



**Australian Federation of
Disability Organisations**

AFDO Initial Response to 2024 Federal Budget

15 May 2024

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About AFDO

The Australian Federation of Disability Organisations (AFDO), a Disabled Peoples Organisation (DPO) has been a respected & recognised national peak in the disability sector for over twenty years.

Our vision: That all people with disabilities must be involved equally in all aspects of social, economic, political and cultural life.

Our mission: Using the strength of our membership-based organisations to harness the collective power of uniting people with disability to change society into a community where everyone is equal.

AFDO's thirty-six member organisations represent disability specific & cross disability communities with a total reach of over **4 million** Australians.

Our Members:

Advocacy for Inclusion Inc. - ACT	Arts Access Australia
Autism Aspergers Advocacy Australia	Blind Citizens Australia
Brain Injury Australia	Deaf Australia
Deafblind Australia	Deafness Forum Australia
Disability Advocacy Network Australia	Disability Justice Australia
Disability Resources Centre - Vic	Down Syndrome Australia
Enhanced Lifestyles - SA	Physical Disability Australia
People With Disabilities WA	Polio Australia
South West Autism Network - WA	Women With Disabilities ACT
Women with Disabilities Victoria	National Mental Health Consumer & Carer Forum
Advocacy WA	All Means All
AED Legal Centre - Vic	AMAZE - Vic
Arts Access Victoria	Aspergers Victoria
Disability Advocacy & Complaints Service - SA	Explorability Inc - SA
Multiple Sclerosis Australia	Leadership Plus - Vic
National Union of Students - Disabilities Dept.	National Organisation for Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder
TASC National Limited	Star Victoria Inc
Youth Disability Advocacy Service - Vic	Tourettes Syndrome of Australia

Acknowledgement

AFDO acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the traditional custodians of the land on which we stand, recognising their continuing connection to land, waters, and community. We pay our respects to the peoples of the lands on which these operate and to their respective Elders past and present. We also pay our respects to the traditional owners of all lands on which we operate or meet around the country.

AFDO acknowledges people with disability, particularly those individuals that have experienced or are continuing to experience violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation. We also acknowledge their families, supporters, and representative organisations and express our thanks for the continuing work we all do in their support.

1. Introduction

This report is provided by AFDO and due to the timing from the release of the budget on the evening of 14th May there has been no opportunity for consultation with its extensive membership and only limited input from some Members. The views expressed are from the AFDO organisation in its own right and we may continue to add additional commentary to this report with further time and consultation.

The Budget delivered a range of cost-of-living relief for many in the wider community but essentially there was an inadequate response to the significant challenges and major reforms facing people with disability, their families, and communities right now and into the foreseeable future.

We rate this as a budget fail by the Government, it missed the mark on undertaking significant change with some areas being;

- Failing to provide any funding or guarantee for people with disability and their representative organisations, such as AFDO and our Members, to substantial co-design and consultation work on major reform areas coming out of both the Disability Royal Commission and the NDIS Review.

These two reform areas alone will take significant and demanding work from AFDO and our Members over at least the next five to ten years and beyond, with both reforms involving cross ministerial and department involvement and inter jurisdictional engagement with state and territory governments and their respect departments.

- Neglecting those people with disability denied access by design to the Disability Support Pension and stuck on the inappropriate and much lower JobSeeker allowance, many with their “mutual obligation requirement” to find work removed as the Department of Social Services and Centrelink know they can’t.
- No increase to the Disability Support Pension to bring this over the recognised poverty line and a recognition and allowance that there is a far greater cost of living for all people with disability than those without.
- Restriction on the current and ongoing funding levels for the NDIS leaving uncertainty and unknown potential impacts to existing and new participants for their plans and supports.
- Significant spending on NDIS Fraud control when the Agency should have the resources and systems in place to be doing this from the outset and this money could be better spent supporting PWD including those not on the NDIS.
- A costly revamp of the Disability Employment Services to put people with disability through another round of changes with no clear end result that by doing so there will be any increase in PWD employment participation rate.

