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PRIORITIES FOR THE 2016 BUDGET

People with Disability Australia (PWDA) welcomes the opportunity to outline our key priorities for the 2016 Commonwealth Budget to be handed down in May.

PWDA is a national disability peak organisation made up of people with disability and organisations primarily constituted by people with disability. We have a cross-disability focus, representing the interests of people with all kinds of disability. We work in a bipartisan and constructive way with a board directly elected by ordinary people with disability.

PWDA consults regularly with our membership to ensure that our policy positions genuinely reflect the lived experience of people with disability.

PWDA is also a member of the Australian Cross Disability Alliance, a coalition of Disabled Peoples Organisations (DPOs), which are organisations run by and for people with disability. ACDA promotes and seeks to advance the human rights and freedoms of all people with disability in Australia.

Drawing from this lived experience, we would like to provide our key priorities for the 2016 Budget.

- ***Disability and Poverty***
- ***The National Disability Strategy***
- ***The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)***
- ***Australian Hearing***
- ***Income and employment support***
- ***Affordable and accessible housing***
- ***Funding for education needs of students with disability***
- ***Advisory and leadership mechanisms for people with disability***
- ***Disability Discrimination Commissioner***
- ***Australian Broadcasting Corporation***

Regards


Therese Sands
Co-CEO, People with Disability Australia

Disability and Poverty

Australia currently ranks 26 out of 27 OECD countries for the percentage of people with disability living in poverty. Our accumulated short comings mean that 45% of people with disability in Australia live near or below the poverty line.

Many people with disability are dependent on income support due to pervasive barriers they face in finding and keeping work. The most recent OECD ranking placed Australia 21st out of 29 OECD countries for employment participation of people with disability, and data released this month showed that in 2012, nearly half of people with disability in Australia were not in the labour force¹.

We recognise that the Australian Government has a commitment to fiscal constraint in order to pay back debt and bring the budget back to a surplus position. However, we do not believe that those with the least means to contribute should bear the burden of this commitment. Many measures contained in the 2014 and 2015 budgets disproportionately affected people on low incomes, including people with disability and we strongly recommend that this not be repeated in the 2016 Budget.

There have been changes to eligibility to the Disability Support Pension that have left many people with disability trying to survive on the much lower Newstart Allowance. PWDA believes that there must not be further restrictions to the DSP and that the Newstart Allowance must be increased.

People with disability are already ‘doing it tough’ and it is critical that the 2016 Budget does not contain measures that further entrench poverty for people with disability.

The National Disability Strategy

The National Disability Strategy (NDS) is the mechanism under which Australian Governments at all levels are progressively implementing the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD). A progress report on the implementation of the National Disability Strategy to 2014 has been completed and a second implementation plan is in development, but an action plan for the next stage has not.

Investment in actions across governments are needed to see progress for people with disability in being able to access mainstream services in the community, such as transport, education, justice and healthcare. These parallel reforms must happen for the

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More information from the ABS website -

<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4433.0.55.006?OpenDocument>

NDIS to be successful in meeting its objective of increasing the social and economic participation of people with disability.

As we enter the next stage of the Strategy, **PWDA strongly recommends that the Government fully resource:**

- **the range of measures under the NDS;**
- **a strengthened public reporting mechanism and transparent accountability measures within State and Territory agreements; and**
- **a policy engagement framework that enables people with disability and their representative organisations to be consulted on legislation and policy that affects their lives.**

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)

As a national insurance scheme the NDIS recognises that any Australian may have disability at some point in their life, and that the scheme to provide disability supports should be available to, and paid for by, everyone. The Coalition Government's election commitment towards the full implementation of the NDIS has been demonstrated, and PWDA publicly congratulated the Government on this.

It is critical that the NDIS be funded in full, but **we strongly reject measures that would seek revenue to fill any perceived or potential shortfall through a shift in revenue from other human services**, such as aged care. The Aged Care Reforms currently underway are moving to a person centred approach to service delivery which provides choice and control to individuals. Whether an individual is provided with support under the aged care system, or through the NDIS, they must have access to the same quality and level of services. This will require an aged care system which is robust and fully resourced.

The NDIS is an essential part of our social infrastructure that will ensure that all Australians with disability finally have the support they need. This long overdue investment in people with disability and their families will enable more people to move into work, and also create jobs in the disability support sector. Implementation of the NDIS will bring an increase to GDP and the economic benefits of having more Australians able to participate in the community.

