



MENTAL HEALTH FOUNDATION AUSTRALIA (VIC)

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The provision of services under the NDIS for people with psychosocial disabilities related to a mental health condition

Joint Standing Committee on the NDIS - Mental Health Terms of Reference

Submission: "On the provision of services under the NDIS for people with psychosocial disabilities related to a mental health condition"

Joint Standing Committee on the National Disability Insurance Scheme

PO Box 6100

Parliament House

Canberra ACT 2600

Submitted: Friday 10th February 2017

Mental Health Foundation Australia (Victoria) Background and Current Situation:

The Mental Health Foundation Australia (Victoria) is one of the oldest Mental Health associations in Australia, originating in 1928. Over many years the Foundation has been active in promoting Mental Health awareness and advocating for the rights of consumers. The Foundation has coordinated Mental Health Week in Victoria for many consecutive years and has a long history in the development of peer support groups, with six currently established groups. We also provide a telephone information and counselling service provide educational services, and give voice to range of issues on various bodies to improve community mental health.

Our organisation is currently funded by the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services to the amount of \$68,000 annually which equates to only half our annual expenditure. Our own resources, gained over many years by donations and bequests, make up the balance of our costs. Funding is a constant challenge.

The Foundation applauds the guiding principles and staged introduction of the National Disability Insurance Scheme. Allowing consumers better choices in the provision of services is a central goal of our policies and constitution. The Foundation wishes to continue its contribution to the community on a sound financial footing under the umbrella of the NDIS.

However as small non-government organisation with 2 part-time workers (1.2 Effective Full time) and all other services delivered by many volunteers, the problems our organisation faces in appropriately preparing for the NDIS seem insurmountable.

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NDIS Tool Kit and Registration Problems:

The NDIS Provider Toolkit and the “Getting Ready” section seems like a time-wasting distraction. The requirement to complete steps towards becoming a registered provider seem overly complex and confusing to the staff at the Foundation. Questions were mainly related to the policies and future financial viability of our organisation which, in itself was dependent upon details of the NDIS unavailable to us. One step required a forty-page questionnaire of dubious validity and took two days to complete.

The Foundation has been unable begin the process to register for a Provider Digital Access (PRODA) account as the link leads to the following notice: **“404 Page Not Found. The page you are looking for cannot be found. Please try again later.”** This is enormously frustrating. The “Getting Registered” section of the process at the website link has been inactive for several months.

Bayside and Peninsula rollout of the NDIS commences from 1st April 2018. The Mental Health Foundation Australia provides valuable services and will not be in anyway prepared as we struggle to accommodate a program that does not allow us to register for a Provider Digital Access (PRODA) account.

Case Study of “Alex” Meeting with Hon. Tim Wilson (Member for Goldstein, previously Australian Human Rights Commissioner):

“Alex” is a consumer suffering from a severe psychiatric condition. He is currently on a disability support pension and requires ongoing medical treatment and social support. Alex is currently employed on a part-time basis by the MHFA (Vic) and is provided with various forms of social support by the MHFA (Vic).

“Alex” visited the Hon. Tim Wilson MP (ex-Human Rights commissioner) in December 2016 and made the case: “For me to stay healthy I need a work environment”. He asked if the NDIS provided some sort of support for people such as himself that he might access. According to “Alex”, the Hon. Tim Wilson stated that the NDIS would not be able to provide funding or services to Alex because it was “not designed for that purpose”. “Alex” took this to mean and was left with the distinct impression, that people with significant mental health issues like himself would not be provisioned under the NDIS.

This statement was made directly to Jim Goodin (President, MHFA Vic.) by “Alex”. If it is true, or at least believed to be true, by someone as allegedly knowledgeable of the disability sector as a former human rights commissioner, it is extremely disheartening to an organisation such as ourselves.

Issues of Concern for Potential Providers such as the Mental Health Foundation Australia (Victoria):

Concern 1.

Key strategic challenges facing providers is the NDIS pricing model. The NDS report indicates that 67% of providers “are concerned they will not be able to provide services at the prices being offered under the NDIS.” A recent Curtin University study of 180 disability groups found that 42% of providers were generating a profit of less than 3%. For many, the risk of financial collapse is very real. For some, the closures have already begun. (“A Year of Disruption in Disability: Part 2”, Fran Connelley, December 13, 2016 - <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/year-disruption-disability-part-2-fran-connelley>)

Question 1.

What assurance does the MHFA (Vic) have that the NDIS will provide a stable financial base to justify the time, effort, upskilling and financial requirements of its staff?

Concern 2.

Mental Health eligibility issues still need to be addressed. Around 64,000 Australians with mental health issues are expected to be eligible for an NDIS package. “Alex” (See above – Case study of “Alex”) was advised that the NDIS is not designed for or accessible to people such as himself i.e. people with a severe mental illness. This is a critical question for the Mental Health Foundation Australia (Victoria) as we mainly provide services to many people such as “Alex”, who is deemed eligible for an ongoing disability support pension and assessed by the Department of Human Services as only able to work eight (8) hours per week.

Question 2.

If you have an episodic mental health issue, will it be considered a disability?

Question 3.

How will the NDIS support participants to gain and keep employment such as required by “Alex”? Who is eligible for assistance?

Prepared by: