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## WWDACT Position Statement 3

### Equitable Participation of Women\* with Disabilities

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#### Our Position:

- The equitable participation of women\* with disabilities is crucial to achieving full and effective participation in all aspects of life on an equal basis with others.
  - Women\* with disabilities must be part of the leadership of Disabled People's Organisations on an equal basis with men with disabilities.
  - Women\* with disabilities must be encouraged and supported to take up positions of leadership and decision-making across all levels of government.
  - Women\* with disabilities must be encouraged and supported to take up positions of leadership within their communities.
  - Accurate and diverse representation of women\* with disabilities must be achieved across all forms of media.
  - Women with disabilities must have access to all forms of education on an equal basis with others in the community. This includes but is not limited to secondary education, tertiary education, vocational education, and workplace professional development.
  - Gender and disability disaggregated data should be kept and publicised to both understand the current state of disempowerment and track progress.
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## Key Points:

1. In Australia, compared to their peers, women, girls, feminine identifying, and non-binary people with disabilities experience higher levels of all forms of violence more intensely and frequently and are subjected to such violence by a greater number of perpetrators.<sup>i</sup>
2. Women\* with disabilities experience the same forms of violence that all women\* experience, such as family and domestic violence and sexual assault. They also experience forms of violence unique to the intersection of gender and disability.<sup>ii</sup>
3. Violence against women\* with disabilities includes physical, sexual, psychological, and economic violence and abuse as well as institutional violence, chemical restraint, forced or coerced sterilisation, forced contraception, forced or coerced psychiatric interventions, medical exploitation, withholding of or forced medication, violations of privacy, forced isolation, restraint, denial of freedom of choice, denial of essential care, humiliation, and harassment.<sup>iii</sup>

## Understanding the equitable participation of women\* with disabilities

Women\* with disabilities in Australia face systemic marginalisation. Attitudinal and environmental barriers lead to lower economic and social status, increased risk of violence and multiple discrimination. In addition, women\* with disabilities face barriers to accessing education, health care, sexual and reproductive health rights, information and services, justice, and civic and political participation. This systemic marginalisation prevents women\* with disabilities from participating in all aspects of life on an equal basis with others.<sup>iv</sup>

Equitable participation of women\* with disabilities is critical to overcoming the inequalities they currently face. This involves identifying and redressing power imbalances and giving women\* with disabilities more autonomy to make their own decisions and manage their own lives.

As there is minimal gender and disability disaggregated data kept in Australia, it is difficult to fully understand the levels of disempowerment. Despite this, it is known that women\* with disabilities in Australia bear a disproportionate burden of poverty; they are amongst the poorest demographic in our society. Given this, they are more at risk of social exclusion, socio-economic disadvantage, social isolation, violence, poor health care, and a lack of opportunities to actively participate in society.<sup>v</sup>

Women\* with disabilities continue to be denied the right to participate in, and are often entirely excluded from, decision making, participation and advocacy processes. They are therefore not permitted a voice about issues that affect their lives as well as the lives of their families, communities, and nation. As well as signifying the stark inequality faced by women\* with disabilities, their absence in public decision making diminishes awareness of their rights, sidelines issues of importance to them, and reinforces negative stereotypes and discriminatory practices.<sup>vi</sup>

It is critical to understand that the participation of women\* with disabilities in all levels of Australian society is impacted by the intersection of gender and disability. Women\* with disabilities have been invisible, both to the advocates of women's rights<sup>vii</sup> and of disability rights, and this has led to vulnerability and low participation rates. Consequently, women\* with disabilities often face additional disadvantages in comparison to men with disabilities and women\* without disabilities.<sup>viii</sup>

The lack of equitable participation by women\* with disabilities in Australia reflects a concerning non-observance of basic human rights. The rights of women\* to participate on equal terms with men, in all aspects of community, are protected by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).<sup>ix</sup> The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (CRPD) requires governments ensure people with disabilities have equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms. Governments must also guarantee persons with disabilities have political rights and opportunities on an equal basis with others and the right to 'effectively and fully participate in the conduct of public affairs'.<sup>x</sup>

## Want to Learn More?

[The Status of Women and Girls with Disability in Australia \(2019\)](#)

### [United Nations](#)

- [THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN AND GIRLS WITH DISABILITIES Towards Full and Effective Participation and Gender Equality \(United Nations, 2018\)](#)
- [Addressing gender equality in the context of disability](#)

