

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Sent via email to: community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Senate Inquiry into the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). As one of Canberra's largest providers of community services, Communities@Work is committed to working with government to ensure that the transition to self-directed funding is managed in a manner which supports equitable access for people with disability to quality services.

Communities@Work and Disability Services

Communities@Work provides a number of programs specifically targeted towards the needs of people with disability. These are:

- The Malkara Primary School, which provides quality education focused on the abilities of each student and which also offers a vacation care program to facilitate engaging, interactive leisure opportunities in a safe and flexible context.
- The Inclusion Support Agency, which works with children's services providers to support the inclusion of children with disability.
- Fun4Youth after school and vacation program for young people with disability.
- Connections@Cooleman, which supports people with disability to develop living skills and access leisure activities.
- Respite Options to assist families and natural supports in their caring roles.
- Services under Home and Community Care to assist people to live independently and to access much needed transport services.

Communities@Work is also committed to working with the sector more broadly to assist people with disability to develop and implement social enterprise opportunities with a view to improving skills, quality of life and capacity to access the paid workforce.

Communities@Work strongly supports the intent of the NDIS in improving choice for people with disability in determining the type of services they wish to access and the providers associated with this. It also welcomes improved equity in access to funding, noting that current Individual Support

Package funding in the ACT is very limited.

Sector Sustainability and Client Choice

How the NDIS is implemented from the point of view of service providers will impact on the range of choices available to people with disability. In moving towards a self-directed funding model, maintaining the viability of disability services providers in the context of reduced certainty of ongoing funding will require careful consideration. As funding is moved from a long-term, "block" based allocation to individual funding with the capacity for easy movement to other providers, smaller organizations may struggle in planning for ongoing financial sustainability.

Similarly, the management of multiple individual service contracts as opposed to a small number of government-based contracts may place pressure on corporate or administrative functions, which are traditionally very lean to allow resources to be focused on service delivery.

As a larger service provider, Communities@Work is well placed to support the sector in developing and implementing processes and business models which will maximize the sustainability of smaller entities and would be pleased to assist the National Disability Insurance Agency and other key stakeholders in determining the best means of achieving this.

Translating Existing Funding to the NDIS

Funding for Communities@Work disability services is sourced from a number of federal and ACT government sources. These funds are applied to service delivery in accordance with contracts including a component being directed towards administrative costs.

Some services will readily translate to a fee for service model which will align well with the self-directed funding approach. Other disability services provided by Communities@Work relate to group-based activities and programs, support levels and costs for which are less easily determined. Benchmarking of support models and service levels may be appropriate to ensure consistency in approach within the sector.

Employment Opportunities for People with Disability

With its strong focus on inclusion and choice, Communities@Work is interested in utilizing its existing expertise and capacity to further develop employment opportunities for people with disability. As such, Communities@Work welcomes the removal of the cap on supported employment places, while noting that there is limited information available to date regarding how this will be implemented. With only two providers of supported employment in the ACT, Communities@Work believes that the removal of the cap on places warrants consideration of expansion of the provider pool in order to meet demand.

The process for evaluation and endorsement of new providers, as well as the means by which appropriate support levels should be determined, will require thorough consideration and Communities@Work would welcome the opportunity to be involved in such a process.

Assessment and Access for People with Cyclical or Changing Support Needs

Communities@Work would welcome clarification of the process for assessing the eligibility of people with support needs of a cyclical nature or which change over time. This is an aspect which has been identified by the mental health community as a potential challenge and also applies to

those people with disability whose condition may improve or worsen at various stages in their life. Under the tier-based model of eligibility, the assessment of people with changing support needs will be key to determining ongoing access to the scheme and associated funding levels. It is therefore important that the assessment process accommodate this group of people. While current block funding through Home and Community Care allows for this cohort to access services without the need for frequent reassessment, the individually focused eligibility under a National Disability Insurance Scheme may present new challenges.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to provide input to this Inquiry and I am happy to provide further information as required.

Yours sincerely

Lynne Harwood
Chief Executive Officer

14 January 2013