

National Conference - PAUL FLETCHER

PF: Well, thanks very much, Anthony and congratulations to you and to Youngcare, to Luke and the Summer Foundation for organising this very important event to discuss specialist disability accommodation or SDA. And congratulations to your two organisations and all the other organisations in the room, which are powerful advocates for the importance of quality housing choices for people with complex disability support and housing needs.

In my view, the delivery of modern well-designed specialist disability accommodation, or SDA, at an increasing rate, is one of the most powerful ways in which the NDIS is helping Australians with disability to live better lives. With more dignity, more self determination, more engagement with the broader community, but quite simply, more joy in their lives.

But don't listen to me; listen to Liz who I met recently on a visit to the new unit accommodation she's living in, in Fairfield, in Melbourne.

Liz:

I'm Liz, I moved in to my new apartment a month ago.

It's really exciting because it's the first time I've lived anywhere on my own and it's very, very cool.

It's a home instead of someone's workplace. With the NDIS in conjunction with other organisations, to make things like this happen; it's just so special.

PF: So today, I want to speak firstly about the progress that we're making with SDA including the changes we announced recently.

Next, to discuss our plan for younger people in residential aged care and finally to report on how we're doing in delivering overall on the promise of the NDIS. So let me start with SDA, and you heard Liz there, talking about her experience and the sense of autonomy, the sense of privacy that she gets and these are some of the reasons why SDA is so important and that's why SDA is a big part of the NDIS.

In fact, a full rollout will spend nearly \$700 million dollars a year in SDA payments to support close to 28,000 participants.

We are gathering momentum with SDA.

Currently, there are 10,975 participants with SDA funding in their plans, up 58% in the 12 months since the end of 2017.

The number of registered SDA providers has nearly doubled to 802 and the number of enrolled SDA dwellings has jumped nearly 130% to 2593.

In a research paper released just recently, the Australian Housing and Urban Institute reported that SDA has attracted substantial interest amongst the property sector, large financial institutions, specialist financial institutions, community housing providers and disability service providers. And I know there are representatives from all of those stakeholder groups in this room today.

I was also pleased today to see the release of a new report from Social Ventures Australia and the Summer Foundation, which shows that there are 1,518 SDA places in development around Australia, with activity particularly strong right now in New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia. So this is a solid start to the new SDA market.

Now, in the interest of maintaining momentum for SDA, we recently announced significant reforms to further encourage investment in SDA and to increase choice and control for NDIS participants. And that follows a very extensive review. Anthony reviewed to the KPMG report and importantly, these changes have been discussed and agreed with all of the state and territory governments.

We're removing some of the current barriers so that SDA funding can be placed in participants' plans sooner.

We will no longer require participants to exhaust all other options before they can access SDA funding.

These changes mean that more SDA will be funded, more quickly for those who need it, and critically, can be included in participants' plans even if a dwelling is not yet available. And that means that participants can go out in to the market, use their funding to find an SDA property from the market, or commission an SDA dwelling that meets their needs.

We're also working to remove rules, which presently restrict families from living together, allowing participants more choice and control as to where they live and with whom they live.

These reforms will also stimulate further construction and supply in the SDA market, remove barriers to investment and build market confidence.

The National Disability Insurance Agency will only review the specific underlying assumptions within the pricing methodology every 5 years, commencing in 2023 in consultation with a panel of independent experts skilled in pricing.

Each 5-yearly review will occur in the first half of the calendar year with prices to take effect from 1 July of that year.

SDA prices will not change unexpectedly and can only be adjusted upwards if systemic unexpected cost pressures emerge within any 5-yearly review of the pricing assumptions.

In line with this commitment, the National Disability Insurance Agency will undertake an immediate review by pricing assumptions to resolve issues that providers have told us may be creating unintentional disincentives for investment. In particular, regions or particular design categories.

And the agency has already published the assumptions underlying prices in the 2018/19 price guide, confirming that prices will be indexed each year to CPI. And the NDIA is also in the process of rolling out further improvements and when NDIA Chief Executive, Rob De Luca, speaks to you shortly, he'll update you on that in more detail.

We're going to work with an SDA reference group to bed down these reforms, as most in the room would know, we've recently appointed that group. I'm really pleased with the range of participants, representatives, providers, investors and other stakeholders who have joined.

I thank everybody who expressed their interest and I'm confident that that reference group is going to help us get these reforms right.

Well, there's one group of Australians for whom SDA changes are particularly important, I'd argue, and that is younger people in residential aged care.

As we all recognise, the aged care system is designed to support the needs of older people.

It's not designed, or necessarily well equipped, to meet all of the needs that a younger person with disability may have.

It's unacceptable that nearly 6,000 younger people, almost 200 of them under the age of 45, live in residential aged care facilities, when many of them should not need to.

During the 2017/18 financial year, around 50 younger people a week were admitted to aged care. And there's a good example on the Summer Foundation website of a comment from one young man living in an aged care home.

He's quoted as saying, "my sense of place in the world was gone".

Now of course, one way we're responding to this issue is through the Royal Commission in to Quality and Safety of Aged Care, which has a specific term of reference to look at the issue of younger people with disability living in aged care. But we're determined to get action under way now, and set out a clear direction for the future.