We also strongly reject any measures that link a fully funded NDIS with the need to cut welfare spending.

PWDA strongly supports the retention of the NDIS component of the Medicare Levy, which provides predictable targeted revenue for the NDIS. The current levy relief

and exemption measures in place for low income earners and others should be maintained.

Tier 2 of the NDIS, now called Information, Linkages and Capacity (ILC) is currently being formalised before being rolled out across Australia. ILC is targeted at all people with disability, particularly those who will not receive funding packages through the NDIS but who will need targeted information, advice and linkages in order to successfully navigate the specialist and mainstream service system. The draft Commissioning Framework indicates the total budget available for ILC in 2019-20 will be approximately \$132 million. While we have yet to understand the extent of ILC activities to be delivered through Local Area Coordinators this appears to be very low. ILC services are an important buttress to the specialist service system

It is essential that the full scope of the ILC system be funded, to ensure that all people with disability can access the services they need.

Australian Hearing

PWDA is pleased that the Government has decided to defer any scoping study into the potential sale of Australian Hearing and to consult people who are Deaf or hard of hearing. Australian Hearing provides essential hearing services, research and targeted programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, children and young people with disability, adults with complex hearing rehabilitation needs. PWDA strongly urges the Government to permanently rule out the potential sale of this Government asset to the private sector.

Income and employment support

PWDA was pleased that the final report of the Reference Group on Welfare Reform echoed our call for a Jobs Plan for people with disability and mental health conditions. However, the detail of the payment structure redesign, particularly the proposed Tiered Working Age Payment and the Supported Living Pension needs to be known.

Any redesign needs to ensure that people with disability are able to meet daily living costs, the extra costs of disability and support people to get jobs. Requiring claimants to show they cannot work more than eight hours a week is a very high bar especially in the current labour market.

PWDA welcomes the idea of a passport to work which could remove the fear involved in people taking up jobs by enabling them to return to their former income support

arrangements and concessions if the job ends or the work hours reduce. This needs to be practical, not just a repackaging of existing arrangements.

PWDA urges the Government not to adopt recommendations which relate to income support savings and ignoring those which relate to building a disability and mental health jobs plan. The focus of any welfare reform must be on incentives, not penalties.

PWDA maintains our view that any reform must ensure that social security be available to all who need it, and provide for an adequate standard of living in relation to the rest of the community. This safety net is particularly important for people with disability who face profound and complex barriers to participation.

The reality is that for some people with disability, the barriers to participation are so great that they will be dependent on income support over the long term. The Disability Support Pension (DSP) provides for a basic standard of living, with little room for luxuries or savings. This would mean that rather than being supported to live in dignity, people with disability dependent on income support would fall further behind the living standards of the rest of the community.

We support the recommendations of the wider community sector² for the base rate of income support (Newstart) to be increased, and that this be indexed to wages. Evidence shows that this base rate has not kept pace with increasing living costs³. Tightening eligibility for the DSP has resulted in increasing numbers of people with disability being dependent on Newstart. These people struggle to survive on a payment that in no way accounts for the additional costs associated with disability⁴.

We strongly disagree with the proposed cessation of the Pensioner Education Supplement (PES). If PES is stopped, many people on the DSP will have to fund their study costs out of their income support payments, which will mean that enhancing training and skills to move into employment will be prohibitive.

PWDA urges the Government to dedicate resources towards the development of a comprehensive Jobs Plan⁵ for people with disability, which supports and incentivises people with disability towards long-term employment. As part of this

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ACOSS 2015 Budget submission p. 10

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ACOSS Poverty report 2014

http://www.acoss.org.au/images/uploads/ACOSS_Poverty_in_Australia_2014.pdf

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<http://www.smh.com.au/national/hidden-crisis-of-long-term-joblessness-worsens-20150201-1330gk.html>

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PWDA's platform 'Get Real on Jobs' provides more details on potential areas of focus - <http://www.pwd.org.au/pwda-publications/get-real-on-jobs2.html>

Jobs Plan, PWDA supports strategic investment in areas which will increase public sector employment participation including our suggestion of a paid parliamentary internship scheme to lift the profile and presence of people with disability. We also continue to advocate for measures to alleviate the cost of disability.

