

26 September 2025

Whaikaha | Ministry of Disabled People  
PO Box 1556. Wellington 6140133 Molesworth Street  
Thorndon, Wellington 6011

By email to: [disabilitystrategy@whaikaha.govt.nz](mailto:disabilitystrategy@whaikaha.govt.nz)

Tēnā koe

## Re: Draft Disability Strategy 2026-2030

Tū Te Akaaka Roa, the Aotearoa New Zealand Branch of the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Draft Disability Strategy 2026-2030 (the strategy) as part of the public consultation process.

The RANZCP is the principal organisation representing the medical specialty of psychiatry in Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia and is responsible for training, educating, and representing psychiatrists. The RANZCP has over 8900 members, including more than 6300 qualified psychiatrists, and is guided on policy matters by a range of expert committees. This submission was prepared in consultation with Aotearoa New Zealand based committees of the RANZCP, including the Aotearoa New Zealand Section of Psychiatry of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities who have expertise and experience in working with tāngata whaikaha experiencing mental health and addictions challenges and their whānau.

## Recommendations

Tū Te Akaaka Roa supports the underlying principles and stated vision of making Aotearoa New Zealand an accessible and equitable society for disabled people and their whānau – a place where disabled people thrive, lead, and participate in all aspects of life. However, we provide several recommendations to further develop the strategy and ensure the stated actions support the strategic vision and principles. Given the unique expertise of our members, our recommendations are focused primarily on health-related actions.

## Health Action and Outcomes

*Health Action 1 - Review and improve policies and practices, so the health journey is equitable, accessible and inclusive.*

Tū Te Akaaka Roa supports the review of current policies and processes relating to disability support services in Aotearoa New Zealand. However, the strategy currently lacks detail regarding the intended target areas for this review and we recommend:

- Clarifying the scope and outcome measures for the proposed review.

- Reviewing policies and system that impact access. Tāngata whai ora living with an intellectual and/or developmental disability are often unable to access appropriate support services due to rigid diagnostic policies, e.g., a requirement for obtaining IQ test scores despite limited access to psychometric assessments.
- Ensuring a strong focus on equity as part of the review, working alongside iwi and whānau whaikaha Māori, who are disproportionately impacted by existing policies and system barriers.
- Reviewing connection points with other sectors (e.g., inappropriate housing) and evaluating their impact on health services and outcomes to break-down silos and improve service accessibility.
- Working with Manatū Hauora | Ministry of Health to guide the implementation of a new Mental Health Act, including supported decision-making policies and practices for tāngata whaikaha.

*Health Action 2 - Build health workforce capability to deliver services that are inclusive, culturally safe, and easy to navigate.*

While we agree with the need to improve workplace policies, environments and career development opportunities, the scope and intent of Action 2 is currently unclear. We recommend:

- Creating a separate workstream focusing on appropriate support and training for the non-disabled health workforce to clearly distinguish Actions 2 and 3, reduce the risk of cultural loading and marginalisation of disabled health professionals, and enable system change.
- Working with stakeholders including Te Whatu Ora | Health New Zealand, Te Kaunihera Rata o Aotearoa | Medical Council of New Zealand, medical colleges, and employers to ensure the needs of disabled people is adequately considered throughout all policies and training modules.
- Providing clear guidance to health professionals and tāngata whai ora outlining pathways for accessing disability support services. Due to ongoing system changes, regional differences, and dispersed responsibilities across government agencies, information is often disjointed and difficult to navigate. We recommend Whaikaha work with relevant agencies, including government and non-government organisations to ensure national alignment and consolidate available resources, acting as a central point of contact for tāngata whaikaha, their whānau, and service providers.

*Health Action 4 - Identify disabled people in national health data.*

Effective data management and reporting is essential to drive system improvements for tāngata whaikaha and whānau. Current reporting processes are fragmented and provide insufficient data to allow for effective monitoring. Tū Te Akaaka Roa recommends:

- Working with relevant agencies, tāngata whaikaha, whānau and tāngata whenua to explore options for identifying disabled people across the spectrum, including those with an intellectual, neurodevelopmental, and/or psychosocial disability.
- Working with relevant agencies, such as the Ministry of Health and Te Hīringa Mahara, with input from tāngata whaikaha and Māori, to improve data management

and reporting processes and ensure the tāngata whaikaha can be identified on existing data dashboards and reports, including data/reports for seclusion and forensic mental health services.

