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2 May 2011

Disability Care and Support Inquiry  
Productivity Commission  
GPO Box 1428  
Canberra City  
ACT 2601

### **Re: Disability Care and Support Inquiry**

Warringah Council would like to express its support for the Productivity Commission draft report into Disability Care and Support, including the proposed National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and the National Injury Insurance Scheme (NIIS). However, Council opposes the proposal to partially fund the NIIS through an increase in municipal rates.

Warringah Council encompasses 152 square kilometres on Sydney's northern beaches and has a population of 144,000 residents. Within our community and neighbouring communities there are many people living with a disability. Warringah is also home to many disability service providers who provide respite, accommodation, recreation, employment, education and transport services. For example, Sunnyfield Independence, Cerebral Palsy Alliance (formally the Spastic Centre), House With No Steps and Autism Spectrum.

The issues faced by people with a disability and their carers in Warringah are the same as any other person with a disability living in Australia - the struggle to deal with a disability support system that is 'underfunded, unfair, fragmented, and inefficient... with little choice and no certainty', as described in the Draft report. Council supports the need to more adequately fund and manage the resources required for people living with a disability to properly exercise their rights. Council also supports the Commission's recognition that social attitudes, practices and stereotypes place significant barriers to people with a disability and that beyond the main function of the NDIS which is to fund long-term high quality care and support - breaking down those barriers would be a key role.

In Warringah there is a critical need for low cost, high quality, accessible respite care for families locally, and on a needs basis. There may be a role for local government in the future to oversee the roll out of the necessary infrastructure at the local and sub regional level similar to Family Day Care, without the need for huge infrastructure (soft and hard) costs, as it can be done on a cost neutral basis. The state and federal governments need to work with local government to design effective programs and strategies.

The proposed NDIS and NIIS will further support Warringah Council's aspiration to achieve a reputation as an accessible Local Government Area where people living with a disability are treated as equals and do not experience discrimination for any reason.

Council supports the position that resources to the disability field in Australia should be increased, with the proposal being for around \$12.5 billion per year, which is an increase of about \$6.3 billion per year or \$280 per Australian.

Council supports the following services to be provided by the NDIS:

- Aids & appliances and home and vehicle modifications
- Personal care
- Community access and supports
- Respite
- Specialist accommodation support
- Domestic assistance
- Specialist employment services
- Therapies assistance
- Case management, local coordination and development
- Crisis/emergency support
- Guide dogs and assistance dogs

In particular, Council endorses the move towards more self-directed funding whereby the client and their family are able to choose their own provider/s and manage their own funds if they wish, within rules. Investing money into early intervention in the areas of education and employment, as the NDIS proposes, has also been found to save money in the long term.

Furthermore, with the NDIS being focused on the improved care and support of people with a severe or profound disability, the pressure in other areas will hopefully be alleviated and have a flow on effect in the provision of high quality services for people with low to moderate disabilities.

Council notes that the Commission has listed in its 'Information Requests' feedback on where the boundaries between the mental health sector and the NDIS might lie. While the Commission is currently in the process of seeking information about this issue – it is of particular concern that people with a mental health condition may fall through the gaps between an NDIS system and a currently long standing failing mental health system. People with a mental health condition should not be left to struggle for support from a failing mental health sector but if the NDIS and mental health sector were to share responsibility there is concern in particular as to whether it is actually possible to ever properly guard against cost shifting.

To ensure that people with a disability achieve certainty about getting reasonable support over their lifetime the governments need a sustainable source of revenue. Council therefore supports the use of personal income tax as the preferred option to cover these costs, potentially through the introduction of a Medicare like levy or an addition to the Medicare levy. This is the method which involves the least administration and therefore ensures that the maximum amount of funds make it to the client.

With respect to the NIIS specifically, Council supports the development of the scheme to provide for the life long care and support of people who suffer injury as a result of

catastrophic injury. However, at this stage Council opposes an increase in municipal rates as a source of revenue. It is not possible at this stage, with the information available, for Council to determine if the potential decrease in insurance premiums would be sufficient to offset the increase in rates. Revenue raising through a rate increase would place the burden unfairly on people who own rateable properties. For example, this would put increased strain on people who may already be struggling to meet mortgage repayments as well as retirees living on tight budgets. It also places a further administrative burden on local government.

Council requests that local government be consulted prior to enacting an increase in rates to fund the NIIS. Council would also like to see further consideration given to the option of using personal income tax, possibly through a Medicare like levy, to fund the NIIS in addition to the NDIS.

Overall, Council believes that both the NDIS and NIIS are a dramatic and necessary step in the right direction to ensure the long term care and support of Australia's residents suffering from a severe and profound disability, ranging from disability resulting from catastrophic accident to disability since birth. These two schemes will help support the rights and entitlements of people with disabilities through a much needed increase in funding and the empowering option for people with a disability to self-direct the funding for the services they require.

Yours sincerely

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Michael Regan  
**Mayor of Warringah**

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