



17-20 July 2023  
Kigali, Rwanda

## Women Deliver Oceanic Pacific Region

### Women with Disabilities Statement

This statement outlines key priorities for women, girls and non-binary people with disability across the region.<sup>1</sup> Listed at the end of this statement are a series of organisations, and women, girls and non-binary people with disabilities who have contributed to and/or endorsed this statement during June and July 2023.<sup>2</sup> This document will support regional and global messaging at Women Deliver 2023 in Kigali, Rwanda from 17-20 July 2023.

This document is aligned to the six cross-sectoral preconditions for the inclusion of persons with disabilities that are essential to policies, systems, and services, outlined by the United Nations:<sup>3</sup>

- *Equality and non-discrimination*
- *Service delivery*
- *Accessibility*
- *Participation of persons with disabilities*
- *CRPD-compliant budgeting & financial management*
- *Accountability & governance*

*These preconditions apply to all persons with disabilities, but some preconditions may be of more importance to one group of persons with disabilities than another. In addition, the preconditions are inter-related and require a joint approach tailored to the context.*

**The following sections outline our key thematic areas, summarising the issue as we define them and our solutions for change. The most significant cross-cutting theme for women and non-binary people within our region is climate change and ecological damage, biodiversity protection, disaster risk reduction, management and response.**

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<sup>1</sup> Our diversities include: women, girls, lesbians, bisexual, asexual, queer and trans/gender diverse people, gender nonconforming people, ethnically diverse women and girls, Indigenous women, women with disabilities, sex workers, women living with HIV and AIDS, widows, women living in rural and remote areas, young and older women and women throughout the life cycle, heterosexual women, women in sports, women in non-traditional roles and industries, women from faith-based communities, women in creative industries, women who have been incarcerated or criminalised, women in the informal sector, women in private sector, micro, small, medium enterprises, and more.

<sup>2</sup> The Women Deliver Oceanic Regional Convening on 6 June 2023 gathered together approximately 300 people, including civil society activists, allies and observers. Due to accessibility barriers, only seven people with disability attended the in-person event on the day. To ensure that we represented women, girls and non-binary people with disability in all our diversities, we held an online consultation to develop this document throughout June 2023, including an online convening on 26 June 2023.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2022), The preconditions necessary to ensure disability inclusion across policies, services, and other interventions.

## 1. Leadership and employment

The issue as we define it:

Women and non-binary people with disability continue to be an afterthought in spaces that discuss and attempt to progress women's rights. The lack of women with disability and leadership representation in our region is stark, particularly for those who are First Nations women, women of colour and/or LGBTIQ+.

Women, girls and non-binary people with disabilities have a right to safe and equitable employment opportunities and working conditions. However, we are regularly subjected to discrimination, harassment, under-representation and exploitation within the workforce. We are over-represented in rates of unemployment, underemployment and in unpaid work.

The solutions as we define them:

- First Nations women and non-binary people with disability must be front and centre in leadership and decision making. This must be underpinned by principles of self-determination and Indigenous sovereignty.
- We support each other as women and non-binary people with disabilities to be represented in leadership positions.
- People with disabilities voices must be present in every policy, every system, every panel, every meeting, and every conversation, as co-designers and paid lived experience experts. This should occur in the conception, design, implementation, and evaluation stages.
- Adequate resourcing needs to be set aside to meet the accessibility requirements of women with disability in the workforce and in decision making processes.
- Access aids need to be present at every event or action, regardless of if or how many people with disability are in attendance.
- Where further education or support is required to enable leadership delegations, refer to the education section below.
- Enable community controlled research, including data collected by and evidence authored by people with disability.
- Where research concerns First Nations people with disability, research and data collection must operate in support of the principles of Indigenous data sovereignty, recognising that data should only be used as a tool for improving the lives of First Nations people with disability and not as a means of surveillance.
- Ensure researchers with disabilities are at least co-authors in broader population wide and public health research.
- Eradicate discrimination and exploitation within the job market, with particular attention to settings where modern slavery risks are present, such as sheltered workshops and prisons. Implement intersectional and gender-responsive policies, frameworks and pathways to improve social and labour protections for women, girls and non-binary people with disability in both paid and unpaid work.
- Address social structures that pose barriers to equal employment opportunities and equal pay for work of equal value, including sexism, racism and ableism.
- Capitalise on learnings through pandemics about flexible working and how that can be an enabler of employment for women and non-binary people with disability.

These solutions to ensure employment and leadership must be central to climate change, disaster management and response.

