

Productivity Commission Inquiry – Disability Care and Support

Submission from Latrobe City

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1.0 About Latrobe City

Latrobe City is made up of four major urban centres: Churchill, Moe/Newborough, Morwell and Traralgon, with smaller townships of Boolarra, Glengarry, Toongabbie, Tyers, Traralgon South, Yallourn North, and Yinnar. With a population of over 73,000, the beautiful and highly productive Latrobe Valley is located at the gateway to Gippsland in the South East corner of the state of Victoria only 70 minutes from the outskirts of Melbourne. Latrobe City is today one of Australia's major provincial centres. Latrobe City is home to regional headquarters for significant government and private organisations, education centres, such as Monash University Gippsland, Central Gippsland Institute of TAFE, and Apprenticeship Group Australia.

2.0 Introduction

The National Disability Strategy 2010-2020 and the Productivity Commission Inquiry and recommendations on Disability Care and Support have the potential to transform the lives of many Australians with a disability. For this to occur, a co-ordinated approach by all levels of government is required. Latrobe City is proud of its record in providing equitable access for people with a disability to its facilities and services, building inclusive communities through community development programs and providing high quality direct care services to people with a disability.

We look forward to being part of a range of reforms to ensure people with a disability have access to relevant and timely support to enable them to reach their full potential and make the life choices available to all members of the community.

3.0 Funding

The known unmet need for disability services is well documented in a number of research and consultation reports. We believe that there is a significant additional level of unknown unmet need as many people are not aware of the support services that are available. Also thousands of unpaid carers are

feeling the strain associated with a service system that is not coping with the current demand.

We strongly support the introduction of a National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) as a method of increasing funding to the disability support system in Australia. We agree with the proposal that a Medicare type levy be introduced to ensure all Australians with a disability receive aids and equipment in a timely manner and have access to the support services they need to live a fulfilled and active life.

We also strongly recommend that the extra funding raised by a levy associated with a NDIS be in addition to the current levels of funding allocated by governments and existing insurance schemes operated by the Transport Accident Commission (TAC) and worker's compensation schemes. We believe that a significant increase in funding is required to meet the significant amount of unmet need for disability support.

4.0 Who should be eligible?

We recommend that any new system of disability care and support be needs based and open to people of all ages. This would require the development of an assessment tool which took a holistic approach to identifying peoples' needs. Much work has been done in recent years to streamline the assessment process to avoid people with a disability having to undergo multiple assessments for multiple services. This work could be utilised to inform the development a suitable assessment tool and process.

There has been much discussion in the disability sector and the aged care sector about the benefits and disadvantages of operating two support systems for people with a non-aged related disability and people who acquire a disability after the age of 64 years due to ageing. It is important that any amalgamation of these two systems is given careful consideration to ensure that the quality and efficiencies of either system is not compromised. One option may be that if people enter the disability support system before the age of 65 years, they remain in that system after the age of 65 years eliminating the need to switch to a different system as they age.

5.0 Who has the power?

In Victoria in recent years there have been two initiatives which we believe have led to significant improvements in providing support services to people with a disability.

Firstly, the self-directed approach to planning, delivering and funding disability support services as outlined in 'Support Your Way: a self-directed approach to Victorians with a disability' is a model which we recommend should be expanded across Australia.

Secondly, the 'direct payments' initiative in Victoria has resulted in significant benefits for people with a disability. These benefits include the empowerment of people with a disability to take control of their support plan and directly manage their own support services to the extent that they choose. This model has the potential to reduce administration and management costs which in turn results in more hours of care for no additional funding. We also feel that the 'direct payments' model should be more widely implemented as part of any new disability support system.

6.0 Rural and regional considerations

Consideration needs to be given to the differences in the way disability support services are delivered in rural and regional areas. In some rural areas specialist disability services may not be available or people have to travel long distances to access services. A contributing factor to the availability or non-availability of services in rural areas is the additional cost for service providers in providing the service. We recommend that unit costing for the delivery of service in rural areas be increased to reflect these additional costs. This may encourage service providers to establish services in rural remote areas or develop regular outreach services to meet identified need.

Flexibility needs to be built in to the way disability support services are delivered in rural areas. For example, a meals on wheels service may not be available in a rural remote area, however a neighbour may be able to provide a comparable service. The service system should be flexible enough to ensure these types of arrangements are possible.