

PRIME MINISTER

ADDRESS TO THE 2009 NATIONAL DISABILITY AWARDS CEREMONY GREAT HALL, PARLIAMENT HOUSE, CANBERRA 23 NOVEMBER 2009

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

I acknowledge the First Australians on whose land we meet, and whose cultures we celebrate as among the oldest continuing cultures in human history.

I also acknowledge the excellent work of everyone involved with tonight's awards in raising the profile of the concerns of people with disabilities across the nation.

And I'd particularly like to thank the Minister, Jenny Macklin, and the Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities, Bill Shorten, who are both extremely dedicated to real improvements for people with disabilities and those who care for them.

There are many statistics that inform us about the condition of people living with disability across Australia.

But they only tell one part of the story.

The personal tragedies behind the statistics tell a damning tale.

The kids left in respite because their parents are just too exhausted to cope.

People left without the basic services and equipment they need to get out of bed in the morning.

People denied the chance to work and study or take advantage of opportunities for a better life.

Discriminated against, shut out and isolated because of the attitudes of others and the inadequacy of support available.

For far too long, people with disability in this country have had to battle for the right to live their life to its full potential.

For far too long, people with disability have had to battle a service system that simply isn't up to meeting their complex needs.

The Australian Government is determined to work with you to make sure people with disability have the opportunity to be involved in their communities, to where possible have a job and to have a life that is meaningful and worthwhile.

After years of neglect, there is a lot of catching up to do.

And again I'd like to pay tribute to the hard work that Jenny and Bill have been doing.

Thanks to their efforts, we've made a start by:

- ? Doubling the funding to the States and Territories under the National Disability Agreement, including the highest ever level of indexation;
- ? Increasing the Disability Support Pension for around 720,000 Australians, and giving extra payments to carers; and
- ? Ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities – with Australia becoming one of the first Western countries to do so.

But we know there is much more to be done.

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare figures released last week show that there will be around 1.5 million people with severe disability by next year, and almost 2.3 million by 2030.

Recent trends indicate that demand for specialist disability services will grow by around 7 per cent a year in real terms – this would indicate a doubling of cost by 2020.

How we care for people with a disability is a fundamental matter that goes to our values and our character as a nation.

But it is also a matter of responsible economic management.

Australian governments spend approximately \$20 billion a year in total on the disability welfare system:

- ? Around \$8 billion on payments to community care and support providers;
- ? Nearly \$3 billion on payments to family and other informal carers; and
- ? Almost \$9 billion in income support through the Disability Support Pension for over 700,000 Australians.

This is a substantial investment of public resources.

But while significant assistance is provided to people with disabilities, there are many weaknesses in the support systems that governments provide.

National long-term care and support scheme for people with disability

The Australian Government believes that we need to rethink how we support people with disability and identify what new approaches are needed.

We need a system that provides greater incentives for early intervention and incentives to help people with disability participate in work and the community.

A system that provides some certainty for people with a disability and their families, no matter where they live, and how they acquired their disability.

A system that is not based on rationed services, and is not crisis-driven.

We know this is what people with disability want and it's also the most cost-effective and efficient solution.

One idea that has united disability consumer and advocacy groups, the disability service sector and carer organisations, is a national long-term care and support scheme for people with disability.

This was one of the ideas to emerge from the Australia 2020 Summit.

It has come up again and again in consultations all across the country for the National Disability Strategy. And in the Who Cares? – Report on The Inquiry into Better Support for Carers conducted by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth earlier this year.

A long-term care and support scheme would look at an individual's needs, across their whole lifetime, and determine what support is needed and when.

My colleague, Bill Shorten, has called it a big idea. That's somewhat of an understatement.

It would be a historic social reform.

It would require transformative change to the disability service system – how it is delivered, funded and administered.

But it could help us achieve a clear, overriding objective of the Australian Government – building a fairer Australia, with the goal that all Australians can reach their full potential in life.

