

**NDS ACT Submission to the
ACT Legislative Assembly Inquiry into Respite Care Services in the ACT**



The Standing Committee on Health, Community and Social Services recently sought input to the Inquiry into Respite Care Services in the ACT.

NDS is the national industry association for disability services, representing over 650 not-for-profit organisations. Collectively, NDS members operate several thousand services for Australians with all types of disability. NDS's members range in size from small support groups to large multi-service organisations, and are located in every State and Territory across Australia.

- In Canberra, NDS ACT represents disability service providers across a wide and representative range of service types, including respite care.
- As the peak body for disability services, NDS ACT is well placed to provide input to this important inquiry.

Respite Care as Part of the Disability Services Spectrum

Respite care is a service type which cannot be viewed in isolation of other disability services. It is important that respite services be considered in the context of increasing demand for supported accommodation. If the current demand on supported accommodation increases and cannot be met, many individuals with disability may need to remain in their family home. This will have a flow on impact regarding demand for respite services to support those individuals and families. The linkages between respite services and community access services should also be recognised, with some individuals and families utilising community access programs as a form of respite. The potential for cost shifting and distortion of estimates of demand are linked to this interconnectedness of disability services.

Respite services offer preventative solutions to families and individuals. Providing carers with adequate access to respite, whether for planned or unplanned activities, can offer significant benefit in terms of reducing stress and accumulated tension. Carers can continue to provide their essential support for much longer if they can be confident of having a break when they need it, reducing pressure on other areas and types of service.

The Impact of an Ageing Population on the Disability Services Sector

NDS ACT also notes that the ageing of the population may require increased coordination and cooperation across the disability and aged care sectors, both government and non-government. Where a person's primary care relates to their disability, their support needs

are tailored accordingly. As they age, these needs may change as a result of their ageing and, as such, it would be appropriate for aged care providers to provide input to assessment of support needs. Again, this will impact on the disability services sector beyond respite care alone. At present, the coordination within government between the two sectors warrants some improvement to ensure that the needs of individuals can be met, including through assessment, staff training, facilities and so forth.

Growing a Sector to Meet Demand

NDS ACT is keen to see service levels grow to a level which will provide greater assurance to the community that the support needs of people with disability and their families can be met in both the short and long term. NDS ACT considers respite services to be essential to supporting those individuals and families who choose to meet their care needs in their own homes. With supported accommodation services in high demand, the use of respite support is important to manage pressure on services, families and carers. Increased funding for the non-government disability services sector will assist in ensuring that services are able to meet this growth in demand.

The Productivity Commission's "Report on Government Services 2010" highlighted a range of issues for the disability sector, including providing useful statistical information on the number of users of different types of disability services and the funding made available by State/Territory to support them.

- The Inquiry may wish to review section fourteen of the report in order to establish the ACT's relative position compared to other State/Territories.

Transparency of Government Action

NDS ACT notes the Auditor General's "Report Number Three of 2009, Management of Respite Services in the ACT". This report raised significant concerns across a number of areas and NDS ACT would welcome an update from government as to progress to address the audit findings. Specifically, NDS ACT notes:

- Equitable access to services is important. The audit found that eligibility criteria are not well defined, if at all. It also found inconsistency in decision making. Linked to this issue, the use of "minor assessments" of needs rather than structured review against defined criteria is a concern.
- NDS ACT considers the identification of unmet need to be an essential component of effective planning for service capability across both government and non-government sectors. Effective demand management for services is increasingly important as the

population ages and client's support needs change. The audit found that access to respite services had not increased proportionately to meet the growth in demand for service in recent years. It is important that the ACT government consider current and future demand for disability services with a view to better aligning demand with supply capacity.

- NDS ACT notes that the audit found the cost per respite user in government services to be significantly higher than in non-government services. NDS ACT believes this warrants further investigation with potential to consider wider out-sourcing of services or increased funding to non-government services.

NDS ACT would like to note its appreciation to the ACT Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Health, Community and Social Services for inviting input to this Inquiry. Should the Committee require any further information in relation to this or any other matters relating to the disability sector, please contact the ACT Manager of NDS, Ms Louise Gray on 02 6283 3213 or via email at louise.gray@nds.org.au.

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