

Consultation Response:

The Draft Northern Ireland Disability Strategy

By the Department for Communities

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INTRODUCTION

Men's Alliance Northern Ireland

[Men's Alliance \(NI\)](#) supports male victims and survivors of domestic abuse. We provide support to over 2000 men in NI, providing them with 1-2-1 and peer support, signposting to services, and help with Legal issues and Social Services. We also advocate on behalf of male victims and survivors, raising awareness of their experiences, the challenges they can encounter when seeking help and the lack of Support Services available to them.

Domestic abuse is often described as '*gendered violence*' and '*overwhelmingly*' perpetrated by men. PSNI, NISRA and ONS data consistently report that one in three victims are male and yet research, advocacy and state interventions often centre exclusively on female victims. This means that men's experiences may be minimised or ignored.

Draft Northern Ireland Disability Strategy

The draft NI Executive Disability Strategy 2025-2035 aims to improve the lives of people who are Deaf and disabled people, their families and carers so that they can play a full and active role in all aspects of our society.

The Strategy's vision is for: "*An inclusive society that respects, protects, promotes and fulfils the rights of all Deaf and disabled people to participate fully, free from discrimination.*"

The Strategy is structured around eight outcomes which will in turn be supported by an associated Action Plan. Outcomes include seeking to ensure that Deaf and disabled people can:

- live independently in the community with choice and control and with a sufficient and sustainable standard of living; and
- exercise their rights and fundamental freedoms and participate in society on an equal basis, free from discrimination.

RESPONSE SUMMARY AND KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Men's Alliance welcomes the development of a much needed strategy to improve the lives of disabled people, their families and their carers.

We have restricted our response to the implementation and outcome areas that will most directly impact on the needs and rights of disabled victims and survivors of domestic abuse in Northern Ireland.

We recommend that the Department for Communities (DfC) commit to take the following additional steps to protect disabled people from violence, exploitation and abuse:

- **Extend commitments outlined in outcome 5 to ensure that the needs of disabled people are considered in the implementation of the Executive's Domestic & Sexual Abuse Strategy.**
- **Extend commitments outlined in outcome 1 to:**
 - **include a commitment to review the needs of disabled males facing additional risk of violence and take action to remove all informational, attitudinal, structural and systemic barriers to support identified.**
 - **take steps to ensure that disabled male victims of domestic and sexual abuse do not feel that their human rights and legal protections are being overlooked or ignored.**

FULL RESPONSE TO THE DRAFT STRATEGY

Men's Alliance welcomes the development of a much needed strategy to improve the lives of disabled people, their families and their carers.

We urge the Northern Ireland Executive and the Department of Communities to fully implement the recommendations of the Disability Strategy Co-Design Group who have advised on the development and drafting of this strategy based on their lived experience of disability.

Men's Alliance have restricted our response to the two outcome areas that will most directly impact on the needs and rights of disabled victims and survivors of domestic abuse in Northern Ireland.

Outcome 5: Independent living.

We welcome commitments outlined in outcome 5 to take steps to protect disabled people from violence, exploitation and abuse, including the commitment to ensure that the needs of disabled women and girls are considered in the implementation of the Executive's 'Equally Safe: Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy'.

We were surprised to read that this commitment does not extend to ensuring that the needs of disabled people are also considered in the implementation of the [Executive's Domestic & Sexual Abuse Strategy](#).

This strategy is central to delivering on the commitment to create a society where domestic and sexual abuse are not tolerated and victims receive the support they need. It is therefore imperative that disabled people's needs are fully considered in its implementation so that DfC can deliver on their Outcome 5 commitments.

We recommend that DfC extend commitments outlined in outcome 5 to ensure that the needs of disabled people are considered in the implementation of the Executive's Domestic & Sexual Abuse Strategy.

Outcome 1: Rights & Fundamental Freedoms

We welcome the commitments outlined under this outcome to protect disabled people from discrimination, including the commitment to run community led reviews of the needs of women and girls facing additional risk of violence and the barriers to accessing services and make recommendations with the first phase to include deaf and disabled women.