It requires detailed and considered examination to see if the outcomes it promises can be delivered.

But we believe now is the time to examine this option in detail.

That's why I am pleased to announce today that the Australian Government will engage the Productivity Commission to carry out an Inquiry into a National Long-term Care and Support Scheme.

Starting early next year, the Commission will look into the costs, benefits and feasibility of approaches which provide essential care and support - on an entitlement basis - for eligible people with a severe or profound disability.

It will look at a no-fault social insurance model reflecting the shared risk of disability across the population – strongly supported by many of you here tonight - as well as other options for long-term care and support, building on international best practice.

It will also consider the complex but critical interactions with other schemes and systems – income support, aged care, and state based compensation schemes.

An Associate Commissioner with specialist disability expertise will also be appointed to support the review.

Reform in this area is not something that can be undertaken lightly.

Some people live with disability from birth.

Others have their lives forever changed in an instant as a result of a traumatic event.

Sitting in the House of Representatives tonight are two people who know that only too well.

Paul Anicich and Tony Purkiss were among the Australians targeted in the 2005 Bali bombings.

This feasibility study will look at how long-term care and support can be provided to all people with a disability, including those who acquire it as a result of a traumatic event.

The study will consider coverage and entitlements, and implications for health services.

The very personal consequences for many thousands of Australians with disabilities, their carers and their families demand a well thought-out study.

We need to do the work.

And we need to get it right.

That is why the inquiry will be assisted by an Independent Panel.

This panel will guarantee that the inquiry hears the views of the disability sector.

We will be announcing the Panel appointments shortly.

The Inquiry will report to Minister Macklin and Bill Shorten in July 2011 and is a key plank of the National Disability Strategy – a 10 year blueprint for improving the participation of people with disability in all areas of life.

Thousands of people across Australia responded to our consultations on the National Disability Strategy.

At these consultations, people with disabilities, their families, friends and carers gave us a clear message.

They want Australia to change.

They want an inclusive Australia.

An enabling Australia.

An Australia that treats them equally and gives them opportunities to fulfil their potential.

The Strategy will drive improvements in performance across Commonwealth, and state and territory governments.

Not only in disability systems but, importantly, mainstream systems where it is vital that we improve our responses in areas such as education, transport, housing, health, communications and human rights.

To this end I am pleased to announce that the Australian Government is now moving to include the National Disability Strategy within our COAG reform agenda.

That means we will be seeking the support of all states and territories in implementing the national strategy.

And next year, we will be releasing a robust and integrated approach to the National Disability Strategy.

But tonight we are here to present The National Disability Awards.

In presenting these awards, I want to acknowledge the strong support that my wife Therese has given as patron of the International Day of People with Disability and the National Disability Awards.

These awards are a true celebration.

They celebrate not only the recipients and the nominees, but also every person who chooses to devote their time to people with disability.

We need to break down the barriers in this country.

We need to educate Australians to stop the discrimination against people with disability.

Discrimination that is generally the result of ignorance rather than malice.

You only have to look at Paralympic gold medallist Kurt Fearnley, who is here with us tonight, for proof of ability far exceeding disability.

Kurt is an Ambassador for these awards.

And what an Ambassador he is.

About seven weeks ago Kurt won the Boston Marathon.

Four weeks ago he won his fourth New York Marathon.

And less than a week ago Kurt conquered the Kokoda track.

He crawled the entire 96 kilometres.

I know from personal experience how difficult the Kokoda Track is.

It almost did me in.

So Kurt's achievement is nothing short of extraordinary – and Kurt, we salute you.

As finalists for the National Disability Awards, you have all played your part in educating Australians and you have done it with great commitment and passion.

I thank you all for the work you do in addressing the inadequacies in the Australian disability system.

To all the National Disability Awards finalists and nominees - I applaud you.

And to those who receive awards today – congratulations and keep up the fine work that is being recognised here today.

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