



Australian Government

Department of Families, Housing,  
Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

## EXECUTIVE MINUTE

on

**JOINT COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND AUDIT**

**REPORT No.415**

**Review of Auditor-General's Reports tabled between  
September 2008 and January 2009**

### **General comments**

I write to respond to Recommendation No. 3 of Report 415, which relates to matters for which the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs has primary carriage of, and also takes a coordination role across Commonwealth Agencies, specifically on behalf of the Department of Employment Education and Workplace Relations. The Department of Employment Education and Workplace Relations have been consulted and have agreed to this joint response.

### **Response to the recommendation**

#### **Recommendation No. 3**

**That the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs and the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations monitor and report within 12 months of the tabling of this report, on progress towards achieving the Commonwealth State/Territory Disability Agreement objective of 'striving to enhance the quality of life experienced by people with disability through assisting them to live as valued and participating members of the community'.**

**Department of Families, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs  
Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations**

#### **Response**

The recommendation is supported.

From 1 January 2009 a new National Disability Agreement (NDA) came into effect to replace the Commonwealth State/Territory Disability Agreement (CSTDA).

As noted by the JCPAA, a main CTSDA objective has been:

"The Commonwealth and the States/Territories strive to enhance the quality of life experienced by people with disabilities through assisting them to live as valued and participating members of the community." Objective 4(1)

This objective has been replaced by a similar headline objective under the new 2008 National Disability Agreement (NDA or Agreement):

“Through this Agreement, the Parties commit to the following objective as the long-term, overarching aspiration that governments should strive for in the provision of disability support services. All aspects of the National Disability Agreement contribute to, or measure progress towards:

*“People with disability and their carers have an enhanced quality of life and participate as valued members of the community.”<sup>1</sup> (paragraph 6)*

### National Disability Agreement (NDA)

The NDA came into effect on 1 January 2009. Under the NDA the Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments are working to improve and increase services for people with disability, their families and carers. The NDA reflects a strong commitment from these two levels of government to provide more opportunities for people with disability to participate in and enjoy Australia's economic and social life. The NDA will continue to improve and increase services for people with disability, their families and carers.

The NDA is designed specifically with the aim of ensuring that people with disability have an enhanced quality of life and participate as valued members of the community. Through the Agreement, all Australian Governments have agreed to support services that provide skills and supports to enable people with disability to live as independently as possible and help them establish stable and sustainable living arrangements. It has a focus on the achievement of economic participation and social inclusion, choice, wellbeing and independence for people with disability. At the same time, the Agreement focuses on supporting families and carers in their caring roles.

- Under the NDA the Commonwealth has responsibility for the provision of employment services for people with disability and income support.
- The State and Territory Governments have responsibility for delivering other specialist disability services including accommodation, respite, community support and community access services, in a manner which most effectively meets the needs of people with disability, their families and carers, consistent with local needs and priorities.

The NDA Objective of ‘an enhanced quality of life’ is likely to be experienced by people with disabilities and their carers through a combination of many formal and informal interventions and modes of assistance. Formal interventions and assistance may include access made to a variety of cross-jurisdiction funded services, many of which are provided under the auspices of the NDA.

For example, a person with, say, a severe core mobility restriction may:

- be working at a Commonwealth funded Australian Disability Enterprise;
- live in a house that was specially provided by their State or Territory; and
- be provided with specialised Aids and Equipment by their State or Territory.

In addition this individual may also be assisted by other formal programs. For example they may:

- have a personal Carer living at home who is receiving an income support payment provided by the Commonwealth; and

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<sup>1</sup>[http://www.coag.gov.au/intergov\\_agreements/federal\\_financial\\_relations/docs/IGA\\_FFR\\_ScheduleF\\_National\\_Disability\\_Agreement.pdf](http://www.coag.gov.au/intergov_agreements/federal_financial_relations/docs/IGA_FFR_ScheduleF_National_Disability_Agreement.pdf)

- they may receive assistance under other programs, for example the Home and Community Care (HACC) Program, which is another joint Australian, State and Territory Government Initiative. HACC programs might for example:
  - provide assistance with home modifications;
  - transportation; and
  - respite care for their live in carer.