That's why today I'm announcing the launch of our National Action Plan for Younger People in Residential Aged Care. With the improvements we've made to specialist disability accommodation, with the NDIS complex support needs pathway, we have the tools to act. So today, we are committing to 3 specific goals and we will use these tools to help us meet these goals.

Firstly, to those with disability aged 45 and under, who are living in residential aged care today and wish to get out, I say to you that we will commit to get that done by the end of 2022.

Our commitment is that if you wish to leave residential aged care, and you're under 45, you will have alternative age-appropriate housing and supports by 2022 at the latest.

Secondly, to those aged between 46 and 65 who are living in residential aged care today and wish to get out, we will commit to that being done by 2025. And I should add, that while our first focus here, or our immediate focus is on those aged under 45, we're confident that people throughout that age group will start to see benefits over the coming years.

The third commitment is that by 2025, we will halve the number of people with a disability under the age of 65 entering aged care, compared to today. And of course, we'll continue to build beyond that, we won't stop there. We will be continuing work beyond 2025 to minimise, as much as we possibly can, the number of people under 65 with disability entering and living in aged care.

Now these are ambitious goals, they can only be achieved if everybody works together.

That means people with disability, their families, carers and supporters. That means the Australian Government, and state and territory governments, it means providers and investors in the SDA market.

The National Insurance Scheme cannot achieve this on its own, but with the goodwill and cooperation of all stakeholders, and building on the reforms to SDA which we recently announced, I believe these goals are realistic and achievable.

We will take action to enable faster access to better planning and integrated support, improved processes and pathways out of hospital and as I've already talked about, the development of the SDA market.

The number of younger people being admitted to aged care from hospital will be reduced by earlier and better NDIS planning, stronger relationships and more information sharing between support coordinators, hospital discharge planners and aged care assessment teams. And by July this year, the complex support needs pathway will give all NDIS participants in aged care or currently in hospital, access to appropriate planning decisions, better engagement with support coordinators and the SDA sector, planning discussions tailored to explore and confirm housing and support goals and assessments and approvals for assistive technology and home modifications. And before I move on, I do particularly want to acknowledge the work and advocacy of my colleague, the Assistant Minister for Social Services, Housing and Disability Services, the Hon Sarah Henderson.

Sarah's been a steadfast and passionate advocate for the rights of people with disability to live in age appropriate housing and her work has really been key to the announcement I'm making today.

She is in her own electorate today to do with another announcement about very significant delivery of high-speed rail to Geelong, so she's got a lot to focus on there. But she's been absolutely essential in the outcomes that we're announcing today in relation to younger people in residential aged care.

Let me turn to the final part of my remarks to briefly touch on how we're doing more broadly across the NDIS.

As of January this year, more than 250,000 Australians receiving support including some 78,000 people receiving life-changing support for the first time.

The NDIS is now available to all people with disability across New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania, the Northern Territory and the ACT. With the rollout continuing in Western Australia, and over the last few months, Assistant Minister Henderson and I have announced a range of improvements including a rollout of a new participant pathway with face-to-face planning where preferred, a single point of contact, easier to read plans, a new NDIS website, improved training for staff.

We've announced a psychosocial disability stream, we've announced better planning and pricing for NDIS participants with complex needs. We've announced the NDIS participant employment taskforce to work on better employment outcomes and we've been laying the groundwork for a new national investment strategy for information linkages and capacity building. And we've announced new and simplified processes for assistive technology.

We're continuing with the rollout of the NDIS quality and safeguards commission and none of this, of course, would have been possible without the contribution of people with disability, their families, carers and supporters.

It would not have been possible without the work of the NDIS, the NDIA board of management, without the dedication of the not-for-profit sector, and the sole traders businesses, large and small, who are also supplying the needs of and services to Australians with disability.

But there's more to do.

We're committed to making the NDIS deliver for people with disability, their families, carers and supporters.

We need to support the growth of the NDIS market and workforce as we deliver, so as to deliver individual choice and control for people with disability.

We'll work with all interested parties in the private and not-for-profit sectors, as well as members of the broader community and of course, all those within government to make the NDIS a success.

This is one of the largest job-creation opportunities in Australia's history, up to 90,000 additional full time equivalent workers are needed across the country over the next 5 years.

We're supporting that growth, including investing over \$45 million in the jobs and market fund, to improve the capacity and capability of the sector to meet the needs of the NDIS participants. And in days and weeks ahead, I have more announcements to make to assist participants in the sector to plan ahead, with confidence.

So let me close then by quoting another young person who I think's got an important perspective.

Jamie Lee Dwyer, who has a rare neurodegenerative condition, wrote an open to the letter to the Prime Minister on age-appropriate housing and she said, "Just because I have a condition that's beyond my control, I don't think I should have to give up my independence, privacy or relinquish my dignity."

She went on to say that in her experience, it's the little things like choice and privacy that make a real difference to the outlook of a person with high needs/disability.

Providing choice and the privacy of a home of your own is an important element of specialist disability accommodation.

Our recent reforms to SDA, the release of our National Action Plan for Younger People in Residential Aged Care today are underpinning elements of our commitment to provide the best possible supports for people with disability.

Let me close by thanking everybody in this room for your interest, passion, commitment and engagement.

I want to thank everybody like you all across the country, who share your commitment, there is of course always further to go, but our combined endeavours are starting to deliver some very significant results.

(Applause):

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