

Inquiry into the delivery of outcomes under the National Disability Strategy 2010-2020 to build inclusive and accessible communities

This submission, prepared by Canberra Legacy, follows the layout of the Terms of Reference, TOR.

- TOR (a) The planning, design, management and regulation of:*
- (i) the built and natural environment, including commercial premises, housing, public spaces and amenities,*
 - (ii) transport services and infrastructure.*

The Built and Natural Environment

1. In a broad sense our society comprises two components, the home and the wider community. For those with disability, together with the growing number of frail aged, the obese, and, to lesser extent, those with babies and small children, there are significant barriers to continuing to live in the home and access the community.
 - a. The HOME (where one lives). The home needs to be capable of meeting the physical and psychological needs of its occupants. Without extensive and expensive modifications, sometimes not practical, the initial design and construction of most existing and planned homes are not suitable for people with physical disabilities. For example, mobility equipment such as walking frames, wheelchairs, motorized scooters and hoists are getting larger - with much bigger footprints – which require larger turning circles to manoeuvre. This impacts on the negotiation of steps, the width of corridors and doorways; and the size of rooms and storage areas (such as for the storage of mobility aids and storage hoists when not in use).
 - b. In these circumstances there is usually no option but to seek less welcome and more expensive accommodation in a community group disability facility specifically designed for the purpose, when care in the home will usually be more appropriate and much cheaper.
 - c. There are also significant psychological and social costs associated with leaving a familiar home environment.
 - d. The COMMUNITY (the world of built and natural environment beyond the front door or gate). Community facilities include all buildings, roads, paths and resources outside the home - not just commercial buildings. They include government buildings at national, state and local government levels. Examples include the National War Memorial, State Art Galleries, local entertainment venues, sporting and swimming pool facilities. A review was undertaken some years ago into the accessibility of many public buildings in the ACT. The review revealed that there were severe limitations to disabled access to many institutions. This survey demonstrated that discrimination against access by people with disabilities was common in the ACT and elsewhere.
 - e. Implications for the disabled are not confined to buildings. Lack of maintenance to footpaths causes great concern to those needing to use mobility aids – sometimes leading to the need to drive on the roads at great risk to themselves

and the public. Also, the design of footpaths does not always take into account the width, pitch and curb cutaways needed to support mobility aids.

- f. One very important issue deserves special mention and consideration. It concerns access to public toilet conveniences. More are needed. Also, just as the greater footprint and turning circles of mobility aids restrict access within the home, they are even more critical for public conveniences within the community. Even when disabled toilets are provided, their design does not always take recent improvements to mobility aids into account.
2. **TRANSPORT SERVICES** Transport is the means of mobility; everything from wheelchairs and motorized scooters (some now the size of golf buggies to accommodate two persons with disability or frail aged in the one family), to cars/vans/ buses/ trains/ watercraft and aircraft. The types of mobility aids available have been the subject of much appreciated innovation. Consideration of the limitations of people with disabilities by public transport agencies has been noticeable in recent years although significant gaps still exist. We wish to acknowledge the continuing consideration of these needs by transport agencies

3. Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- (a) *An audit be conducted of homes occupied by people with physical disabilities registered under NDIS with the objective of ensuring that they can, where possible, continue to live in their own homes with cost effective modifications.*
- (b) *In consultation with disability organizations, initiate a review of existing national standards and specifications for the construction of future private and public dwellings to provide for their adaption for disabled access, if necessary.*
- (c) *In consultation with disability organizations and with the assistance of disabled people, initiate a national review of the accessibility of community facilities for those with disabilities; progressing to corrective action and a review of applicable standards and specifications at all levels of government;*
- (d) *Give priority to the availability of adequate user-friendly public toilet facilities for people with disabilities.*

TOR (b) Potential Barriers to progress and how these might be addressed

4. One of the main benefits of the NDIS strategy is that services are tailored to the immediate needs of eligible people with disability. However, in practice, this has led to a process that, in the opinion of those affected, appears to concentrate on providing good support to those who are in critical need with less emphasis on the need to provide continuing maintenance after crises have passed. By “maintenance” we mean the facilitation of peer support and networking such as attending organised activities arranged by mental health professionals. These valuable resources are no longer funded under NDIS.