People with disability need access to employment services that meet their individualised needs and which are focused on long term outcomes for their clients. Disability Employment Services (DES) continue to deliver poor employment outcomes for people with disability, and we support the current reform process.

The reforms are due to be completed by 2018, and to date the Department of Social Services (DSS) has been in dialogue with people with disability, employers and disability peak bodies regarding the design of the new employment support system. **Ongoing resources must be committed over the next year to support dialogue between all stakeholders to ensure that the new employment support structure offers the best outcomes for people with disability.** As part of this structure, PWDA supports trialled unbundling of DES to provide a more effective and responsive approach at the NDIS interface. This will require some upfront investment but yield savings over the longer term.

With individualised funding provided through the NDIS, some people with disability will, for the first time, be able to consider their work options in the open employment market. Currently many people with disability are forced to work in Australian Disability Enterprises (ADEs), formally known as sheltered workshops, because their support services are tied to these organisations. ADEs segregate people with disability from the rest of the community, and workers do not receive equal pay for work of equal value or enjoy the same industrial protections as other workers.

Under the NDIS, people with disability will be able to access support services when and where they need them, and this opens up new possibilities for employment. **The reform of the DES system is integral to the success of the NDIS, in terms of facilitating positive employment outcomes for all people with disability in the open employment market.**

We congratulate the Government on settling the outstanding BSWAT wage case for people in supported employment and look forward to seeing the funds needed in the 2016 Budget.

Affordable and accessible housing

Access to appropriate, affordable and accessible housing presents one of the greatest barriers to inclusion for people with disability, limiting participation in all aspects of life.

PWDA notes the undersupply of affordable, accessible and universally designed housing and supports work with industry and attention to the tax treatment of housing investment to increase mainstream housing supply. We strongly support the position of the Australian Network for Universal Housing Design that minimum access features, such as those in the Liveable Housing Design's Gold Level, be included in the National Construction Code for all new and extensively modified housing.

Significant reforms in the disability and aged care sector will be undermined if the Government does not dedicate significant resources towards addressing the undersupply of affordable, accessible and universally designed housing.

PWDA also urges the Government to invest in the expansion of a revised National Rental Affordability Scheme and increase the level of Commonwealth rent assistance to meet growing rents.

Governments should incentivise private investors in affordable and accessible housing and encourage jurisdictions to commit to a dedicated land release pipeline for housing which meets AS4299. COAG work should aim to develop a pool of accessible housing product below the \$200,000 range and invest in innovative housing forms, rather than "models" which expand the choices for people with disability.

PWDA strongly advocates for the de-linking of disability support from housing. The NDIS must be a mechanism to achieve this rather than creating new opportunities to congregate people with disability in order to reduce the cost of support provision. People with disability are now able to exercise choice and control over their provider of disability support. Their choice of provider must not be limited due to a lack of options for appropriate housing, or because service providers wrap accommodation options into their disability support packages thus making housing and support cheaper.

It is essential that full choice and control over provision of disability support applies to all people with disability, including those who live in group homes and large institutions. In parallel, it is imperative that people with disability receive adequate information about their housing options in the pre-planning phase, and the housing sector is educated on the rights and needs of people with disability so that it can support the development of an increase in appropriate, affordable, accessible, universally designed homes. Innovation should focus on accessible and affordable built housing forms, not failed institutional models with high downstream costs.

There is an urgent need for synergy between the development of future housing policy with disability policy and resources to enable this would be strongly welcomed.

A national redress scheme for abuse survivors with disability

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Abuse last year recommended a [national redress scheme](#) to make available counselling, support and a monetary payment to victims and survivors of child sexual abuse, a recommendation PWDA supported.

The Federal Government has said it will coordinate a nationally consistent approach, yet appears resistant to a national redress scheme. This leaves much uncertainty for survivors, as some states have already begun their own redress schemes.

