

Tasmania – If We Don't Lead Now - We Will Miss Out

Late last year the Australian government released a major report that recommends radical and urgent changes to fix the unsustainable costs and problems with the NDIS. When the NDIS was proposed, thirteen years ago, Tasmania was the first to implement it. We were eager to see improvements for our community and believed that shifting the complex responsibility for disability and community services to the federal government would get best results.

You might have missed another significant event; one day prior to release of the report, the Australian and State governments negotiated radical changes to the funding and delivery of supports. Tasmania is now responsible for funding and delivering a large part of vital disability and community services.

Shortly, the Australian government will release another major report – **the National Autism Strategy**. A strategy that aims to fix the unfair economic, social and emotional disadvantage that Autistic Australians experience more than others in society.

Don't forget, the incoming major reforms to the system, **deliberately and disproportionately impact the autistic community**. This is why Minister Shorten wrote to all autism organisations and addressed Autistic people directly in his Press Club speech. He promised that the changes will be better for; and not disadvantage autistic people. His letter is framed in my office with the hope this promise is realised.

The **new Tasmanian government is** now responsible for leading the design, integration, and delivery of community services like never before. It's not enough to go back to what we did before. These changes affect every portfolio area – education, health, justice, transport, community services. The days of a small 'disability' portfolio with low or no budgets are gone.

Under the new NDIS vision, the incoming Tasmanian government must implement a new ambitious policy concept "**Foundational Supports**". This concept proposes a well-connected network of public and community supports and services that are coordinated to help people navigate their lives and achieve positive outcomes, across their lifespan.

Streamlining the experiences of Autistic people is the best example of this vision. Currently, when a child is developing differently; access to assessment, interventions and supports are hit and miss. Vital supports like speech pathology, occupational or physical therapies; and trained educators and safe education settings is scattered and exhausting to navigate.

Foundation supports propose to implement local services that integrate assessment, interventions and education supports in one place. The benefits – lived and economic, are potentially enormous. National models will not work in Tasmania. We need local design that builds on existing strengths and connections.

The new Tasmanian government needs to quickly build capacity to make the absolute best use of national reforms. This includes **building the capacity of the community** to unify to inform changes and to ensure that they are well coordinated and work to deliver smart and cost-effective sustained outcomes. National policy and programs perform best when tailored for the local community.

The first task of the incoming government is to understand its new community sector brief and **remedy the dangerous lag in funding to community organisations**. Because of national reforms, key organisations won't receive national funding from July. Yes – July 2024! This includes Autism Tasmania, representing an increasingly sizeable proportion of

Tasmanians who know what will work for them. Anticipating change, Autism Tasmania released the *Autism in Tasmania- the State of the State* report, a systems-view of the experiences of Autistic Tasmanians.

Tasmania can lead again and be the first to make changes that work for Tasmanians. We must not be complacent and blindly follow national reforms.

Help us invest and build in readiness. As part of this, Autism Tasmania must be recognised and funded in the same way as other comparable organisations.

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Autism Tasmania.