Inclusive Communities Fund Consultation Response

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Question 1: What support, resources or changes would help organisations become more inclusive and accessible for people with disability?

For organisations operating in remote and very remote communities, disability inclusion cannot be separated from cultural requirements, workforce capability and sustainability and community relationships.

Many community organisations want to become more inclusive but lack the resources, knowledge and ongoing support required to do so effectively. Mainstream policies and service models are often designed for urban environments and do not translate well to remote locations where engagement requires significant time, trust-building, local cultural knowledge and specific consideration of the natural environment.

The Fund should support:

- Disability inclusion training that is culturally informed and tailored to the needs of different communities.
- Co-design processes involving people living with disability, families and carers.
- Long-term partnerships between community organisations and disability-led organisations.
- Flexible funding that recognises the higher costs associated with remote and very remote service delivery.
- Activities that strengthen local workforce capability and support recruitment and retention in remote locations.
- Initiatives that build the capacity of existing community infrastructure and organisations to support inclusion.

Partnerships between community organisations and disability-led organisations are critical. Disability-led organisations can provide practical advice, lived experience and specialist knowledge that support community organisations to build confidence and capability.

For example, MJDF has worked collaboratively with local businesses and service providers to improve accessibility and inclusion. This has included contributing funding towards the construction of a wheelchair ramp at a local store in Angurugu, Groote Eylandt, consultation regarding local provider shopfront/office access and accessible parking and providing advice to Sea Swift regarding accessible boarding and safer ferry transfers for people living with disability. These initiatives demonstrate how practical partnerships can lead to lasting improvements in community participation.

In remote and very remote communities, disability-led organisations can also play an important role in helping community organisations navigate cultural considerations, engage appropriately with communities, and develop solutions that are locally relevant and sustainable. Building trust and meaningful partnerships takes time and should be recognised as a critical component of successful inclusion initiatives.

Question 2: What activities should the Fund support, given that it will not pay for service delivery?

The Fund should prioritise activities that create sustainable, long-term changes rather than one-off events or initiatives.

Priority activities should include:

- Co-design activities involving people living with disability, families and carers.
- Disability inclusion training that incorporates cultural capability and practical implementation strategies and accounts for a wide range of literacy
- Partnership development between disability-led organisations and community organisations.
- Community accessibility reviews and inclusion planning.
- Development of local inclusion champions and community leadership opportunities.
- Small-scale infrastructure or accessibility improvements where there is evidence that the asset can be maintained and continue delivering benefit after the funding period.

In remote First Nations communities, strengthening existing community infrastructure may have significant benefits. For example, supporting the sustainability and capability of locally based respite and care services can help people living with disability remain connected to family, culture and Country rather than being forced to relocate to larger centres where language and culture are unfamiliar, due to limited local supports.

The Fund should also prioritise the effective use of existing resources, tools and infrastructure rather than funding the development of new materials where quality resources already exist. Across the disability sector, significant time and funding have already been invested in developing training packages, inclusion tools, guidance materials and accessibility resources. Rather than duplicating these efforts, the Fund should encourage organisations to review, adapt, implement and embed existing evidence-based resources within their local context. Funding should focus on building capability, strengthening partnerships and supporting practical implementation, rather than creating additional resources that duplicate existing work and contribute to fragmentation across the sector.

This is particularly important in regional, remote and very remote communities, where organisations often need support to translate existing resources into culturally informed and locally relevant approaches rather than developing entirely new products. Investment in local adaptation, mentoring and implementation is likely to deliver greater long-term benefit than investment in resource development alone.

The Fund should prioritise adoption and implementation over duplication. Applicants seeking funding to develop new resources should be required to demonstrate that equivalent resources do not already exist or explain why existing resources cannot reasonably be adapted to meet local needs.

Where existing resources, infrastructure or partnerships can be strengthened and embedded, the likelihood of benefits continuing beyond the three-year funding period is significantly increased.

The Fund should avoid investing in stand-alone activities that depend on a single individual or organisation to continue. It should also avoid funding asset purchases where there is no demonstrated plan or capacity for maintenance and ongoing use.

Question 3: What role could local governments play in supporting community inclusion?

