

HOW DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE IS OUR PROGRAM?

Introduction

In 2019, CBM Australia led a review team of returned Australian volunteers, including persons with disabilities, to identify findings and recommendations for strengthening disability-inclusion across all aspects of the Australian Volunteers Program.

Disability¹-inclusion has been a strong feature of the program for many years, and the review assessed the program's experience to understand and strengthen approaches to achieving disability-inclusive development. The review also drew from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's (DFAT's) *Development for All 2015-2020: Strategy for strengthening disability-inclusive development in Australia's aid program*; and the Office of Development Effectiveness' November 2018 report *Development for All: Evaluation of progress made in strengthening disability inclusion in Australian aid*.

Methodology

The review utilised a mixed methods approach including: a desk review; online survey; and qualitative interviews (both face-to-face, over the phone and via email). A total of 174 staff, volunteers and partner organisations were consulted through interviews and surveys, including in-depth consultations with Melbourne head office staff, Regional Directors, country staff and volunteers.

The desk review and early consultations with key program staff informed the framing of the review and question guide, and data from the various methods was analysed and synthesised to develop findings, recommendations and suggested practical steps.

Key Findings

The review builds on previous experience and current practice to enhance disability inclusion across the program. It found that while disability inclusion has been a key strength and core component of the program's approach over recent years there are some key ways the program can be strengthened to become more disability inclusive.

The review recommended:

- Clearly articulating and socialising a vision for a more comprehensive approach to strengthening disability inclusion.
- Strengthening knowledge, skills and attitudes within all levels of the program (Melbourne, regional and in-country staff, partner organisations and volunteers).
- Strengthening the mainstreaming of disability inclusion across the program, through mainstream placements, not just disability-focused assignments.
- Expanding, utilising and establishing new strategic and innovative partnerships with disability and mainstream partner organisations.
- Enhancing processes and resources to recruit and support volunteers with a disability.
- Maximising communications, public diplomacy, and monitoring, evaluation and learning opportunities to tell a greater story of impact.

1. The program uses the term 'disability' in the same way that the UN Convention on the Rights of People with a Disability approaches it: the term 'disability' includes persons who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments that, in the face of various negative attitudes or physical obstacles, may prevent those persons from participating fully in society.

