

Proposed major reform for Australia's 'disastrous' disability services

By Zoe Noakes

Australia's disability services will be "brought into the twenty-first century" by a proposed Medicare-style levy that will provide cover to people who have or acquire a permanent, severe disability.

Just Better Care supports the implementation of a no-fault National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), which would replace the current crisis-driven, welfare-based approach to disability services.

The insurance-based scheme would provide cover to Australians on an as-needed basis, and be funded by taxpayers through general revenue or an extension of the Medicare levy.

The major national reform will supply funding for respite care, aid, equipment, support, and therapy and home modifications to anyone who needs long-term care.

Executive Director of the National Disability and Carers Alliance Kirsten Deane said NDIS would be a "national safety net", ensuring peace of mind for all Australians should themselves or a family member become severely disabled.

'A national disgrace'

There is no automatic support system for Australians who are born with a permanent disability or who acquire a permanent disability through medical conditions or non workplace-related accidents.

Carers Alliance party secretary Mary Lou Cater said the lack of services available to Australians with a disability is a "national disgrace".

"It's a brutal mechanism that denies and delays care to everyone except those who are extremely unwell or in crisis," she said in an interview with Alan Jones.

"That's not the way to run a country; that is not a civil society.

"We need to bring ourselves up to date and into the twenty-first century and care for those citizens who can't care for themselves."

Equal opportunities

Ms Deane said the NDIS would ensure people with a disability "finally get the same opportunities as everyone else in the community".

"For too long Australians with a disability have been reliant on limited government support or charitable handouts," she said.

"They have not received the support they require to be full, active, contributing members of the community.

"People with a disability, their families and carers want the same things in life as everyone else – a good education, meaningful employment, somewhere to live, the opportunity to go to the footy and to go to the movies.

“The National Disability Insurance Scheme will ensure that people finally get the same opportunities as everyone else in the community.”

The benefits of a NDIS extend to the carers and families of people with a disability, with families expected to return to age-appropriate caring roles, and carers to be offered counselling, respite care, training and education.

All three main political parties have confirmed they will commit to a major reform of the disability sector if elected, and will support the introduction of a NDIS.

NDIS would be a major social and economic reform for Australia.

The Productivity Commission is undertaking a landmark enquiry to assess whether NDIS would be appropriate, practical and economically responsible in the Australian context.

To see the plan for a National Disability Insurance Scheme, visit www.ndis.org.au.