

# Polio Australia

Representing polio survivors throughout Australia

National Patron: Dr John Tierney PhD OAM, Federal Senator for NSW 1991 – 2005

3 June 2015

Senator the Hon Mitch Fifield  
Assistant Minister for Social Services  
Chair – COAG Disability Reform Council  
PO Box 6100  
Senate  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Assistant Minister,

Polio Australia is the national body providing for communication and collaboration between the state polio organisations and affording polio survivors the opportunity to undertake programs on a unified national basis. Polio Australia is committed to standardising quality polio information and service provision throughout the country for polio survivors. Polio Australia's Vision is that all polio survivors in Australia have access to appropriate health care and the support required to maintain independence and make informed life choices.

In moving towards achieving this Vision, Polio Australia has made numerous submissions and representations to the Federal Government regarding the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) inequity in relation to our demographic due to the 65 year cut off. These include:

- July 2012: Meeting and email exchange with Mr Bruce Bonyhady AM, Chair, NDIS, regarding the onset of the Late Effects of Polio and subsequent need for disability support services and assistive technology (despite living with polio for decades, the need for such services and technology may not be recognised or acknowledged before age 65).
- 25 January 2013: Teleconference with Dr Nick Hartland, Group Manager, NDIS; Dr Bruce Smith, Branch Manager, NDIS; and Denise Ryan, Section Manager, NDIS.
- 1 February 2013: A Submission from Polio Australia relating to the Inquiry into the National Disability Insurance Scheme Bill 2012 at the invitation of Mr Ian Holland, (then) Secretary of the Standing Committee on Community Affairs.
- 20 February 2013: Representation at the NDIS and Aged Care roundtable (Adelaide).
- 21 February 2013: Submission to, and representation and evidence at, a Senate Inquiry – The NDIS Bill 2012, Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs (Melbourne).
- 4 March 2013: Submission to, and representation and evidence at, a Senate Inquiry - The NDIS Bill 2012, Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs (ACT).
- A number of meetings with relevant Ministers, Members, and Senators to discuss this inequity since the NDIS Bill was passed in May 2013.

Polio Australia and the state-based Polio Networks who have co-signed this letter (together with writing separately to their relevant state disability ministers) want to ensure that people with disabilities who aren't eligible for the NDIS due to the age cut-off at 65 are provided with the same level of funding, choice and quality of service that will be available under the NDIS.

As of July 2015, the Commonwealth Home Support Package (CHSP) will provide services to people over the age of 65. The NDIS will cover those under 65 and the Commonwealth Home Support Package will cover all people under 65 who require attendant care and other home supports.

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We have three main concerns for the post-polio community who will not be covered by the NDIS when it rolls out from 2016-2019:

1. there should be a clear plan for an equivalent level of funding of assistive technology (AT) for those not covered by the NDIS;
2. the level of funding under the CHSP should be equivalent to that of the current Individual Support Package;
3. if Aged Care is to be responsible for those with long term or lifelong disabilities, specialist disability services should be established with the appropriate scope, training and vision.

As previously mentioned, Polio Australia has made representations on this matter pointing out that it is understood that it would be prohibitive to cover all age-related disabilities but for those whose disability dates from perhaps 60 years ago, many since early childhood, some even less than one year of age, the NDIS should provide cover.

We appreciate that the theory behind entry to the NDIS cutting out at 65 is that there is a significant proportion of older people who may need AT because of age-related disabilities, and it is considered preferable that these needs be met through aged care provisions. However, the fact that a person has reached the age of 65 does not mean that they need residential or nursing home care. In fact many live independently into their 90s. The increase in the age for entitlement to the aged pension and changes to retirement age notions attest to the independence and capability of older people. Where a person does have some eligibility for general assistance with in-home living, the availability and appropriateness of AT are applicable, and often vital.

For those who do need residential care the question must be asked whether there is any provision for specialised AT. It is assumed that aged care providers would source equipment through the same 'approved providers' currently being suggested under the NDIS. We have serious doubts that many residential care providers would include funding for such equipment as part of their care and, even if they did, whether the equipment available would be suitable to the person's special needs. If funding were not available then they would be in the same position as all others not eligible under NDIS. These concerns are highlighted by a simple example: if a nursing home keeps a stock of walking frames, they might expect all residents to use the same style, whereas people with unusual and difficult gaits, such as polio survivors, may need a special type of frame. These can cost up to \$800 compared with the standard \$100.

Polio Australia and the state Polio Networks are very keen to see that our concerns and the issues raised in this communication are given due consideration for effective redress. Australia's post-polio community have survived, had gainful employment and contributed to the community for many years despite their disability, often with physical, emotional and financial hardship for them and their families. That Australians with a lifelong disability are not able to have the assistance of the system which is supposed to cover ALL people with a disability is a tragic injustice. Ensuring equivalent services under aged care funding initiatives will go some way towards mitigating this injustice.

We look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,



Dr John Tierney OAM  
President and National Patron  
Polio Australia



Gillian Thomas  
Vice President  
Polio Australia