The combined benefit arising from all of these services might contribute toward enhancing a persons' overall quality of life.

#### Current arrangements for Commonwealth funded disability employment services

On 1 March 2010 the model for Disability Employment Services was introduced to replace Disability Employment Network and Vocational Rehabilitation Services. This followed an extensive review which included consultation with key stakeholders including people with disability and their advocates, peak welfare and industry associations, employment services providers and employers.

Under Disability Employment Services, caps on services have been removed and all job seekers with disability receive individually tailored employment services better suited to their needs, with stronger links to skills development and training. The services place greater emphasis on achieving outcomes for job seekers. The new services will substantially improve services for job seekers with disability, their families, employers and employment service providers. It is envisaged that improvements to employment services for people with disability will contribute to an enhanced quality of life for participants.

Disability Employment Services are funded by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations and meet the requirements of the Quality Strategy for Disability Employment and Rehabilitation Services.

Australian Disability Enterprises provide supported employment to over 20,000 people with moderate to severe levels of disability. People with disability are supported to work in a variety of industries including manufacturing, packaging, laundry services, horticulture, maintenance, cleaning, hospitality and catering.

Enterprises are funded by the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and meet the requirements of the Quality Strategy for Disability Employment and Rehabilitation Services.

#### NDA reform agenda

The NDA, like the CSTDA, facilitates the provision for specialist disability services in a manner which most effectively meets the needs of people with disability, their families and carers, consistent with local needs and priorities.

Implementing reform within the disability service system is a major goal of the new Agreement – which will place people with disability, their families and carers at the centre of services across the country.

It is recognised that the fulfillment of this goal will be a long term process, however, as the initial steps, all governments have committed to achieving this through driving key national reform initiatives in several areas, including:

- a. Better Measurement of Need – Under this priority: a national model to estimate demand will be developed; there will be improvements in the data collected through the Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (SDAC), which will provide a stronger basis for demand estimates; and improvements in the quality of data reported under the National Minimum Data Set, and jurisdiction-level unmet demand data;
- b. Population Benchmarking for Disability Services – A National Population Benchmarking Framework will be developed and initial population benchmarking of disability services, based on information available, will be achieved to improve the evidence base to assist in policy, service and planning decisions;
- c. Making Older Carers a Priority – The National Disability Priorities Framework will assist Governments to target services to more vulnerable population groups based on relative need (including older carers and Indigenous people with disability);
- d. Quality Improvement Systems based on Disability Standards – A National Disability Quality Framework with a National Quality Assurance system for disability services will be developed to introduce a national approach to quality assurance and the continuous improvement of disability services;
- e. Service Planning and Strategies to Simplify Access – The National Framework for Service Planning and Access will be developed, focusing on providing a person centred approach to service delivery and to simplify access to specialist disability services;
- f. Early Intervention and Prevention, Lifelong Planning and Increasing Independence and Social Participation Strategies – An Early Intervention and Prevention Framework will be developed to increase Governments' ability to be effective with early intervention and prevention strategies and to ensure that clients receive the most appropriate and timely support;
- g. Increased Workforce Capacity – A national workforce strategy will be developed to address qualifications, training and cross sector career mapping issues and establishing the disability sector as an 'industry of choice';
- h. Increased Access for Indigenous Australians – A National Indigenous Access Framework will ensure that the needs of Indigenous Australians with disability are addressed through appropriate service delivery arrangements;
- i. Access to Aids and Equipment – More consistent access to aids and equipment; and
- j. Improved Access to Disability Care – Systems that improve access to disability care and ensure people are referred to the most appropriate disability services and supports, including consideration of single access points and national consistent assessment processes in line with nationally agreed principles.

