**Media Release**

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Let’s talk about sex.

In an interview today, Minister Stuart Robert and 2GB’s Ray Hadley talked about a plan to impose a ban on NDIS funded   
sex-based supports. They discussed what types of disability support funding were fair and reasonable and ‘in line with community expectations’.

‘I never thought you and I would be talking about prostitutes,’   
the Minister said.

Let’s be clear. We’re not.

This is not about sex work, or ‘prostitutes’, as Minister Robert claims. This is part of a wider plan to change the legislation and overhaul the entire NDIS, introducing punitive new rules that will make the already difficult scheme impossible to navigate. And when Minister Roberts talks about sex-based supports, he’s not just speaking about ‘ladies of the night’.

Don’t be fooled, Australia.

Millions of dollars aren’t being spent by participants on sex workers, nor sex toys – this statement is misleading in a variety of ways. And the proposed changes, which the disability sector has been vehemently fighting, is not even about sex-based supports.

It’s about controversial changes to the NDIS and trying to garner the support of a public and politicians who are expected to be outraged by ‘misuse of public funds’.

It’s a power grab to change the NDIS irrecoverably in ways that will make sure we are denied the reasonable and necessary support we need.

And it’s a shameful attempt to conflate issues in an attempt to slam home legislation that the disability sector is united in standing against.

First, though – let’s talk about the sex. Is it true that thousands of disabled people are paying sex workers for their services?

No. There are a range of services that disabled people use, because they choose to date, have casual sexual partners, enjoy loving relationships, choose celibacy, marry and decide to be parents or not – just like you do. There are also many ways that we can enjoy sexual expression.

Some disabled people use sex therapists and other types of specific support to learn about their sexuality and sexual capacity after a significant injury, illness or sexual assault, increase their experience, knowledge and acceptance about changes in their own bodies and abilities and to gain confidence and skills.

In my lifetime, I have known many disabled people who have used sexologists, sex therapists, sex workers and allied health professionals to carry out a range of supports that the good Minister and Mr Hadley probably wouldn’t know about.

There was the young woman with the intellectual disability who was raped, repeatedly, and needed to very specific counselling to help her understand who to trust, who not to trust and what she could and could not do safely.

There was the man who broke his neck and had to learn to make love to his wife again, using a modified sex aid and a special rocking aid.

There was the woman with no arms, who, like the woman who won that appeal in a court of law against the NDIS, could not successfully masturbate or have sex.

There was the young man who needed sperm retrieval and whose nice Christian support worker almost certainly wouldn’t help him out with that. He started a family last year.

There are even special organisations that help young people learn about puberty and masturbation, charitable organisations like Touching Base that connect disabled people and sex workers and sexologists who specialise specifically in disability.

Access to these services and supports are uncontroversial, long-standing arrangements that have proven to negate some of the difficulties disabled people experience.

This is about our basic rights, enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, enacted through the NDIS, which is underpinned by those same rights.

The NDIS is designed to provide access to supports that are deemed reasonable and necessary to make sure that we are fully supported to live ordinary lives, equal to the rest of the community. That is what we fought for and that is what all our governments agreed to when they signed up to the NDIS.

We call on government to ensure that we will not be subjected to changes in legislation that will leave us worse off, nor forced to undergo mandatory independent assessments. We call on you to support an NDIS that realises our rights to be full citizens with the same rights, freedoms and quality of life as other Australians.

When the time comes, we hope you will say no to introducing independent assessments and the legislative changes that will see our supports reduced or eliminated, our goals eliminated and people left worse off.

It’s what you promised to do when you said yes to the NDIS.

You can read about the DPO Australia Joint Position Statement, which calls for a rights based framework for sexuality in the NDIS, here. <https://dpoa.org.au/joint-position-statement-a-call-for-a-rights-based-framework-for-sexuality-in-the-ndis/>

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**Additional information for journalists:**

Original interview – <https://omny.fm/shows/the-ray-hadley-morning-show/government-services-minister-stuart-robert-fights#description>

Jordon Steele-John’s commentary – <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/feb/03/stuart-robert-condemned-for-plan-to-deny-people-with-disability-access-to-sex-worker-services>

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