



New Draft National Disability Policy changes focus

The first Draft White Paper relating to the revised National Disability Policy, which introduces the concept of “duty bearers” and charges them with responsibility for ensuring the implementation of the provisions of the policy, is expected to be signed off by the incoming Minister of Women, Children and People with Disabilities in June this year.

It will then be released for public comment, following cabinet approval, in August and should hopefully be ready to be launched on 3 December, National Day of People with Disabilities.

That’s according to Lidia Pretorius, DWCPWD’s Chief Director, Monitoring and Evaluation of the Rights of Persons with Disability, who said much of the focus of the new policy was directed at ensuring the mainstreaming of persons with disabilities in all walks of life, including in the workforce.

Speaking at the SAE4D breakfast last month, Ms Pretorius said that duty bearers – those who are in a position to make a difference, from captains of industry to government officials – will be deemed to have intentionally discriminated against persons with disabilities (a criminal offence), if they are unable to provide evidence that they:

- **Acknowledged** that there are **barriers** which exclude persons with disabilities/detract from their access or participation;
- **Identified** potential barriers;
- Put in place **measures** to minimise/remove barriers;
- **Budgeted** for these measures;
- Can **report** on **progress with implementation**;
- Can **measure impact**.

“We are moving beyond begging and encouragement,” she said. “We want results. The new policy is based on four key pillars: Human Rights, Universal Access Design, Maintreaming; and Self-Representation. Its purpose is to ensure equality for people with disabilities.”

The new policy is designed to bring the National Disability Policy in line with the Government’s Medium Term Strategic Framework 2014 – 2019 and to address the shortcomings identified in the 2011 Draft Policy which did not fully make provision for its integration into the government outcomes-based planning approach or the integration of mainstreaming guidelines.

“Disability,” Ms Pretorius said, “is not something a person has. Disability is imposed by society when a person with a long-term impairment is denied access to full participation in all aspects of life; and when society fails to uphold the rights and specific needs of individuals with impairments.”

In terms of the new policy, persons with disabilities will include all those who have long-term physical, psychosocial, cognitive and/or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

SAE4D will be participating in consultations with the DWCPWD and monitoring the progress of the new Draft Policy; and will keep members informed about all new developments.