

# UK National Disability Strategy 2021

## Introduction

The UK Disability Survey launched in January 2021 and ran until April. Thousands of people responded to inform this strategy, including disabled people, families and carers.

Disabled people face huge inequalities in every part of society, right through from early years and into adulthood and old age. And things have been made even harder by coronavirus. A cross-Government strategy is needed and there are some important commitments in the first year of this plan, particularly around improving public understanding and tackling the disability employment gap. But the Government must make clear how it will meet its long-term goals of ensuring fairness and equality. To truly transform disabled people's lives, a concrete plan is needed, alongside investment.

The UK Disability Survey and lived experience research complements a wider programme of engagement which has been running since February 2020, including:

- meetings with our existing disability stakeholder forums:
- 42 regional meetings of the nine Regional Stakeholder Networks (RSNs) involving disabled people, their organisations, parents and carers, totalling 225 members
- 10 meetings with the Disability Charities Consortium, a group of 10 of the UK's largest disability charities
- 4 meetings of the Disabled People's Organisation (DPO) Forum
- 11 roundtable discussions with a total of 98 disabled people about their experiences in daily life
- 6 cross-cutting thematic groups with a total of 130 attendees including disabled people and representatives from DPOs, charities, academia and think tanks

Their expertise and insights have been integral to the development of the strategy.

## Immediate Steps

The National Disability Strategy sets out the actions the government will take to improve the everyday lives of all disabled people.

In the first year of the strategy the Government makes a number of commitments, including to:

- Consult on introducing workforce reporting for businesses with more than 250 staff on the number of disabled people they employ.
- Launch a new online advice hub for both disabled people and employers to provide information and advice on disability discrimination in the workplace, flexible working and rights and obligations around reasonable adjustments.
- Increase the accessibility requirements for new homes and adapt existing homes.
- Develop a UK-wide campaign to increase public awareness and understanding of disability.
- Consider how to support disabled people standing for public office and those who hold public office.

Beyond the first year, the Government says it will work to:

- Ensure fairness and equality.
- Consider disability from the start.
- Support independent living.
- Increase participation.
- Deliver joined up responses.

# UK National Disability Strategy 2021

## The Vision: Transforming disabled people's everyday lives

The vision is to transform the everyday lives of disabled people. To give disabled people the same opportunities as everyone else.

The survey picked up on the following:

- **Home** – Homes are often not suited for disabled people to live
- **Public Transport** – Only a quarter of stations have a way to get from one platform to another without using stairs
- **Work** – It is much harder for a disabled person to get a job than a non-disabled person
- **Shopping** – Difficulties in shopping, not enough facilities, like toilets. Using public transport like buses and trains. Moving around shops
- **Online** – Many websites are not fully accessible
- **Loneliness** – Disabled people are much more likely to feel lonely
- **Safety** – Disabled people are more likely to be the victim of crime

Key ways to tackle this are:

- To treat everyone fairly and equally
- Help disabled people be more independent and have choice and control over their lives
- Collect information so we can understand more about how disabled people are affected by the things we do
- Ensure disabled people have the same opportunities to take part in things
- Make products and services more accessible

## The action now: practical steps to improve disabled people's everyday lives:

**(Part 1)** sets out immediate commitments to improve every part of a disabled person's day – from the moment someone gets up to the moment they go to bed. Disabled people's aspirations for their lives are no different from non-disabled people's aspirations. Every day, many disabled people:

- wake up in a home that is not adapted to their needs
- rely on an unpredictable transport network to get out and about
- navigate inaccessible and inflexible workplaces or education settings
- face limited choice and additional expense when shopping around for goods and services
- use unresponsive and fragmented public services that do not meet their needs
- feel excluded from leisure opportunities and socialising
- find themselves barred from exercising rights, such as voting and serving on a jury

**While at home** – only 1 in 10 homes in England have at least one adaptation for disabled people.

**When commuting** – just a quarter of train stations have step-free access between all platforms.

## UK National Disability Strategy 2021

**At work or in education** – there remains more than a 28 percentage point gap in the employment rate of working age disabled people compared with working age non-disabled people, and while the proportion of disabled people with a degree has increased from 15.9% in 2013 to 2014 to 23.0% in 2019 to 2020, the gap between disabled people and non-disabled people has not narrowed.

**When shopping or getting about** – 2 in 5 disabled people had experienced difficulties shopping around for products or services, with reported barriers including a lack of appropriate facilities (16%), difficulty using public transport (15%), and difficulty moving around premises (13%).

**When accessing public services online** – when tested in September 2020, the websites of nine of the 10 most populated English county councils did not meet accessibility standards.

