



New inquiry launched into migration treatment of disability

The Joint Standing Committee on Migration has launched an inquiry into the migration treatment of disability. The Committee will examine whether visa decision-makers should be able to take into account the social and economic contribution, as well as the anticipated health care costs, of potential migrants with disabilities.

Every year, millions of people apply to visit or migrate to Australia, and grant of a visa is conditional on a person satisfying the health requirement specified in the Migration Regulations. The health requirement is designed to protect Australia from public health risks, contain public expenditure on health and community services, and maintain access of Australian residents to those services.

Disability does not in itself mean that a person or a family will be refused a visa. However, as part of the health test, applicants with a 'disease or condition' are assessed on the potential cost and impact on Australian health and community services.

Committee Chair Michael Danby welcomed the launch of the inquiry and said he looked forward to canvassing community views on the issue.

"Potential migrants with disabilities and their families are currently treated under the migration system as costs to our society, and there is little scope to take into account the contributions they might make to their community and workplace," he said.

"Under the terms of reference we will be examining whether the balance between the economic and social benefits of the entry and stay of an individual with a disability, and the costs and use of services by that individual, should be a factor in a visa decision."

"We look forward to receiving a wide range of submissions to the inquiry about where the balance should lie between our positive recognition of the role that people with disabilities play in our community, our human rights obligations, and the realities of a health system and disability services sector under pressure."

The Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Senator the Hon Chris Evans, and the Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children's Services, the Hon Bill Shorten, asked the Committee to inquire into the matter following several cases in recent years of individuals and families refused visas on the basis of their own or a family member's disability.

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 more information and the inquiry terms of reference, 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.