- No specific interventions for preventing violence against women with disability, despite them being more than twice as likely to experience violence.
- No specific interventions for preventing violence against people with disability by carers.
- No defined funding to start the process of foundational supports that came out of the NDIS Review and will need the cooperation and engagement with the States and Territories just a carry all line in reform of NDIS architecture.
- No disability-specific housing initiatives and nothing on increasing the supply of accessible housing as part of the strategy.
- No mention or funding to even start transitioning people out of group homes.
- No recognition or additional funded supports, as per the Aged Care Royal Commission Recommendations, for people with disability or those who acquire a disability, and are stuck in the aged care system either centre based or in home.
- Nothing in education except for a small part in early childhood

Whilst acknowledging some positive aspects, AFDO rates this budget as a failure for people with disability, underscoring the urgent need for meaningful reform and genuine support for the disability community.

We call upon the Government to meet with AFDO and our Members to ensure that these areas and others are given priority and addressed as a matter of urgency.

2. Violence, abuse, and neglect

The 222 recommendations arising out of the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability and the 26 recommendations arising out of the Independent Review of the NDIS have remained largely unaddressed in this year's budget.

AFDO welcomes the commitment of an additional \$2.6 million to support the continued delivery of the National Disability Abuse and Neglect Hotline and the Complaints Resolution and Referral Service.

While there are a number of measures aimed at improving outcomes for women experiencing domestic violence, there are no specific measures targeting the unique situation of women and girls with disability.

With Government yet to provide its official response to the Disability Royal Commission, we hope additional funding will be allocated to support the full range of reforms that are needed to improve outcomes for the one in six people with disability across Australia in years to come.

What's welcome:

- \$925.2 million over five years from 2023–24 to permanently establish the Leaving Violence Program (LVP), which provides support for victim-survivors leaving a violent intimate partner relationship including migrants, regardless of visa status. Victim-survivors can access up to \$5,000 in financial support, indexed annually to ensure the payment meets the rising cost of living. Additional support services will be available through the program including safety planning, risk assessment and referrals to other services for up to 12 weeks.

While AFDO is in support of this program being made permanent, the eligibility criteria must be expanded to include people with disability who have faced violence from carers or family, as currently they are excluded and have no access to funding.

- \$56.1 million over four years to improve access to sexual and reproductive healthcare for women across the life-course.

AFDO supports this move, particularly expanding access to medical termination, however we question whether any of this will be targeted to women and girls with disability who face greater challenges in accessing sexual and reproductive care.

- New statistical dashboard, the intimate partner homicide dashboard, to improve the reporting and measurement of intimate partner homicide with accurate, verified and closer to real-time data, with cumulative, quarterly data on incidents of intimate partner homicide, by current or former partners.

AFDO supports the creation of this dashboard but questions whether data on disability will be collected.

- Establishment of a National Lived Experience Advisory Council to embed the voices of people with lived experience of domestic, family and sexual violence in policy at the national level.

AFDO supports the concept of a lived experience council, but notes provisions must be made for the equitable inclusion of women with disability with lived experience of violence.

What's missing?

- No specific interventions for preventing violence against women with disability, despite them being more than twice as likely to experience violence.
- No provisions made to implement the 222 recommendations emerging from the Disability Royal Commission.
- No provisions for frontline services, despite huge waiting lists and ever-growing need.
- No additional funding for accessible crisis accommodation for women with disability fleeing violence.
- No provisions for addressing violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation in closed settings.
- No provisions for addressing violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation from carers

3. Disability support and care

The only tangible commitments made in relation to disability care and support have a disproportionate emphasis on the NDIS; particularly given only 12% of people with disability across Australia are supported by the scheme. The NDIS Review demonstrated that greater expenditure was needed to ensure foundational supports are available to support people with disability outside the NDIS, but foundational supports have not been prioritised in this budget.

