



MEDIA RELEASE

MS AUSTRALIA WELCOMES AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT FEASIBILITY STUDY FOR DELIVERY OF DISABILITY SERVICES AND SUPPORT

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MS Australia has today welcomed Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's announcement of a new feasibility study to assess approaches for funding and delivering long-term disability care and support, including the possibility of a social insurance scheme.

Alan Blackwood, Manager of Policy and Community Partnerships for MS Australia said the initiative has potential to change the lives of millions of Australians who are living with a disability or caring for a family member with a disability.

"For too long people living with disabilities in Australia, their family and carers have been isolated and unsupported by the disability services system. The current system is a funding lottery meaning that many Australians with a disability do not get the support they need and live in a world of uncertainty about their future. We have people living in tragic predicaments where children are caring for disabled parents, where young people are forced into aged care nursing homes because of the lack of resources in the system"

"Every day in our communities people with disabilities face battles which most of us would deem inconceivable. Along with meeting the needs of Australians who have a disability and their families who are so desperate for change, we need to re-think how as a country we deal with the rising demand and cost of disability services

The cause of a disability should not determine the level of care people can receive, although that is the reality in Australia. The current inequity is indefensible. A long term care and support scheme would be more equitable and is likely to save significant amounts of money in health and aged care, and see improvements in people getting back into the workforce.

The study forms part of the National Disability Strategy and will be run by The Productivity Commission who will report to Government in 2011 regarding the feasibility, costs and benefits of replacing the current system of disability services with a new approach. The study will look at options for long-term care and support for people with disabilities, how to better provide job access, ways to improve community engagement and a 'no-fault social insurance' scheme.

Craig Coleman has been caring for his wife who lives with Multiple Sclerosis (MS) for 15 years. Over that time, her disease has got progressively worse and he has had to scale back to part time work, putting pressure on the household income. Craig says an insurance scheme would give much needed security to families like his.

"The things we have had to pay for over the years because of my wife's illness aren't luxury items – they are basic needs. She can't physically get in and out of the shower so we had to buy expensive bathroom modifications. It took forever to scrape the money together through funding applications and thousands of dollars of our own money. If she had acquired her

disability through a car accident we'd be well supported and things would be very different. A scheme like this would be much fairer.”

“If my wife keeps getting worse, we want to rest assured that there is a way of helping us deal with the increasing demands that her illness places on our family life,” Craig said.

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ⁱ A recent Australian Institute of Health and Welfare showed that around 2.3 million Australians will have a high level of disability by 2030.