### [Women with Disabilities Australia](#)

- [Submission to the Productivity Commission National Disability Agreement Review \(2018\)](#)

### [Women with Disabilities Victoria](#)

- Violence against women with disabilities
- Position statement – violence against women with disabilities (2014)

## What can you do?

Addressing equitable participation for women\* with disabilities at all levels of society involves correcting widespread systemic disadvantage, overcoming ill-informed prejudices, and vastly improving accessibility. This necessarily includes promoting gender informed practices in mainstream inclusion and diversity strategies. These changes need to occur at all levels of society from the individual, community, service provider, to government. You can help by learning about, discussing, and promoting equitable participation in your communities.

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<sup>i</sup> Frohmader, Carolyn, Leanne Dowse, Aminath Didi (2015) Think Piece: Document for the Development of the National Framework to Prevent Violence Against Women [https://wwda.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Think-Piece\\_WWD.pdf](https://wwda.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Think-Piece_WWD.pdf)

<sup>ii</sup> Frohmader, Carolyn, Leanne Dowse, Aminath Didi (2015) Think Piece: Document for the Development of the National Framework to Prevent Violence Against Women [https://wwda.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Think-Piece\\_WWD.pdf](https://wwda.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Think-Piece_WWD.pdf) . ; Manjoo, R. (2012) Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences. United Nations General Assembly, UN Doc No. A/67/227. ; Dowse, L., Soldatic, K., Didi, A., Frohmader, C. and van Toorn, G. (2013) Stop the Violence: Addressing Violence Against Women and Girls with Disabilities in Australia. Background Paper. Hobart: Women with Disabilities Australia ; Frohmader, C. (2014) 'Gender Blind, Gender Neutral': The effectiveness of the National Disability Strategy in improving the lives of women and girls with disabilities. Prepared for Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA), Hobart, Tasmania. ISBN: 978-0-9585268-2-1. ; Swift, K. (2013) Women with disabilities and violence: Challenges and visions in the Asia Pacific Region. Presentation at the CSW57 Side Event, 8 March 2013, United Nations.

<sup>iii</sup> Frohmader, Carolyn, Leanne Dowse, Aminath Didi (2015) Think Piece: Document for the Development of the National Framework to Prevent Violence Against Women [https://wwda.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Think-Piece\\_WWD.pdf](https://wwda.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Think-Piece_WWD.pdf) ; Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA)(2010) Assessing the Situation of Women with Disabilities in Australia: A Human Rights Approach. Women With Disabilities Australia, Rosny Park, Tasmania. ; Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA) (2004) Submission to the South Australian Government's Discussion Paper: "Valuing South Australia's Women: Towards A Women's Safety Strategy For South Australia". Rosny Park, Tasmania: Women With Disabilities Australia.

<sup>iv</sup> UN Women. The Empowerment of Women and Girls with Disabilities: Towards Full and Effective Participation and Gender Equality. New York: UN Women, 2018. Accessed 8 September 2021. <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2018/empowerment-of-women-and-girls-with-disabilities-en.pdf?la=en&vs=3504>

<sup>v</sup> Carolyn Frohmader. The Status of Women and girls with Disability in Australia, Tasmania: Disabled People's Organisations Australia and the National Women's Alliance, 2019. Accessed 8 September 2021. <https://wwda.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/The-Status-of-Women-and-Girls-with-Disability-Asustralia.pdf>

<sup>vi</sup> Carolyn Frohmader. The Status of Women and girls with Disability in Australia, Tasmania: Disabled People's Organisations Australia and the National Women's Alliance, 2019. Accessed 8 September 2021. <https://wwda.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/The-Status-of-Women-and-Girls-with-Disability-Asustralia.pdf>

<sup>vii</sup> Including advocates for the rights of gender diverse people.

<sup>viii</sup> UN Women. Addressing gender equality in the context of disability. Undated. Accessed 8 September 2021. [https://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/hlmdd/hlmdd\\_unwomen.doc](https://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/hlmdd/hlmdd_unwomen.doc)

<sup>ix</sup> Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. United Nations, 1979. Accessed 8 September 2021. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cedaw.aspx>

<sup>x</sup> Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. United Nations, 2008. Accessed 8 September 2021. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/crpd/pages/conventionrightspersonswithdisabilities.aspx>