## 2. Bodily Autonomy

The issue as we define it:

Women, girls and non-binary people with disabilities have a right to make free and informed choices about our own bodies. This includes the right to sexual and reproductive freedom, the right to freedom from violence in all its forms, the right to safe and adequate healthcare, and the right to choice, control and self-determination. However, women, girls and non-binary people are regularly denied these basic human rights, including through lawful and legitimised means.

The solutions as we define them:

- Use every opportunity to affirm women, girls and gender non-binary people in all our diversities.<sup>4</sup>
- Create and enable law, policy and regulatory reforms that enable intersectionality and continuous improvement in leadership, policy, research and service provision.
- Embed community led, culturally responsive, comprehensive sexuality education throughout our communities and lives.
- Girls and young women must be supported to establish peer support education and social support programs, including comprehensive sexuality education.
- Prohibit and abolish lawful forms of violence that deny us our bodily autonomy and sexual and reproductive rights, including those laws that allow for or condone substitute decision-making, forced treatment, forced child removals (particularly targeting First Nations women), forced strip-searches, restrictive practices and segregation.
- Enable reforms that empower our bodily autonomy, including access to healthcare, social services, and sexual and reproductive justice.
- Enable new policies and processes to ensure that we have autonomy over how, when and where we experience pregnancy, birth and parenting, including solutions listed in the 'family life' section.
- Enable a range of measures to collect intersectional disability data, that can be used to inform evidence based community controlled action. This includes preventative and protective measures to reproductive and maternal health, with key health indicators like maternal mortality rates.
- Prevent sexual and reproductive coercion, abuse and violence through community led research, comprehensive sexuality education, equitable sexual and reproductive healthcare, and health system reforms that enable reproductive justice.
- Introduce redress and reparations for victim-survivors of both historical and contemporary instances of sexual and reproductive coercion, abuse and violence, including those enacted against First Nations women since colonisation. Redress and reparations must include financial compensation, access to rehabilitation and trauma recovery, alongside structural and community-based measures such as apologies, memorialisation and community education.

These solutions that secure access to bodily autonomy, and access to sexual and reproductive health, must be central to climate change, disaster management and response.

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<sup>4</sup> Our diversities include: women, girls, lesbians, bisexual, asexual, queer and trans/gender diverse people, gender nonconforming people, ethnically diverse women and girls, Indigenous women, women with disabilities, sex workers, women living with HIV and AIDS, widows, women living in rural and remote areas, young and older women and women throughout the life cycle, heterosexual women, women in sports, women in non-traditional roles and industries, women from faith-based communities, women in creative industries, women who have been incarcerated or criminalised, women in the informal sector, women in private sector, micro, small, medium enterprises, and more.

### 3. Education

The issue as we define it:

Women and non-binary people with disabilities face significant barriers to accessing and fully participating in quality education. These barriers not only limit their educational opportunities but also hinder their ability to occupy positions of leadership in various sectors. The underrepresentation of women and non-binary people with disabilities in leadership roles perpetuates systemic inequalities and prevents diverse perspectives from being included in decision-making processes.

The solutions as we define them:

- Ensure education policies and practices that prioritise accessibility and accommodate the diverse needs of women, girls, and non-binary people with disabilities. This includes providing reasonable accommodations, such as assistive technologies, accessible learning materials, and supportive classroom environments, across all educational levels.
- Uphold and affirm students with disabilities right to education in their own language, including but not limited to Braille, sign language and First Nations languages.
- Adopt culturally responsive pedagogies and curriculums, across all educational levels, which value and embrace diversity, challenge histories and cultures of sexism, racism and ableism, and foster a sense of belonging and inclusion for students with disability, particularly First Nations students with disability.
- Ensure equal access to educational opportunities by identifying and eliminating physical, communication, and attitudinal barriers that hinder full participation in mainstream early childhood education, primary and secondary schools, vocational training, and higher education.
- Eradicate punitive 'manage and discipline' models of education that regularly sanction students with disability, particularly First Nations students with disability, and encourage educational disengagement.
- Implement comprehensive intersectional gender-based disability awareness training for educators and staff, including within Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programs, to foster inclusive and respectful learning environments.
- Establish mentorship programs and leadership development initiatives specifically targeted at empowering women and non-binary people with disabilities. These programs should provide guidance, support, and opportunities to develop the skills and confidence necessary to occupy leadership positions in various sectors.
- Foster consistent and sustainable partnerships between educational institutions, disability organisations, and employers to create pathways for women and non-binary people with disabilities to access leadership opportunities. This can include internships, apprenticeships, and professional development programs that bridge the gap between education and career advancement.
- Invest in accessible and inclusive entrepreneurship training programs for women and non-binary people with disabilities, including the necessary capital to start our own businesses, for example various models of micro-investing.
- Enable the representation of women and non-binary individuals with disabilities in decision-making bodies and committees related to education policy and planning.

