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CITY OF MELBOURNE

Ms Patricia Scott
Commissioner
Inquiry into Disability Care and Support
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Dear Ms Scott

INQUIRY INTO DISABILITY CARE AND SUPPORT

On behalf of the City of Melbourne Disability Advisory Committee I thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback in relation to *The Way Forward – A New Disability Policy Framework for Australia*.

The City of Melbourne Disability Advisory Committee is committed to advocating the rights of people with a disability to equity of access in all facets of life as prescribed in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Person with Disabilities. Ensuring people with a disability have access to support and services that help maximise their life opportunities is a basic human right.

We commend the progression of the development of the National Disability Insurance Scheme proposal as it is our firm belief that a transformation of the disability service system is required to meet the current and future demands of people with a disability in Australia.

We therefore are pleased to provide the following submission for your consideration in the further development of a National Disability Insurance Scheme. It is a firm belief of the membership that these recommendations further enhance the proposed scheme and will significantly improve the life opportunities of people with a disability.

If you have any queries in relation to this submission please do not hesitate to contact Vickie Feretopoulos Senior Social Planner Access and Inclusion on 9658 8679.

Yours sincerely

Cr Jennifer Kanis
Chair City of Melbourne Disability Advisory Committee

#6434441

Overview: The City of Melbourne Disability Advisory Committee supports the development of a National Disability Insurance Scheme

Melbourne City Council works with the internal and external community to enhance access and inclusion for people with a disability in all aspects of life.

This is achieved through implementation of *Our Melbourne – Disability Action Plan 2010-2013* that aims to lead the removal of barriers in the physical, attitudinal, and informational environments to ensure all members of the community can participate in all aspects of life with dignity and independence.

The City of Melbourne sought input and feedback from its Disability Advisory Committee in writing the following recommendations. This Committee comprises twelve community representatives with personal and/or professional expertise in disability access (directly or indirectly) and who represent the diversity of people within our society (disability types, age, sex, culture, language, sexual orientation).

The City of Melbourne Disability Advisory Committee wishes to applaud the proposal of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) as this proposal will provide more independence and dignity to people with a disability and their carers. A scheme that empowers individuals and offers choice in accessing services and supports will assist people to participate more fully as equal members of our communities.

The below points summarise the views of the membership in further development of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

- **Prevalence of disability**

There is concern that the data on the prevalence of disability in Australia is extremely dated as statistics cited in the document make reference to the *Survey of Disability and Carers 2003*. This report estimates that one in five Australians (3,951,000 or 20%) had a disability. To ensure adequate service planning it is highly recommended that a thorough and ongoing collection on the prevalence of disability be conducted on a regular periodic basis.

- **Definition of 'severe and profound' disability**

The definition of 'severe or profound' disability needs to be clearly stipulated within the proposal as this base criteria will determine eligibility to the scheme.

- **Eligibility for levels of disability**

The eligibility for levels of disability requires further clarification as supports and services will also be dependent upon this. It is also recommended that eligibility criteria be aligned with a continuum of supports and services available for individuals with reference to life planning options.

- **Funding of Auslan interpreters**

Anecdotal data indicates a lack of and increasing demand for Auslan interpreters to meet current needs of people who are hearing impaired or deaf. This need will only increase in the future and it is therefore of paramount importance that appropriate levels of funding are allocated to increase training of and the availability of Auslan interpreters.

- **Cultural significance of support for Indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse communities**

The scheme needs to acknowledge and respond to the specific needs of Indigenous Australians and those of cultural and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. Ensuring service providers understand and are able to respectfully respond to the specific needs of Indigenous and CALD individuals and families is of the utmost importance.

Language and cultural diversity may compound difficulty in understanding the complexity of the disability service system creating additional barriers to adequate assessment and support planning. Information in community languages and in formats easily understood by various cohorts must be included in the redevelopment process.

- **Age eligibility cut off at 65**

The report states that "people with a severe or profound disability acquired before 65 years of age would be eligible for life" (pg6). This creates inequality in access to the scheme by persons aged over 65 years.

Many people with existing 'mild' disabilities may develop further complications or progressive ailments as a result of the ageing process. A key example includes vision impairments that may lead to blindness in older age. With reference to the current proposal these people will be ineligible for services under the proposed NDIS scheme.

Availability to the NDIS must be made available to persons aged over 65 years of age.

Recommendations for consideration

In addition, the following recommendations are submitted for consideration by the Productivity Commission.

- All service and supports should be consistent with UN protocols for Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2008) and reflect the aims of the National Disability Strategy.
- The NDIS should:
 - Set a minimum level of care for people with significant ongoing support needs.
 - Outline measures or periodic timeframes for reassessment of levels of service support for people to ensure response to changing life needs.

- Provide and support an individualised person centred life long planning model that is developed by the person with a disability. The planning process should also include families, carers, significant others and disability service organisations/service providers at the direction of the person with a disability or their guardian.
- Provide support for appropriate models and options for self managed care. People who would like the option to self manage their care arrangement should have access to appropriate services, support and assistance.
- Provide assistance in tasks of daily living as deemed necessary by each person with a disability to maintain their independence and ensure their community participation.
- Support the portability of funding as required by the person with a disability to maximise life choice, planning opportunities and support requirements.
- Provide scope for a variety of service providers to meet the current and changing needs of clients over time. The scheme must support decisions made by individuals with respect to their individual circumstances and life choices.

References

- Commonwealth of Australia, (2009) *The Way Forward, A new Disability Policy Framework for Australia- Report of the Disability Investment Group.*
- United Nations, (2008) *The United Nations Convention on The Rights of Persons with Disabilities –Optional Protocol*, accessed 04/04/2011 at <http://www.un.org/disabilities>