The NDIS and associated measures continue to be framed in negative terms in relation to “cost blowout” and “economic burden”. This framing fails to recognise that investing in the timely provision of disability services and supports:

- Reduces the burden on health services by minimising accidents and falls, preventing the onset of secondary health conditions and improving the mental health and wellbeing of people with disability.
- Enables more people with disability to take on paid and voluntary work.
- Enables many unpaid carers to return to the workforce by increasing the autonomy and independence of the people with disability they support

What’s welcome:

- We welcome the commitment of \$20.0 million over two years from 2024-25 to commence work relating to the new Navigator services that were proposed under Recommendation 3 from the Independent Review of the NDIS. While greater investment will be needed for the new Navigator service to be effectively operationalised, this up-front commitment is intended to support Government to engage with people with disability and their representative organisations to inform the future design of navigation services.
- We welcome the commitment of \$5.3 million in 2024-25 to undertake preliminary work in relation to the pricing reforms proposed under Recommendation 11 from the NDIS Review. We stress that these reforms must be undertaken in the context of the broader disability support ecosystem. Prices must be aligned across the disability, health, and aged care sectors to ensure consumers are prioritised on a fair and equitable basis. New pricing arrangements must also ensure providers are adequately compensated for the additional time and cost associated with delivering services to people in regional and rural areas.
- We acknowledge the commitment of \$45.5 million over four years (and \$13.3 million per year ongoing) from 2024–25 to establish and maintain a NDIS Evidence Advisory Committee; noting that this measure aligns with Recommendation 23 from the Independent Review of the NDIS. AFDO and its Members are cautious about this recommendation and do not see it as being one of the most urgent priorities arising out of the review. It is critical for this

Committee to be disability-led, with appointments being made in an open, transparent, and merit-based manner.

The proposed name of the Committee also makes it appear as though its findings will only apply to participants of the NDIS. It is critical that older people with disability who are forced to access their supports from the aged care system are able to access “reasonable and necessary” supports on an equitable basis.

This is also the case for people with disability who will be required to access foundational supports outside the NDIS. We will have more to say about our concerns around Recommendation 23 in our official response to the NDIS Review report, which will be released in the coming week.

What’s missing - funding for advocacy organisations.

The commitments made in this year’s budget in relation to disability care and support hinge on the need to undertake extensive consultation and co-design with people with disability and their representative organisations. If this commitment is to be taken seriously, representative organisations such as AFDO and our Members must be effectively funded to be resourced to support this work.

AFDO has a unique point of difference, as we come to Government with considered positions that represent the views and concerns of our 36 member organisations across Australia. Collectively, we represent the needs of:

- People with disability.
- Women with disability.
- People with sensory disability, including people who are Deaf or hard of hearing, people who are blind or vision impaired, and people who are deafblind.
- People with physical disability.
- People with psychosocial disability.
- People with acquired brain injury.
- People with Down Syndrome.
- People with Autism.
- People with disability from a range of other disability cohorts
- People with disability living in regional and remote Australia.

AFDO has had a 30% cut in our funding from the Department of Social Services for our essential national systemic advocacy work. Our current funding only enables us to employ two part-time policy and advocacy staff to support this important work.

On Friday 10 May 2024, Minister for Social Services, the Hon Amanda Rishworth MP, announced the results of the Disability Representative Organisations funding round. AFDO made a bid for funding as part of a consortia of six organisations. This bid was

successful, securing us just over \$1.7 million over the next two financial years. Once split across our six organisations, this will represent a 30% decrease from our current systemic advocacy funding at a time when our workload is more demanding than ever before.

Unless AFDO and our Members are provided with adequate and sustainable funding that reflects the full scope of our workload, we will not be able to meet the increased demands that are being placed on us subsequent to the recommendations arising out of the NDIS review and the Disability Royal Commission.

We stress that this is not business as usual, with these two reports requiring significant expertise, lived experience input, collaboration and codesign over many years to come. Given people with disability aged 65 and over are still expected to access their support through the aged care system, much of our time and resources have also been, and will continue to also be taken up with advocacy relating to Australia's aged care reforms.

In light of the above, we are calling on the Department of Social Services to urgently increase our funding to enable us to properly engage with the breadth of work arising out of the NDIS Review and the Disability Royal Commission. Importantly, this approach would align with:

- Recommendation 6.21 from the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability
- Recommendation 26 from the Inquiry into the Capability and Culture of the NDIA,
- Paragraph 6: G of the Concluding observations on the combined second and third reports of Australia's performance under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

4. Housing and homelessness

While the additional funding for homelessness and rent assistance are welcome inclusions, they are insufficient given the scale of the current housing crisis and do little to address the concerns of people with disability. This is particularly disappointing given the raft of housing recommendations that emerged from the Disability Royal Commission. We also note that the Budget fails to address many of the systemic drivers contributing to the current crisis, such as tax settings that incentivise housing as a vehicle for investment.

