

**Whaikaha – Ministry of Disabled People**

1 March 2023 Community Hui Transcript

**Prudence Walker**

Kia ora koutou, thank you for joining us this evening for this community Q&A session with Whaikaha - The Ministry of Disabled People. I'm Prudence Walker. I'm the Chief Executive of the Disabled Persons Assembly of New Zealand and happy to be assisting Whaikaha and facilitating this session tonight. I'd like to hand over to Peter Allen to lead us in Karakia.

**Peter Allen**

Tihei mauri ora. Ko te mea tuatahi i tēnei pō, he maumahara mātou ki a rātou kua ngaro i te pō ki Gabrielle. Āpiti hono, tatai hono te hunga mate, te hunga mate. Āpiti hono, tatai hono te hunga ora, te hunga ora. Ki a koutou ko ngā tangata whaikaha me ngā tangata whaikaha Māori i roto i tēnei wā pōuri. Nō reira, he mihi, he aroha, he manaaki ki a koutou katoa. He kaupapa o tēnei pō, Kotahitanga. Engari, te mea tuatahi, he aha te mea nui o tēnei ao?

He tangata, he tangata, he tangata. He karakia timatanga o tēnei pō. Whakataka te hau ki te uru. Whakataka te hau ki te tonga. Kia mākinakina ki uta. Kia mātaratara ki tai. E hī ake ana te atākura. He tio, he huka, he hauhū. Tihei mauri ora!

So that was just a quick paying of respects to those people who have lost their lives during Gabrielle and another mihi and call out to those of you who are having troubles at this time because of Gabrielle.

So we think of you, and then our karakia for starting the night for our hui. Just letting things settle so that we can move on through the night. Kia ora tātou, back to you thanks Prudence.

**Prudence Walker**

Thank you for that Peter. As I said before, welcome to this hui. I'm just going to let you know what to expect tonight. The first thing is that we will be recording this and the agenda for that, for this sorry, is shortly we will hear a few comments from Paula to open us up and to introduce the people that she has here with her this evening.

And then there's already been some questions that have been formulated that we’ll start with, but you will also get the opportunity to ask some questions that you may have. So depending on how many questions there are that you may have, we might not get to those all today. But as with the previous sessions that we've had, if you have attended any of those, the team at Whaikaha will be looking into those and will communicate about the answers to any questions that we don't get to this evening.

So without further ado, I'd like to hand over to Paula.

**Paula Tesoriero**

Ngā mihi ki a koe Matua Peter for your karakia and opening us so appropriately as usual. E nga mana e nga reo, rau rangatiratanga ma, tēnā koutou katoa. Ko Paula Tesoriero tōku ingoa, ko taku tūranga mahi, he Tumaki mō Whaikaha - the Ministry of Disabled People. Talofa lava, kia orana, warm Pacific Greetings. My name is Paula Tesoriero and I’m the Chief Executive of Whaikaha - the Ministry of Disabled People.

I’m currently seated. I’m wearing a black jacket with pink flowers on it, and I have a chunky silver chain around my neck and I have short brown hair and I’m sitting next to two colleagues that I’ll introduce you to in a moment. And I’m sitting in front of a gray wall with a Whaikaha banner behind me, and my sign name is two fists moving as bicycle pedals.

So welcome and thank you for joining us this evening for what is still an incredibly difficult time for many in our communities that have been impacted by the cyclone and flooding. As Matua Peter said there’s been a tragic loss of life and I want to acknowledge this. There are many loved ones who are still suffering.

Ka oho toku ngakau ki a koe, my thoughts are with you. Countless people have put in huge efforts during this crisis to keep disabled people and whānau safe. There’s still a huge effort happening to connect and care for people in our communities, and we expect that this will continue for months to come. I am also aware of the many people supporting the recovery who are also dealing with their own clean ups and own impacts of the cyclone.

This evening is very much a check in with you for us to hear what’s happening, what’s working and what we can do more. Today I’m joined by Whaikaha’s, two of our Deputy Chief Executives. On my immediate right is Brian Coffey, who’s the acting Deputy Chief Executive for our Policy, Strategy and Partnerships Group. And to his right is Amanda Bleckmann, who is the Deputy Chief Executive for Operations and Service Design.

And on screen, we’re also joined by Mary Roberts, the manager of the Hawke’s Bay NASC, who has been working tirelessly on the ground in Hawke’s Bay with others. So we’ve set ourselves up as a bit of a panel tonight. I’m very conscious that some of you may have been attending the almost daily meetings that Brian has been having with the community groups with an open invitation.

