



Federal Budget Submission 2021 - 2022

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Who is the Physical Disability Council of NSW?

The Physical Disability Council of NSW (PDCN) is the peak body representing the estimated 1,079,200 people with physical disabilities across New South Wales.ⁱ This includes people with a range of physical disability issues, from young children and their representatives to aged people, who are from a wide range of socio-economic circumstances and live in metropolitan, rural and regional areas of NSW.

Our core function is to influence and advocate for the achievement of systemic change to ensure the rights of all people with a physical disability are improved and upheld.

People with physical disability in Australia

Estimates of the prevalence of physical disability in Australia vary, reflecting differences in the definition, quantitative methodology, and measurement measures.ⁱⁱ

Latest ABS figures provide a modest estimate that there are 3,379,200 people with physical disability across Australiaⁱⁱⁱ This represents 76.5% of the 4.4 million people nationally who identifying with a disability more broadly.^{iv}

People with disability, physical or otherwise, fall behind those without disability across various welfare indicators. Most recent statistics indicate, for example, that-

- The unemployment rate for people with disability 10.3% in contrast with 4.6% for those without disability^v;
- the median gross personal income of people with disability is \$505 per week, less than half (49.7%) that of people without disability (\$1016 per week)^{vi};
- 44% of persons with disability of employment age receive a government pension or allowance as their main source of personal income as opposed to 12% of people without disability^{vii};

Meeting Australia's international and domestic human rights commitments

Australia, as a signatory of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and its Optional Protocol has non-delegable obligations to ensure that the rights of people with disability are upheld within Australia. These commitments are applied domestically across a number of statutory instruments.

We appreciate that tough decisions around the allocation of the federal budget need to be made for our economy to recover - *but these decisions cannot detract from our international and domestic human rights commitments or erode Australia's functioning as a fair and equitable society.*

People with disability are relying on the Federal Government both to ensure their protection and safety during the pandemic^{viii} and to continue its work more broadly towards an inclusive Australian society where people with disability can participate equally as citizens and members of their communities.

In the 2021-22 Federal Budget we call on the Federal Government to meet these commitments by:



Ensuring adequate funding of federal disability advocacy organisations - UNCRPD Article 29



Addressing income support inequalities – UNCRPD Article 28

- *Re-instate \$560 Coronavirus Supplement to the Job Seeker Payment*
- *Provide ongoing economic support payments for people on income support ineligible for the Coronavirus Supplement*
- *Fund the development of a Social Security Commission to investigate the adequacy of current government payments*



Investing in a National Housing Strategy to increase social and affordable housing - UNCRPD Articles 4 and 28



Enhancing the capacity for eligible NDIS participants to access Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) funds – UNCRPD Articles 19 and 28



Expanding funding for the support for older Australians – UNCRPD Article 28

1: Ensure adequate funding of federal disability advocacy organisations – UNCRPD Article 29

As a section of the population with a greater propensity towards adverse consequences from Covid19, people with disability have faced many challenges across the last 12 months.^{ix}

Disability Advocacy Organisations have worked hard to ensure that the interests of persons with disability have been represented across pandemic decision making and there will be ongoing need for advocacy as we move through the various stages of the Government's emergency response plan^x

A commitment to funding these services, reflective of the higher workload experienced^{xi}, would enable organisations to focus their efforts on this ongoing work.

2: Reinstate the \$560 Coronavirus Supplement to the Jobseeker Payment to ensure those looking for work can meet their essential living costs – UNCRPD Article 28

While the unemployment rate is dropping, an estimated 942,100 people remain unemployed, amounting to 3.7 unemployed people for every job vacancy^{xii}.

Whilst many people with disability want to work and are actively seeking employment, they are twice as likely to be unemployed compared to people without disability, and tend to stay unemployed for longer.^{xiii} The continuing tight job market makes finding work even harder.

We are gravely concerned by warnings from the welfare sector that many people on Jobseeker will fall into poverty as a result of cuts to the Coronavirus Supplement. Already, it is estimated that 7500 more people will experience homelessness as a consequence of the December cut.^{xiv}

It is our view that any tapering off of this vital payment is too much, too soon.

We call on the Federal Government to reinstate the Coronavirus supplement at a rate of \$560 per week as part of its commitment to providing an adequate standard of living for people with disability and their families under Article 28 of the UNCRPD.

The Coronavirus Supplement should remain in place at the rate of \$560 per week, until an independent investigation on the adequacy of the standard rate of Jobseeker can be undertaken (see 4).

3: Provide ongoing Economic Support Payments for people on income support ineligible for the Coronavirus Supplement – UNCRPD Article 28

The Covid19 Pandemic continues to affect how we spend our money, increasing household costs for people on income support across items including PPE, hand sanitizer, cleaning products, household equipment and services as well as home utility usage and telecommunication costs.

