



Action for More Independence & Dignity in Accommodation

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Advocacy, Self Advocacy, Rights, Accessibility, & Community Living for People with a Disability

17.3.15

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Committee Secretary and Members,

Re: Impact on service quality, efficiency and sustainability of recent Commonwealth community service tendering processes by the Department of Social Services.

AMIDA is an independent advocacy organisation which advocates for good quality housing for people with disabilities which is accessible, affordable and non-institutional. We provide advocacy to individuals and advocate for change in systems which prevent people from achieving good housing. AMIDA strongly supports the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with a Disability and works to assert these rights and community inclusion for people with a disability. We prioritise people with an intellectual disability.

Our comments here primarily relate to the Inquiry terms of reference:

- a) the extent of consultation with service providers concerning the size, scope and nature of services tendered, determination of outcomes and other elements of contract design**
- c) evidence base and analysis underlying program design**
- i) the potential and likely impacts on service users concerning service delivery, continuity, quality and reliability,**
- l) impact on advocacy services across the sector**

We are funded under the National Disability Advocacy Program (NDAP) and rely for resourcing and sector networking and collaboration from the Disability Advocacy Network Australia (DANA). Our comments primarily relate to the impact on the Disability Advocacy sector over the next year in particular as a result of the defunding of DANA. The coming 18 months will see the NDAP reformed and possibly the tendering out of this funding, if the sector survive?

We were dismayed to discover in 2014 that DANA had to tender for funding and compete with other peaks for a smaller pool of funding where only a defined number of tenderers would be successful. **No consultation preceded these announcements and no analysis was presented to justify the exclusion of funding for resourcing independent advocacy at a National level. Service provider peak funding cannot resource advocacy because of the conflict of interest this poses.** The result for DANA was as follows.

(From the DANA new year update 14.1.15)

"On 22 December, DANA was informed that we have not been successful in securing funding as a representative organisation under the new DSS Grants arrangements.

Background

We had previously been funded as a Disability Peak from the "National Secretariat Funding". Last year new funding guidelines were released for the "Disability, Mental Health Carers Programme", along with broader restructuring across the Department of Social Services. In the open competitive selection process, DANA made an application to receive funding as a "Disability Representative Organisation" for the "Disability and Carer Service Improvement and Sector Support Activity". The selection process called for **up to seven** national organisations to represent people with disability and service providers to the Federal Government.

The summary indicated certain target groups were to be represented:

- women with disability
- children and young people with disability,
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability
- people with disability from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds
- service providers that provide support to people with with disability (Answers from the Department clarified "A target group for service provider representation is included... because of the importance of ensuring capacity building activity continues")

Accordingly, the following organisations, all experts in their respective fields, have secured funding:

- Women with Disability Australia (WWDA)
- Children with Disability Australia (CDA)
- First Peoples Disability Network (FPDN)
- National Ethnic Disability Alliance (NEDA)
- National Disability Services (NDS)

Beyond this, and so that people with disability across all demographics, "are able to elect to join one or more of the organisations/consortia", the Department indicated that **"up to two** cross-disability peaks could be supported depending on the way the sector chooses to organise itself".

One cross-disability organisation has been successful in securing funding:

- People with Disability Australia (PWDA)

DANA congratulates all the worthy recipients - these organisations have demonstrated their considerable skill and experience in stakeholder engagement, advocating strongly and knowledgeably for people with disability.

We are deeply concerned that DANA's reduced capacity following these cuts will stifle the perspectives of advocacy organisations, and the voices of the clients with disability they advocate for, being heard at a national level.

We are also concerned that much of the specific disability and advocacy expertise that has been built up over time by other peaks (for instance Inclusion Australia-National Council on Intellectual Disability, Deaf Australia etc) will now be lost”.

Those Peaks that were defunded have important work ahead of them during the transition to the NDIS. Their expertise and disability specialization will not be replaceable by those peaks that were funded. The nature of the tendering process that guaranteed some services funding because of the sectors they represent has not guaranteed full and expert representation for people of all disability types and has seriously impeded the sectors capacity for collaboration. **This will impact on advocacy services across the sector.**

For Disability Advocacy Organisations the timing of the defunding of DANA could not have been worse. We have been waiting for some time the consultation and government to government renegotiations around the National Disability Advocacy Framework including the role and funding of advocacy under the NDIS. Finally this has just been announced along with a 12 month extension of NDAP funding while planning takes place and to engage in the consultation and reform of advocacy for people with a disability. See below extracts from the press release and departmental email.

SENATOR THE HON MITCH FIFIELD
ASSISTANT MINISTER FOR SOCIAL SERVICES
MANAGER OF GOVERNMENT BUSINESS IN THE SENATE
SENATOR FOR VICTORIA

MEDIA RELEASE

13 March 2015

Funding extensions for disability and carer programmes

Minister Fifield also announced funding assurance to current providers of the National Disability Advocacy Program (NDAP), with a 12-month extension to all agreements.

More than 11,500 people received support through the NDAP in 2013-14.

Existing three-year agreements with providers were due to expire on 30 June 2015, but have now been extended until 30 June 2016.

“The extension allows advocacy groups to continue supporting people with disability while planning takes place for the future of the NDAP,” he said.

Email to NDAP services from DSS 13th March 2015

“Dear NDAP agencies,

I am very pleased to advise you that the Assistant Minister for Social Services, the Hon Mitch Fifield is about to announce a 12 month extension to the grant agreements for the current National Disability Advocacy Program (NDAP) agencies, to 30 June 2016. The extension will be under the same terms and conditions as the existing grant agreement you have in place with the Department.

This time will be used to enable the Department to work closely with stakeholders and with state and territory governments on the reform for NDAP, and have broader discussions about advocacy in the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). There will be opportunities provided over coming months to talk with you further about the reform of NDAP, to ensure it meets the needs of people with disability, is available where it is required, and to ensure clarity of understanding about the interaction with the NDIS.”

While advocacy services are pleased to be given an extension of funding and opportunities to “talk about reform of the NDAP, to ensure it meets the needs of people with a disability, is available where it is required and to ensure clarity of understanding about the interaction with the NDIS”, we will be constrained by the demands of actually providing this advocacy service. DANA was able to assist us to collaborate, respond to consultations and engage in reform as a sector, rather than each of us duplicating this effort all around Australia. The defunding of DANA at this time will therefore mean advocacy services will have to take time away from service delivery. **There is therefore a huge potential for impact on service delivery, continuity, quality and reliability.**

The reform of the NDAP and transition to the NDIS, will be compromised and will not be as effective as it could be because of the defunding of DANA. It makes no sense at all to review and reform advocacy services across Australia and to defund the Disability Advocacy Network of Australia at the beginning of this review. The tendering process therefore **will impact of advocacy services across the sector. As a matter of common sense DANA ‘s funding should be extended also until 30th June 2016 so that can assist the sector to collaborate and participate in the reform so that the advocacy needs of people with a disability can be properly planned for. We urge the Senate Community Affairs Committee to recommend this.**

Much more could be said about the impact on service quality, efficiency and sustainability of recent Commonwealth community service tendering processes by the Department of Social Services but we will have to hope that others have the time to address this. Advocacy services deal with people in crisis and time to comment on inquiries is scarce. We felt we had to respond due to the impact of defunding the Disability Advocacy Network Australia and the fall out this will have on the people with a disability we support, the review and reform of National Disability Advocacy Program services and perhaps the next tender process of advocacy funding that will probably follow this “review and reform”.

Yours sincerely,

Pauline Williams

Housing Rights Coordinator

AMIDA