

SUBMISSION: PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION REVIEW

NATIONAL DISABILITY AGREEMENT

Mental Health Australia is the peak, national non-government organisation representing and promoting the interests of the Australian mental health sector. Our primary interest in the National Disability Agreement relates to psychosocial disability.

A National Disability Agreement is required to ensure all Australian governments commit to, and are held accountable to the Australian people for, addressing psychosocial disability.

The National Mental Health Consumer and Carer Forum document *Unravelling Psychosocial Disability* is essential reading to fully understand psychosocial disability, its impact on people with severe mental illness and the disability support services that aid recovery and assist people to maximise their capabilities.

Psychosocial disability is the term that mental health consumers and carers use to describe the disability experience of people with impairments and participation restrictions related to mental health conditions. These impairments and restrictions include loss of or reduced abilities to function, think clearly, experience full physical health and manage the social and emotional aspects of their lives.¹

Since the deinstitutionalisation of care for people with mental illness, psychosocial disability support services have evolved to assist people to live in the community and achieve economic and social participation. However, the "mental health system" in Australia is yet to achieve the appropriate balance between biomedical and psychosocial models and interventions recommended by the United Nations Special Rapporteur.²

The mental health sector welcomed the inclusion of psychosocial disability in the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), as it signified an end to short term funding arrangements for psychosocial support services and the inherent uncertainty for people receiving those services.

Prior to the introduction of the NDIS, psychosocial disability support services were funded by all governments, primarily under health portfolio programs³. Unfortunately during transition to the NDIS governments effectively abrogated their responsibility to support people with psychosocial disability who are not eligible for the NDIS in two ways:

- Health portfolios largely no longer consider psychosocial disability as their responsibility; and
- State and territory governments consider psychosocial disability is a Federal responsibility and have closed many programs that provided psychosocial disability support services.

¹ National Mental Health Consumer and Carer Forum *Unravelling Psychosocial Disability* 2011. Page 16.

² United Nations General Assembly. Human Rights Council. *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health*. Thirty-fifth session 6-23 June 2017 Agenda item 3.

³ At the Commonwealth level, the Department of Social Services funded four programs.



The current National Disability Agreement was clearly not robust enough to mitigate this risk. Our concern therefore is that without a new agreement the NDIS will be the only avenue for accessing psychosocial disability support services.

The need for psychosocial services outside the NDIS is clear. In 2015, the Australian Government estimated that 690,000 Australians have a severe mental illness and that around one third (i.e. 230,000 people) have chronic, persisting illness and have a need for some form of social support⁴. At full scheme the NDIS is expected to provide services to approximately 64,000 people with a primary psychosocial disability⁵. Based on those numbers, there are around 166,000 people who are not eligible for NDIS but who have no certainty of access to psychosocial disability support services.

A National Disability Agreement is needed to provide clarity on the responsibility of all governments, and the respective portfolios, to provide psychosocial disability support services to people who are not eligible for the NDIS. Other governance documents, such as the Constitution and the Commonwealth Administrative Arrangements Orders, are not specific enough to provide certainty, nor hold governments to account for unmet obligations to Australians living with mental illness and psychosocial disability.

In the absence of a response from disability Ministers, and recognising the shortfall in psychosocial disability support services, the Federal Minister for Health stepped in to secure commitments from all state and territory governments to provide a small amount of funding for people who are not eligible for the NDIS,⁶ with funding only available until June 2021.

A new National Disability Agreement should build on this effort, and;

- clarify where the psychosocial disability and health portfolio responsibilities lie
- ensure all governments have programs in place to provide the highest standard of mental health through the provision of psychosocial disability support services in addition to clinical care and treatment
- clarify the psychosocial disability support services covered by the NDIS
- specify psychosocial disability support services that will be available for those who are ineligible for the NDIS
- assign roles and responsibilities in relation to implementation of the revised National Disability Strategy
- specify jurisdictional roles and responsibilities in relation to:
 - psychosocial disability policy development and implementation
 - provision of psychosocial disability support services
 - funding contributions for psychosocial disability support services
- contain monitoring and reporting provisions to ensure governments meet their responsibilities and commitments beyond their obligations to the NDIS.

It is imperative that Governments are held to account for the delivery of psychosocial services both in and outside the NDIS to ensure that vulnerable people are not left without service. A National Disability Agreement is a tangible mechanism to assist in clarifying roles and responsibilities between the Commonwealth and jurisdictions. Such an agreement also provides a commitment to the public and particularly consumers and carers about services required to meet their basic needs.

⁴ Department of Health *Australian Government Response to Contributing Lives, Thriving Communities – Review of Mental Health Programmes and Services*. 2015

⁵ National Disability Insurance Agency, 2018, *Key Data on Psychosocial Disability and the NDIS – as at 31 December 2017*

⁶ The Hon Greg Hunt, MP. Minister for Health. Press release. *\$160 million boost for mental health support*. 23 June 2018

