



MEDIA RELEASE

10 August 2011

National disability proposal is warmly welcomed, and the drama will be in the detail

Purple Orange welcomes the Australian Government's release of the Productivity Commission's final report on the future of disability support. With its principal focus and recommendation being a national disability insurance scheme, this report is the latest milestone in the journey towards disability reform since the idea of national disability insurance first emerged in the 2020 Summit. As such, the report's recommendations signal a welcome paradigm shift in the way our country understands and funds disability support.

Robbi Williams, CEO of Purple Orange, said the proposed scheme would distribute funding according to assessed need, and on an individualised basis so the recipient can create support arrangements that are right for that person's situation.

"This approach is something that we have been exploring and advocating for a number of years. It is great to see it in the proposed scheme," said Mr Williams.

With its emphasis on needs-based funding entitlement, the proposed scheme will take Australia to the front of the pack internationally, as it offers a new level of assurance for people living with disability and their families. Purple Orange sees this as a very encouraging development, though as always, the drama could be in the detail.

"A good idea is at its most vulnerable during implementation. The disability community will be paying close attention to how the scheme is set up. There will be many challenges along the way, any one of which could result in people being disappointed," Mr Williams said.

"For example, the National Disability Insurance Scheme would need to include methods to assist people to explore what is genuinely possible in their lives, especially in terms of taking up valued roles in community life. Otherwise, people may opt for what they've been used to through the current system which has been underfunded and constrained and this may not always be for the best."

Importantly, Purple Orange believes the Australian Government needs to ensure people living with disability have a genuine stake in the leadership of the scheme. This means there needs to be community-nominated people living with disability involved in the scheme's design and implementation, and on the scheme's board.

The Government has set aside \$10m to undertake detailed policy work on several themes, including how assessment is carried out, how quality is understood, how pricing is developed, and how the disability sector adapts to the new arrangements, including workforce development.

Purple Orange would add to this list the theme of how best to build community capacity so that people living with disability are welcomed and included in community life, particularly given the Productivity Commission highlighted this important issue in their final report. Also added to the list would be how best to evolve a person's support arrangements so they don't focus solely on the assistance of paid helpers, but on other elements that uphold people's autonomy and active citizenship.

"This is an important opportunity for Australians living with disability, and the family members in their lives, to move away from being second-class citizens and instead take up their rightful place as active members in our communities," Mr Williams said.

Purple Orange encourages the Australian Government to take the earliest opportunity to give its commitment to the detailed elements of the Commission's recommendations, including funding levels. Using the Productivity Commission's own estimates, the required additional funding for this scheme translates to around 80c per Australian per day.

"In our view, this is a very small price to pay to have a scheme which provides all Australians a degree of comfort that if they experience a major disability, there will be appropriate funding and arrangements to enable them to continue with their life aspirations. Doing the right thing for people living with disability and their families is fundamental to the implementation of the scheme," Mr Williams said.

"Meanwhile, given the recommended commencement of the scheme is 2014, and in selected areas only, a key question is how people and families can access additional assistance between now and the proposed full availability of the scheme in 2019. It is well-known that current arrangements are deeply inadequate, so we need early signals from the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments on how they can increase funding in the shorter term."

For more information on this media release and the activities of Purple Orange please contact:

Brigette Elliott
Communications Officer
The Julia Farr Group
brigette@juliafarr.org.au
Phone: (08) 8373 8316
Mobile: 0413 644 819