But this is just to complement that and talk a little bit more about the recovery. Together, the three of us will be happy to answer what questions we can directly, and importantly, we’re here to hear your thoughts. I’d like to say briefly before we begin that I want to make sure we understand what is needed for those who are still taking the toll of damage.

I know that we’ll all be feeling this for some time, and many people right now are managing daily challenges, on top of other challenges. As you know, this is only the third time in New Zealand’s history that a national emergency has been declared, and it came at a time where I think we all felt 2023 was going to be the year that we could move on and get some other things done. So for our community,

already feeling isolated through the impacts of COVID, further disruptions to services, power cuts, loss of transport and other infrastructure impacts. This has been a really stressful experience and we’ve been hearing that in our community engagement.

Myself and the team at Whaikaha are keenly aware that we need to make sure that the needs of disabled people and their families are front and centre in responding to a crisis.

As a relatively small agency, without a footprint in all of the regions our role has primarily been to support the lead agency, which is the National Emergency Management or NEMA or Civil Defense. Right throughout the emergency, we have provided them with direct input into making sure that things like communications are accessible and we put one of our staff, during the floods in Auckland, into an office up there. We’ve been working with and supporting Disability Support Service providers, NASCs and community organisations and NGOs who are supporting people on the ground.

We’ve been having engagements with communities to hear directly what’s been happening and trying to find solutions across government and within community for those people. We’ve been using all of our channels to communicate key disability specific information from other agencies. Another key piece of work that we were involved in is helping to develop the Government’s Community Support Package. We wanted to make sure that there was a presence of the needs of disabled people being met in that fund.

So we were really pleased to be able to make progress on that and to organise a Community Support Package for disabled people, information on the Government’s Community Support Package and how to access that is available on MSD’s website. And we’ll also put a link to that up on the screen at the end of tonight’s session. You may have issues and questions that we can’t solve.

Or provide answers immediately, but where we can’t, the team will record those and come back to you. What we hear today will help us influence the ongoing response. We’ve spent a lot of time working in cross-government forums in the last few weeks to make sure that when Housing are responding, when MSD are responding and when Fire and Emergency Services are responding, when Civil Defense Centres are being set up.

We’ve been providing advice to ensure that as much as possible, the needs of disabled people are being met and we’ve been making sure that we work with local people to be in some of those Civil Defense Centres to ensure that the needs of disabled people can be met. So we’ll take your insights tonight to inform both how we’re responding right now, as well as thinking about how we get ahead of the next crisis that happens and have a well developed plan across government for that. At the end of the session we’ll bring up a slide with some of the ways that people can get support.

And I will ask Prudence at the end to run through that. Before I hand back to Prudence to take us through some of the questions that have already been sent in advance, I’ll just invite my colleagues to introduce themselves.

**Brian Coffey**

Kia ora koutou, ngā mihi mahana kia koutou. Ko Brian Coffey tōku ingoa. So greetings to you all, I’m Brian Coffey. As Paula said, I am the Acting Deputy Secretary for Policy, Partnership and my other role as the Director of Office for Disability Issues in Whaikaha. So greetings to you all. I am six foot tall. I have much more gray hair than Paula on my left or Amanda on my right.

I’m wearing a business shirt, a checked business shirt, and I’ve got lots of notes in front of me and a big mihi out to all those people that are on the Zoom call who have actually been participating in some of the community meetings over the last few weeks.

**Amanda Bleckmann**

Kia ora koutou ko Amanda Bleckmann tōku ingoa, I am the Deputy Chief Executive of Operation, Design and Delivery. I’m sitting next to Brian, Brian’s on my left. I have medium blond hair that’s tied up in a ponytail. I’m wearing glasses and I’m wearing a pink bracelet. Thank you.

**Mary Roberts**

Kia ora koutou katoa Mary Roberts tōku ingoa. So greetings everyone I’m Mary Roberts. I’m the manager of NASC Hawke’s Bay, which covers not just the disability NASC, but the older persons NASC and the mental health NASC across the Hawke’s Bay region. I’m currently sitting in my home, which is in Waipawa in Central Hawke’s Bay.

I have brunet hair which is tied up in a clip. I’m wearing glasses, I have a silver necklace with an amber heart and a cream coloured top over a blue dress. And welcome to everyone.