Local governments can play an important role in supporting community inclusion through leadership, planning, community engagement and ensuring local facilities and activities are accessible.

This includes:

- Embedding accessibility and inclusion within community planning processes.
- Ensuring people living with disability are actively involved in the design of facilities, programs and services.
- Supporting community organisations to access information, partnerships and resources.
- Promoting inclusive participation across sporting, cultural, recreational and civic activities.

However, in many remote and very remote communities, Aboriginal community-controlled organisations may have a greater capacity to influence participation and inclusion than local government bodies where staff turnover is high and corporate knowledge transient. The Fund should recognise these different governance environments and remain flexible in how leadership and partnerships are structured.

Where funding is provided to local governments or community organisations, appropriate governance, accountability and monitoring arrangements should be in place to ensure investments deliver meaningful outcomes for people living with disability.

Applicants should be able to demonstrate genuine community support through a combination of co-design evidence, established community relationships, endorsement from relevant local organisations and a demonstrated history of engagement in the community. Reliance on a single endorsement should not be considered sufficient evidence of community support.

A key priority should be improving the consistency and quality of community facilities and services, with people living with disability and their families actively involved in planning and decision-making.

Question 4: What is the best way for community organisations to build meaningful and lasting inclusion?

Meaningful inclusion is built through relationships, trust, community ownership and sustained commitment. It comes from meeting people where they are and considering the specific context. It is not achieved through one-off training sessions or short-term projects.

Based on our experience, lasting inclusion is most likely when organisations invest in:

1. Strong relationships with people living with disability, families and carers.
2. Community ownership and leadership.
3. Visible leadership commitment to inclusion.
4. Stable policies and organisational practices that embed inclusion into everyday operations.
5. Infrastructure that can be maintained over time.
6. Ongoing partnerships and capability building.

For people living with MJD and SCA7, participation in community life extends beyond formal recreational activities. It includes attending ceremonies, participating in cultural activities, spending time on Country and maintaining family and community connections. These forms of participation are essential to wellbeing, identity and belonging.

For many people living with MJD and SCA7, remaining connected to Country is particularly important. When community-based supports are unavailable and individuals are required to relocate to regional or urban centres, they can experience significant disconnection from family, culture and community life. Inclusion should therefore be understood not only as participation in organised activities but also as maintaining connection to the people, places and cultural practices that are important to an individual's identity and wellbeing.

People who relocate to larger centres often face significant barriers to maintaining these connections, including high travel costs, inaccessible accommodation, limited transport options and workforce shortages. For people who remain in community, barriers commonly include limited respite options, shortages of support workers outside family networks, challenges attracting and retaining skilled staff, and inadequate workforce housing. These realities must be considered when designing the Fund.

To maximise long-term impact, the Fund should support activities that can continue beyond the funding period. Community-led initiatives, embedded partnerships and practical infrastructure improvements are more likely to create lasting change than projects that rely on ongoing external funding or individual champions.

Current government programs often fail because they are not disability-led, are insufficiently culturally informed, place excessive compliance burdens on smaller organisations, and are designed primarily

around metropolitan service environments. The Fund presents an opportunity to take a different approach.

Additional Recommendations

The MJD Foundation recommends that the Fund include:

Dedicated Remote and First Nations Funding

A dedicated funding allocation, or minimum percentage of total funding, for First Nations regional, remote and very remote communities.

Staged Funding Model

A staged funding model that includes an initial co-design, relationship-building and partnership development phase before implementation funding is assessed. Meaningful engagement, particularly in remote communities, requires time and trust and should not be expected to occur within a standard grant application process.

Strong Community Endorsement Requirements

Projects should demonstrate:

- Genuine co-design with people living with disability, families and carers.
- Evidence of community support.
- Endorsement from relevant local organisations.
- Demonstrated history of engagement within the community.
- Evidence that benefits can be sustained beyond the funding period.

Key Recommendation

If the Fund adopts only one principle, it should be this:

The Fund should prioritise culturally informed, disability-led and co-designed initiatives and require meaningful partnership with trusted organisations already working in the communities where funding will be directed.

This approach is most likely to create genuine, lasting inclusion for people living with disability, particularly in Australia's regional, remote and very remote communities.