

National Disability and Carer Alliance

www.disabilitycareralliance.org.au

ALL PARTIES COMMIT TO NATIONAL DISABILITY INSURANCE SCHEME

All three major parties have confirmed they will commit to major reform of the disability sector in their next term if elected, including supporting the introduction of a National Disability Insurance Scheme.

The National Disability and Carer Alliance circulated the following statement to the Coalition, the Australian Greens, and the Australian Labor Party. All three declared their support for the statement – a summary of each party's position is attached.

The current disability support system is unsustainable and indefensible. It is chronically under-funded, inefficient, inequitable and, most seriously, fails to meet the needs of Australians with a disability, their families and carers. Unless there is fundamental change, the gap between the need for disability services and their availability will grow.

We therefore call on all parties to commit to major reform of the disability services system immediately following the final report from the Productivity Commission's Inquiry into a Disability Care and Support Scheme, due in July 2011.

The reforms, most importantly the introduction of a National Disability Insurance Scheme, should create a system that is equitable, efficient, sustainable and based on self determination. The person with a disability, their family or carer should be placed at the centre – exercising choice, control and receiving the services and supports they require for as long as they require them.

Executive Director of the National Disability and Carer Alliance, Kirsten Deane, said the Alliance was pleased that support for the National Disability Insurance Scheme had now become bi-partisan and welcomed the attention given to the needs of people with a disability, their families and carers during this federal election.

"For too long Australians with a disability have been reliant on limited government support or charitable handouts. They have not received the support they require to be full, active contributing members of the community," said Ms Deane.

“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 National Disability Insurance Scheme represents a once in a lifetime opportunity to change the lives of people with a disability and their families in this country and we are delighted that all parties have finally recognised the need for its introduction.”

The National Disability Insurance Scheme has been endorsed by other parties including the Carers Alliance, Family First and the DLP.

The National Disability and Carer Alliance was formed last year by National Disability Services, Carers Australia and the National Federation of Disability Organisations to pursue the structural and systemic changes necessary to improve the lives of people with a disability, their families and carers in this country. The Alliance is united in their strong support for a National Disability Insurance Scheme.

For further information about the Alliance or the National Disability Insurance Scheme, please call Kirsten Deane, Executive Director, National Disability and Carer Alliance on 0409 565 925.

AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY

The Australian Labor Party provided the following response to the National Disability and Carer Alliance:

The ALP supports the policy statement, given it is consistent with the Gillard Labor Government's commitment to major reform in disability services. The status quo simply isn't good enough, and that is why our government has asked the Productivity Commission to undertake its landmark inquiry into the feasibility of a national care and support scheme for people with disability.

As the Prime Minister said in her speech on 29 July 2010, Federal Labor acknowledges that we must re-think how we can better support people with disability and their carers. We need greater incentives for early intervention, and better drivers of participation in work and the community. We need to consider the whole of a person's life and adapt to their unique needs, no matter how they acquired their disability. People with disability and their family or carer should have choice, flexibility and control over the services and supports they require. We know this is what people with disability want, and it is in the nation's long-term interest.

The ALP notes that the idea for a National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) emerged from the 2020 summit that was convened by the Federal Labor Government in 2008.

The idea was further explored by the Disability Investment Group (DIG), commissioned by the Federal Labor Government to consider new approaches to disability. The central recommendation of DIG was that the Australian Government, in consultation with States and Territories, immediately commission a comprehensive feasibility study into a NDIS.

A national disability insurance scheme would be a complex and transformative reform that requires detailed consideration.

The Productivity Commission inquiry will assess whether a national disability insurance scheme would be appropriate, practical and economically responsible in the Australian context.

The Coalition has little credibility on disability issues. The former Coalition Government ignored people with disability and their carers for 12 long years and stood by while demand grew for disability services and disability pensioners struggled with the cost of living.

After 12 long years of neglect, the Gillard Labor Government has put support for people with disability back on the national agenda.

THE AUSTRALIAN GREENS

The Australian Greens endorsed the statement provided by the National Disability and Carer Alliance. The Greens also released a statement on July 12 on disability which is partly reproduced here:

The Greens fully support the principle behind the National Disability Insurance Scheme. We agree that the current model for providing services to people with a disability is complex and inadequate – driven by crisis rather than proper forward planning – and does not deliver the personalised, flexible services that people with disabilities and their families need to participate in everyday life.