It is recommended that consistent reliable “maintenance” will be more cost effective in the long run.

5. For many people with disability, getting a job is near impossible. Another simple but very important issue is that both those responsible for providing facilities and services and those in need of assistance are often unaware of the resources that are already available in the community. For example, many employers (including Government agencies) are not aware of programs such as “Job Access”. There is a need to put more effort into ensuring that the extensive resources that are available in the community are communicated to those who need to know.

It is recommended that this inquiry emphasise the need for better communication of resources such as “Job Access” that are available to those who need them and, more widely - beyond those directly involved in the direct provision of disability services.

TOR (d) Other Related Matters:

National Disability Insurance Scheme, NDIS

6. It is not the purpose of this submission to praise the merits or to criticise the shortcomings of NDIS. It is assumed that this aspect will be thoroughly addressed in other submissions.
7. However, this submission does wish to highlight one strategic issue. That is the changed method of service delivery – which encourages “for profit” agencies at the expense of smaller community based “not for profit” agencies. An unwelcome outcome has been closure or forced amalgamation of current community service providers with reduced services available in many locations.
8. The previous Bulk Funding system was augmented by very significant donated funds from the community through fund raising, sponsorships and the use of volunteers. It has been our experience that implementation of the NDIS has led to considerably less involvement by the community, both directly and indirectly, resulting in more reliance on government revenue. Also, the former Bulk Funding model provided free access to community based tailored services and resources by people with disabilities suffering less obvious symptoms without the need for formal diagnosis and acceptance. This particularly affects those with mental health, autism and related conditions. Loss of support has led to widespread discontent and anguish among those who have been adversely affected. For many, this results in a relapse of symptoms that require accessing crisis primary intervention.
9. Given the framework of the national strategy, there is no simple solution to addressing this strategic issue.

(a) It is recommended that the NDIS Costs Review by the Productivity Commission that was announced by the Treasurer on 24 January 2017 be invited to address this strategic issue. It is suggested that the Productivity Commission be invited to review the current framework of NDIS with the object of stopping the erosion of community organisations/resources and encouraging the exploitation of recognised beneficial aspects of the previous system through things like volunteering and fund - raising . The benefits will be twofold; it will take much of the pressure off the unexpected escalation of Government funding for NDIS and assist in supporting those in the community who fall outside the current eligibility criteria.

10. Summary of recommendations:

TOR (a) Planning, design and Measurement

An audit be conducted of homes occupied by people with physical disabilities registered under NDIS with the objective of ensuring that they can, where possible, continue to live in their own homes with cost effective modifications.

In consultation with disability organizations, initiate a review of existing national standards and specifications for the construction of future private and public dwellings to provide for their adaption for disabled access, if necessary.

In consultation with disability organizations and with the assistance of disabled people initiate a review of accessibility of community facilities those with disabilities progressing to corrective action and a review of applicable standards and specifications at all levels of government;

Give priority to the availability of adequate user-friendly public toilet facilities for people with disabilities.

TOR (b) Potential Barriers

It is recommended that this inquiry emphasise the need for better communication of the extensive resources that are available to those who need them and, more widely - beyond those directly involved in the direct provision of disability services.

TOR (d) Other related Matters

It is recommended that the NDIS Costs Review by the Productivity Commission that was announced by the Treasurer on 24 January 2017 be invited to include the effect on "not for profit" organisations in their forthcoming review. It is suggested that they review the current framework of NDIS with the object of stopping the erosion of community organisations/resources and encouraging the exploitation of recognised beneficial aspects of the previous system through things like volunteering and fundraising. The benefits will be twofold; it will take much of the pressure off the unexpected escalation of the need for additional Government funding for NDIS and assist in supporting those in the community who fall outside the current eligibility criteria.

11. Conclusion

The above recommendations are formidable yet achievable through phased actions. The involvement of community expertise should be encouraged to contain costs and to promote community ownership of outcomes. The vast reservoir of available talent in the disability sector alone would do much to ensure an enduring benefit for all in our society both today and in the future.

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