People with disability are particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse as children. Many have, with [PWDA's support](#), told the Royal Commission of shocking treatment in institutions that were meant to care for them, often run by government agencies. PWDA strongly believes that **a national redress scheme is the best way to ensure justice for people with disability abused as children**. The multiple barriers to accessing justice experienced by people with disability means they may miss out altogether on any kind of compensation for the abuse they experienced. They also often struggle to access the services that all survivors need to deal with what happened to them. **A national redress scheme would help level the playing field for people with disability and ensure justice for all survivors.**

Royal Commission into violence, abuse and neglect of people with disability

The [Senate Community Affairs Committee's report](#) and recommendations following its 'Inquiry into Violence Against People with Disability in Institutional and Residential Settings' was released in November 2015 and made a number of recommendations that PWDA supports. They included:

- A Royal Commission into violence, abuse and neglect of people with disability, with terms of reference to be determined in consultation with people with disability, their families and supporters, and disability organisations;
- The establishment of a national system for reporting, investigating and eliminating violence, abuse and neglect of people with a disability;
- That the Australian Government work with state and territory governments on the implementation of initiatives to improve access to justice for people with disability;
- That the Australian Government consider amending a number of protective policies to include the specific needs of people with disability, to ensure that people with disability are afforded the full range of rights protections that are available to people without disability.

The Australian Cross Disability Alliance made a comprehensive submission to the inquiry outlining terrible violence, abuse and neglect of people with disability. **The 2016 Budget must contain funding to begin to address this issue, starting with the implementation of a Royal Commission to begin to expose these crimes and bring justice to people with disability.**

The stories that the Senate inquiry heard are only the tip of the iceberg and are indicative of a widespread and far-reaching problem that is not limited to a few rogue individuals nor confined to disability support settings. **This is a national epidemic, and it warrants urgent national leadership from the Australian Government to address it.**

Funding for education needs of students with disability

The [Senate inquiry](#) into 'Access to real learning: the impact of policy, funding and culture on students with disability' released a report in January 2016 that showed that the system is failing to meet the needs of many students with disability. PWDA strongly supports recommendations from the committee for **increased funding, including the disability loading component of the Gonski education reforms and reversing the cuts to the final two years of these reforms.**

PWDA also urges the funding of the development of a **national strategy to improve the education of students with disability** and resources to assist the Federal government to work with states and territories to end restrictive practices in schools.

Advisory and leadership mechanisms for people with disability

PWDA welcomed the 2014 budget measure towards the establishment of a new Disability and Carers Industry Advisory Council.⁶ The Council would bring together industry, the service sector, peak bodies, people with disability and carers to work closely with Government and provide innovative advice.

However, this Council has not been established to date. PWDA is concerned that with the demise of other advisory mechanisms, such as the National People with Disabilities and Carers Council and the National Disability Strategy Implementation Reference Group, there are no formal engagement mechanisms for people with disability to provide advice and feedback to Government on key reform agendas.

PWDA recommends that the 2016 Budget retains measures and funding allocations for the establishment of the Disability and Carers Industry Advisory Council.

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DSS Budget paper p.23 https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/05_2014/2014-2015_dss_pbs.pdf

Disability Discrimination Commissioner

The lack of a formal mechanism for engagement with Government is compounded by the loss of leaders or champions within Government who strongly promote the rights of people with disability. PWDA remains deeply disappointed and concerned that the loss of a dedicated position of Disability Discrimination Commissioner was an outcome of measures in the 2014 budget.

40% of complaints received by the Australian Human Rights Commission are related to disability discrimination⁷, with half of those complaints relating to employment discrimination. At a time when the national disability landscape is undergoing such significant change, and when people with disability are under increasing pressure to find and keep work, a dedicated full-time Disability Discrimination Commissioner is critical to identify and address systemic disability discrimination and to promote public dialogue on issues and concerns for people with disability. **We strongly urge the Government to provide funding in the 2016 Budget and forward estimates for a dedicated full-time Disability Discrimination Commissioner who is a person with disability.**

PWDA congratulates the Government on the appointment of the new Sex Discrimination Commissioner, but have concerns that the current Aged Discrimination Commissioner is ending their term and a replacement has not yet been appointed. The Human Rights Commission is an essential organisation that provides leadership on a range of human rights issues in Australia. These positions must be filled as soon as possible.

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

By any reasonable measure people with disability are under-represented in the content produced by the ABC despite the ABC charter providing a mandate for the Corporation to broadcast programs that contribute to a sense of national identity and inform and entertain, and reflect the cultural diversity of, the Australian community and provide a balance between broadcasting programs of wide appeal and specialised broadcasting programs. Supporting this voice through ABC Ramp Up was an important initiative within the National Disability Strategy.

There is now **no dedicated portal or programming voice within any ABC platform for disability** and the ABC should be encouraged to prioritise this voice given people with disability are one in five Australians and the prevalence of disability increases with age.