These solutions that enable access and full participation in quality education, must be central to climate change, disaster management and response.

#### 4. Family life

The issue as we define it:

Women, girls and non-binary people with disabilities are denied the right to start or lead our own families, including a lack of autonomy within families or other living arrangements. Inadequate social support often results in people with disability being left with no alternative options other than relying on family members for unpaid care, for access to financial resources, and for connection to the wider community. This can create conditions where abuse and exploitation is possible. Women and girls with disabilities are also denied reproductive rights through forced sterilisation, contraception, abortion, adoption and child removals.

The solutions as we define them:

- Track mortality rates of people with disability experiencing pregnancy, including experiences of miscarriage, abortion, stillbirth and live birth, and experiences of institutionalisation, adoption and child removal. Put in place mechanisms to reduce maternal health and parenting disparities between disabled and non-disabled parents.
- Decriminalise homosexuality, and affirm LGBTIQ+ rights to formalised and/or intimate relationships, regardless of gender.
- Support LGBTIQ+ cohabitation outside of institutional settings, or if within institutional settings support people's requests for intimate relationships, including partners of any sex or gender to stay overnight.
- Any practice which prevents people with disability from having children, or prevents disabled fetuses or babies from being born, is malpractice and should be addressed by regulatory bodies that monitor and regulate the quality and safety of healthcare.
- Develop *accessible* reporting mechanisms and response protocols to prevent and end family violence and forced treatment, segregation, and other forms of violence which disproportionately affect women, girls, and non-binary people with disabilities. Ensure response systems can support people who are experiencing violence perpetrated by carers and family members, as well as structural forms of violence perpetrated by institutions such as the police, prisons, hospitals, psychiatric wards, residential aged care settings and disability group homes.
- Ensure parenting and caring rights for women and non-binary people with disabilities, recognising and valuing our ability to raise children. This includes removing legal and policy barriers that restrict our right to start and maintain families, access appropriate support and accommodations, and preventing discrimination including addressing stereotypes that perpetuate discrimination.
- Uphold First Nations people with disability's right to retain shared responsibility for the upbringing, training, education and well-being of their children. This includes enabling First Nations people with disability's cultural and birthing aspirations, including Birthing on Country programs, and investing in accessible housing options that allow First Nations people with disability to maintain and strengthen their relationship with their traditional lands, territories, waters and coastal seas.
- Invest in community-based and controlled support services that enable women, girls, and non-binary people with disabilities to live independently and exercise their right to choose their living arrangements. This includes accessible housing options, personal assistance services, and peer support networks to foster social inclusion and self-determination.
- Enable LGBTIQ+ people with disability to parent and care give through methods such as assisted reproductive technology, adoption, foster care or kinship care.
- Ensure access to inclusive and affordable reproductive healthcare services, including contraception, family planning, and assisted reproductive technologies. This requires

removing discriminatory barriers, providing adequate information, and ensuring that healthcare professionals receive disability-inclusive training.

- Develop and implement community led social support programs that address the specific needs of women, girls, and non-binary people with disabilities within the family context. These programs should provide accessible information, resources, and services to promote independence, well-being, and participation in our wider communities.

These solutions that secure access to our family life, must be central to climate change, disaster management and response.

## **5. Services and supports**

The issue as we define it:

Women, girls and non-binary people with disability have a right to safe and quality services and supports, including safe and adequate healthcare. However, we are regularly discriminated against and under-represented in service systems, and subjected to violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation when accessing support and services.

The solutions as we define them:

- Employ women and non-binary people with disability in public policy roles, so that we lead reform processes, policy and regulatory development and implementation.
- Create and enable law, policy and regulatory reforms that are gender-responsive, intersectional, and facilitate our access to safe and quality healthcare, social support and community services.
- Support and resource community controlled organisations and services, for and by women and non-binary people with disability.
- Ensure all social support systems provide adequate, dignified support for people with disabilities that includes financial support, healthcare, community access, and childcare.
- Social support should be adequate enough to enable independent living, and prevent conditions such as financial and mobility dependence that increase the risk of abuse.
- Address social structures that enable violence, abuse, neglect, exploitation and discrimination, including sexism, racism and ableism.
- Address physical and structural barriers to access to services and supports, including distance and proximity, discrimination, and both gender-biased and racial-biased eligibility criteria.
- Address under-diagnosis and under-treatment of health and medical conditions, and the particular discrimination experienced by people on the basis of gender, race and other dimensions of identity, in healthcare systems.
- Eradicate violence, abuse, neglect, exploitation and discrimination within service systems with accountability processes and ombudsman roles.

