

April 2020

Dear Prime Minister and Minister Robert

We are a group of CEOs representing a wide range of non-affiliated National Disability Insurance Scheme providers with operations across Australia in every State and Territory. Together, we support more than 300,000 people with disabilities across Australia, employing thousands of Australians as part of the NDIS.

We are deeply concerned that the support package being offered to the disability sector is *manifestly inadequate* to save the lives of people with a disability; to keep people in jobs; and to ensure the sector's ongoing survival.

With limited cash reserves to support our clients and workforce through the COVID-19 crisis, a huge number of disability providers – including some of the largest – confront insolvency within six months, if not earlier, leaving no service for those people with disability to return to once the pandemic has been brought under control. This would be a shocking outcome for people with disabilities, given all the work that both sides of government have done over the last decade to provide access to essential support services – and would completely compromise the choice and control promised by the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

If you act now, this is preventable. We urge you to maintain disability services during the COVID-19 crisis, and ensure that service providers remain viable by immediately

1. **Defining disability services as a “critical service” aligned and equal to aged care.** We do not understand why some services (like bottle shops) are defined as essential, when disability services are excluded. This will mean that our staff can send their kids to schools for essential service personnel; get priority access to COVID-19 testing (currently available only in health and aged care); and will clearly acknowledge that the disability support sector has the full support of government.
2. **Provide a realistic stimulus package for the disability sector that will help us survive the next 6 months. That includes:**
 - **Allowing the advance payment previously announced to be retained** (not paid back), enabling disability support services to continue to pay staff who are self-isolating AND at the same time employing alternative staff to provide essential disability services and ensure the safety of those we support.
 - **Making Supported Independent Living services for the most vulnerable people with disabilities viable,** by adding an additional 30% loading for every individual, enabling providers to cover the costs of replacement staff, risks of infection exposure, additional cleaning and hygiene measures AND at the same time offering a service guarantee for providers to meet the full value of all existing service agreements through until their expiry. This will ensure that those at risk of COVID-19 get support when they need it most, and that we can keep people with disability safe at home - not inundating the hospital system.
 - **Ensuring the viability of all other non-residential NDIS services** by guaranteeing that a minimum of 50% of all existing service agreements can be seen through until their expiry, allowing providers time to restructure and redevelop service offerings to provide appropriate alternative solutions by the time new service agreements are due.

We have already **closed many services in the interests of client safety** from COVID-19. What little margin these services provided to charities to do our work has vanished. Many organisations in our sector will simply go under without government support. This will leave thousands of people joining the already lengthy job queue and people with disabilities, already frightened by coronavirus, also facing an uncertain future.

These are extraordinary times and they require extraordinary measures.

We support some of our community's most vulnerable. We are doing our best to keep them safe, however the operating margins of the NDIS never factored in a pandemic of this dimension, and the rescue packages that have been announced to date are manifestly inadequate.

We implore you to urgently act and we are available to speak with you at a moment's notice.

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On behalf of:

