

Submission

Inquiry into Disability Care and Support Productivity Commission

In response to the Draft Report, released on 28 February 2011

30 April 2011

The Information Access Group supports the introduction of a National Disability Insurance Scheme. We are pleased to take this opportunity to comment on the Draft Report.

About the Information Access Group

The Information Access Group specialises in creating accessible materials. We work with a range of government departments at federal, state and local level, as well as organisations in the community and disability sectors. We create publications and websites that meet the specific needs of their audience, that might include people with disability, people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, the elderly and adults with low literacy.

Our specialty is Easy English – the presentation of information in a way that is very easy to understand. We use simple language with images that support text, larger font sizes and plenty of white space. Easy English is currently used extensively for audiences with a disability. However, it is also becoming more widely used for audiences with low literacy levels or where English is an additional language

Declaration of Interest

To date, the Information Access Group has worked with the Productivity Commission on two projects:

- A small project in 2009 where we converted the initial short questions paper into Easy English.
- The recent conversion of a summary of the *Draft Report into Disability Care and Support* into Easy English.

We were honoured to work on the Easy English version of *the Draft Report into Disability Care and Support*. Since its publication, we have received a great deal of positive feedback. Our colleagues working in disability advocacy have been grateful for an Easy English version of the document. It has allowed them to communicate the contents of the Draft Report to their members in a format that is easier to understand and explain.

Providing information

Our submission is about the role of the National Disability Insurance Scheme to provide information to people with disabilities and their families. In the Draft Report, this is explained as part of Tier 2 – which would provide information, referral and web services, targeted at all people with disability. We also believe that the provision of information will form an important part of Tier 3.

Our experience with people with disabilities and their families shows that most people find the disability service system incredibly difficult to navigate. It requires a high level of literacy and high levels of determination and resourcefulness.

For example, we have met families who did not know what kind of disability support program they were on because they did not understand the government jargon or much of the paperwork to do with their support. Instead, they were just grateful to receive the funding and were thankful that they had a case manager to take care of things for them.

To us, it matters that people know what kind of support they are receiving. If people understand their options for support, they can make better decisions. And that, in turn, creates better results for people with disabilities and their families. Freedom of choice and flexibility should underpin the provision of disability services, and clear information is an integral part of this.

The following quotation supporting this point is from *Shut Out: The Experience of People with Disabilities and their Families in Australia – the Australian Government National Disability Strategy Consultation Report, 2009*.

“For people with a sensory impairment or an intellectual disability ... access to information remains problematic. Information is rarely provided in alternative accessible formats, including plain English. And yet as many submissions argued, information is essential to meaningful participation in a range of activities, as well as essential to understanding and exercising basic rights.”

The National Disability Insurance Scheme should make information accessible

We believe that any information produced by, for and about the Scheme must be clear and easy to understand. The information must be designed with people with disability in mind, and also be tailored to the needs of families and the wider community.

In Australia today, approximately 46% of adults aged 15 to 74 have a literacy level below what is considered enough to get by in everyday life.

The 2006 Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALLS) was conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics as part of an international study on literacy levels, coordinated by Statistics Canada and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

The survey was broken into five different categories: prose, documents, numeracy, problem solving and health. The developers of the study regarded a literacy level of 3 as the "minimum required for individuals to meet the complex demands of everyday life and work in the emerging knowledge-based economy."

In each of the categories, large percentages of people fell into the lowest levels of literacy – Level 1 and Level 2:

Prose – 46% of the general population at Level 1 or 2

Document – 47% of the general population at Level 1 or 2

Numeracy – 53% of the general population at Level 1 or 2

Problem solving – 70% of the general population at Level 1 or 2

Health – 60% of the general population at Level 1 or 2

We believe that the National Disability Insurance Scheme must prioritise accessible information.

What makes information accessible?

There are two key ways of making information accessible:

1. Providing alternative formats that can be used with assistive technologies such as screen readers.
2. Making information easy to use and easy to understand.

By providing information that is easy to use and easy to understand, we make the pathways to services clearer. We help people to understand their rights and allow them to make better, more informed choices. As an additional benefit of making information easy to read, we make the translation process easier. Translating easy to read text into languages other than English ensures that complex concepts do not get lost in translation and that the entire process is smoother and more cost-effective.

The steps to creating accessible materials are not onerous, they just involve a different approach. For example, feedback in focus groups tells us that people hate acronyms. In fact, they can't stand them. A lot of the time, they don't understand them and they would much prefer to read the full title, even if this takes up more space on the page. This is a small cultural shift for organisations to consider when creating publications for the general public. And in doing so, they can take a positive step towards increased readability.

Consulting with the community

By engaging audiences in the creation of materials, we have the opportunity to overcome many barriers to accessibility. No one is a better expert at checking accessible materials – whatever their format – than the audience they are intended for. We hope that the National Disability Insurance Scheme will engage people with disabilities in the process of developing information. From the outset, the National Disability Insurance Scheme can intend to meet the communication needs of the people it serves.

Setting the benchmark

The introduction of the National Disability Insurance Scheme offers an enormous opportunity to improve the level of accessible communication in Australia today. We currently lag far behind the United Kingdom, where Easy English has been widely used since the mid 1990s. While all levels of government in Australia frequently consider accessibility on technical levels – including websites and assistive technologies such as screen readers – not enough departments and agencies produce materials in Easy English or easy read formats.

The development of this new scheme is the perfect time to set the benchmark on accessible information. This will benefit everyone involved, including people with disabilities, their families, friends and support people, staff working in the sector and those working in government. Clear, concise information is easier and faster to read.

In short, materials that are easy to read benefit everyone.

Yours sincerely,

[signed]

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