These solutions that secure services and support, must be central to climate change, disaster management and response.

## **6. Pre-conditions to inclusion**

There are six different themes which are pre-conditions for Inclusion. These are:

1. Accessibility
2. Assistive Devices
3. Support Services
4. Social Protection
5. Community-based Inclusive Development
6. Non-discrimination

The preconditions to inclusion can be referred to as the prerequisite for disability inclusion. These measures/actions need to be in place first before inclusion for persons with disabilities can be achieved.

### Related statements

***Our messaging draws on other recent regional disability and gender equity statements:***

- ***Framework for Pacific Regionalism and the Pacific Framework for the Rights Persons With Disabilities 2016-2025***
- ***The 3rd Pacific Feminist Forum Outcomes Document (May 2023),***
- ***The Outcomes of the 14th Triennial Conference of Pacific Women and 7th Women's Ministerial Meeting,***
- ***The 2012 Pacific Leaders' Gender Equality Declaration,***
- ***The Pacific Platform for Action on Gender Equality and Women's Human Rights 2018 - 2030***
- ***Outcomes from the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW67).***
- ***Wiyi Yani U Thangani National Summit 2023 Communiqué.***
- ***The Outcomes from the Conference of the States Parties (COSP) 2023***
- ***Pacific Regional Framework for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities .***

### Further reading

- Curtis, J., Dickson, A., Gadd, E., Robinson, T., (2022) LGBT+ rights and issues in Pacific Islands, House of Commons Library.
- Indigenous Allied Health Australia (2019), Cultural Responsiveness in Action.
- United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner (2006), Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, sixty first session of the General Assembly by resolution A/RES/61/106.
- United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner (2018), Report on legal recognition of gender identity and depathologization.
- United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner (2019), Report on data collection and management.
- United Nations Independent expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity (2021), Bodily autonomy and integrity.
- United Nations Independent expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity (2021), Ensuring healthy lives for all, leaving no one behind.
- United Nations Independent expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity (2021), Reports on gender: the law of inclusion and practices of exclusion.
- United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2022), The preconditions necessary to ensure disability inclusion across policies, services, and other interventions.
- Women With Disabilities Australia (2023), Our Site. Real Stories.
- Women With Disabilities Australia Position Statement 1: The Right to Freedom from All Forms of Violence
- Women With Disabilities Australia Position Statement 2: The Right to Decision-Making
- Women With Disabilities Australia Position Statement 3: The Right to Participation
- Women With Disabilities Australia Position Statement 4: Sexual and Reproductive Rights
- Women With Disabilities Australia Submission to the Disability Royal Commission: Sexual and Reproductive Rights

**This statement is endorsed by the following Oceania Pacific organisations, groups and networks:**

- First Peoples Disability Network Australia
- Women With Disabilities Australia
- Women with Disabilities Victoria
- Disability Pride Hub - Rainbow Pride Foundation, Pacific
- International Lesbian Gay Bisexual Trans and Intsersex Association (ILGA) Oceania
- Diverse Voices and Action (DIVA) for Equality, Fiji/Pacific
- Qaqa Grassroots Young Feminist Network, Fiji/Pacific
- Pacific Feminist SRHR Coalition, Pacific
- Pacific Feminist Community of Practice, Pacific
- Sista, Vanuatu
- KEWITA Learning Initiative, West Papua
- Sisters Foundation, Honiara.
- Voice for Change, Papua New Guinea
- Pacific Conference of Churches, Pacific
- Pacific Women Mediators Network
- Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict-Pacific
- Shifting the Power Coalition, Pacific
- Pacific Island Feminist Alliance for Climate Justice
- Rainbow Pride Foundation, Pacific
- Pacific Sexual and Gender Diversity Network
- Pacific Feminist Fund
- Pacific Network on Globalisation
- WITTT Sunshine
- Tonga Leitis Association
- Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM)
- We Rise Coalition, Pacific
- Fiji Youth Sexual & Reproductive Health & Rights Alliance (FYSA)
- Pacific Menstrual Health Network
- Trans Affirmative Action Guild (TAAG), Fiji
- ActionAid Australia
- Pacific Centre for Peacebuilding
- Women United Together Marshall Islands
- International Women's Development Agency (IWDA)
- UFFO Nouvelle-Calédonie
- MSI Asia Pacific and MSI Australia
- Australian Women's Health Network
- International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF)
- Alliance for Future Generations (Fiji)

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*Ends.*