

Australian Volunteers Program's Disability Inclusion Statement of Intent

VISION

The Australian Volunteers Program values and supports people with disabilities as volunteers, staff and partners. The program encourages an environment where disability inclusion is both a process and an outcome, promoting the full participation of people with disabilities.

PURPOSE

The Australian Volunteers Program recognises that people with disabilities have much to offer in both mainstream and disability-specific work. People with disabilities and their representative organisations can greatly contribute to the program's understanding and practice of disability-inclusive development.

The program recognises that disability-inclusive development is good development, and that disability inclusion and accessibility sets the standard for exemplary practice on diversity and inclusion. This applies to the program's two diversity objectives: having diverse volunteers and ensuring inclusive practice, which aim to ensure no-one is left behind.

The program takes a twin-track approach to disability inclusion by:

- mainstreaming disability inclusion across all aspects of the program, and
- targeted initiatives to maximise inclusion and accessibility of the program for people with disabilities - as volunteers, staff, partner organisations, Australian partner organisations and program stakeholders.

This Statement aligns with and supports the Australian Government's policy commitments on disability inclusion, as articulated in the *Development for All 2015-2020: Strategy for strengthening disability-inclusive development in Australia's aid program* (extended to 2021), and reaffirmed in the *Partnerships for Recovery policy*.

The program will achieve this by ensuring all people with disabilities have equal access to contribute to, and benefit from, the Australian Volunteers Program.



CONTEXT

People with disabilities are the largest and most disadvantaged minority in the world. To be effective in reducing poverty, the program must actively include and benefit people with disabilities. The 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals recognises the importance of inclusion with the goal to 'Ensure no one is left behind'.

Disability-inclusive development recognises that people with disabilities have the same inherent dignity and human rights as others. Disability-inclusive development is a process and an outcome: it is the process of making sure people with disabilities are able to participate and are included in decision-making; and it is the outcome achieved when all community members, including people with disabilities, benefit equally from a program or service.

OUR COMMITMENT

The program's approach to disability inclusion is underpinned by our commitment to:

- Ensuring our disability inclusion work is informed and led by people with disabilities, upholding the 'Nothing about us without us' approach to disability inclusion.
- Taking a rights-based approach, which recognises that people with disabilities have the same rights as everyone and replaces previous medical, charitable or welfare approaches to disability.
- Recognising that disability intersects with other diversity areas, especially gender identity and sexuality, indigenous status, age, cultural diversity and identity.
- Recognising that no two disabilities or people with disabilities are the same, and that some groups are at greater risk of marginalisation and exclusion (particularly those with psychosocial disabilities, with intellectual disabilities and Deaf people).
- Ensuring staff, volunteers and partners understand and are able to practice disability-inclusive development and promote the rights of all people with disabilities.

PRIORITIES

The program has identified key priorities to strengthen its approach to disability inclusion, and ensure disability inclusion is considered across all aspects of the program. Research conducted with CBM Australia has informed these decisions. Our priorities include:

- Establishing a Disability Inclusion Working Group to inform knowledge sharing and action on disability across the program.
- Developing a Disability Inclusion Action Plan, which will guide the program to strengthen disability inclusion for volunteers and partners with disabilities on an ongoing basis.
- Building staff capacity to engage with and support people with disabilities.
- Partnering with Disabled Persons Organisations (DPOs) and other in-country experts to localise learning and technical support on disability.
- Developing disability-inclusive development learning resources to ensure all volunteers consider disability as part of their assignments.
- Reviewing and developing policies and guidelines to ensure disability is considered in a respectful manner.

OUTCOMES

Practising disability inclusion is a long journey. It is important to recognise that change will not happen overnight, and successful integration of disability inclusion requires effort from staff, volunteers and partners. However, while it is a journey, the program is building on progress already made and opportunities currently exist to further enhance inclusion of people with disabilities. Through our actions and commitment to disability inclusion, the Australian Volunteers Program strives to achieve the following outcomes:

- The program is actively inclusive of people with disabilities.
- Disability inclusion is a cross-cutting priority and is considered in all activities, projects and institutional aspects.
- More Australians with disabilities are aware of and are supported to participate in the program.
- The program has developed strong partnerships with disability organisations in Australia and overseas and is achieving impact.
- Volunteers have greater capability to consider disability inclusion in their assignment objectives.
- Staff are confident to work in ways that support disability inclusion.