**Paula Tesoriero**

I think we might have momentarily lost Prudence. I’m just checking -

**Prudence Walker**

No, I’m here. I was just waiting for the screen to change.

**Paula Tesoriero**

Sorry Prudence.

**Prudence Walker**

Sorry about that folks. I’m currently attending the seventh Pacific Regional Conference on Disability and I’ve been sitting there in interest yesterday in the opening session, when some people to do with various parts of the UN were speaking about disaster responses.

And so there’s some great people to follow up with on that, so that’s really good, and also just wanted to portray to everyone who is attending today from affected areas in recent times that there’s much love being sent from other Pacific nations thinking about what’s been happening in New Zealand recently.

So as I mentioned before, we do have some questions that we’ve pre-prepared and I’ll address those to the panel. In the meantime, if you have any questions that you want to ask, if it’s more suitable for you to put those in the chat, please go ahead and do so and we will be watching out for those or after we have addressed the pre-prepared questions. You are also able to raise your hand, either physically or electronically.

If you’re able to do it electronically I’m probably going to notice those ones sooner, but I will scroll through for anyone who’s raised their hand physically. So some of the questions that we have, the first one that I have here is what does the Chief Executive intend to do about support during emergencies for those with disabilities in rural areas and communities?

**Paula Tesoriero**

Thanks Prudence, it’s Paula speaking. So firstly, I just want to acknowledge again the providers, community groups, other organisations, families who are supporting people on the ground, who during this recent period have done an incredible job in really challenging circumstances. Our role at Whaikaha, you know for the last few weeks has been working alongside and providing advice directly to emergency authorities, local representation, working closely with NEMA and making sure that information that is coming out about the emergency is in accessible formats.

Now that hasn’t always happened, and I think that teaches us some lessons for the future, but we have certainly been encouraging, influencing, and trying to make sure that happens. I’m hearing about the impacts when infrastructure is down in maintaining health services and things that are critical and absolutely acknowledge that in rural communities, that can be especially challenging. The impacts on infrastructure like transport, telecommunications, the isolation that that can create for disabled people poses much more risk than non-disabled people.

And, you know, those messages are messages that we continue to push with and alongside other government agencies. I think it’s also worth emphasising that all agencies at the central and local level have to make sure that they are delivering on their obligations to disabled communities that they serve.

So one of the things that we’ve been doing is trying to plug gaps where that hasn’t happened or working with agencies to help them address those gaps. And then we’ve also been keeping a log, if you like, of all gaps that we have observed during this crisis so that we can get ahead of, and create a better framework for the future.

**Prudence Walker**

Thanks, Paula. So the next question we have is - what steps is Whaikaha taking or planning for this year for a cross-government response to climate change where disabled people are meaningfully included, and how can disabled people with knowledge or lived experience and expertise in this area get involved?

**Brian Coffey**

Kia ora Prudence Brian speaking. So I’ll answer this question and it really builds on Paula’s response to the last question, because I guess the last few weeks have really reminded us that climate change is a reality and the effects of climate change impacts disproportionately on disabled people. So this is a really important issue for disabled people. Whaikaha has a role working with other government agencies influencing policy from a disability perspective and climate change is no different to that.

So I think one of the things that we ought to do is get the names of people who want to inform policy change and we can make sure that they see opportunity to do that either by speaking to us and amplifying the voice to the agency that’s leading climate change or the opportunity for people to be directly involved if they wish to.

**Prudence Walker**

Thanks for that Brian. Yeah, I mean it’s a really great opportunity in all of the difficult times people are going through right now, to influence the future and take some action in relation to that. Now to the panel, is there any flexibility or alternative that is in place for those who are on special authority medication? Especially for those who have only a day or two that they can manage without, so that we can be confident that we don’t just keel over due to a medical technicality-

-sorry, there’s a bit to this. Is there any flexibility or alternative that’s in place for those who are on special authority medication, especially for those, you know, who only have that day or two? And what can, you know obviously a lot of systems are impacted when these events happen. So what can be done when people need medication urgently due to their supply? And in those special authority situations?

**Amanda Bleckmann**

Kia ora Prudence, Amanda speaking. I will answer that question. So we went and checked and have been advised that pharmacies can use their discretion when dispensing medication. There is more information available on the Pharmac website and we’re happy to take any queries about that.

**Prudence Walker**

Okay yeah. I wonder if people might comment if they have an experience of that because obviously being at the discretion of pharmacies, people are not necessarily going to get a consistent approach are they? But good to know what the official word there is.

