

COMMUNIQUE: NATIONAL COALITION ON DISABILITY AND INCOME SUPPORT (WELFARE) REFORM

- Thirty-one people from 26 disability organisations came together over two days on 11-12th November 1999 to consider the Discussion Paper, “The Challenge of Welfare Dependency in the 21st Century” and the terms of reference of the Reference Group on Welfare Reform announced by the Minister for Family and Community Services, Senator Jocelyn Newman.
- Participants agreed to establish a National Coalition on Disability and Income Support (Welfare) Reform to build on the common views expressed at the meeting.
- The Disability Coalition welcomed genuine reform in the design and implementation of income support and employment policy to allow for the greater incentive and support for people with disabilities to participate as equal citizens in our communities.
- *The Disability Coalition calls on* government to research the reasons for the increase in the number of Disability Support Pension recipients over the last 10 years before embarking on major structural reform, particularly in view of the tighter eligibility criteria and the increasingly difficult processes and procedures involved in receiving the DSP.
- *The Disability Coalition* rejects the notion that people with disability do not want to work and that they want to be pension dependent. Work provides dignity, gives self-esteem, and it decreases social isolation.
- *The Disability Coalition* calls on the Government to recognise that while there may be 580,000 DSP recipients, there are another 1,380,000 working age people with disabilities who are not DSP recipients.
- *The Disability Coalition* believes that the main disincentives to work lie in inadequate supports at the workplace, inaccessible transport and buildings, discriminatory community and employer attitudes, inflexible working conditions and poorly designed means-tested programs.
- *The Disability Coalition* believes that the key to increasing the employment of people with severe and profound activity restrictions involves investment in infrastructure, rehabilitation, education and service provision. It questioned the conventional wisdom that taxpayers resist increased taxes to support meaningful, dignified, productive, coordinated and responsible social policy.
- *The Disability Coalition* believes that a Disability Allowance to cover the unavoidable costs of disability should be separated from income support.
- *The Disability Coalition* expressed its disappointment in the sudden abandonment of the **More Intensive and Flexible Services** (MIFS) Pilot since it was successful and welcomed by people with disabilities. For appropriate case-based funding, the Disability Coalition calls for improved classifications systems, outcome and disability standards benchmarks, and realistic service costing based on these benchmarks and systems.
- *The Disability Coalition calls on* the government to recognise that disability policy is more than income support and more than the province of the Department of

Family and Community Services. It furthermore calls on the government to recognise that the link between disability income support, cost alleviation and the employment of people with disabilities involves substantial investment in education, building and transport infrastructure, and attitudinal change.

- *The Disability Coalition calls on* all levels of government to honour their obligation to seamlessly integrate the several and various aspects of disability policy across the Commonwealth and State/Territory levels, across Departments at each level of government, and across Programs within Departments. To this end, the Disability Coalition calls on the government to more fully account for the cross-sectoral and economy-wide benefits of programs.

- *The Disability Coalition calls on* all political parties to recognise that people with disabilities continue to be systematically excluded from being able to participate as equal citizens in the community and that people with disabilities will continue to be second-class citizens in their own country so long as political parties continue to at best ignore, and at worst to exploit, people with disabilities.

- The Disability Coalition will build on these common views to provide the basis for a paper which will address Senator Newman's Discussion Paper. The Disability Coalition's response will be coordinated by the National Caucus of Disability Consumer Organisations. The sectoral response will be supplemented by submissions from individual member organisations and individuals, recognising that people with disabilities are a heterogeneous group with different particular interests but with a common interest in their need for supports and accommodations.

- The Disability Coalition of organisations will inform its members of the processes, recommendations and outcomes flowing from the Discussion Paper and consult with its members on the most appropriate responses and courses of action to take as the Green Paper process and its policy implications unfold.