Improving the lives of Australians

The Year in Disability - 2010

Over the past 12 months, Jenny Macklin, Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs has continued making inroads in delivering the Australian Government’s disability and carer reform agendas. She has been supported in this role by the then Parliamentary Secretary for Disability and Children’s Services, Bill Shorten, and the newly appointed Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Carers, Jan McLucas.

Removing barriers and supporting social inclusion

In July 2010, the Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, released a draft National Disability Strategy outlining a 10 year national plan to improve the lives of people with disability, promote participation and create a more inclusive society. The Strategy will provide a framework to drive future reforms in mainstream systems and the disability services system.

Additional measures to support social inclusion for people with disability were announced in July 2010, including:

- a new capital fund of $60 million over four years, to build an additional 150 innovative, community-based supported accommodation and respite places for people with disability
- the $122 million Better Start for Children with Disability program, which will provide new access to intensive early intervention therapies and treatments from health professionals to give children with disability a better start in life. This will give children under 6 with a listed disability $12,000 to access early intervention services, as well as new Medicare items for children up to age 15.
- six additional community participation initiatives to remove barriers and expand the opportunities for people with disability and their carers
  - $1 million over four years to promote liveable housing design
  - $0.5 million over four years to improve cinema access for people with hearing and vision impairment
  - $0.5 million for a National Disability Portal
  - $3 million over four years to support leadership development for people with disability
  - $5 million to support local governments to make public spaces more accessible
  - $1 million to provide digital playback devices and improved access to digital content in public libraries.

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Other achievements during the past 12 months include:

- reforms in the administration of disability advocacy services, including the development of a National Disability Advocacy Framework.
- a National Companion Card Scheme, allowing card holders who require attendant care to get a free second ticket to access events and activities. It is estimated that there are now 4,200 affiliate organisations and 37,000 card holders across Australia.
- a new national permit, national eligibility criteria and national minimum standards for disability parking concessions. The national permit is due to be rolled out to approximately 900,000 current permit holders and will replace over 100 permits currently in use across Australia.
- establishment of initiatives, in partnership with state and territory governments, to give people with disability more consistent access to aids and equipment by the end of 2012.
- a new Print Disability Services Program from 1 October 2010, which will enable the production of digital masters of print material that can be converted into a range of accessible formats.
- introducing measures to encourage more families to establish Special Disability Trusts, by giving families and carers of people with severe disability more flexibility in how their Trust will benefit their loved one.

Inquiry into long-term care and support

The Government has asked the Productivity Commission to conduct an independent inquiry into the costs, benefits and feasibility of a national long-term care and support scheme for people with disability, including a national disability insurance scheme.

The Productivity Commission has held public hearings in capital cities and has already received hundreds of submissions.

Addressing barriers to workforce participation

The Government is committed to a 10 year vision for the supported employment sector, to improve economic and social inclusion in supported employment for people with disability, and strengthen the sustainability of Australian Disability Enterprises.

Consultations were held in late 2010 to seek the views of Australian Disability Enterprise employees and providers on how to achieve improvement in the supported employment sector.

Improving assessments for Disability Support Pension

From 1 July 2010, the Government implemented reforms to improve the assessment process for Disability Support Pension (DSP) and support recipients to re-engage with the workforce, including:

- introducing lists of conditions that allow more claimants with terminal illness or profound disability to be fast-tracked onto payment. Early evidence indicates that manifest claims are now being processed more quickly.
establishing a Health Professional Advice Unit (HPAU) within Centrelink to give DSP assessors expert advice on medical issues. In three months there were 304 referrals to the HPAU.

- introducing new payments for treating doctors when they provide further information on DSP claimants.

- providing DSP recipients better information on the employment support they have available.

- initiating a *Workforce Re-engagement Contact Pilot*. Over the three years of the Pilot, Centrelink will contact an estimated 16,000 new DSP recipients at three milestones to outline the assistance and incentives available to help those who may be able to work, or participate in study, training or volunteer activities. Initial feedback from Pilot participants has been positive.

### Recognising and supporting carers

Development of the National Carer Recognition Framework has progressed since it was announced by Minister Macklin in October 2009:

- the Carer Recognition Bill 2010, which recognises the valuable contribution made by carers across Australia, has passed through Parliament. It includes the fundamental principle that all carers should have the same rights, choices and opportunities as other Australians.

- In November 2010, carers, carer organisations, state and territory governments and service providers were consulted to continue the development of the National Carer Strategy. The strategy sets out the long-term goals and objectives for policy development and the delivery of services for carers over the next 10 years.

### Improving assessments for Carer Payment and Carer Allowance

From July 2010, a single assessment process for Carer Allowance (child) and Carer Payment (child) was introduced, as were new rules to facilitate the transition from Carer Allowance (child) to Carer Allowance (adult) when the child reaches the age of 16. These reforms will make these processes easier for carers of children with a disability or medical condition.

### Supporting respite for carers and young people with disability

The Young Carers Respite and Information Services Program continues to support 3,688 young carers at risk of not completing secondary education due to the demands of their caring role, with respite and carer support. Many more young carers are being provided with information, referral and advice services.

MyTime Peer Support Groups for Parents of Young Children with Disability established 262 peer support groups for parents and carers of young children with disability or chronic medical condition. Since the start, 4,821 parents and carers have attended a MyTime session to socialise and share ideas with others. The groups also provide information about community support services and research-based parenting information.
Respite Support for Carers of Young People with Severe or Profound Disability Program will provide immediate and short-term respite to 7,014 carers of young people with severe or profound disability. Services provided under the program include in-home, residential and recreational respite delivered to around 7,500 care recipients.

Outside School Hours Care for Teenagers with Disability benefits more than 1,700 students with disability, aged 12 to 18 years, by providing appropriate outside school hours and holiday care. Services are delivered in 64 locations across Australia and provide parents and carers with time to work or participate in the community.

Supporting mental health

People with mental illness, their families and carers were assisted through the Targeted Community Care (Mental Health) Program, including Personal Helpers and Mentors, Mental Health Respite and Mental Health community based services.

Personal Helpers and Mentors creates opportunities for recovery for people whose lives are affected by severe mental illness, helping them overcome social isolation and increase connections to their community.

Mental Health Respite provides flexible respite and support services for carers of a person with a severe mental illness/psychiatric disability or with intellectual disability.

Mental Health Community Based Services assist families, carers, children and young people affected by mental illness. Services seek to build on family strengths and improve resilience, family functioning, social support and coping skills.

From April 2007 to September 2010, 12,892 people with mental illness were assisted by Personal Helpers and Mentors, 58,435 carers were assisted by Mental Health Respite and 32,773 individuals and 63,103 communities were assisted by Mental Health Community Based services.

Supporting children with autism

The Government continues to deliver its $190 million Helping Children With Autism package of early intervention and support for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

In the two years since its start, more than 10,000 Australian children aged up to six years have accessed more than 220,000 early intervention services through the package. These services include speech therapy, occupational therapy and behavioural treatment to improve cognitive, emotional and social development. The package also includes a range of support and professional advice for parents and carers.

Six Autism Specific Early Learning Centres have been set up across Australia, offering early learning and care services, and helping children to grow in confidence and experience playing and learning with others. In addition, 86 PlayConnect playgroups specifically targeted to children with autism and their families have been established across Australia.

For more information on any of the programs and initiatives mentioned in this fact sheet visit [www.fahcsia.gov.au](http://www.fahcsia.gov.au)