

**MEETING OF COMMONWEALTH, STATE AND TERRITORY DISABILITY MINISTERS
TELEPRESENCE – 11 MAY 2020**

COMMUNIQUÉ

Commonwealth, state and territory disability ministers met today by telepresence. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss continued efforts to ensure that people with disability are supported and are able to access the services they need during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Ministers acknowledged Commonwealth, state and territory governments have implemented extensive coronavirus response measures to keep people with disability connected to the supports they require to maintain their health and wellbeing. Ministers committed to working with their Health colleagues to explore the future provision of telehealth to support people with disability to access health related support and to continue to build on flexible support arrangements.

All ministers expressed their strong support for the COVIDSafe app and encouraged people with disability and disability support workers to download and use the app. Ministers discussed the importance of ensuring the ongoing accessibility of the app for people with disability.

Coronavirus resources for people with disability have been distributed and published in a range of formats on Commonwealth and state and territory government websites, which include dedicated pages for people with disability and disability care providers.

Ministers remain committed to ensuring health services and supports continue to be delivered to people with disability and their families and carers during the COVID-19 pandemic. A critical part of this is the [Management and Operational Plan for People with Disability](#) (the Plan). Ministers noted the ongoing collaborative work of the Commonwealth, state and territory governments and disability sector to implement the supports and measures in the Plan. The development of the Plan was overseen by an Advisory Committee, which includes experts from the health and disability sectors and people with lived experience of disability. Ministers noted that the Advisory Committee will monitor implementation of the Plan, and adapt the actions as required when new advice is provided by the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee.

Ministers acknowledged the success of the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) and states and territories in expediting safe hospital discharge for National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) participants. This was achieved through expanding the role of Hospital Liaison Officers, temporary and flexible provision of funding for assistive technology and home modifications, and direct outreach and support for participants at high risk of entering hospital. Ministers noted the lessons learnt in responding to the pandemic should be embedded into future practice.

Ministers acknowledged the strength of the disability support workforce, and will continue to monitor the strength of the workforce and respond as required.

Ministers acknowledged the dedication of, and thanked, the disability workforce for their commitment during this challenging time. Disability support workers play an essential role and deserve ongoing support. Disability ministers are working with the NDIA; Commonwealth, state and territory health agencies; and the disability sector to ensure the disability workforce is supported and informed during the coronavirus pandemic, including ensuring access to the required personal protective equipment (PPE).

Ministers welcomed the [announcement from the Minister of Health on 28 April 2020](#) of the allocation of an additional 500,000 masks for the disability sector. Ministers noted that NDIS providers and self-managing NDIS participants can continue to make requests for PPE from the National Medical Stockpile (NDISCOVIDPPE@health.gov.au) and noted the [advice](#) from the NDIS Commission about the use of PPE and how requests for PPE are prioritised.

To further support the disability workforce, and ensure the continuity of essential disability services, Ministers noted scenario modelling about the potential workforce shortfalls should coronavirus infections increase significantly. They also noted that ongoing monitoring of workforce will be undertaken, along with the development of measures to ensure that actions can be taken if major workforce shortages were to arise.

Ministers noted the considerable steps already taken by the Commonwealth and state and territory governments to support the disability workforce, including recent measures:

- removing visa restrictions on internationals student working in the sector;
- fast-tracking worker screening processes in jurisdictions;
- online job matching tools to assist the disability sector to connect with job seekers; and
- developing new accessible online training programs to assist displaced workers to retrain for critical sectors, such as the care sector.

Ministers noted the substantial progress made by the NDIA in proactively contacting 62,000 high-risk NDIS participants to check on their wellbeing, and to ensure they are continuing to receive supports and services. Ministers acknowledged the positive feedback from participants that the calls have eased their concerns and made them feel well-supported. Ministers also noted the complementary efforts of all jurisdictions to provide outreach and support for vulnerable citizens during this time, including people with disability and the support available nationally through the [Disability Information Helpline](#).

Recognising the extra demands on providers in situations when an NDIS participant tests positive for the virus, Ministers acknowledged the introduction of additional claimable support items for participants newly diagnosed with coronavirus. This is in addition to the financial assistance, in the form of advance payments and a temporary 10 per cent increase to the price limit of some Core and Capacity Building supports that the NDIA has implemented to help ensure NDIS providers are supported to retain their workforce and continue to deliver critical services.

Ministers acknowledged providers are now in place nationally for the Exceptionally Complex Support Needs Panel (ECSNP). The NDIA is working with the states and territories and ECSNP providers to ensure panel providers are equipped to handle a potential increase in demand for services due to coronavirus, should it eventuate.

Ministers noted the release of the NDIS Quarterly Report and the positive outcomes in relation to increased participation and reduced waiting times.

Disability ministers will continue to provide national leadership on the coronavirus response for people with disability, to ensure they continue to receive the disability and health supports they need. Disability ministers agreed to meet again in mid-July 2020.

Government online resources for people with disability on coronavirus include:

National: australia.gov.au

Department of Health: www.health.gov.au

Department of Social Services: www.dss.gov.au/disabilityhelp

National Disability Insurance Agency: www.ndis.gov.au/coronavirus

NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission:
www.ndiscommission.gov.au/resources/coronavirus-covid-19-information

New South Wales: www.nsw.gov.au/covid-19

Victoria: www.vic.gov.au/coronavirus

Queensland: <https://www.qld.gov.au/health/conditions/health-alerts/coronavirus-covid-19/information-for/people-with-disability-and-carers>

South Australia: www.covid-19.sa.gov.au/

Western Australia: www.wa.gov.au/government/covid-19-coronavirus

Tasmania: <https://coronavirus.tas.gov.au/>

Northern Territory: <https://coronavirus.nt.gov.au/>

Australian Capital Territory: www.covid19.act.gov.au/