

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



Submission

Inquiry into the Social Services Legislation Amendment (Transition Mobility Allowance to the National Disability Insurance Scheme) Bill 2016

Submission from People with Disabilities WA.

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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.

Recommendations

Recommendation one

Review and investigate how transport costs are covered within NDIS packages to ensure that they are applied consistently and in a way which is meeting the needs of people with disabilities before any changes to Mobility Allowance.

Recommendation two

Allow new people to access the Mobility Allowance while the NDIS scheme is not fully rolled out and has not addressed the problems currently being experienced with the covering of transport costs.

Recommendation three

Provide a healthcare card which can assist with the cost of medical and medication expenses such as doctor's appointments for those people who are not on the Disability Support Pension but have significant disabilities.

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Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback to the senate inquiry into the proposed changes to Mobility Allowance eligibility. We understand that this change is a direct result of the implementation of the NDIS. However we do have some concerns which we would like to raise due to potential inadequacy of transport costs being covered through the NDIS, and unintended consequences of what loss of the payment may mean too many people who rely on wheelchair accessible taxis.

Transport is an extremely important issue for people with disabilities in being able to actively participate in their communities. When we have done research on accessing the community, difficulties in accessing and paying for transport is consistently raised as an issue that needs to be addressed.

Issues

Firstly, we would like to point out that covering the cost of transport is still a major issue in NDIS plans. We have seen numerous complaints about how much transport a person can get covered in their plan and how service providers pay or do not pay for transport that they may provide for accessing the community. Although we are strong advocates in ensuring that public transport is fully accessible to all people with disabilities we acknowledge that there are a small number of people with very high support needs, that may have large electric wheelchairs, and/or challenging behaviours, that find public transport extremely difficult to use. Within this there are also a group of people who have difficulties when using taxis. On top of this there is still the issue that the public transport system is not fully accessible for people with disabilities and there are ongoing cases of discrimination by taxi drivers, plus an inadequate supply of multipurpose taxis.

What this means is that we are still not actually confident that all transport costs will be covered through peoples NDIS packages. There are a small group of people who the Mobility Allowance does make a difference to in dealing with the added cost of taxis and transport. A person who is reliant on wheelchair accessible taxis may get some subsidy from the state based Taxi User Subsidy Schemes, however if they are needing to use a taxi every day to return to and from work or education they are still likely to need to pay out at least \$100 a week. Currently this cost is covered by the mobility allowance.

There is also the issue of transport costs in regional areas where we are hearing that only the first 15 km is able to be part of a service providers transport costs and it is unclear how the rest of the cost gets put into someone's NDIS package. Knowing your transport costs in advance is also not that easy and we have heard of people underestimating those costs for their NDIS plan.

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The Mobility Allowance also provides a subsidy for those people who rely on private car transportation to get around due to their inability to use taxis and public transport. It is important to note that it is usually not small low-cost cars which are required when wheelchairs, aids and equipment, or safety devices are required.

An unintended consequence of stopping the Mobility Allowance will also be the inability to receive the Healthcare Card allowing for subsidised medication as well as other cost reductions. For people who work and are ineligible for a Healthcare Card but are not necessarily in high-paying jobs, the cost of living with disability is much higher. Many people have circumstances such as doctor's appointments averaging three times more than those without a disability and high ongoing medication costs, that are currently subsidised by having a Healthcare Card through the Mobility Allowance. If the Mobility Allowance were to cease this would need to be addressed in another way.

Conclusion

As it currently sits the mobility allowance does not always actually pay for the real cost of transport for many people with a disability who are reliant on taxi services.

The way that transport costs are provided to people through the NDIS is still inconsistent and needs much further work to adequately meet the needs of participants both now and into the future in a way which is flexible and actually covers the real costs. Whilst the NDIS is still being rolled out and people with disability are still not being adequately covered for their transport costs in NDIS packages the mobility allowance should remain in place.

We urge the government to look carefully at the issue of transport in the NDIS and the issues related to subsidies for health costs that are currently provided by the Healthcare Card which for people who are working are not available by any other means.