Submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs, National Disability Insurance Scheme Inquiry 2012

Dear Committee Members,

I submit my story to the Committee as an illustration of some of the current problems in this sector and the inadequate ways that successive Governments have attempted to deal with these problems. My hope is that lessons are learned from past mistakes and that the implementation of an NDIS does not lead to further poor outcomes.

I'm the father of a two year old child recently diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD). I was absolutely shocked to discover the almost complete lack of funding for early intervention services for ASD. My shock became disgust when I researched the topic further and discovered that the funding solution attempted in 2008 appears to have been implemented in full knowledge of its inadequacy.

Let's be specific about the issue we're talking about - the Australian Government recommends the following early intervention for ASD:

'A program needs to be of at least 20 hours per week over an extended period of at least two years, with continuing support into, and through the school age years.' (source: Australian Government Department of Health and Aging, http://www.health.gov.au/internet/publications/publishing.nsf/Content/mental-child-autbro-toc~mental-child-autbro-best)

Given these guidelines, which were in existence at the time, the Government should be ashamed at the Helping Children with Autism package. This provides $6000 per year for 2 years for early intervention therapies. 20 hours per week is (approximately) 1000 hours a year. Does the Government really believe that therapists for ASD earn $6 per hour? The true cost of the therapy that the Government recommends is (clearly) tens of thousands of dollars a year, which families must find out of their own pockets. The fanfare around the package (which continues today, noting recent press releases) is similar to the current fanfare around the NDIS, and as such I am suspicious of the quality of the outcome that will be achieved.

This entire situation should be a cause of shame for all Australians, and in particular the Government who introduced something so manifestly inadequate, despite its own best practice guidelines.

My hope for the NDIS is that the same situation is not repeated for any recommended treatment for any disability. I implore the Government to be aware of the required funding for full, best practice treatment for disabilities when implementing the NDIS, and to not make the same mistakes made when the Helping Children with Autism package was introduced.

I ask that my submission be published, but for my name to be kept anonymous to protect the identity of my son.

I am always available to discuss my concerns with the Committee or any other Member of Government, at any time.