

Productivity Commission Submission - Disability Care and Support Inquiry

About the municipality: South Gippsland Shire Council

Situated in south east Victoria and comprising the major townships of Korumburra, Leongatha, Mirboo North and Foster, South Gippsland offers a diverse range of commercial, social, cultural and environmental qualities.

Shire Statistics

Population: 27,000

Area (sq km): 3,280

Established: 2nd December, 1994

Rate Income: \$20,600,000

Total Recurrent Expenses: \$37,700,000

Total Capital Outlay: \$7,761,000

About the Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee (AIAC)

Through the Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee, Council seeks to promote inclusion, accessibility and equity to all members of the community. The Committee assists through the provision of strategic advice to Council on disability issues and in the development and implementation of Council's Access and Inclusion Plan.

The Committee is comprised of members of the community who have disability, people who work as service providers and members of Council staff.

The AIAC met on Friday 15 April 2011 to discuss the Productivity Commission Report in relation to Disability Care and Support and the proposed National Disability and National Injury Insurance Schemes (NDIS and NIIS). The meeting was open to individuals with disability, service providers and the public to attend and have their say about the NDIS/NIIS.

There was broad support for both the NDIS and the NIIS.

We discussed the question "*what matters to us?*" The following issues are important considerations in relation to any changes to existing or new services for people with disabilities, their families and supports.

What matters to us:

- 1. What carers (support workers and family/friends who provide care and support) get paid**

In the current system, paid carers (such as disability support workers) have relatively poor working conditions, both in terms of low rates of pay and security of employment. "Unpaid" carers (such as family and friends), or those who receive the Carers' Allowance, receive even lower remuneration. This is a point of considerable concern to those consulted, in relation to both the paid and unpaid workforces. Issues of concern include: availability, retention, skill, choice of workers, and stress on families and "unpaid" carers who forgo the opportunity to work in higher paid roles in order to provide care and support to their family and friends.

2. How much agencies take in brokerage fees

It is understood that brokerage fees relate to organizational overheads (related to staff training, remuneration and support), however the rates (percentage and amount) of brokerage are perceived to be excessively high. People raised specific cases in which brokerage/administrative fees were applied at rates between 15-30%.

It is felt that for the NDIS to work, that brokerage rates need to be prescribed, uniform and more realistic/fair, say 5%. If this is not the case, high proportions/amounts of funding will be "eaten up" in administration/brokerage fees.

3. That disability employment services can provide suitable and local support to people with disabilities

The issue of "generalized" and "specialist" disability services was discussed. It was perceived that there is a valid role for specialist disability services, such as those designed for people with psycho-social disability, or Autism Spectrum Disorder. However, in rural/regional areas disability employment services need to be able to provide assistance to the broader community of people with disability. This is important in terms of access to services: specialization would mean that some people may not have access to a local DES.

4. \$500 excess to access the NDIS annually

This was felt to be a case of "robbing Peter to pay Paul" and a bureaucratic intervention that did not need to exist. If people need the NDIS, it should be available to them in the same way that the Medicare system is available.

5. More money in the system means more choice about providers and services

There was optimism that a greater level of funding (\$ in the system) would mean that there would be more providers, and as such more work for people in this field. It was hoped that, in turn, this would mean greater workforce security and improved conditions. Further, this should mean more options for people with disability who are purchasing the supports, either directly or through a brokerage agency.

6. That the NDIS does not add an extra layer of bureaucracy

There was concern that the NDIS could be additional burden, in terms of assessment, administration, cost and stress, for people with disability and their families. Although it is recognized that this is not the intention, it is very important that any changes to the system act to benefit rather than stress those it is designed to support.

7. That the NDIS be implemented in a similar way to Medicare, ie as a fundamental shift in the system, and as a result becomes a normal aspect of society/community

This point related to that made above in 4. (about unhindered access to the system). Also, the NDIS needs be represented (and thought of) as a universal "safety net" system that underpins the "normal" social/medical infrastructure. The analogy is made again with Medicare: this system is now an accepted and fundamental part of the Australian social/medical infrastructure.

Funding - Consideration needs to be given to the following:

- Economies of scale (human and financial) that will be achieved
- Reduced spending in the "broken" end of the spectrum (acute health, legal), more in the "preventative" end
- Reduced administrative cost (burden) through a more centralized approach

There is concern that the NDIS will be perceived as costly, unnecessary and as being of benefit to only a few. It is vital in all publicity and promotion of the NDIS that the above points are made in discussion of the cost of the scheme, and how to pay for it.

The final point that was raised was that Gippsland would be a great region to hold the NDIS trial.

Please note that this submission represents the views of some members of the South Gippsland community – it is not the endorsed view of South Gippsland Shire Council.