



Australian Government

Department of Families,
Housing, Community Services
and Indigenous Affairs

The Year in Disability

The Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Jenny Macklin, and the Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children's Services, Bill Shorten, have progressed a range of initiatives to support people with disability, their families and carers, over the past twelve months.



Meeting the needs of people with disability and carers

- ▶ Worked collaboratively with State and Territory Ministers on a new National Disability Agreement which will improve and expand services for people with disability, their families and carers.
 - ▶ Under the new agreement the Commonwealth is providing the States and Territories an additional \$1.3 billion in funding over five years, including \$901 million from the Disability Assistance Package and an additional \$408 million to help with reform and to provide the highest ever level of indexation. The Commonwealth commitment to the agreement is \$5.3 billion over 5 years.
 - ▶ The new agreement will come into effect from 1 January 2009 and will replace the current Commonwealth State Territory Disability Agreement.
 - ▶ The reform of the disability service system will create an effective, efficient and equitable disability services system with a focus on timely, person-centred approaches and lifelong planning. The reform vision is for a system comprising single access points, assessment processes and quality assurance systems in line with nationally agreed principles and benchmarking to be created within each jurisdiction. The reforms will have a renewed focus on early intervention and will result in more consistent access to disability aids and equipment. Accredited providers will be better able to develop, train and employ disability care workers and governments will work together to better measure the level of actual demand for disability services.
- ▶ Conducted a national consultation on the development of a National Disability Strategy. The Strategy will include a national policy statement setting the directions and priorities for the development of legislation, policy and financing of disability services. This includes the development of consistent accessible parking schemes around Australia. A new Council has also been established to assist in the development and monitoring of the National Disability Strategy. The National People with Disabilities and Carer Council provides advice to Government on issues affecting people with disability and carers.



Improving the lives of Australians

Helping pensioners and carers make ends meet

- ▶ Extended the Utilities Allowance to recipients of the Disability Support Pension and the Carer Payment and increased the allowance from \$107.20 to \$500 for singles and from \$153.60 to \$250 a year for each member of a couple. Also increased the Telephone Allowance from \$88 to \$132.
- ▶ Economic Security Strategy payments - taken action to assist pensioners with the cost of living pressures through a payment of \$1,400 to single pensioners and \$2,100 to couples, providing them with immediate financial help in the lead up to comprehensive reform of the pension system. This is the first time lump sum payments include Disability Support Pensioners.

Rights

- ▶ Worked with the Attorney-General to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities - one of the first Western countries to do so. Areas covered by the convention include non-discrimination, awareness-raising of the rights of persons with disability, accessibility of the physical environment, transportation, information and communication technology, and services to enable independence and full participation of people with disability in society.
- ▶ Australian (Professor Ron McCallum) elected to the United Nations Committee for the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities at the first meeting of countries that have ratified the convention. Also the Attorney General appointed a substantive Disability Discrimination Commissioner, Mr Graeme Innes AM, to the Australian Human Rights Commission.
- ▶ On 3 December, the Attorney-General tabled in the House of Representatives a National Interest Analysis recommending Australia become a party to the Optional Protocol to the Disabilities Convention'
- ▶ 'On 3 December, the Attorney-General introduced amendments to modernise the Disability Discrimination Act and implement recommendations of the Productivity Commission from 2004

Access to premises

- ▶ Worked with the Attorney-General and Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research on draft Disability Standards for Access to Premises. These were tabled in Parliament on 2 December 2008 and referred to the Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs. The Committee will undertake public consultations on the Premises Standards before they are finalised. The Premises Standards represent significant progress in support of the Government's Social Inclusion agenda and supports implementation of the recently ratified United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The Standards will provide greater certainty for people with disability as well as industry, and will cover new publicly accessible buildings and those that are being significantly upgraded.

Expanding the National Disability Advocacy Program

- ▶ Expanded the delivery of individual advocacy services and improved service coverage. Additional funding to 10 new regional areas and 5 metropolitan areas will further improve access for people with disability to individual advocacy support, assisting them to overcome barriers such as abuse, neglect and discrimination so that they can fully participate in the community.



Helping people with disability participate in the work force

- Worked with the Minister for Employment Participation to allow people on the Disability Support Pension to volunteer to look for work without risking losing their pension in new job capacity assessments – already we are seeing a modest increase in disability pensioners seeking employment assistance through the Disability Employment Network.
- Worked with the Minister for Employment Participation to consult widely to develop a national mental health and disability employment strategy that is aimed at encouraging participation by people with disability.
- Rolled out 250 new places in Australian Disability Enterprises. Australian Disability Enterprises provide supported employment for people with disability who are unlikely to obtain competitive employment in the open labour market at or above the relevant award wage or its equivalent and who need ongoing employment support for a substantial period. The release of 250 places for new services is designed to create employment opportunities for people with more severe disabilities. Also revised Commonwealth Procurement Guidelines that provide Australian Government Departments and agencies with the flexibility to undertake simple procurement processes from Australian Disability Enterprises where they represent value for money.
- Held regular meetings with employers to obtain a commitment to improving employment of people with disability. Several corporations are committed to developing a Disability Action Plan framework to assist them to develop strategies to change business practices which might result in discrimination against people with disability, including recruitment of people with disability and tips for making their workplace accessible.

Supporting families and people with disability

- Increased access to outside school hours care, including before school, after school and vacation care, for teenagers with disability aged 12 to 18 years. Funding of \$23.6 million has been committed over five years to support teenagers with disability and their families by providing appropriate outside school hours and vacation care services to enable parents and carers to participate in the workforce and wider community.
- Committed an additional \$2 million for 2008-09 to the Respite Support for Carers of Young People with a Severe or Profound Disability Program, bring total program funding to \$9.3 million. This additional funding will provide immediate and short-term respite to about 2000 additional carers this year, bringing the total number of carers assisted to around 8000 carers in 2008-09.

Early intervention for children with autism

- The establishment of six Autism Specific Early Learning and Care Centres is a part of the broader Australian Government commitment to establish up to 260 Early Learning and Care Centres across Australia. Centres will be brought online as soon as possible with at least two expected to be operational before June 2009, and four in the 2009-10 financial year.
- Families can now make appointments to see Autism Advisors who are the gateway to early intervention funding. The Autism Advisor Program aims to establish up to 40 autism advisors in the 2008-09 financial year.
- To date, over 100 organisations across Australia have been offered membership on FaHCSIA's Early Intervention Service Provider Panel.
- Playgroups Australia has received funding to establish 150 Playgroups nationally over the next four years.

An innovative approach

- Investigated new, innovative options for better support for people who experience a catastrophic event during their lifetime; examined options in response to the recent Senate report on special disability trusts; and convened a Disability Investment Group, chaired by Ian Silk. The Disability Investment Group will provide options for increasing private sector involvement and investment in the funding of disability services and related infrastructure.

Listening to people with disability and carers across Australia

- On behalf of the Minister, the Parliamentary Secretary has met with over 500 interested groups and has listened to, spoken with, and presented to, over 35,000 of people with disability, carers, advocates, and members of the community across Australia. Based in Melbourne, Mr Shorten has travelled to Sydney for at least 20 days, Brisbane for 10 days and every other capital city at least twice to meet many groups and listen to their concerns. He has also travelled to Cairns, Ipswich, Mackay, Beenleigh, Wollongong, Newcastle, Lismore, Parramatta, Campbelltown, Penrith, Geelong, Ballarat, Warrnambool, Hobart, Fremantle, Dubbo and Launceston.

