

Call for increased funding to disability legal and advocacy services

Joint Media Release

The NDIS has faced funding short falls that have affected individual participants, their families, and carers.

In Victoria approximately 1 million people live with a disability and of those 133,859 are participants on the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). Without a well-funded NDIS many people will be left without the support and care they need to thrive.

Appeals against NDIS decisions have skyrocketed, with a recent 400% increase in complaints lodged at the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT).

Community legal centres and disability advocacy services are struggling under the high demand for advice and casework support, with many services unable to offer in person representation at Tribunal hearings.

In 2020-21 there were 1,780 NDIS applications for review. Of these, advocacy organisations represented 622 participants and only 325 participants received legal representation.

Last financial year the NDIA spent \$34.8 million on external legal costs, which included challenges to AAT reviews. However, community legal centres and advocacy services only received a combined \$10 million to support thousands of NDIS participants.

The ongoing Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with a Disability has heard from peers and advocates on the importance of robust legal and advocacy systems to ensure access to justice for people living with a disability.

Community legal centres have seen disability service providers exploiting vulnerable consumers on the scheme, while others are denied access completely. It is clear that there is a need for in depth community consultation and reform of the system to ensure fair access and protection from unscrupulous providers.

Labor has pledged support for a review of the NDIS if elected, however we need certainty from all parties that advocacy services will be supported to fully represent the interests and needs of the disability community.

Quotes attributed to joint coalition of disability legal and advocacy services

“We are calling on all parties to support increased funding to disability legal and advocacy services to improve access to justice for people living with a disability”.

“Accessible legal and advocacy services play an important role in breaking down barriers for people living with a disability”.

“Instead of spending \$35 million dollars a year on Collins Street corporate lawyers to block people accessing crucial services, the Government needs to fund community led solutions to improve access to the scheme”.

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