- Targeted reporting to provide more effective monitoring of disabled peoples' experiences using health/mental health and addiction services.

### *Health - further comments*

Tū Te Akaaka Roa is generally supportive of the identified Health actions. However, we recommend a stronger focus on supporting mental wellbeing of tāngata whaikaha, which can significantly impact outcomes across all priority areas. Further we recommend specific actions for consideration:

- Working with the Ministry of Health and Health New Zealand to ensure safe and effective implementation of the new Mental Health Bill (expected July 2027), in particular supported decision-making processes, provision of resources (e.g., communication aids), and advanced care planning.
- Reviewing membership of the Expert Advisory Group to include mental health experts and/or conducting appropriate consultation with professional groups and agencies, such as the RANZCP.
- Developing specific action plans to address the needs of tāngata whaikaha living with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities. While we acknowledge the broad scope of the strategy and resource limitations, we believe the needs of tāngata whaikaha living with an intellectual and/or developmental disability warrant further consideration, due to the persistent inequities experienced by this group. We recommend working with the Ministry of Health and non-government organisation to develop targeted action plans. Recent work completed in Australia (e.g., [Roadmap for Improving the Health of People with Intellectual Disability](#), [Autism Strategy](#)) may serve as a useful resource for this mahi.

### **Justice Actions and Outcomes**

Tū Te Akaaka Roa supports the identified actions for the justice sector. To further strengthen the action plan and improve the outcomes for disabled people we recommend:

- Reviewing entry and exit pathways and short-term interactions with the justice sector as part of the development of the proposed safeguarding framework.
- Focusing on safeguards and support services for tāngata whaikaha living with intellectual, neurodevelopmental, and/or psychosocial disabilities (including mental illness) who are overrepresented in the justice system and are more likely to experience negative outcomes, as highlighted in several national and international reports.
- Working with the Ministry of Health to address workforce shortages in forensic mental health services and create opportunities for building knowledge and understanding within the existing workforce and enable tāngata whaikaha to participate in system design and delivery.
- Improve data collection and management processes across all justice agencies (including police, courts, corrections, and forensic health services) to ensure consistency, and identify targeted actions for improving services for tāngata whaikaha.

## Housing Actions and Outcomes

Tū Te Akaaka Roa does not oppose the identified actions. To further strengthen the proposed action plan and support the strategic vision, we recommend:

- Reviewing availability and access to respite or step-down beds, and targeted residential support services for tāngata whaikaha living with intellectual, neurodevelopmental, and/or psychosocial disabilities to prevent unnecessary hospital admissions, discharge delays, and support the mental health of tāngata whaikaha and their whānau.

## General Comments

We recommend a stronger focus on cross-sector collaboration, ensuring alignment of the proposed actions across all priority areas. The current siloed nature of support systems creates unnecessary challenges for tāngata whaikaha, preventing whānau whai ora from accessing adequate support. Tū Te Akaaka Roa supports Whaikaha as the central agency to provide national guidance and coordinate relevant support services. We acknowledge the significant mahi accomplished by non-government organisation and recommend supporting existing platforms to provide target resources for specific groups. To ensure follow-through, we recommend obtaining written commitment from other government agencies to help Whaikaha achieve the identified actions and outcomes.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback; we look forward to working with Whaikaha in the future. If you have any further questions regarding this letter, please contact the Aotearoa New Zealand National Office - Tū Te Akaaka Roa via [nzoffice@ranzcp.org](mailto:nzoffice@ranzcp.org) or on +64 (0)4 472 7247.

Ngā manaakitanga



Dr Hiran Thabrew

**National Chair, Tū Te Akaaka Roa**



Dr Gail Fleming

**Chair NZ Section of Psychiatry  
of Intellectual and  
Developmental Disabilities**