So what’s been done to support people through this time in the Hawke’s Bay region? In terms of making sure disabled people are being supported to get the help that they need on the ground, but also in response to potential social isolation. What’s been done there and what do you think needs to happen? What have you heard?

**Amanda Bleckmann**

Kia ora Prudence, Amanda speaking. I’ll answer that question. So hopefully what Paula mentioned earlier about our work with providers, with NASCs, DPOs and community groups was helpful. Going to be very important as immediate and urgent needs are met, and we also need to understand and acknowledge the incredible stress that many people are under and that this is heightened by the isolation many people will be feeling under the normal circumstances.

So we welcome, I welcome thoughts and suggestions and initiatives from this group and other groups. We will be talking to our network of providers and NASCs who have already been reaching out to those at risk and about addressing social isolation as well, and this is also happening through local people and groups.

As previously mentioned, people can ring or text the Disability Helpline 24 hours a day, seven days a week. There’s also a Wellbeing line for people who are experiencing social isolation that they can call and text, and I encourage you to contact the Whaikaha team if this is not helping. We will share all these contact details at the end of the session and we have received a suggestion that Whaikaha develop a social isolation strategy for emergency events.

We think that’s a great idea and we are looking into this. So it’s important to note that Whaikaha isn’t an on the ground Ministry in every community with capacity to go door to door. However, the providers and groups we work with have done a fantastic job looking after those most at risk.

**Mary Roberts**

I’d like to just come in there Prudence, if that’s okay as well. Thank you for that and I absolutely know that there’s such a huge community spirit here in Hawke’s Bay. There’s a very good disability community. We have a regular hui on that which involves as many people as possible and there is such strength out there and so many good ideas

I think that we’re going to have from this and to have all of those suggestions would just be so valuable for the way forward. But honestly, in Hawke’s Bay, the community spirit out there is absolutely amazing and my teams are out on the ground and working with providers and with people and they have been absolutely overwhelmed with the whole input from anyone and everyone.

But of course there are many rural areas in Hawke’s Bay and those are the ones that are very difficult, so social isolation is a huge problem. And can I just clarify that NASC stands for Needs Assessment and Service Coordination. I’ve just seen a question come up. So that’s Needs Assessment and Service Coordination. But of course we can only reach out to those people that we know about, who have public funded services.

There are a lot of people who don’t fit into that, so I think there are a lot of hidden people. So the more people have a voice, the better for us all to actually take this forward.

**Prudence Walker**

Thanks for that, Mary. I’ll take one more of the pre-organised questions and then we’ll get on to some of the questions that you’ve all posted in the chat, or if you would like to ask those yourself. And the last one is, what supports need to be put in place and how can we get the right funding to the right areas?

So in this case, especially Hawke’s Bay, Northland and other areas affected by the cyclones, to help with the rebuild in the disability sector. So I guess that’s, you know, about some of the stuff that disabled people, along with everybody else, needs access to, but also about some disability specific supports, individuals or the community need in rebuilding after these events.

**Paula Tesoriero**

Thanks, Prudence. It’s Paula speaking. So, there’s a few ways to respond to that. Firstly, as I think we’re sort of we’ve emphasised, we really have worked incredibly closely with providers and NASCs for those disabled people and families who receive disability supports.

And that’s obviously a portion of disabled people in our communities, and so what we are really trying to do as an agency is make sure that we are amplifying voices across government so that the needs of all disabled people affected are taken into account.

So we’ve done that through these various forums we’ve been contributing to, working closely with NEMA and closely with those organisations who are directly responding to things on the ground and making sure that through the Community Support Package, that we were part of shaping and developing, that there’s funding not only for providers but also for disabled people through community organisations.

So we hope that in that way we can ensure that funding gets to those places. And, you know, we’ve done outreach calling through both the floods and the cyclones, and we’ve really, and we’ve put some staff and hired some people on the ground in some of the affected areas just so that we are getting that on the ground intel back, and can help to push resources that way. Sometimes those resources have been things as practical as a generator or a SAT phone and other times it’s been linking people up in Civil Defense Centres and things.

So really we’ve played a multiple number of roles and making sure that through all of that, that we’re trying to do our best to direct resources to where it best goes. And then I think there’s a bigger answer to that question, which is actually about, so longer term, as New Zealand rebuilds the affected parts of our country, we as an agency absolutely have a responsibility to be inputting into Cabinet papers and policy decisions and things that are made, that have the potential to impact all disabled people in those communities.