What's welcome:

- \$100 million in disbursements by Housing Australia Future Fund over five years for crisis and transitional housing options for women and children experiencing family and domestic violence, and older women at risk of homelessness.

While AFDO supports this move, we are concerned about the lack of provisions for accessible crisis and transitional housing for women with disability experiencing family and domestic violence.

- \$9.3 billion for a new five-year National Agreement on Social Housing and Homelessness with states and territories – an increase of \$423 million. Under this agreement, Commonwealth will double its dedicated funding for homelessness services to \$400 million per annum, which states and territories must match.
- \$1.9 billion over 5 years to increase maximum rates of Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) by further 10% (previously increased by 15% in September 2023).

While AFDO is in support of increasing CRA, we note that, based on median rent figures, private renters receiving JobSeeker or Youth Allowance will still be in deep housing stress. We also note the lack of provisions to reform the rental market or otherwise assist the vast majority of renters who do not receive CRA.

- \$1.9 billion in concessional loans to community housing providers and other charities to support delivery of new social and affordable homes under the Housing Australia Future Fund and National Housing Accord.
- Commitment to deliver 1.2 million new homes by end of 2029.

While AFDO supports this move and agrees that new housing stock is desperately needed, we note that this will likely not begin to ease the current housing crisis until near the end of the decade and question the lack of provisions for accessible housing or prioritising housing for people with disability.

What's missing?

- No disability-specific housing initiatives; nothing on increasing the supply of accessible housing.
- No attempt to address systemic drivers of housing crisis, such as negative gearing and other tax settings that encourage investment.
- Failure to sufficiently invest in social housing, despite long and ever-growing waiting lists.
- No provisions for accessible crisis and transitional housing for women with disability fleeing violence
- No provisions to assist the vast majority of renters who are not in receipt of CRA, nor to address the current rental crisis.
- Nothing to assist prospective home buyers – noting that owning one's own home is particularly important for people with disability, as it allows them to make needed modifications.
- No mention of transitioning people out of group homes.
- No mention of addressing any of the housing recommendations that emerged from the DRC and NDIS Review.

5. Income support and employment

It is estimated that there are 200,000 people with disability who are denied access to the Disability Support Pension (DSP) and are relegated to the substantially lower JobSeeker payment. In addition, those who do receive the below-the-poverty line DSP last received a mere \$1.40 a day increase for a single rate in April, well below the runaway cost of living expense. There is nothing in this budget that addresses these ongoing inequities, further relegating Australians with disability to a lifetime of entrenched disadvantage.

AFDO maintains that another revamp of the Disability Employment Service costing \$227.6 million next year, will just further up end people with disability and will still not shift their employment participation rate which hasn't moved for the last twenty-five years and is not money well spent.

What's welcome?

- \$18.6 million over five years from 2023–24 and \$3.1 million per annum ongoing to support Carer Payment recipients by changing the 25 hour participation limit rules from 20 March 2025 to allow up to 100 hours of work over a four-week settlement period.

AFDO supports this move noting that it will allow both carers of people with disability and people with disability themselves who are carers to work more and improve their standard of living without being penalised.

- \$777.4 million over five years from 2023–24 (and \$255.5 million per annum ongoing) in a new Remote Jobs and Economic Development Program to create up to 3,000 jobs in remote Australia and support income support recipients move into paid employment.
- Extending the freeze on social security deeming rates for financial investments at their current levels until 30 June 2025, benefitting 876,000 income support recipients.
- Expansions to Paid Parental Leave (PPL) and \$1.1 billion over four years from 2024–25 and \$0.6 billion p/a from 2028–29 to pay superannuation on Government-funded Paid Parental Leave (PPL) for births or adoptions on or after 1 July 2025.

What's missing?

- No increase to the rate of DSP, nor removal or modification of the 30 hour per week work limit for DSP.

