

Campaign for a Public Apology from the Australian Prime Minister to People with a Disability and their Families

This is an Open Letter (please send via Australia Post or email to your local Members of Parliament as well as throughout your online networks)

People with disabilities and their families are the most invisible and marginalized Australians and also amongst the most disadvantaged. A significant percentage of this group of Australians are known to be living like second class citizens. Despite some reasonable efforts and good intentions by people with disabilities and their families as well as various disability organisations, government policies for many decades were designed to 'shut out' people with disabilities and their families from society. This is not just history, it continues today through a dysfunctional disability service system that provides little genuine support to ensure people with a disability and their families are able to live inclusively in our communities. This legacy has directly effected a current national culture of pitying people with a disability and ignoring, condoning and fostering human rights violations of endemic and chronic proportions. These violations, which derive directly from and are thus prohibited by various articles and principles described in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities that the Australian Government has signed and ratified, include the suffering of hundreds of thousands of Australians with a disability from exclusion, isolation, abuse, neglect, discrimination, vilification, ignorance, inequality economically and socially and in meaningful access to employment and health services, inequity and a reduced quality of life compared with abled Australians. Whilst an overhaul in personal care and support is welcome, it will likely fail at combating the many obstacles placed in the path of people with disabilities in all facets of society such as education, employment, health care, housing, access to premises and social inclusion.

We call upon the Prime Minister of Australia and each of the State Premiers and Territory Chief Ministers to deliver a formal public apology to people with disabilities and their families for past and present denials of human rights and the imposition of a dysfunctional service system upon the most vulnerable sections of Australian society.

In addition, we call upon disability charities and services to deliver a formal public apology for their part in the 'shutting out' of people with disabilities and their families from society, and their participation in a poorly resourced and dysfunctional service system that continues to humiliate people with disabilities and their families.

Finally, we call upon all politicians and policy-makers to support and facilitate the overhauling of the culture and support arrangements for people with disabilities and their families which shall include the implementation of the following recommendations that include, but are not limited to, the Government of Australia committing to:

1. Integrating support to people with a disability through the introduction of self-directed in-home and in-community services and personal budgets in education, health care, employment and training and housing, as well as in personal support and aids and equipment, traversing service boundaries with mental health, child and family support, and aged care;
2. Changing State and Territory building regulations for private housing to ensure all new builds meet the requirements for visitable housing;
3. Supporting and extending existing subsidy programmes for employers to facilitate the employment of large numbers of people with disabilities which shall include strategies to prohibit subminimum wages;
4. Introducing additional federal anti-discrimination provision that prohibits disability vilification to match the racial, homosexual and religious vilification legislations;
5. Adopt the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities into Australian law;
6. Conducting an official inquiry into how reasonable the "fair go" principle was implemented for Australians affected by disability in disability discrimination complaints (e.g. Purvis and Walker) previously pursued in the courts including the deterrent posed by financial disincentive due to crippling court costs;
7. Conducting a Royal Commission into the efficacy of the Australian Human Rights Commission in promoting and protecting the human rights of Australians with a disability and their families including its administration of the Disability Discrimination Act;
8. Conducting an independent investigation into the merits and practicability of a national Autism Bill/Act and formulating a strategy to address the results of the 2009 Autism in Australia study by the Australian Bureau of Statistics;
9. Honouring the human rights of people with a disability by adopting a principled approach to the use of language and public discourse in matters regarding people with a disability, including removing references which engender pity, revulsion or distrust;

10. The creation of an Ombudsman for Disability to demonstrate commitment and resolve in improving the delivery of services to people with a disability in an appropriate and respectful manner;

11. Ensuring community referencing by people with a disability and their families by asking that all disability government funded organisations and NGOs be required to have at least one member of their executive committee be a person with a disability or their family representative;

12. Measures to reduce administrative overhead, inefficiency and waste in disability services, including a strengthening of quality control procedures.

13. Actively promoting and publicising disability diversity (similar to sexual orientation, racial and religious diversity) and the contribution of people with disabilities lives to a just, humane and rich society;

14. Reviewing the suitability of various sections (e.g. clause 1.9.6) of the Commercial Television Code of Conduct that are meant to protect people with a disability and investigating the previous performance of the Australian Communications and Media Authority in the management of complaints relevant to these sections; and

15. Establishment of a government authority, that includes Australians with a disability and or their families, for administering the implementation of recommendations 1-14 above including periodic efficacy measurements that are accessible to the public.

Sincerely

James Eggleton



Vern Hughes



Kylie McClelland



The Disability Discrimination Australia Public Forum Group (Facebook) plus other Australians supporting the apology campaign.

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Contact Information

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