And so we have already had some input into papers and we’ll continue to do that.

**Prudence Walker**

Kia ora, thanks for that Paula. Now, you did just touch on the next question that I have from one of the people participating today, but I just wanted to delve a little bit further because it’s something that I’ve been thinking about myself in terms of emergency preparedness, and that is around, has there been communications to places that provide disabled people with funding, that if need be and if possible, they can use their fund- how they can use the funding flexibly in this time?

So for example, purchasing a generator to be able to charge power chairs or other equipment that’s needed, can we just delve into that a little bit more?

**Amanda Bleckmann**

Kia ora it’s Amanda speaking Prudence, I’ll respond to that. So in the immediate response, we were making sure that things like generators were available so that people weren’t having to use disability support funding, and where we were hearing that there were difficulties in accessing things like generators, we were making sure that they were available and particularly to providers, things like generators or satellite phones.

In terms of the disability support funding that’s already allocated, there is already quite a bit of flexibility through the purchasing guidelines for people who have individualised funding or carer support.

For example, we have had some feedback that people have wanted assistance with things like carer support claiming and we’ve been working to make the payments much quicker, but also providing assistance so that people aren’t having to even fill out the forms. And so we continue to be really open and receptive to feedback about the things that we could do to make things easier for people and the carer support was one of those examples.

**Paula Tesoriero**

Maybe just another one to add, sort of building on Amanda’s comments is one of the things that we sort of naturally expected and saw was people’s equipment being disability related, equipment being damaged and needing replacement or repairs and things and we thankfully were able to work with, and ensure adequate funding for our equipment providers and that’s for any disabled person to apply for. So we expected that to happen and wanted to make sure that we were putting those supports in place and making sure that people knew how to get access to that.

**Prudence Walker**

Thanks for that Amanda and Paula. I’ve got another question from the chat, and then I see at least a couple of hands up so I will go to those after this. So somebody who mentions that they have a daughter who has very high needs asks, the cyclone has been very stressful, does Whaikaha have anything in place for disabled people if we can’t depend on Civil Defense since they’re already so busy?

**Amanda Bleckmann**

It’s Amanda speaking Prudence I’ll answer that, but Brian might add. So some of the outreach, the purpose of the outreach calling was to check that people were okay and that there was contact made, but also if there were things that people needed. So we were getting feedback around the types of things that people needed locally and we were supporting either the NASCs or providers to get that in place.

Were you going to, yeah.

**Brian Coffey**

The thing that I was going to add Prudence, was the message we’ve been giving, and it’s the right one, is the emergency response in terms of evacuation and those sorts of processes must be done through Civil Defense and emergency services and then the disability support is there after that. But I think we put everyone at risk, many people at risk in fact, if we try to do the role that emergency services are best placed to do.

**Prudence Walker**

Yeah sure. So if I’m hearing you correctly there, you’re sort of talking about being able to influence Civil Defense, for example in those emergency responses, but not creating something alongside or in addition to it. Correct. Thanks Amanda and Brian. Now I see we will go to somebody who has their hand up and I’m just scrolling back through. Rachel Cuthbertson.

**Rachel**

Just wait.

**Prudence Walker**

Kia ora Rachel.

**Rachel**

I’m in Dunedin and I’m a disabled person who for my sins used to work in emergency management and I wondered whether there is a way in which better information can be gathered from the people that various agencies support who have disabilities regarding their frailties, whether it is a high dependence upon specific medications or whether they have a power chair and therefore have a requirement for generators, etc. like that.

Because I know that the emergency response centres have plans for areas that are at higher risk of flooding etc, other various sort of weaknesses within the sort of general areas around them, and you’re saying that they’re the people that should have the repository of all the information for these sorts of things.

Is there any sort of way in which when NASC funding has been approved on an ongoing fashion, there’s a requirement that information comes back from those people with the NASC funding to provide information on the vulnerable people that they’re supporting, so that that could be fed back through to the local emergency management officers, because I don’t think enough information has been held by

**Amanda Bleckmann**

the emergency management officers currently regarding disabled people and their vulnerabilities. Amanda speaking, I’ll answer some of that question. So there is a centralised list that is held through Te Whatu Ora of people who have electric wheelchairs and may need generators and we understand that people also have access or will have manual wheelchairs. So there’s that information available.

