

Additional Comments by the Australian Greens

1.1 The Australian Greens welcome the opportunity to provide additional comments to this inquiry.

1.2 The Australia Greens are committed to a fully funded National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and want to see a secure, reliable and adequate source of funding for the scheme.

1.3 We note the excerpt of the Treasurer's second reading speech at paragraph 1.2 of the Majority Committee Report, specifically his reference to providing '[c]ertainty that the National Disability Insurance Scheme will be fully funded for the long term'.

1.4 The Australian Greens are concerned to ensure that that funding ensures the scheme is functioning as intended. We have concerns that the scheme is not at that point, for example:

- planners not having the necessary expertise and a lack of training;
- the number of people with psychosocial disability being rejected and the difference in the level of packages they are receiving;
- packages for individuals with hearing impairment or hearing loss being insufficient and again varying between individuals;
- inconsistent rollout of the NDIS Early Childhood Early Intervention Approach;
- the reduction to supports provided in packages after reviews;
- operationalisation of 'reasonable and necessary' being downgraded to 'ordinary life';
- necessary equipment not being funded in plans; and
- a lack of funding for independent advocacy, transport and Information, Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC).

1.5 The Joint Standing Committee on the National Disability Insurance Scheme (the committee) has completed numerous inquiries into the NDIS and its rollout. Recently the committee has tabled a number of reports raising a large number of concerns and making substantive recommendations in relation to the scheme. The Australian Greens want to see these recommendations actioned by the government.

1.6 Some of these recommendations are:

- that the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) provide an opportunity for participants, and those who support them, to view, comment, and rectify any errors in their plan in advance of it being finalised and implemented;

- that the NDIA ensure that only criteria underpinned by terminology set out in the NDIS Act and associated Rules is used in the assessment of appropriate supports;¹
- the NDIS Act is reviewed to assess the permanency provisions in subsection 24(1)(b) and the appropriateness of the reference to 'psychiatric condition' in subsection 24(1)(a);
- the NDIA, in conjunction with the mental health sector, develops and adopts a validated fit-for-purpose assessment tool to assess the eligibility of people with psychosocial disability that focuses on their functional capacity for social and economic participation;
- clients currently receiving mental health services, including services under Commonwealth programs transitioning to the NDIS, namely Partners in Recover, Personal Helpers and Mentors, Day to Day Living, and Mental Health Respite: Carer Support, should not have to apply for the NDIS to have guarantee of continuity of supports and access services;
- the Department of Social Services and the NDIA collaboratively develop a plan outlining how advocacy and assertive outreach services will be delivered beyond the transition arrangements to ensure people with a psychosocial disability and those who are hard-to-reach can effectively engage with the NDIS and/or other support programs;
- the NDIA, in conjunction with the mental health sector, creates a specialised team of NDIS planners trained and experienced in working with people who have a mental health condition as their primary disability;
- the NDIA develops an approach to build flexibility in plans to respond to the fluctuating needs of participants with a psychosocial disability, including allowing minor adjustments to be made without the need for a full plan review;
- the NDIA considers allocating specific funding for the provision of mental health services through the ILC;
- the NDIA establishes an NDIA unit specialising in the interaction of the Scheme with the criminal justice system;²
- the NDIA reviews immediately the cases of people with hearing impairment who were previously found ineligible and tests their eligibility against the revised guidelines; and

1 Joint Standing Committee on the National Disability Insurance Scheme, *Progress Report*, September 2017, pp. 71–73.

2 Joint Standing Committee on the National Disability Insurance Scheme, *Provision of services under the NDIS for people with psychosocial disabilities related to a mental health condition*, August 2017, pp. xiii–xvi.

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- Australian Hearing be formally appointed as the independent referral pathway for access to early intervention services under the NDIS and funded appropriately to take on this new role.³

1.7 Some of these recommendations will require additional monies to be committed and this should be factored into the government's projected NDIS expenditure (the Australian Greens note here that the government's projected NDIS expenditure is still based off the Productivity Commission's 2011 study from before the scheme's rollout commenced).

1.8 The Australian Greens are also concerned that the government is attempting to provide certainty of a fully funded NDIS before the final report of the Productivity Commission into NDIS costs is released at the end of this month, which could well recommend changes to the pricing structure of the NDIS.

1.9 The Australian Greens also support the submissions of Australian Universities and Researchers that abolishing the Education Investment Fund is short-sighted and undermines our country's future productivity and well-being. As the Group of Eight submission to the inquiry states:

The fact is that if you damage research, you damage not only the research-driven medical and other advances that could prevent or alleviate permanent impairment but indeed the economy which sustains many of the critical services we wish to have available in the long term.

1.10 The funding of the NDIS should be separate from cutting funding from Australia's strengths in advancing cutting-edge research. There is no justifiable policy reason for the \$3.8 billion in the Education Investment Fund to be redirected to the NDIS. Instead the fund must be quarantined to fund both capital and operating costs of important national research.

1.11 Lastly, the Australian Greens note the Majority Committee Report endorses the findings of the Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee's inquiry into the National Disability Insurance Scheme Savings Fund Special Account Bill 2016 (paragraph 2.44 of the Majority Committee Report). The Australian Greens dissented from the findings of that inquiry and are still of the view that the Bill should not be passed in its current form.

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3 Joint Standing Committee on the National Disability Insurance Scheme, *Interim Report: Provision of hearing services under the National Disability Insurance Scheme*, September 2017, p. ix.

