

**Response by the Government of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas
to the Questionnaire of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities: *Provision of Support for Persons with Disabilities***

**Disabilities Affairs Division, Ministry of Social Services
Commonwealth of The Bahamas**

**November 2016**

**Questionnaire on the Provision of Support for Persons with Disabilities**

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***1. Please provide information on the following services that are available for persons with***

***disabilities in your country, including data on their coverage, geographic distribution and delivery arrangements, funding and sustainability, challenges and shortcomings in their implementation:***

1. ***Personal Assistance;***
2. ***In-home, residential and community support;***
3. ***Support in decision making, including peer support; and***
4. ***Communication support, including support for augmentative and alternative communication.***

Disability Affairs is a Division of the Department of Social Services in the Ministry of Social Services and Community Development. As a government agency, its mandate is to provide services, welfare and support to the community of persons with disabilities throughout the Commonwealth of The Bahamas. The Division is charged with addressing the issues and concerns of persons with disabilities, as well as to collaborate, encourage and promote cooperation between all stakeholders including the public and private sector, all government Ministries/Agencies/Departments and local non-governmental organizations. The services and support offered by the Disabilities Affairs Division include:

* Provide special allowance for eligible children with disabilities under the age of sixteen.
* Provide financial assistance for Assistive/Adaptive Devices; Medical Services/Travel and Supplies and Tertiary Education.
* Provide assistance for home repairs and modification.
* Provide counseling for individuals and families.
* Identify financial needs and advocates for public and private support.
* Identify and coordinate services available to persons with disabilities throughout The Bahamas.
* Provide psycho-social assessments on persons with disabilities.
* Conduct visits to clients requesting assistance.
* Liaise with treatment facilities locally as well as abroad.
* Network with government agencies and non-government organizations.
* Make referrals to appropriate agencies for consultations and necessary assistance.
* Psychological Support Groups.
* Education, personal and skills development training.

Although the Disabilities Affairs Division's office is situated in New Providence, the majority of the services provided are generally available to all Family Islands, through the local (Family Island) Social Services Office.

With respect to funding, the Government provides annual grants totaling $700,000 to disability-related NGOs, Schools and Centres, as well as a monthly or occasional subsistence allowances and grants related to medical or assistive devices expenses to persons with disabilities, totaling $400,000 annually. Funding for these programmes and support services are sustained annually as a part of the Bahamas Government's recurring expenditure.

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The National Commission for Persons with Disabilities is a statutory body established when with Bahamas' Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities) Act became legislation in August 2014. Since the passing of the disabilities legislation, and the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities by The Bahamas in September 2015, the Commission has been actively engaged in a number of functions, including monitoring and ensuring compliance with the Act, recommending policies on certain provisions of the Act, providing public education, raising awareness of disability issues, stakeholder consultations and addressing complaints of alleged discrimination or violations of the Act.

The Commission also continues to engage extensively with more than 20 disability-related NGOs as a way of strengthening their individual and collective capacity to provide better informed support, have a stronger advocacy voice, and deliver more effective service to the community of persons with disabilities. Engagements with NGOs included consultative dialogues, town hall meetings, and most recently, a training workshop that focused on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Advocacy and the Persons with Disabilities Act.

Regarding communication support, the Disabilities Commission has introduced and makes available CART (Communication Access Real-time Translation) service for persons who are deaf and hard of hearing. In addition to encouraging the use of CART in appropriate settings in corporate, community and national forums, the Commission continues to encourage the training and certification of sign language interpreters. To ensure that the communication access provisions of the legislation are fully adhered to, the Commission continues to engage with the utilities regulation authority regarding the provision of close captioning by local television service providers, and the provision of assistive communication access to essential services, by telephone service providers.

***2. Please explain how persons with disabilities can access information about existing services referred to in question one, including referral procedures, eligibility criteria and application requirements.***

Information about the services offered by Disability Affairs Division is disseminated through all
Government Social Services offices throughout The Bahamas. Information is also disseminated through
traditional and social media (newspaper, radio and television, websites, Facebook, etc) and directly to

more than 20 disability-related NGOs, Schools and Centres. Individuals may also visit or contact by telephone, email or SMS, any Social Services Office to access information.