And in terms of people who may need extra support or are more vulnerable, the disability NASCs do collect information and they have contact lists of what they would do in an emergency, and the Te Whatu Ora NASCs also have that. I don’t know if Mary wants to add or make an additional comment.

**Mary Roberts**

Yes, it’s Mary here. Thank you Amanda, just to reinforce what you’ve said, the NASC in Hawke’s Bay is actually managed under Te Whatu Ora and we have very strong links and lots of sharing of information and trying to make sure that gaps are filled, you know, so that actually occurs all the time.

I think there’s always room for improvement and communication is always one of the things that we need to get better at. But certainly there are strong contingency plans in place as to what happens in these emergencies, and I think we’re learning more and more each time. But certainly we are continually feeding information up and sideways and wherever and getting feedback back down again.

**Rachel**

I appreciate that it’s a large amorphous mass of groups and people and that the information will be patchy. But just from my personal experience with the two agencies who support me, I suspect in a lot of regards, if I wasn’t quite so stroppy and outspoken, I’d get left in the cold, so to speak. So I’m just wondering if doing that and I know that these things are evolving, but if we could get ahead of the disasters rather than reacting to them, that would be useful too.

**Brian Coffey**

I think we all absolutely agree with you, Rachel. Absolutely.

**Prudence Walker**

Thank you, Rachel.

Elinor, I know that you have been waiting a while, so now is your time. Go ahead with your questions. We’ll just get you on screen for this.

**Elinor**

Kia ora, I’m from Whangārei and Taitokerau. Mostly, I’ve got a few things, even though I’ll probably repeat myself now and again. But I’ve got, is there an opportunity for somebody like myself to have direct contact with the people that are in our rural areas that are in our community?

Because what I’m saying there is, a lot of people contact me I don’t belong to anything, but because none of the agencies work after five, none of the agencies work on the weekend, they need someone to contact and this is what I’m trying to say is, I’m prepared to, you know, I mean, it’s not my authority, but I would love to see our Taitokerau region have a database where someone in Taitokerau can ring around and check if these people are okay.

Because, just funny enough they I got a phone call from my NASC team telling me that they heard from Whaikaha and how great I am, that they need to catch up with my NASC.

Why needs does it need to take something like that for them to get their job organised? They’re doing that for me, what about everyone else they’re not filling in the gaps for, and this is hard. So I’m just thinking in Taitokerau it feels like we’re left out even though I’m attending these huis. But the J-Blogs up there and the Carol Browns and the public don’t actually know what’s going on until they hear it from somebody and our providers aren’t telling us, if you know what I mean.

I mean, we’ve got people in, out Rāwhiti that have got no power, people in Te Hokianga who’ve got no power. There’s a lot of this sort of stuff going on it’s just, what does it take to become an opportunity with Whaikaha to have someone in our region to provide a service like this, so we can have a database, so we can contact our people, take the pressure off you guys or something like that.

We want to look after our own as well if you know what that means, you know, because I mean, they, well, well, well, I’ve got my - I mean, organisations aren’t always that well for us disabled people up here. I’m not sure what it’s like anywhere else, but you can’t always rely on organisations. I mean, it only happened to be that they contacted me, through me being in Whaikaha, that’s why

if I wasn’t involved they still wouldn’t contact me so we need people, hear from the people that actually live with the disabilities in Taitokerau, that actually need to talk to the disabled in Taitokerau because the problem is that, don’t get me wrong I’m not racist, but a lot of able bodied people are telling us what to do and we’re getting fed up because they don’t put themselves in our shoes.

They don’t live our life. I’ve had to, personally, I got a bed given to me, but without the rails, what’s the point of a bed without the rails? They do not understand because this is an able bodied business and this is the thing is, I’m disabled wanting to teach the un disabled what I know, you know, and we need to start something and unfortunately this flood and this cylone woke me up to a lot of agencies and organisations in Taitokerau, you know, who’s there at the end of the day, you know, who’s been there for the people, not the agencies.

You know, they’re nine to five they don’t do weekends. So I’m prepared to, you know, I mean, I’m not putting myself out there, but contract me Whaikaha, give me all the names I’ll ring everyone up and see if they’re okay. Because no one’s doing it.

**Prudence Walker**

Thank you, Elinor.

**Paula Tesoriero**

Thanks, Elinor, it’s Paula.

