

Dear Senator Fifield

I write about meeting to discuss the NDIS implementation for people living with Autism Spectrum Disorder. A recent article in The Australian (see <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/fifield-demands-action-on-disability/story-fn59niix-1226756923270>) expresses concerns that we share about the NDIS and its roll-out.

NDIS procedures and processes that are visible to the community do not recognise some essential needs of people living with Autism Spectrum Disorder. While NDIS officials say they “consulted” people with Autism Spectrum Disorder and other relevant stakeholders, we don't know who they “consulted” (apparently not anyone we know). The NDIS's emerging processes and procedures lack features we regard as essential/fundamental. Our conclusion is that, if anyone with real expertise in services and supports for people with Autism Spectrum Disorder was “consulted”, the communication was incomplete and/or ineffective. The NDIS needs to do better.

Autism Aspergers Advocacy Australia (A4), the national grassroots organisation representing people living with Autism Spectrum Disorder, requested meetings with representatives from the NDIS on numerous occasions to raise our concerns. So far, NDIS staff have denied/refused our requests to meet and discuss issues and concerns we have about NDIS implementation.

The article in The Australian focuses on people with Intellectual Disability; it does not mention people with Autism Spectrum Disorder. But the overlap between Intellectual Disability and Autism Spectrum Disorder is substantial (in excess of 30%). Some of the issues/concerns raised in The Australian around Intellectual Disability have parallels in relation to Autism Spectrum Disorder; and several issues that are more specific to Autism Spectrum Disorder also deserve/require process overhaul and “remedial action”.

The recent Labor Governments did not recognise or respond discernibly to Government reporting of particularly poor outcomes in Australia for people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (see <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4428.0>). The report shows people with Autism Spectrum Disorder:

- have mostly (74%) severe or profound disability and need frequent or constant support (so, presumably, the NDIS is intended to fund the services they need for their disability);
- currently cannot access the services and supports they need – consequently reported outcomes in education and labor force participation are particularly poor.

NDIS eligibility criteria for people with Autism Spectrum Disorder are unclear. Sadly, many people in the community who live with Autism Spectrum Disorder lack confidence that they will be eligible for the NDIS or that the NDIS will meet their essential needs.

At this time, the number of school-age children who are diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder is similar to the number of children with Intellectual Disability; these are two major and overlapping elements of school-age people with a disability. Also, outcomes for people with both disabilities (Intellectual Disability and Autism Spectrum Disorder) are abysmal.

A4 representatives would like to discuss with you how the NDIS can better meet the needs of people living with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

So please, can we meet to discuss how your Government can overhaul NDIS processes to improve outcomes for Australian living with Autism Spectrum Disorder. I can be contacted via email or on the telephone (04xxxxxxx).

yours sincerely  
Bob Buckley  
A4 Convenor.

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