**In feeling connected to others** – disabled people are more than three times more likely than non-disabled people to often or always feel lonely, with well-being rates for disabled people consistently lower than for non-disabled people. Disabled people more often indicated that the impact of the pandemic had affected their well-being than non-disabled people. The disparity in wellbeing and loneliness between disabled and non-disabled people has not improved since 2013 to 2014.

When it comes to basic rights like the right to be safe from harm, disabled people are disproportionately affected by crime.

### **The long-term ambition: putting disabled people at the heart of the design and delivery of services:**

**Part 2** sets out ambitious changes to how the government works with and for disabled people in the future. “We commit to putting disabled people at the heart of government policy-making and service delivery – laying the foundations for longer term, transformative change”.

The following elements need to be embedded:

1. **Ensure fairness and equality** – empower disabled people by promoting fairness and equality of opportunities, outcomes and experiences, including work and access to products and services.
2. **Consider disability from the start** – embed inclusive and accessible approaches and services to avoid creating disabling experiences from the outset.
3. **Support independent living** – actively encourage initiatives that support all disabled people to have choice and control in life.
4. **Increase participation** – enable greater inclusion of a diverse disabled population in the development and delivery of services, products and policies.
5. **Deliver joined up responses** – work across organisational boundaries and improve data and evidence to better understand and respond to complex issues that affect disabled people.

### **Ensuring Cross-departmental Action**

**(Part 3)** The actions each government department will take as part of this strategy to improve disabled people’s everyday lives. This section makes clear which department is responsible for which commitment. Each department commits to play their part, with ministerial champions setting out how they will personally drive progress.

For Local Authority, the government plans include:

- Building more new homes that are suitable for disabled people
- Making sure that disabled people are safe in buildings, especially if there is an emergency

## UK National Disability Strategy 2021

- Looking at ways to make shopping areas better for disabled people
- Having more Changing Places toilets
- To build more playgrounds that are suitable for disabled children

For the Department of Health and Social Care, the government plans include:

- Involving disabled people in plans to improve social care
- Improving the information we collect so we understand disabled people better
- Helping make sure disabled people are better understood
- Making sure disabled people get the same good healthcare services as non-disabled people

For the Department for Work and Pensions, the government plans include:

- Working with businesses to increase job opportunities for disabled people
- Supporting more disabled people to get a paid job
- Improving the way DWP check if people should get disability benefits

### Key Areas of Focus

#### 1. Employment

Disabled People face significant barriers when accessing employment (where employment is possible). While the strategy should look at these impacts, attention should be paid to developing much needed long-term, sustainable economic solutions to the specific barriers disabled people experience.

Increased flexibility within the Access to Work (publicly funded employment support programme) eligibility criteria would enable disabled people to become permanently employed.

Create vacancies that will enable and support people into employment within the company or linking with other organisations, such as CWaC who provide employment mentors to increase job opportunities for disabled people: [Employment support for adults with disabilities](#) .

#### 2. Support to live independently in the community

Focus on promoting independent living as a positive solution and prevent working aged disabled people and older people from being pushed into generic and larger group settings which decreases independence and subsequent life chances.

Support people to live and access their community more. Provide or work with other organisations/companies to give more community based care, provide more activities and sessions, including support to help someone vote, this will empower people to full and healthy lives within the local community.

Raise awareness about disability in the local communities so residents can be welcoming and inclusive of all individuals.

#### 3. Technology

Affordability and availability of assistive technologies is preventing older people and disabled people from getting the interventions they need at the right time.

We need to help promote more independence through online resources. Implement a digital champion programme to encourage, provide support and guidance on the use of technology.

#### 4. Tackle loneliness

Disabled people are more than three times more likely than non-disabled people to often or always feel lonely, with well-being rates for disabled people consistently lower than for non-disabled people.

## UK National Disability Strategy 2021

Implement / work with other providers in creating / joining a community scheme/project to connect people (staff / service users / public), to champion disability equality, share their thoughts and visions, join in activities, include talking groups, to ensure people are able to improve their wellbeing, quality of life and tackle loneliness,

### 5. Accessibility

Products and services need to be more accessible to people, including homes, transport, pavement parking, shopping, whether online or in stores, towns and streets.

We could engage with local champion disabled ambassadors to help:

- Tap into funding sources to increase the amount of Changing Places toilets in local communities; [Expression of Interest](#)
- Explore new assistive technologies that could help, either within services or in someone's home;
- Improve the accessibility of our websites and documents, in line with the Accessibility Regulations 2018.
- Ensure our service and service users own homes are accessible and adapted