



4 DEC 2014

OFFICE OF SENATOR THE HON MITCH FIFIELD

ASSISTANT MINISTER FOR SOCIAL SERVICES

MC14-012968

Professor Karen Healy
National President
Australian Association of Social Workers
PO Box 4956
KINGSTON ACT 2604

Dear Professor Healy

Thank you for your letter of 23 October 2014 to Senator the Hon Mitch Fifield, Assistant Minister for Social Services, about provision of mental health supports as the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) rolls out. The Minister has asked me to reply to you on his behalf.

I appreciate the concerns you have raised in relation to current mental health programmes and the NDIS, and I can assure you that the Australian Government will draw on the experience of the current trials to ensure we get the best outcomes for people with mental illness.

The Productivity Commission recommended that the NDIS include people with mental illness and the legislation sets out how people are eligible for support from the NDIS. Section 24 of the *National Disability Insurance Scheme Act 2013* specifies that people with an impairment, or impairments, attributable to a psychiatric condition may meet the disability requirements to become a participant of the scheme. The impairment must be permanent (or likely to be permanent), result in substantially reduced functional capacity or psychosocial functioning in undertaking activities of daily living, affect the person's capacity for social and economic participation, and mean that the person is likely to require support for their lifetime.

In March 2013, the Government agreed for 17 Commonwealth programmes to progressively cash out block funding, either in full or in part, to the NDIS. In 2019-20, the transfer of these programmes is expected to contribute around \$1.2 billion towards funding the Commonwealth's commitment to the NDIS (or around 11 per cent).

In relation to the concerns you have raised about the transition of Personal Helpers and Mentors (PHaMs) and Partners in Recovery (PiR), I can confirm that the evidence on pathways for people with mental health needs in the NDIS trials will continue to be closely monitored. In addition, where a person is currently receiving support and the programme from which this support is received ceases, that person's supports will continue. The Intergovernmental Agreement for the National Disability Insurance Scheme Launch, signed by the Commonwealth and all states and territories, specifically states that the Council of Australian Governments committed to provide continuity of support to people with disability who are currently receiving services to ensure that they are not disadvantaged in the transition to the new scheme.

I understand your concern for people with mental health disorders whose illness may be episodic in nature. Paragraph 5.5 under part 5 of the NDIS rules states that an impairment may be permanent notwithstanding that the severity of its impact on the functional capacity of the person may fluctuate or there are prospects that the severity of the impact of the impairment on the person's functional capacity, including their psychosocial functioning, may improve.

With regard to your comments on Tier 2, the Commonwealth, states and territories are currently developing a framework for supports in Tier 2 which will set out the ways in which they can be of benefit to all people with disability, their families and carers. This includes the role of the National Disability Insurance Agency, activities to be provided and implementation. In line with the Productivity Commission's vision of Tier 2, this work is focusing on the following functions:

- Information, linkages and referrals;
- Capacity building for mainstream services;
- Community awareness and capacity building;
- Local area co-ordination, and;
- Individual capacity building.

Should you require further information on this matter, please contact Mr Bruce Smith at the Department of Social Services at bruce.smith@dss.gov.au.

Thank you again for writing.

Yours sincerely



2/12/14

CRAIG BOSWORTH
Chief of Staff