We welcome DfC's acknowledgement of their obligations under Article 5 of the UNCRPD which asserts that: *'all persons are equal before and under the law and are entitled without any discrimination to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law.'*

We also note that in 2022 the Disability Strategy Expert Advisory Panel recommended that the NI Executive commission research to understand experiences of disabled people in accessing domestic violence services, support and legal redress in Northern Ireland.

We recommend that DfC extend commitments under this outcome to:

- **include a commitment to review the needs of disabled males facing additional risk of violence and take action to remove all informational, attitudinal, systemic and structural barriers to support needs identified; and**
- **take steps to ensure that disabled male victims of domestic and sexual abuse do not feel that their human rights and legal protections are being overlooked or ignored.**

Informational Gaps Adversely Impacting Disabled Male Victims

The narrative establishing why change is only needed identifies data on disabled female victims of domestic abuse. We have provided a report on the experiences and barriers encountered by disabled male victims as an appendix to this response and would especially highlight the following facts:

- Systematic reviews show that disabled people are more likely to experience threats of violence, physical abuse and sexual assault.¹
- ONS annual crime surveys show that disabled men experience domestic abuse in higher numbers than non disabled women.²
- Research indicates that disabled people in NI experience physical (16%) sexual (12%) psychological (26%) and economic (6%) forms of violence at levels at least 50% higher than non disabled people.³
- Research indicates that: 72% of male victims of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) in NI met the case criteria for depression, 72% had thoughts of ending their life and of these, 92% had formulated a plan and 47% had made at least one attempt.⁴
- Muckamore Hospital Inquiry testimony has highlighted harrowing incidents of abuse experienced by disabled males in institutional settings. In one incident a staff member allegedly threatened to "cut off" a resident's penis if he spoke out. In another a male patient's genitals were "*bruised so badly that they turned black.*"⁵
- Disabled people encounter multifaceted barriers to support access and disabled male victims face additional gendered barriers including: stigma, fear of not being believed or losing their children and negative social responses.⁶ Access to specialist safe haven refuges and floating support services are simply not currently an option for disabled males living in NI.⁷

¹ Hughes, et al. (2012): [Prevalence and risk of violence against adults with disabilities:](#)

² Mankind Initiative (2021): [Male victims of domestic abuse and partner abuse: 55 key facts.](#)

³ NISRA (2022): [Ending Violence Against Women & Girls: Experiences / attitudes of adults in N.I](#)

⁴ Spikol et al (2025): [Male Experiences of Intimate Partner Violence.](#)

⁵ BBC (2025): [Nature and extent of Muckamore abuse at heart of inquiry.](#)

⁶ Mankind Initiative (2023): [Key Facts about Male Victims of Abuse.](#)

⁷ NI Victims of Crime Commissioner (2025): [Mapping Services for Male Adult & Child Victims of DASA](#)

Equality Impact Assessment and Mitigation Measures

The Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) for this draft strategy includes commitments to review strategic commitments contributing to the Strategy to further consider the potential for adverse impacts; and consider the need for mitigating actions identified during the consultation period.⁸

We hope that DfC will take this opportunity to amend the final strategy on the basis of the information provided and mitigating actions recommended.

We also urge DfC to equality screen revised strategic commitments, and if necessary conduct a further EQIA, to ensure that they have taken sufficient mitigating measures to address any potential adverse impacts identified.

Failure to acknowledge and plan adequately for disabled victims, including disabled male victims, risks perpetuating systemic invisibility and barriers to support and justice. Such a dereliction of due regard could have significant moral, practical and legal implications including:

- denying disabled male victims fair and proportionate treatment;
- failure to adequately align with statutory frameworks that acknowledge and address abuse irrespective of gender;⁹ and
- exposing the strategy to challenge on grounds of disparate impact.

⁸ DfC (2025): [NI Draft Disability Strategy - Equality Impact Assessment](#)

⁹ Such as the DASA Strategy 24–31, Victims Charter & Domestic Abuse & Civil Proceedings Act 2021.