- No increase to JobSeeker Payment for the vast majority of recipients, many of whom are people with disability who are not eligible for DSP. No increase to other income support payments such as Youth Allowance. We note that the
- No targeted cost of living relief to those most in need.

6. Transport

The Budget provides \$16.5 billion for new and existing projects across Australia over a ten-year timeframe. In terms of other projects and an overview please go [here](#)

What's welcome:

- The Remote Airstrip Upgrade Program will be extended with an additional \$50 million over three years, to improve safety of remote airstrips and accessibility for people with disability.
- The Regional Airports Program will be extended with an additional \$40 million in competitive grant funding over three years from 2024-25.
- The government will also provide \$500,000 in funding per year to the Remote Aerodrome Inspection Programme, to provide critical inspection services to ensure safety of remote airport operations. The program supports First Nations community aerodromes safety and allows the Royal Flying Doctor Service and others to safely land in remote communities.
- \$3.9 million in 2024-25 to support the ongoing safety investigative functions of the Australian Transport Safety Bureau.

AFDO was pleased by the inclusion of these initiatives from the Aviation White Paper, particularly in regard to improving accessibility of remote airstrips, and hopes to see further recommendations implemented when the White Paper process concludes at the end of 2024.

What's missing:

- Funding to implement recommendations from the 2022 Review of the Transport Standards.
- Provisions to improve accessibility of public transport across the board for people with disability.
- While a great deal of funding has been dedicated to upgrading rail networks, we note that providers such as the Australian Railway Association continue to be exempt from disability discrimination law.

We were disappointed to see no provisions included for bringing these services up to par and making them accessible for people with disability.

7. Health & Aged Care

Health budget aims to strengthen Medicare, ease cost-of-living pressures with cheaper medicines, expand urgent care clinics and embed new mental health services in Medicare.

Aged care budget supports reforms in the sector, including those recommended following the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety but over half of the funding provided go towards implementing new technology and '*digital systems*' to support both the enactment of the new Aged Care Act and '*a contemporary IT system*'.

What's welcome:

- \$882.2 million to support older Australians avoid hospital admission, be discharged from hospital earlier and improve their transition out of hospital to other appropriate care.
- \$227 million to deliver a further 29 Medicare Urgent Care Clinics and boost support for regional and remote clinics. This will increase the total number of clinics across Australia to 87. Since commencing last year, existing clinics have already provided almost 400,000 bulk-billed visits.
- \$90 million to address health workforce shortages by making it simpler and quicker for international health practitioners to work in Australia.
- \$141.1 million for research and services for people living with chronic conditions, including bowel and skin cancer, diabetes and dementia.
- \$825.7 million to ensure Australians can continue to access testing for and vaccinations against COVID-19. The Government is also ensuring continued access to oral antiviral medicines on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme.
- \$41.6 million over two years to continue funding for alcohol and other drug treatment and support services.
- \$3.4 billion for new and amended listings to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme.
- \$2.2 billion package delivering recommendations from the Aged Care Royal Commission and to improve services.
- Co-payments for prescriptions on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme will be frozen at \$7.70 for pensioners and concession card holders and \$31.60 for the general public.

- Legislation amendment allowing eligible nurses and midwives to prescribe PBS medicines and provide services under Medicare.
- Women's health, \$49.1 million for higher Medicare rebates to see a gynaecologist for complex conditions like endometriosis, a revolutionary new medicine for breast cancer, and \$56.5 million for new Medicare services for midwives to provide longer consultations before and after the birth of a child.
- \$531 million will be provided to support the provision of 24,000 home care packages in 2024-25, with a further \$174.5 million invested in equipment and software to support the staged roll-out of the new Support at Home Program from 1 July 2025
- \$21.6 million will be provided for the *Home Care Workforce Support Program* for an additional three years to incentivise and support aged care workers in rural and remote regions.

What's missing:

- While AFDO welcomes the investment of \$888.1 million over eight years into mental health, this will likely not be sufficient. We also question whether the online mental health service will be accessible for people with disability. Further details are needed to determine the suitability of the other proposed initiatives.
- No recognition or additional funded supports, as per the Aged Care Royal Commission Recommendations, for people with disability or those who acquire a disability, and are stuck in the aged care system either centre based or in home