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Procedures for programs and services are as follows:

* Application Form(s) are completed by the Social Services Representative at the time of application.
* Supporting Documents include a Passport, Driver's License or Voter's Card, National Insurance Card, and Medical Summary Report.

Process includes:

* The applicant visits the Disability Affairs Division Office and requests assistance from the Social Services Representative (SSR).
* The applicant is interviewed by the SSR to complete the intake and social history report.
* A needs assessment and home investigation are arranged and completed.
* The applicant submits a Medical Summary Report.
* The SSR then makes a recommendation based on the findings
* The applicant is informed of the recommendation made about whether or not he/she qualifies for the service.

Eligibility:

* The applicant must have some type of disability (sensory/ physical/intellectual/developmental) and must be earning minimum wage or lower. Services are free to all eligible persons.

Response time:

* One week to two and a half weeks.

Information regarding the technical support that the Disability Commission provides is disseminated through its public education initiatives and consultations with disability-related NGOs and stakeholders. Commission members and the Commission's Secretariat also use their contacts and networks as a way of disseminating information about support that is available to persons with disabilities.

***3. Please elaborate on how these services respond to the specific needs of persons with***

***disabilities throughout their life cycle (infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, older age) and how service is delivery ensured in the transition periods between life cycle stages.***

Persons with disabilities who access services provided by or through the Government will typically be
assigned to Social Workers who manage their cases throughout the cycles of their lives. Case histories

are maintained to ensure that information is available from one life cycle of the person with disabilities to the next, or one social worker to the next. Care is taken to ensure that services provided are needs-, gender- and age-appropriate, and, through regularly scheduled monitoring and evaluation of services, any deficiencies or gaps that are identified are addressed.

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1. ***Please provide information on the number of certified sign language interpreters and deafblind interpreters in your country.***

There are two certified sign language Interpreters in country. There are no certified deafblind interpreters in country.

1. ***Please provide information on the existence on any partnership between State institutions and private service providers (e.g. non-governmental organizations, for-profit service providers) for the provision of support to persons with disabilities.***

The Government, through a number of its Ministries, Departments and Agencies, partners with several NGOs for the delivery of support services to persons with disabilities. The Ministry of Social Services and Community Development provides annual grants to 18 NGOs who provide support and services to persons with disabilities. In addition to grants, technical support is also provided by various Ministries including Ministries responsible for Social Services, Health, Works, Youth and Education. Such technical support includes this includes rotation or secondment of health, rehabilitative and educational professionals, as well as placement of support staff, to assist the NGOs in the delivery of service.

1. ***Please describe to what extent and how are persons with disabilities and their representative organizations involved in the design, planning, implementation and evaluation of support services.***

A number of adults with disabilities who are members or staff of disability-related NGOs, Schools or Centres which offer services, are involved at various levels in the design, planning, implementation and evaluation of the support services that their respective organizations provide. For example, the Bahamas Alliance for the Blind and Visually Impaired offers orientation and adjustment to blindness services, as well as programmes for learning to use assistive devices and Braille, and the members, most of whom are blind and visually impaired themselves, are involved at all levels of the service and programmes. There are some services, especially those that are geared mainly towards children with disabilities, where parents or family members, professionals/practitioners with particular expertise, or other capable adults with disabilities, are often consulted to provide input at specific levels of the support services' functioning. The Gladstone Road Project for Young Adults with Developmental Disabilities, which is currently at its design and planning stages, is engaging several young adults with

developmental disabilities, including those with Autism Spectrum Disorders, in the planning stage. Key persons within the community of persons with disabilities, like the leaders of the local Disabled Persons Organization (DPO), or the Ministry of Social Services' Disability Affairs Consultant, who is a wheel-chair user, are often called upon by Government, NGOs and the private sector, to offer input on the design, planning, implementation and evaluation of support services.

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***7. Please provide any other relevant information and statistics (including surveys, censuses,***

***administrative data, reports and studies) related to the provision of support to persons with disabilities in your country.***

No additional information relating to the provision of support to persons with disabilities is available at this time. It should be noted that there are plans to conduct research projects on the prevalence of Autism Spectrum Disorders and Deafness, respectively, in The Bahamas, and information on support to persons in those disability groups will be captured.

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