The basic pension rate remained unchanged in September 2020^{xv} and whilst costs have declined across a number of consumer categories, prices have increased across some basic living costs including transport, and housing^{xvi} and people are still having to spend more than they would pre-pandemic to stay safe and comply with public health requirements.

4: Fund the development of a Social Security Commission to investigate the adequacy of current government payments – UNCRPD Article 28

We ask that the Federal Government continue to provide financial relief to those on pensions via further 6 monthly Economic Support Payments, until household costs associated with public health directives decrease.

43% of people with disability rely on government income support as their primary source of income, including Jobseeker and Youth Allowance.^{xvii} While there is no official poverty measure in Australia,^{xviii} it is clear that many people on the ordinary rate of Jobseeker and Youth Allowance, live hand to mouth and are consistently unable to meet essential costs, including housing, utilities, food and medications.

The results of recent poll and growing support for campaigns such as *Raise the Rate*^{xix}, indicate that there is widespread support across the community to increase JobSeeker and Youth Allowance Payments to ensure that people studying or looking for work can meet their basic living costs.

Funds should be committed over the next four years towards establishing a Social Security Commission to investigate and report on the adequacy of Jobseeker and Youth Allowance as income support both now and into the future.

5: Invest in a National Housing Strategy to increase social and affordable housing UNCRPD Articles 4 and 28

Access to safe, secure and affordable housing is vital to the health and wellbeing of everyone.^{xx}

For people with disability, access to appropriate, sustainable housing is key to inclusion, facilitating participation across the social, economic and political aspects of everyday life.^{xxi}

32% of people with disability in Australia rent their homes and many live in a state of rental stress.^{xxii}

In August 2020^{xxiii} it was projected that 0.8% of private rental properties would be affordable nationally for a single person on the Aged pension and only 0.2% of rentals would be affordable for an individual on the DSP.

No private rental properties were expected to be affordable for a single person on the reduced rate of Jobseeker.^{xxiv}

At the same time, there are limited options for those who cannot sustain housing in the private market. In 2019, there was a national social housing shortfall of 437,600 properties^{xxv} and social housing wait-times up to a decade.^{xxvi}

We support the proposal of a National Housing Strategy^{xxvii} which includes:

- New capital investment for no less than 300,000 new social and aboriginal housing properties;
- tax incentives or direct subsidies to leverage super fund and other private sector investment geared towards the construction of at least 200,000 low-cost rental properties for low to moderate income households.

Currently, 41% of social housing households are reported to have at least 1 person with disability.^{xxviii} Despite this, the accessibility of current national housing stock varies considerably, with many properties unsuitable for people with physical disabilities.

Universal design provides the opportunity to invest in housing that works for all people, across all stages in their lives. The Federal Government should invest in ensuring that 100% of all new social housing is built to at least Gold Standard^{xxxix} and provide a specific fund for the retrofitting of pre-existing social housing stock in recognition of Australia's obligations under Articles 4 and 28 of the UNCRPD.

6: Enhance the capacity for eligible NDIS participants to access Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) funds – UNCRPD Articles 19 and 28

SDA improves the lives of persons with extreme functional impairment or very high support needs, by providing greater independence, whilst ensuring that their day-to-day support needs are met.

Most recent figures from Jan 2021 indicate that SDA funding is currently only being paid to an estimated 28,000 NDIS participants who are expected to be eligible for SDA, with the remaining 12,000 people likely to be living in less-than-ideal circumstances in government housing, hostels, residential aged care, or with family.^{xxx}

Given the lack of accessible housing options for people with physical disability within the broader Australian housing market, PDCN considers that it is critical that these funds are “unlocked” as soon as possible so that additional, much needed SDA properties can be constructed.

7: Expand funding for the support for older Australians – UNCRPD Article 28

In 2018, 1 in every six Australians (3.9 million people) was aged 65 years and over^{xxxi} and the proportion of people aged 65 years and over has increased significantly over the last decade.^{xxxii}

The interim report of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety has provided a scathing indictment on the quality of care and support given to many older Australians. Whilst we wait for the final report from the Commission, we call on the Federal government to:

- Increase the availability of Home Care Packages up to 40-50,000 in total to address the current waiting lists^{xxxiii};
- Increase the number of Commonwealth Home Support packages^{xxxiv};
- Increase funding to the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission to continue its assessment of Aged Care Providers in line with Quality Safeguards; &
- Urgently transfer the 6000 younger people with disability^{xxxv} estimated to currently be living in aged care into age-appropriate accommodation.
- Provide equal access to mobility and IT equipment for Older Australians comparable with the same provisions under the NDIS

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