

The Chairman

Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit

Re No.18 (2015-16) Qualifying for the Disability Support Pension

Firstly thank you for the opportunity to express the difficulties with the DSP. I have been through the process of obtaining the DSP for my eldest disabled child. It was an incredibly stressful and daunting experience. She had just turned 16 when we applied.

My first issue would be the identification requirements for the DSP. The list requires three different forms of identification, the first is easy to provide, an Australian Birth Certificate. But then you come to the second, and in our case my daughter has never been overseas meaning no passport, and the other choice, including a marriage certificate (you would not be married if you are only 16 and disabled), proof of age (which you can't get till 18 in any state). A Drivers licence or Firearms Licence clearance would not be given to a 16 year old who is intellectually disabled. Or a School ID card which the staff member used for my daughter in the next category. My daughter was then told you need more identification which we didn't have because of her disability since a toddler. They refuse to take Medicare card because they can be fraudulent, however, I believe the two departments are connected.

I cannot believe that Centrelink after having confirmed her status and paying family benefit and carers allowance for over a decade that they then thought of her as new client. Why could they not have used her existing file to confirm that she is who I said she was. It seems that they forget a person who has had a disability all their life cannot have access to many of the identity requirements and also at age 16 and would not anyway, nor will ever be able too. We finally got through that with help, sympathy and understanding of senior Centrelink manager Hank Jongen after making a complaint. But, why does that have to be so hard for, an "already known to centrelink" disabled teenager who is also an Australian Citizen.

The next issue for most parents of disabled children is the stressful experience of providing all the medical information confirming the disability. We all completely understand having to supply the information once but, over my child's life already, I have supplied her details on numerous occasions. Many conditions are well known not to be curable, for example intellectual disability, downs syndrome or muscular dystrophy, yet you are asked, "has the person been cured???" This must cost the department a large amount of money when they could have just ticked a box to begin with that the condition in question is not curable.

I also have spoken to many doctors over the years who are angry that Centrelink staff question their diagnosis! They could have confirmed the same information on google. More importantly they did not go to a medical school and medical professionals find the practise disrespectful and insulting, almost suggesting they are making it up. I have filled out many forms over many years repeating the same information which at times has angered the consulted doctors, particularly if they have already recorded the same information numerous times. They are then not seeing patients with an actual medical need in order to fill out the same forms again and again.

This repetitious procedure is increasing the pressure and cost on our medical system needlessly. Not only is it wasting patients time and who need the doctor's help, it costs Medicare money which could be used elsewhere productively. Why can't we use a bit of common sense when applying the rules.

I understand public money must be accounted for but surely wasting it asking a question that you really know will have the same answer is also wasting public money. Additionally, Centrelink only give a few weeks to get the requested information, knowing full well that many doctors have huge patient waiting lists for an appointment, which leaves us carers, to again deal with anger from doctors, because, once again, we need their urgent attention for a diagnosis about something they have already stated numerous times is not curable. Surely Centrelink could have a Multi skilled medical consultant on board who could help them write a basic list of those things that aren't curable if they are worried they are being mis-informed and have them available if it's an unusual disorder or disease. This would save money, not chasing their tails over disabilities that are not going to change. Medicare would save money also.

My last concern, is right now I am able and alive to advocate for my daughter, handling all the DSP issues as best as I can but, what happens when I am deceased?? Is there going to be a person or trustee that will be obliged to repeat everything I have done in order to satisfy reviewing officer demands? What happens if my daughter cannot pay for re diagnosis or doctors' appointments to confirm her disability is **STILL PERMANENT?**

What happens if they are responsible for many disabled adults, for example in a care home and do not get the forms done quickly enough and her DSP is cancelled? What if she is left without an income which helps pay for her eventual supported accommodation (which she will be only going to if I'm deceased). What if no one cares and she is left without support? This is the most horrible torture for a parent. The constant worry that their adult child will be left without any support or people to care about them.

It feels that Australia does not want to care for their disabled or sick. Any decent society around the world has a responsibility to protect and care for their disabled and sick. Indeed, under United Nations agreements – and Australia is a signatory – have an obligation to do so.

What kind of country do we want to be when we make it so hard to get the DSP for people who are permanently disabled and are repeatedly asked the obvious when we could show mercy, respect and dignity by treating people with many conditions that even the average Australian knows does not have a cure. Perhaps they need to have different categories of the pension so they can do this but, I beg of you make this better. Show the permanently disabled and their families some dignity and respect - and save Centrelink and Medicare a great deal of money in their budget by changing current practices.

Thank you again for the opportunity to plead my daughters' case and that of many others cursed with having an incurable and permanent disability.

Yours sincerely

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