

Waitaha EGL Regional Leadership Invitation to meet – By email 23 September 2024

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CC: Ms Paula Tesoriero MNZM
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Re: Request for Meeting to Discuss the Transition of Disability Support Services and Related Concerns

Tēnā koe Chris,

I hope this letter finds you well. We are the Enabling Good Lives (EGL) Waitaha Regional Leadership Group (WRLG) and are writing to formally request a meeting with you and the Taskforce overseeing the transition of Disability Support Services (DSS) to the Ministry of Social Development (MSD). Given the significance of this transition, we believe that direct engagement with the Taskforce is essential to ensure the voices and needs of our disabled community are fully represented and considered.

About EGL Waitaha Regional Leadership Group

The WRLG is a dedicated body of elected representatives from diverse parts of the disabled community, ensuring inclusive and comprehensive representation in the Waitaha Takiwa | Canterbury District. Our group includes six disabled people, three tāngata whaikaha Māori, one Pacific disabled person, three whānau, āiga, or family members, and three provider representatives. Our mission is to engage the broader community and foster genuine partnerships, ensuring that System Transformation, the Government's response to EGL, incorporates the EGL principles and approach.

The EGL principles are rooted in the belief that disabled people should have the same opportunities as non-disabled people to live good lives. These principles include self-determination, mana-enhancing practices, and the importance of genuine partnerships with disabled people and their families. We are committed to ensuring that the voices of disabled people, tāngata whaikaha Māori, and their whānau are central to any discussions and decisions affecting their lives.

Concerns Regarding the DSS Transition

We have identified the following critical areas of concern:

1. Equity and Regional Variability: The Independent Review of Disability Support Services identified 'inconsistencies in the assessments and allocation of disability supports, and value of support packages, across New Zealand.'

EGL system change was purposefully and successfully rolled out in select areas as "pilots", "demonstration sites" to ensure it was understood how to successfully bring about positive change, and in turn inform national change.

We urge the government to use the knowledge gained through these pilots to implement a system where the standards are raised nationwide, ensuring disabled people have equitable access to high-quality support regardless of where they live. The EGL approach should be at the heart of this, which prioritises choice and control for disabled people and their whānau over the support they need to live fulfilling lives. Without careful management, this transition risks exacerbating existing disparities and limiting people's autonomy.

2. Impacts Since March 18 Flexible Funding Changes: Our members are hearing from disabled people and whānau deeply affected by the changes made to flexible funding on March 18. We are gravely concerned about these changes' disproportionate impact on individuals' mental, physical, and overall well-being. The ongoing uncertainty and the prospect of further changes are causing significant distress and destabilisation within our communities. Since March 18, we have observed reduced opportunities for community participation and increased burnout among disabled people and their whānau. The increased choice and control provided by initiatives like EGL have been greatly valued, and many have thrived under this system. However, there is growing concern that this choice and control are being eroded. For example, if support is restricted to external providers, it could render 'support' unusable for some individuals who have previously been able to choose their support staff.

3. Engagement and Representation of Disabled People: The voices of disabled people and their whānau have not been sufficiently included in the decision-making processes related to this transition. The Taskforce must work in genuine partnership with the disabled community, in alignment with the EGL principles and the commitments made under Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). We advocate for a more inclusive approach that genuinely reflects the needs and aspirations of our community.

4. Operational Stability and Continuity of Services: The transition of DSS to MSD has raised concerns about the continuity of services currently provided by Needs Assessment and Service Coordination (NASC) organisations and other service providers. Any disruption to these services could have significant consequences for disabled people who rely on them. We urge the Taskforce to ensure that service delivery remains uninterrupted during this period of change.

5. Impact on Current Providers and NASCs: Addressing concerns regarding continuing services through current providers and NASCs is crucial. We seek clarity on how the Taskforce plans to support these entities during the transition to ensure they can continue providing essential services without disruption.

Request for a Meeting

We respectfully request a meeting with you and the Taskforce to discuss these concerns further and explore how we can work collaboratively to ensure the transition is as smooth and beneficial as possible for all involved. We believe that a collaborative approach will help ensure that the transition of DSS is managed in a way that prioritises the well-being of disabled people and their whānau.

Please let us know a suitable time for this meeting, whether in person or via video conference. We are eager to contribute constructively to this vital process and to help shape a disability support system that is fair, equitable, and responsive to the needs of all disabled New Zealanders.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to your positive response and the opportunity to collaborate with you.

Nāku noa, nā

Waitaha EGL Regional Leadership Group

EGL Waitaha Disabled Core Group

EGL Waitaha Family and Whānau Core Group

EGL Waitaha Providers Core Group