**Prudence Walker**

Hey Paula, just before you go to that, it’s a slightly different question but I think I’ll just put this other question out there as well, because maybe you can address both those things in it, and that was from someone. How can we help government start developing robust emergency management for disabled people? So I guess both of those things are about the role of community in these responses.

**Prudence Walker**

Sorry. Back to you.

**Paula Tesoriero**

Yeah no, thanks Prudence, and thanks Elinor for sharing your experience and thank you for the help that you’re clearly providing people. I think you know it can- while we all want to help in our communities at that local level. We want to make sure that there are not individuals who have to take on a responsibility that becomes quite difficult when you’re managing your own impacts of the weather.

I think one of the challenges we’ve all had is, given the severe impacts on communications and infrastructure and things. Getting communication out about things in the usual way was, particularly at the start, quite challenging. As days moved on, it got a bit better. So I think you know what I would certainly say is, I think there’s a few things, Elinor, and this is not a complete answer, but just sort of, you know, at the top of my head.

So thinking about making sure that where people are contacting people in the community that, you know, the 0800 disability line can be accessed because actually, then they can take care of some of that coordination of things and making sure that the right information for that particular person is being provided.

And then I think also we’ll just do some thinking here as well around- because we’ve been talking just this week about to what extent we can just help a bit more on the ground through putting some people into just help coordinate some of those things so it’s not up to particular individuals. I think that wider point, which is a question you sort of introduced Prudence, is one of the things that, you know, this has really, I guess, reinforced for me, is that New Zealand needs to have an emergency response framework that at all of the relevant levels includes disability information and a disability lens on everything.

So one of the things that we’ll be doing after this is just starting to talk across agencies about what would it take to bring that together, what are other agencies going- you know, what will be the follow up- all of government response to how you develop a national framework and our input into that in partnership with the community because we need that on the ground, feeding in what does a national approach to responding to emergencies for disabled people look like because, you know, this is not the first and it certainly won’t be the last. So we need to get ahead of it.

**Brian Coffey**

Yeah, I think.

**Prudence Walker**

Thanks, Paula, oh Brian-

**Brian Coffey**

Elinor, you’ve provided great input through this process and so that’s really been appreciated in the time that you’ve taken. I think the thing that we’ve learned is really what works well or what’s worked really well over the last few weeks is actually having that disability presence at the Emergency Management Centres. So they’re there to back up the very important things that those frontline people are doing in terms of the disability response.

**Brian Coffey**

So that’s I think, I think what we’re learning is that’s got to be common practice and usual practice and everyone needs to be ready for it when an emergency comes that we are able to do that. We cannot rely on great people like you Elinor right across the country. So then, so if we can’t do that, if we can’t have Elinor everywhere. We have to have a systems approach through organisations. That’s the safest way. Yeah.

**Paula Tesoriero**

I think just building on that, it’s Paula speaking. You know, I think as I sort of said at the start, that we, because we’re really conscious that there’s not a, sort of a disability embedded response throughout the country. We have gone into NEMA, have gone into Civil Defense. We’ve had staff in the relevant bunkers and things coordinating and offering advice.

But it would be nice in the future if we sort of had that immediate response and we didn’t have to sort of do it as we went along. Now, NEMA and Civil Defense and things have been incredibly responsive to our advice and help and things, but it would be good if, you know, emergency services and others in other agencies dealing with any emergency already had that disability response embedded into their own practices.

**Prudence Walker**

Thank you for that. You have touched on some of the questions that have been asked in the chat and I am mindful of time, although this is a really important conversation. So I am going to ask a couple more questions before we wrap up. A while back, somebody had asked, oops, just scrolling up, somebody had asked, are you consolidating this information into accessible emergency info, a booklet or videos or things like that? Has there been thought given there?

**Paula Tesoriero**

It’s Paula speaking. Yes, so one of the things we talked about at the very start was how do you package all this information together and make it available in accessible formats when in an emergency situation, the information keeps changing. So we talked about that a little bit at the start, and so our comms team here have done a really great job at working with those who are putting out information to really encourage them to put them in accessible formats. And then I think the question is about, the information we have been talking about being made accessible than the answer is yes. Thank you.

**Prudence Walker**

Now we’ve got- I’m going to go to one more question. I realize that there are some questions that we haven’t answered so, as with previous huis that we’ve had, the chat will remain open for 15 minutes after we end. So you’re free to type your questions in the chat and those will be answered and Whaikaha will make the answers available in the coming days.

