

Polio Australia

Representing polio survivors throughout Australia

Senator the Hon. Anne Ruston
Minister for Families and Social Services
PO Box 6100, Senate, Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Minister

Polio Australia commends the review of the National Disability Strategy to develop programs and governmental responsibilities that will enable Australians living with a disability to have an accessible and inclusive community.

We note the Productivity Commission's findings that there were little systematic outcomes and reach across all jurisdictions from the 2010-2020 strategy focus¹. The intent of this letter is to request that this strategy addresses the need for a comprehensive assistive technology plan across federal and state governments, as previously assessed and recommended². Polio Australia calls upon the Disability Reform Council and the National Disability Strategy to address together the funding shortfalls of assistive technology that exist between state and federal jurisdictions.

Assistive technology (AT) enables many people to have a measurable improvement in their level of functional independence and quality of life, and provides increased opportunities to participate, work and create in their local communities. AT provision in Australia differs depending on your age, level of disability, where you live, and importantly which service system you access. An estimated 10% of people living with disability are eligible for the NDIS³. Polio Australia calls for expansion of support services of the NDIS to support people living with a disability, particularly those who have lived with considerable physical disability throughout their lives, that is likely to increase due to the neurodegenerative nature of a history of Poliomyelitis. Where this requires considerable time to implement, AT funding must be a priority as state support services are reduced (in line with federal NDIS and aged care funding reforms). Aged care support packages in particular are not designed or adequate to support older Australians

¹ Productivity Commission 2019, Review of the National Disability Agreement, Study Report, Canberra

² Jenny Pearson & Associates. (2013) Research for the National Disability Agreement: Aids and Equipment Reform, Final Report

³ Fisher K., et al. (2019) Review of the National Disability Strategy 2010 – 2020. Social Policy Research Centre. Available at: <https://www.sprc.unsw.edu.au/research/projects/review-national-disability-strategy-2010-2020/>

living with a disability⁴. The availability of funding to support people with disabilities within the NDIS and for those ineligible for NDIS is essentially developing a two-tiered system, complicated further by uncertainty of state-based disability funding in the future. When there is funding available, it is often limited, resulting in people forgoing services to afford AT, or choosing to forgo AT to continue accessing essential care services.

There are possibilities to leverage off the NDIS model to support Australians living with a disability who are currently “ineligible” for this scheme. A national Assistive Technology Program where state and federal governments agree to nationally consistent aids and equipment schemes will enable large-scale social and economic return, and a reduction in health care costs. We invite any opportunity for further consultation to develop the National Disability Strategy for beyond 2020.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gillian Thomas". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Gillian Thomas

22 July 2019

⁴ Tune, D. (2017). Legislated Review of Aged Care, Canberra, retrieved from: <https://agedcare.health.gov.au/legislated-review-of-aged-care-2017-report>