



Read our CEO **Jonny Wilkinson's** regular column in The Northern Advocate

"A Different Light"

A Different Light – 1st April 2023 – “ A great day for disability Action – Yeah right”

Finally, we are going to say goodbye to the yawning discrepancy between ACC funded disability services and Ministry of Health Disability Support (now Whaikaha) funded services.

There will no longer be a two-tiered system which arbitrarily discriminates on funding depending on the cause of disability. The inequities between the level of support provided via ACC to people who become disabled as a result of injury, and the level of support provided through other parts of the system to other disabled people are going to cease to exist. The type of assistance that a person gets will be driven by the degree of need, not the origin of the disability.

No longer will one group of people receive a greater level of support than another just because of the cause of the impairment. Disabled people who have had their equipment funded by the Ministry of Health (now the new Ministry of Disability Whaikaha), who used to have to wait for months on end, while being assessed through a DHB and then being referred to an Equipment provider, will now have a rapid turnaround, just as people receiving equipment from ACC get.

There is now going to be a 24 percent quota of employees with disabilities in all government agencies. This reflects the percentage of disabled people in the New Zealand population. Many countries across Europe and elsewhere have adopted this quota model years ago, where the quota system is mandatory for **all** government agencies and the objective of quotas is to stimulate labour demand by engaging Government employers to hire a certain proportion of people with disabilities.

Kainga Ora (Housing New Zealand) has announced that all new houses they build will be of universal design. Universal design delivers public housing that is more liveable for the entire population, including (but not limited to) young and

growing families, people of all ages who experience temporary injury or illness, those with mobility, visual or cognitive impairments, and the growing aging population. This will futureproof the houses, making them accessible for anyone to live in. This will vastly increase the number of accessible houses in New Zealand and it is a much welcome change from the 15% they used to have. It is very ambitious considering they have only achieved 1.5% of houses with universal design in their new houses since 2020.

On the local front Whangarei District Council have announced that they will be resurfacing the undulating surrounding pavements of the Hundertwasser Arts Centre to make it accessible for everyone and to reduce the risk of falls when disabled people and elderly, including visually impaired people try and access our wonderful Arts mecca.

My dear readers, please remember what day it is today as you read these astonishing announcements. When something is too good to be true its usually a load of bull. We wait for the day this won't be the stuff of dreams.

Happy April Fool's Day!

Jonny Wilkinson is the CEO of Tiaho Trust - Disability A Matter of Perception, a Whangarei based disability advocacy organisation.