So the question that I’m going to ask is the last one, is, what if a person with autism or some other impairment that impacts disability, cannot go to emergency shelters, where do they do?

**Amanda Bleckmann**

Kia ora Prudence, it’s Amanda speaking. I think that what’s- what you’re highlighting or what we have seen is the need for planning ahead of an emergency and so that people are well prepared, know what they will do in advance. And I think it just highlights what Paula’s just said around getting information, having an emergency plan, knowing what to do and who to contact.

And of course, it depends on the emergency. So I won’t answer specifically to what does somebody with autism do. But I would say that there needs to be plans in place and people having a plan in place around what they will do.

**Prudence Walker**

And so would there be an expectation of where people are supported by disability service providers going forward?

**Amanda Bleckmann**

Yeah, So that’s a good question too. I mean, it’s really going to depend on an individual’s situation and what’s going to work best for them. Yeah okay.

**Prudence Walker**

Thank you for that and for all of the questions. As I say, the chat will remain open. So before I hand it over to Paula for her final comments, I’d just like to get up on the screen the emergency numbers- or the vital numbers that we have just in case people don’t have those. But these will be available on various websites as well.

Or feel free to just take a photo of it if you’ve got your phone handy as well or a screenshot, I will read these out and hopefully somebody will also be putting them in the chat as I’m speaking. So just some ways to get support: The disability helpline is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week and they can connect you to information and support you might be needing at any time.

So you can call 0800 11 12 13 or text 8988. You can also use the New Zealand relay service to call them of course. Work and Income may be able to help with funding for disabled people and their whānau and you can get in touch with them by calling 0800 559 009. And if you’re in Wairoa or Hawke’s Bay and need food, bedding, clothes or have lost income, call 0800 400 100.

If you are Deaf or hearing impaired or otherwise find it difficult to communicate on the phone, you can email MSD\_Deaf\_Services@msd.govt.nz and we have another slide.

If you just need to talk to someone to get through the things that you’re dealing with at the moment, you can free call or text 1737 any time for support from a trained counsellor and to get in touch with Whaikaha the Ministry of Disabled People, as we’ve mentioned, you can contact them 8:30am till 5pm on weekdays or email contact@whaikaha.govt.nz or you can call 0800 566 601 or text 4206.

Now of course if it’s an emergency, you can call 111. Thank you for that. I hope people who needed to got a chance to take those down or get them from the chat, but they are also available in a different form on Whaikaha’s website.

So thank you everyone. I’d like to hand over to Paula for any closing comments that you may have before we go to Peter for Karakia.

**Paula Tesoriero**

Ngā mihi Prudence, thank you for facilitating this session, doing as always a great job. I just- thanks to my team, Brian and Amanda and others involved in bringing this session together. To Mary, thank you for being on the ground and all that hard work you’re doing and being part of the team responding tonight. I, you know, seven or so months into the establishment of Whaikaha when we were building our organisation and things, you know, an emergency like this never strikes at the right time.

But it’s been, in an interesting way, it’s been a really useful time to help us inform some of our priorities. And it’s also meant that we’ve really had to get across government quite quickly to ensure that the needs of disabled people across government have been front and center. And so that’s been a positive, if you like. And I saw Leona’s comment pop up just around, something around if we stick at this, this work, it will be better for disabled people.

And that really resonated, that, that’s right. We have an opportunity here, like we do in any crisis or emergency situation, to actually think about how things could look different in the future. And this should be something that community, Whaikaha and other agencies are working on together. So I’ve already had a very very initial conversation about the need to do this, both internally and with our Minister, and we’ll be working with other agencies as we get through the next few weeks to think about how we can pull that together.

So ngā mihi nui kia koutou katoa. Thank you everyone for making the time. Thank you all for all the hard work you’re doing in the area and the community and supporting disabled people and our families and I will hand to you Matua Peter to close us out with Karakia.

**Peter Allen**

Paula, thank you very much. And thank you for all of your team's efforts as well. So our whakataukī before I close with Karakia will summarize all of these things that we've just talked about and especially the planning perspective. So me mahi tahi tatou mō te oranga o tātou katoa, which indicates you know, we work as one for the good of all, and to do that before an event arrives is the best option.

Nō reira, kua tae te mutunga o tatou nei hui o te pō. Kia whakairia te tapu. Kia wātea ai te ara. Kia turuki whakataha ai. Kia turuki whakataha ai. Haumi e. Hui e. Tāiki e! Kia ora everybody.