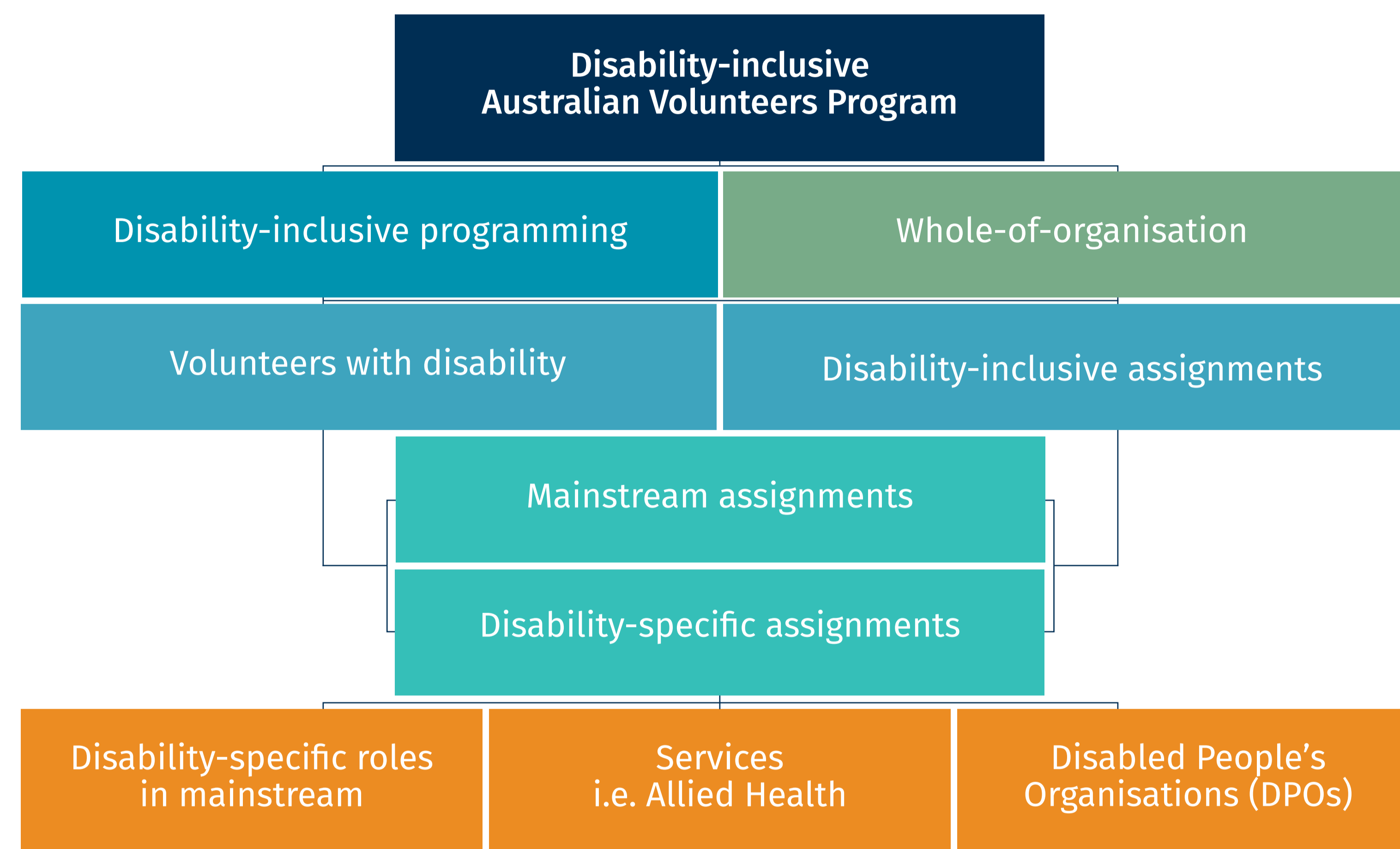
Entry points for disability-inclusion in the Australian Volunteer Program

A disability-inclusive program is more than just volunteers with disabilities and disability-specific placements.

An early finding from the desk review and initial consultations showed that there are varying views on what it means to strengthen disability inclusion within the program.

This flowchart expands upon the existing strategic objectives and identifies additional opportunities.

The program can harness the resources of other organisations to influence their inclusive practice. Volunteers with a disability can be placed in a disability-specific service or a mainstream placement to influence mainstream development or humanitarian organisation in a generic role, or as a focal point specifically to influence disability-inclusion.



What's next?

The review provided a thorough assessment of how accessible and inclusive the program is for persons with disabilities, both as volunteers and as program partners and beneficiaries. It indicated that while the program is already doing a significant amount to be disability-inclusive, it can do more to develop a clear vision for disability inclusion in the future, maximise learning and development, communicate stories of impact, and strengthen support for persons with disabilities.

The review's findings and recommendations were welcomed by the program and DFAT, and has led to subsequent consultations to develop a clear action plan and framework for strengthening disability-inclusion across the entire program.

The program has developed specific activities in five key areas to take forward some of the recommendations in the 19/20 financial year, annual planning discussions for 20/21, and beyond:

1. Articulate a clear and comprehensive vision for disability-inclusion across the program.
2. Develop a learning and development plan for disability-inclusion across the program.
3. Develop a strategic partnership plan to strengthen disability partnering and mainstreaming.
4. Strengthen access and support for volunteers with disabilities.
5. Tell immediate stories of impact of disability-inclusion and mainstreaming.

Acknowledgements

The Australian Volunteers Program is funded by the Australian Government. The Disability Inclusion Review took place from April to July in 2019 and was conducted by CBM Australia, who are recognised development sector experts on disability inclusion and include persons with disabilities. The review team consisted of Tamara Jolly, Jen Blyth, Larissa Burke and Tarryn Brown, all of whom are also returned Australian volunteers.