

People With Disabilities (WA) Inc.
individual & systemic advocacy



Submission

Inquiry into the National Disability Insurance Scheme Savings Fund Special Account Bill 2016

People with disabilities WA thanks the Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee for providing us with the opportunity to submit our views on the National Disability Insurance Scheme Savings Fund Special Account Bill.

Developmental Disability WA, our sister organisation who represent people with developmental disability and their families, support our submission.

People With Disabilities WA (PWdWA)

Since 1981 PWdWA has been the peak disability consumer organisation representing the rights, needs, and equity of all Western Australians with a physical, intellectual, neurological, psychosocial, or sensory disability via individual and systemic advocacy. We provide access to information and independent individual and systemic advocacy with a focus on those who are most vulnerable.

PWdWA is run by and for people with disabilities and aims to empower the voices of all people with disabilities in Western Australia.

President: Greg Madson

Executive Director: Samantha Jenkinson

People With Disabilities (WA) Inc.

Oasis Lotteries House, 1/37 Hampden Rd, Nedlands, WA 6009

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Country Callers: 1800 193 331

Website: www.pwdwa.org



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PWdWA was surprised, as were many other disability groups to hear that legislation was being formed to set up the National Disability Insurance Scheme Savings Fund Special Account Bill. This raised a number of questions for us:

1. Is there something missing from the DisabilityCare Australia Fund Act 2013 that means we need more legislation? Why couldn't that Act be amended if required?
2. Who has oversight and makes the decisions of this new fund?
3. Where is the money coming from that goes into this new fund?

Our biggest concern with this legislation is that it is focused on finding savings within the Social Services portfolio to put aside money for the NDIS. The explanatory memorandum clearly states in its first dot point that credits to the account will come from portfolio savings identified by the Minister for Social Services. It also clearly states that the sole responsibility for the policy and management of the account will be in the hands of the Minister for Social Services.

We believe that setting up an account which essentially takes money from tightening and cutting budgets from other programs which support the most disadvantaged in society is extremely unethical and will only lead to further costs down the line. We are already seeing the impacts of changes to the DSP with people being reassessed and forced onto lesser payments with the same costs to living. Those costs of living are also increasing, as seen by changes to how income is assessed for social housing rent. Payments such as the Mobility Allowance and the Pharmaceutical Allowance are now included, which is leading to increased rental costs. These costs coupled with an inadequate diet, individuals not being able to afford adequate heating or cooling and forgoing medical appointments can come at a greater cost to the system overall both immediately but will impact much greater in the longer term.

If this fund was genuinely set up to put money aside for the NDIS in the case of shortfalls then it should be taking money from those portfolio areas likely to have a surplus or that generate money. It would also have other layers of accountability and not be solely under the control of one Minister. Again, we would ask why the DisabilityCare Australia Fund was not amended to enable credits from other sources.

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This special savings account seems to be trying to make the Social Services portfolio stay within some budgeted range without affecting other areas like increasing corporate taxation. This shows a callous disregard for the social safety net we have in Australia and a lack of understanding of the point of taxation to support our social safety net.

Conclusion

People with disabilities WA are not in favour of this bill nor do we as an organisation see the benefits of such a bill. Nor do we support the Social Services portfolio being seen as the main sources of both funding and savings. We do however believe that if this bill was to proceed, further accountability and or transparency is required such as the oversight by the Joint Parliamentary Standing committee of the NDIS, and perhaps some form of parliamentary agreement on where credits to the fund come from. We believe that the DisabilityCare Australian fund should be used for all NDIS funding and any fund set up for holding money allocated for the NDIS should not allow said funds to be used for anything other than NDIS relevant items.

Recommendations

- PWdWA does not see the necessity for the bill and therefore recommends that this bill is not enacted..
- PWdWA recommends that should this bill proceed further accountability is required such as oversight by the Joint Parliamentary Standing committee of the NDIS, and some form of parliamentary agreement on where credits to the fund are obtained..
- PWdWA recommends the Social Services portfolio is NOT seen as the main source of funding and 'savings'.
- PWdWA recommends that the DisabilityCare Australia fund should be used for all NDIS funds.
- PWdWA supports the recommendation that any fund set up for holding money for the NDIS should not allow funds to be used for anything other than the NDIS.