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16 August 2021

Joint Standing Committee on the National Disability Insurance Scheme  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Carers NSW welcomes the opportunity to provide a further submission to the Joint Standing Committee (the Committee) on the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) in regards to the NDIS Workforce. This brief submission will highlight key workforce issues that Carers NSW believes have not been adequately addressed by the NDIS National Workforce Plan (the Plan) and therefore require further attention and reform.

Carers NSW is the peak non-government organisation for carers in New South Wales (NSW). A carer is any individual who provides care and support to a family member or friend who has a disability, mental illness, drug and/or alcohol dependency, chronic condition, terminal illness or who is frail. Carers NSW is part of the National Carer Network and a member of Carers Australia. Our vision is an Australia that values and supports all carers, and our goals are to:

- Be a leading carer organisation in which carers have confidence
- Actively promote carer recognition and support
- Actively support carers to navigate a changing service landscape that will be characterised by ongoing policy reform
- Promote connected community experiences and opportunities for carers that are inclusive of diverse carer groups
- Lead and advocate for carer-specific and carer-inclusive policy making, research and service delivery
- Continue to be a quality-driven, responsive and carer-focused organisation.

Thank you for accepting our submission. For further information, please contact  
on (02) 9280 4744.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Elena", written in a cursive style.

Elena Katrakis  
CEO  
Carers NSW

## Introduction

Carers NSW wishes to commend the Australian Government on looking to address ongoing gaps within the care and support workforce and the known implications this has for people with disability, their families and carers. The recent release of the NDIS National Workforce Plan (the Plan) offers a timely opportunity to recognise the progress that has been made and the work of the Australian Government in addressing ongoing issues within the disability workforce. However, there remain a number of areas of concern for Carers NSW, particularly regarding workforce conditions and remuneration, which we believe have not been adequately responded to in the Plan.

Carers NSW has provided extensive input to government inquiries and reviews regarding the paid care workforce, particularly regarding critical shortages of adequately skilled and available paid care workers and the insufficient support given to providers to appropriately train and remunerate their staff. Carers NSW has also continued to highlight the impacts of workforce issues on family and friend carers, who often fill the service gaps of formalised supports if they are unavailable or inadequate. This submission will reiterate the impact of workforce issues on family and friend carers, while also addressing areas of concern within the Plan that may require further attention from the Committee.

## Improving job security

While the Plan identifies the need to improve the benefits of working in the care and support sector, Carers NSW does not believe the Plan has adequately captured the impacts of a highly casualised workforce. Although the Plan recognises that many workers in the disability sector are employed causally - citing that that some may find the flexibility beneficial - it does not properly contextualise the implications of this workforce trend, particularly around high turnover.

Carers NSW has previously commented on the impacts of a highly casualised workforce, highlighting how the individualisation of provider funding in the care and support sector has made it difficult for providers to sustainability offer guaranteed hours of employment on a full time or permanent part time basis. As a result, paid care workers are often left to balance multiple roles in order to earn a liveable wage, and may still experience fluctuation in their income due to roster changes and service cancellations. For workers in regional or remote areas, workforce issues are felt more acutely as demand for services is comparatively lower due to smaller population sizes, across a wider geographical distribution. These conditions often result in a level of instability that is undesirable for balancing family life and other responsibilities.<sup>1</sup>

Without appropriate support and incentives to maintain working in the care sectors, workforce shortages will continue to remain critical, particularly in regional and remote communities, leaving sustained service gaps in formalised supports. For carers, the inability to secure consistent, reliable, skilled staff often impacts their health and wellbeing, creating significant psychological distress where there are concerns that the care provided may be unsafe or harmful to their care recipient. Furthermore, the inability to secure appropriate, reliable support workers can impact on carers' ability to engage in other activities, such as employment or education, as they cannot access suitable replacement care.

## Supporting staff retention

Carers NSW is supportive of the Plan's goal to improve staff retention and believes adequate training and professional development opportunities will begin to address this issue. However, Carers NSW has concerns that the Plan has not identified appropriate remuneration as a key issue within the care

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<sup>1</sup> Cortis, N., & van Toorn, G. (2020). *Working in new disability markets: A survey of Australia's disability workforce*. Sydney: Social Policy Research Centre, UNSW Sydney; HSU and United Voice (2019) "Excessive workloads, chronic under-staffing, workers planning to quit sector" [Media Release] 14 October 2019

and support sector and nor does it appear to be an area of strategic focus to overcome staff retention issues.

As highlighted in our submission to the Select Committee on Job Security,<sup>2</sup> low wages of paid care workers is a significant issue.<sup>3</sup> While the disability workforce has grown rapidly, providers are continuing to report difficulty in staff recruitment and retention, leading many to question the sustainability of service provision and long-term viability.<sup>4</sup> Low wages and the inability to cover work related costs such as travel, vehicle maintenance and even petrol continue to act as a deterrent for long-term employment in the disability care sector.

While the Fair Work Commission (FWC) is undertaking a review of the SCHADS<sup>5</sup> Industry Award to address issues associated with casualisation of the workforce, remuneration remains a barrier to meeting disability workers' needs. Failure to ensure competitive and attractive remuneration for current and potential disability sector workers is likely to result in the continued departure of highly skilled and experienced staff from the industry, as well as difficulty recruiting new individuals to the sector.

Given the complex, physically taxing and at times risky nature of care work, low remuneration creates little incentive for people to enter and remain in the paid care workforce. Many carers have reported their frustration to Carers NSW about the resulting high staff turn-over, indicating that it inhibits the ability of paid care workers to build the relationships necessary to provide optimal care for their family member or friend. Additionally, carers have reported that the need to frequently reorient new staff to routines and tasks places additional strain on their time and wellbeing.

## Conclusion

Carers NSW thanks the Committee for the opportunity to provide further feedback on the NDIS Workforce, including the capacity of NDIS National Workforce Plan to address ongoing workforce issues. Carers NSW believes that while the Plan has successfully identified critical issues with the disability workforce, there is a limited focus on tangible outcomes that adequately address these concerns. Without detailed and prescriptive goals or targets, Carers NSW is concerned that gaps within the disability workforce will remain ongoing or may not be solved in their entirety.

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<sup>2</sup> Carers NSW (2020), *Submission responding to the Select Standing Committee's Inquiry into Insecure Work*, Sydney

<sup>3</sup> Aged Care Workforce taskforce report; Parliament of Australia (2020) *Joint Standing Committee on the National Disability Insurance Scheme: NDIS Workforce Interim Report*. Senate Printing Unit, Parliament House, Canberra.

<sup>4</sup> National Disability Services (2019). *State of the Disability Sector Report 2019*. Available online at: <https://www.nds.org.au/pdf-file/ffac29c2-6907-ea11-80e1-005056ac7853>, viewed 15 March 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Social, Community, Home Care and Disability Services Industry Award (SCHADS)