



Media Release

NDIS reform must include focus on Indigenous Australians

The First Peoples Disability Network (FPDN) says it is imperative that the reforms of the NDIS announced by Minister Bill Shorten today at the National Press Club address the causes of the drastic under-representation of First Nations people with disabilities who participate in the scheme.

FPDN CEO Damian Griffis, a descendent of the Worimi people, said the NDIS was a critical element in ensuring First Nations people with disabilities thrive, not just survive.

“We estimate that there are more than 60,000 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people with disability who should be participating in the NDIS, but the current number is much lower than that,” Mr Griffis said.

“There are a number of issues facing First Peoples with disability in accessing the NDIS. Anyone who is on the NDIS or has a family member on it, Indigenous or not, will know how painful a process it is to just get an assessment, with waiting lists years-long just for that part of the process, and that’s just the first hurdle to get over. Then too many of the plans drawn up are inadequate or inappropriate, meaning Indigenous people are being counted as part of the scheme just because they have a plan.

“The complications of living in regional, rural or remote areas means often the only disability services available to Mob are hundreds of kilometres from where they live with no allowance made for transportation to access these essential services.

“The tyranny of distance is enough of an issue, but throw in the lack of cultural safety in mainstream disability services and you have another compounding factor in Mob not participating in the NDIS.

Mr Griffis said many of these issues were not just important to be addressed via NDIS reform, they were also obligations for the federal government via Closing the Gap, and called on Minister Shorten to ensure change happens on the ground, not just in head office.

However, Mr Griffis did welcome a crackdown on both large organisations and small businesses rorting the NDIS by charging a “wedding tax” when delivering goods and services via NDIS plans.

“It’s nothing short of theft from some of the most disadvantaged Australians when overcharging people just because they are accessing NDIS funds for a good or service,” Mr Griffis said.

“Pursuing these unscrupulous and unethical people and businesses makes sense and will hopefully mean more people will be able to access the NDIS, especially those from First Nations backgrounds who really live with the double disadvantage of being both disabled and Indigenous.

“We also welcome the proposed introduction of longer-term plans and ensuring people don’t have to tell their disability and health stories over and over again. That’s exhausting, and can be re-traumatising for many, and does not value the time of people with disabilities and their families.

“Investing in people with disabilities via the NDIS is just that — an investment that has a meaningful human and economic return. Every dollar spent as part of the NDIS returns \$2.25 to the Australian economy. That’s real-life impact that changes lives, ensures human dignity and human rights are valued and protected and means First Nations people with disabilities can thrive, not just survive.”

Mr Griffis said he looked forward to FPDN working closely with Minister Shorten and the National Disability Insurance Authority (NDIA) in improving the NDIS for all disabled people.

“When you get things right for our people and overcome the double disadvantage that disabled Indigenous people face, you invariably improve things for everyone,” Mr Griffis said.

“Australia can and should do better. I believe real, considered reform will improve things for us all.”