

Corin Dann: The newly appointed Minister for Disability Issues National's Penny Simmonds doesn't have a seat at the cabinet table as such, the Disability Support Network's chief executive Peter Reynolds says with Ms Simmonds being a minister outside of cabinet it will make it hard for her to get leverage with her cabinet colleagues he joins us now. Kia ora, good morning.

Peter Reynolds: Good morning Corin.

CD: So I was just looking back, we have had a Minister for Disability Issues in cabinet in Carmel Sepuloni for some part of the last government, but the last minister wasn't from what I can see in Cabinet.

PR: Minister Radhakrishnan was around the Cabinet table as we understand it.

CD: Okay that's not how I read it but you may well be right we can double-check that. Anyway putting that to the side you are worried that the current minister won't be able to push issues. What are the issues that you're particularly worried about?

PR: There's plenty hitting our sector at the moment. We're in dire straits as far as funding is concerned. Demand is increasing for services. We've got a pay equity deal for support workers, potentially costing hundreds of millions of dollars coming. And these are major issues, major issues representing the disability sector and representing the Government's thinking going forward. This position needs to be around the Cabinet table so that we can press those issues. Ministers more broadly can understand what's driving them and the right sort of decisions can be made and made quickly.

CD: There is, I understand, what legislation currently before Parliament that's dealing with ministerial issues, dealing with issues for disabilities that would what, set up some sort of committee, is that right?

PR: You're talking about the accessibility bill, yes, but it's a pretty much a toothless tiger. That bill doesn't, all it does is basically set up a committee and it's been widely panned by the entire disability sector. We're hopeful that with the bill going back to select committee and some sense will prevail and a major rewrite will take place.

CD: So do you expect that to progress though?

PR: We're hopeful it will progress but only in the right shape. If it progresses as it is it's a bit of a waste of paper.

CD: Okay what are the other key issues I'm wondering, housing seems to be a big one in the disability space and I guess getting some standards across housing particularly state housing but all housing for those with disabilities. Is that high on your agenda?

PR: Social housing certainly is. There's a huge call for more social housing, particularly accessible housing, so housing that accommodates the needs of people with disabilities. It's not just a question of ramps or door widths. People with disabilities come from all sorts of different backgrounds and walks of life, whether it's an intellectual disability, a sensory

disability, physical disability and so on. So that whole issue needs to be more carefully looked at. At the moment there's a huge shortage and currently the Government goal for accessible housing is about 15% of new builds, which is woefully inadequate. So that needs to be looked at and it is a high priority issue for us. On top of improving that accessibility legislation, the critical workforce shortage that we've got, we've got a scarcity of support workers, poor and limiting funding in the sector. Last year, most providers in the sector had a 3% increase when inflation was sitting at about 7% and a stalled pay equity claim to ensure those support workers in our sector get paid their worth. There's a long list.

CD: Indeed. Peter Reynolds, thank you very much for that. Disability Support Network's Chief Executive, it is three minutes to nine.