



Arthritis NZ

Mateponapona
Aotearoa

**Submission from Arthritis NZ on the Disability
Support Services Bill
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1. About Arthritis NZ

Arthritis NZ welcomes the opportunity to make submission on the Disability Support Services Bill.

We do so on behalf of more than 860,000^(NZHS 24-25) New Zealanders living with arthritis, a diverse group spanning over 100 different conditions, from osteoarthritis and gout to complex inflammatory diseases such as ankylosing spondylitis, psoriatic arthritis, lupus, and scleroderma. For many of these conditions, access to good standards of care is essential.

Our organisation exists to ensure that people affected by arthritis have equitable access to the information, education, and support they need to live well. We provide frontline services through Arthritis Assist, national and online peer groups, community-based programmes, and advocacy that ensures consumer voices are heard in health policy discussions. Last year we conducted research on the health and care of people with arthritis and of the 1500 respondents 73% identified their arthritis as a disability (ACI research Arthritis NZ 2025)

We are a member of the Carers Alliance and have participated in the development of the Carers Strategy Action plan which placed significance on support and recognition for carers and the importance of their role.

2. Background to this submission

We note the very short time frame allowed for the submission process and as a result we have not been able to conduct the usual consumer consultation process that we would usually undertake. We also note that there has been very limited consultation with the disability sector before the Bill was introduced. This means our submission will focus on the key principles of the Bill rather than the consumer feedback we usually include with submissions.

We do make the point that this very limited consultation and time to make submission has been less than optimum and make a strong plea for consultation with the disability sector to be significantly improved.

3. Key Issues for Arthritis NZ

- There is emphasis placed on the role of family and whanau- setting up an expectation that they will be the “natural supports” for disabled people. This is not a realistic expectation for many, and it demonstrates the need for more consultation to ensure that the voices of family and whanau are properly heard. Factors such as geographical location, employment responsibilities, family health issues, financial circumstances and access to respite care are all issues that will affect a family’s ability to provide care.
- We are concerned that Clause 8 for example will place an undue burden on families and seek its revision to make clear that families may be part of a model of care but must not be always seen as the primary carers as there is also a societal responsibility to care for people with disabilities.
- Too many significant issues are being left to secondary legislation and future policy, without adequate safeguards, strong rights protections, or transparent decision-making. This reflects the limited time allowed for consultation. We urge meaningful engagement with the sector well before the legislation is finalised.
- While the Bill clarifies legal responsibilities, it does little to protect carers’ rights and well-being. A robust disability support system must recognise that support for disabled people and carers is closely linked. The Bill also overlooks the need for fair employment conditions for carers.
- The Bill does not refer to the principles of Enabling Good Lives, which are widely recognised as an important framework for disability support. A longer consultation period would have allowed proper consideration of whether these principles should be incorporated.

4. Recommendations

We ask the Select Committee to

- Recognise the limited consultation process that has taken place
- Redesign and redevelop the Bill alongside organisations in the sector
- Clearly acknowledge that family and natural supports should complement caring services rather than replacing them
- Include safeguards to ensure that carer well-being is a cornerstone of legislation
- Incorporate the principles of Enabling Good Lives into all legislation on disability issues.