



A fair go? Sydney public hearing on migration and disability

“We never think of her blindness as a 'medical condition', it's just more a physical condition,” says an individual whose sister in South Africa has been refused an Australian visa.

While she otherwise meets the requirements for skilled migration, her sister's blindness means that, under current migration health rules, she has been assessed as potentially too costly to the Australian taxpayer and to Australian health and community services.

But the woman says that her sister “is not ill in any way. She happens to be blind — and in many ways we always think of her blindness as affording her skills that other people don't have.

“She has a much more highly developed sense of hearing, for instance. Her computer skills are way better than my computer skills because she has to learn every key stroke.”

“It's hard to explain that to someone like [my sister] — to say you know THAT is the reason why you cannot come to a country like Australia.”

These are among the stories included in the submission of the National Ethnic Disability Alliance (NEDA) to the inquiry into the migration treatment of disability.

NEDA is among a range of witnesses who will appear at a public hearing tomorrow (Thursday 12 November) in Sydney, the first public hearing for the inquiry by the Joint Standing Committee on Migration.

Committee Chair, Michael Danby, said that the Committee was looking forward to commencing public hearings for the inquiry.

NEDA has argued that the current arrangements are discriminatory, create social discord and hardship for many individuals and families, and do not accurately reflect the social and economic contributions that migrants and refugees might make to Australia.

The Committee will also be hearing from Professor Ron McCallum AO, who holds the distinguished position of Rapporteur to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and Graeme Innes AM, the Australian Disability Discrimination Commissioner.

“This is a vexed area of migration policy and the Committee will be examining whether our current rules really are in Australia's interest as a forward-looking, inclusive and productive society”, Mr Danby said.

9.30 am – 4.00 pm, Thursday 12 November 2009
Corinthian Room, Sydney Masonic Centre, 66 Goulbourn St, Sydney

Members of the public and media are welcome to attend. There will also be an opportunity for members of the public to make a comment to the Committee or tell their story. Please see the full program for the day at <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/mig/disability/hearings/Program03.pdf>.

For media comment, please contact the Committee Chair, Michael Danby MP, on (02) 6277 4520, or the Deputy Chair, Hon Danna Vale MP, on (02) 6277 4866.

For information about the hearing or the inquiry, visit the inquiry website at www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/mig/disability/index.htm or contact the Committee Secretariat on (02) 6277 4560 or jscm@aph.gov.au.