

And the new disability strategy, Universal Design has proposed using the concept of taking a twin-track approach. One track is to make sure mainstream facilities and supports which are designed for general audience are responsive, inclusive and as accessible to disabled people as possible. The other track is that where personal support needs cannot be accommodated by the mainstream, specific supports and services are provided. For example, reading Braille is available to blind people and may need to happen in a specialised environment that is not accessible in a mainstream situation.

This approach is not about having to choose between the specific mainstream options. Rather, it is about having the right access to the right high-quality support or service, at the right time and the right place.

Applying a Universal Design approach will make the mainstream work better for everybody. It should also mean that whenever an adjustment or accommodation is needed, that should be easier and less costly to do so.

The government has a clear and strong intention that all government agencies should follow a social investment approach to everything that we do.

It focuses on interventions for a population group into the future, which are driven by data and evidence, and which have impacts which are measurable. The social investment approach, it seems to us, clearly fits within taking a Universal Design approach. Creating a

building or service or product that is intentionally designed for a range of uses with disability in mind would open up more accessibility immediately, as well as reducing costs in future modifications.

We hope this will enforce the case for the Universal Design approach and see services and products in the built environment becoming for everyone. If you want to find out more information when the new Disability Strategy will look like when it's released in the next 5 to 6 weeks, that is on the website. Thank you. (Applause)