We understand the urgent need for transformative sweeping change and the proposal for a National Disability Insurance Scheme provides an excellent framework to consider how best to achieve such change.

It is a basic human right and also the basis of sound economic and social policy that a person with a disability – no matter how the disability was acquired – should have appropriate and adequate support services that are equitable, efficient and fair. Funding such services is a challenge and we are attracted to the concept of a compulsory insurance levy which guarantees lifetime assistance for all Australians affected by severe disability and which recognises the broader community benefit of supporting people with disabilities to reach their full potential.

We recognise that the National Disability Insurance Scheme is an important initiative that has the potential to greatly assist people with disabilities, their families and carers to return from the margins of society to actively participate in our world. We support the Productivity Commission inquiry into the proposal and look forward to its report and working with the government of the day to address its findings and recommendations.

The Greens will be there after the election keeping the pressure on the government, whichever party it is, to take the necessary action.

THE LIBERAL/NATIONAL COALITION

The Liberal/National coalition endorsed the statement provided by the National Disability and Carer Alliance. The following comments were made by leader Tony Abbott during a press conference on July 29 in response to a question about the ALP's election commitment to further funding for early intervention.

“Obviously I think that it's very important that we do more for people with disabilities ... I accept that people with disabilities need a better deal and I'm determined that under a Coalition government they will get a better deal. I guess what I would want to restate here is the Coalition's absolute commitment to seriously considering any recommendation from the Productivity Commission in respect of a National Disability Insurance Scheme. I think that the worst thing we could do would be to

raise the hopes of people with disabilities and carers for people with disabilities in this way and not generously respond to any recommendation from the Productivity Commission”.

CARERS ALLIANCE

The Carers Alliance provided the following statement.

A no-fault insurance scheme is for the benefit of all Australians. Such a scheme is crucial for everyone who has, or acquires a significant disability. If elected Carers Alliance will dedicate themselves to ensuring that an NDIS is not sidelined and forgotten. When the Productivity Commission Inquiry findings are handed down the Carers Alliance will put before parliament a Private Member's bill to set up the Scheme. We will also be seeking through a Private Member's Bill mandated rights for service for all people with significant disability and for all children with additional needs.

Australia's fragmented, chaotic disability system does not identify or deliver the targeted supports which people with disabilities need to participate in our country's ordinary social and economic life, like every other Australian can choose to do.

Most of the obstacles to participating in ordinary life are not people's disabilities, but the barriers they continually come up against due to inadequate or irrelevant support systems or structures. Much taxpayer funded disability support funding simply does not reach the people for whom it is intended - people with disabilities and their carer-families – due to the bureaucratic nature of the system and the illogical focus on meeting the needs of the system, not the needs of real people.

The nine systems (in each state and territory and federal) are uncoordinated, under-funded and inefficient. As the number of unpaid primary family carers continues to decrease due to ageing and need to earn income, and the number of people with disabilities increases due to natural ageing of the population, Carers Alliance believes the system has passed crisis stage and is heading for a complete meltdown. If we don't act now it will cost taxpayers far more in 10 years.

It is therefore critical that the next federal government commits from day one to the major reform of the disability system which the entire sector knows is needed and prepares to implement key findings of the Productivity Commission's Inquiry into a Disability Care and Support Scheme, when the final report is released in July 2011. The reform to Australia's dysfunctional disability system should create a system that is equitable, efficient, sustainable and based on self-determination. Access to necessary therapy, equipment, education and services must not continue to be linked to where or on how a person is injured, but simply to their entitlement to targeted support based on individual need. The person with a disability, their carer family or nominated representative carer must be placed at the centre of this reformed system – exercising choice and control about the types of services they need, when they need them. This reformed system must be planned, funded and based on a legal entitlement to services and support. The nation will benefit economically as a reformed system will enable hundreds of thousands of Australians with disabilities and their carer families to become able to improve their physical and mental health

and ability, learn, work, volunteer and be part of the diverse fabric of Australian life, not condemned as they are now to an emotionally and financially impoverished existence on the margins of our First World society.