The Agreement also includes a commitment to working towards implementing several Commonwealth 2007 election commitments, comprising:

- The establishment of a National Disability Strategy;
- Harmonisation of rules for accessible parking;
- The establishment of a National Companion Card Scheme;
- Ensuring Younger Veterans have access to specialist disability services;
- Modernisation of Print Disability Services;
- Community Aged Care Package for people in group homes; and
- Consideration of improvements in the administration of advocacy.

The delivery of services and the associated implementation of the NDA reforms will combine toward helping achieve a relative level of social and economic independence. The Agreement itself acknowledges “the difficulty in measuring outcomes” and has undertaken to “formulate better outcome measures and associated data collections over time”.<sup>2</sup>

The NDA ‘quality of life’ Objective cannot, in itself, be directly measured. The Council of Australian Governments Reform Council (CRC), delivered its first “National Disability Agreement: Baseline performance report for 2008–09” on 4 June 2010. The council has published baseline performance data and provided a comparative analysis of the performance of governments against the outcomes agreed under the National Disability Agreement.<sup>3</sup>

#### NDA commissioned report on contemporary best practice disability services system

Preceding the 2010 CRC baseline report, emerging evidence to date already suggests that Australia is moving towards meeting the NDA objective:

*“People with disability and their carers have an enhanced quality of life and participate as valued members of the community.”*

In 2008 KPMG was funded by the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments to develop a report and provide a descriptive analysis of the contemporary best practice disability services system.<sup>4</sup>

A key finding of this investigation was identifying the strength of Australia’s disability service systems, noting they include a strong human rights emphasis, and a focus on implementing individual and person centred approaches, along with robust quality management systems and good local response structures.

The research found that the most significant shift in disability support in recent years has been the heightened focus on the person with a disability, in recognition of their human rights and responsibilities, resulting in ‘person centred’, ‘individualised’ or ‘self directed’ approaches. It found that all jurisdictions are implementing reforms to move away from traditional models of support that are program based and ‘one-size fits all’, with responsibility left to the person with a disability, their family and carers to identify

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<sup>2</sup> Paragraph 18 of Schedule F (National Disability Agreement) See Footnote 1 for hyperlink reference

<sup>3</sup> Details available on COAG website link: <http://www.coag.gov.au/crc/reports.cfm#disability>

<sup>4</sup> The report can be viewed at <http://www.nda.gov.au/2/2066/64/reports.pm>

and obtain access to various programs. However, it also acknowledged that all jurisdictions are currently at various stages of change.

Additionally KPMG found that a key reform goal across most disability service systems in Australia, is to move away from primary reliance on specialist disability service systems, towards establishing greater connections and pathways between a broader range of human services for people with disability and their families. This requires building partnerships between disability and other human services and significantly enhancing the capacity of all human services to meet the needs of people with a disability.

#### National Disability Strategy (NDS)

The National Disability Agreement focus is toward service delivery as it impacts on people with disability their families and carers. The soon to be released National Disability Strategy (NDS) will set out a ten year national framework for improving outcomes for Australians with disabilities and their families and carers. The Commonwealth, State and Territory and local government have developed this strategy, under the auspice of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG). The shared vision is for an inclusive Australian society that enables people with disability to fulfil their potential as equal citizens.

It is envisaged the NDS will facilitate a cooperative forward momentum for reform across all levels of Government, the community and service sectors.

The NDS looks beyond the specialist disability support system. For the first time in Australia, a national strategy articulates long term goals for governments across a number of key policy areas which impact on people with disabilities, their families and carers. The reform directions articulated in the National Disability Agreement and the future directions set under the NDS will combine to shift the perspective, from seeing the disability service system as the source of all support for people with a disability, to that of a position where the disability service system as taken as one part of a broader service response (including health, education, housing, employment and income support).

The future emphasis will support the importance of family and carers and other community based informal supports. This shift towards more inclusive mainstream services and a greater emphasis on informal supports is in line with progressive thinking that is at an early stage internationally.

All aspects of service delivery for people with disability and their families and carers are linked, the effort and investment in services over time combine and through steady engagement and life experience, contribute to the quality of life outcomes for people with disability.



*Dr Jeff Harmer*  
Secretary