



Australian Government
Department of Social Services

MC17-012893

Ms Amanda Bresnan
Executive Director
Community Mental Health Australia
[REDACTED]

Dear Ms Bresnan

Thank you for your email of 28 November 2017, to the former Minister for Social Services, the Hon Christian Porter MP, regarding Community Mental Health Australia's (CMHA) 2018–19 Federal Pre-Budget Submission. The Minister has asked me to reply to you on his behalf.

I acknowledge CMHA's submission to the 2018–19 Federal Budget. Thank you for directing the Australian Government's attention to specific initiatives that CMHA believe need to be included in the 2018–19 Federal Budget, and for CMHA's commitment to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). The Government values the views of CMHA and appreciates your role in representing the community-based mental health sector. I provide the following responses to the specific issues raised by CMHA.

The Government is committed to supporting people with psychosocial disabilities related to a mental health condition, including through the NDIS, where appropriate. As you know, the NDIS is delivering significantly improved outcomes for many people with psychosocial disabilities and the Government is committed to the full implementation of the Scheme.

On 18 October 2017, the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) announced its design and release of a new targeted pathways approach to address many of the concerns raised by the sector in the Productivity Commission's review of NDIS Costs and Joint Standing Committee (JSC) reports about the complexity of pathways into the NDIS for people with psychosocial disability. The NDIA is:

- developing a *tailored* pathway for accessing the NDIS for people with psychosocial disability;
- working to ensure all planning is done by skilled agency planners who understand the participant's specific disability; and
- implementing an NDIA Mental Health Team that provides specific policy and practice advice for participants with psychosocial disability and complex needs.

The new pathway is the result of workshops and discussions with over 300 people with disability, their families, carers, providers, and others, to understand key challenges and opportunities that have emerged as the NDIS has been rolled out. The new pathways' approach aims to significantly improve the experience that people and organisations have with the NDIS, with face-to-face engagement as the standard for plan development. The pathway approach will be progressively piloted and tested over the coming months, before being rolled out nationally. The NDIA will continue to engage with stakeholders on the testing and implementation of the new pathway.

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The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Health Council is the vehicle for Commonwealth and state and territory governments to work together on all matters related to coordinated action for health matters, including mental health support. The *Fifth National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan* was recently agreed by the COAG Health Council at its August 2017 meeting. Also at this meeting, Health Ministers agreed to a time-limited working group to progress the Psychosocial Supports Program. This will have the objective of developing bilateral agreements to support access to essential psychosocial supports for persons with severe mental illness resulting in psychosocial disability who are not eligible for the NDIS. Bilateral agreements will take into account existing funding being allocated for this purpose by states and territories.

As you are aware, the JSC on the NDIS Inquiry into the *Provision of Services Under the NDIS for People with Psychosocial Disabilities Related to a Mental Health Condition* released its final report on 15 August 2017. One of its recommendations is a review of the *National Disability Insurance Scheme Act* (the Act). The Government is expected to lodge a formal government response to the JSC by early next year.

I note the National Mental Health Commission's primary role is to provide independent reports and advice to the community and government on what is working and what is not. It has a significant role in the national monitoring and reporting on mental health and suicide prevention in Australia, and works in partnership within and across sectors.

The Government does not consider the introduction of an independent price regulator is required at this time. The NDIA considers that the introduction of an independent price regulator would adversely affect the NDIA's ability to contribute to effective market stewardship. The NDIA has stated it is committed to price deregulation once markets are sufficiently mature to offer diverse, innovative choices for participants. However, while the NDIS remains in its infancy, it is essential that the NDIA is proactively and flexibly able to manage prices. This remains in the best interest of participants, whose ability to access reasonable and necessary supports to underpin their having a better life, depends on the development of a vibrant disability supports marketplace.

I appreciate there will be further challenges during the transition to the NDIS. The priority for Government is to ensure that the NDIS is as good as it can be to ensure that reasonable and necessary supports go to those who need it. Please contact my Executive Assistant, Tracey Peacock, on [REDACTED] to reschedule a meeting in the New Year where we can discuss the issues raised in CMHA's 2018-19 Federal Pre-Budget Submission and any other issues.

Thank you again for writing.

Yours sincerely

John Riley
Branch Manager
Program Transition Branch

22 December 2017