

# Advocacy for Inclusion Inc

## Special Election Issue!

Issue 15  
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Dear Reader...



It is election time again and we have a wonderful opportunity to give the government and the opposition some feedback by voting!

We are pleased to bring you this 'Special Election Newsletter' with contributions from three of our local candidates, Annette Ellis MP (Labor), Senator Gary Humphries (Liberal) and the Green's Senate candidate, Kerrie Tucker. We asked them three questions on disability issues.

Among many other articles also included is a brief run-down of the four major parties policies on disability.

This issue replaces our December issue so is our last until next year – so from the Staff and Governance Committee at Advocacy for Inclusion – MERRY CHRISTMAS!

Happy Reading

Deborah, Ian, Justin A, Justin R, Sheryl and Stephanie



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“providing individual and systemic advocacy to improve life for people who have a disability”

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# Key Advocacy Issues in this Newsletter

NCID Media Release \*

## Australia's Forgotten People Ignored in the Federal Election

The major parties have utterly ignored the most pressing needs of people with disabilities so far in the Election Campaign, according to the National Council on Intellectual Disability (NCID).

In spite of the fact that the Coalition has handled the funding of disability services appallingly in the recent Commonwealth State and Territory Disability Agreement, the Labor Party had produced no alternative means of dealing with the outstanding crisis in accommodation support.

23,800 people with disability are known to urgently need assistance with accommodation in Australia, but neither of the major parties seemed in the slightest bit interested in solving the crisis, said NCID.

NCID calls on the Coalition and Labor to clearly acknowledge the desperate plight of the one in 888 adult Australians, and to provide policy direction to deal with this disgraceful neglect, which has been known and largely sidelined politically for the last fifteen years.

Earlier this year, Mal Brough, the Coalition Minister for disability services, and John Howard, Prime Minister, made a bilateral offer to the states and territories to fund unmet need on a 50:50 basis. This offer was subsequently withdrawn unilaterally by the Coalition. At the time of the offer, NCID congratulated Mr Howard's government for taking a strong leadership position in regard to disability in Australia. The withdrawal of the offer devastated the thousands of families in crisis and made NCID re-evaluate the commitment of the Coalition and Minister Brough to Australian families.

NCID calls on the Coalition and Labor parliamentary parties to re-instate the 50:50 offer and to commit to solving the crisis within 100 days of the election.

The Board of NCID, which represents people from all States and Territories, met in Sydney over the weekend to consider its support for election platforms that might deal with the accommodation crisis, and found that there was little real attention given to addressing the problems, which have been well-known for years.

"All political parties have policies on disability that are fine words, but with scant real programs for action that address the problems of some of Australia's most vulnerable people," said Rob Allen, the President of NCID.

**\*This is an opinion piece from the National Council on Intellectual Disability**

# A Summary of election policies

## PARTIES ANNOUNCE ELECTION DISABILITY POLICIES

### *THE COALITION*

The Coalition parties will extend eligibility to the Utilities Allowance for the first time to all Disability Support pensioners, regardless of age, according to their election policy announcement.

The Utilities Allowance is already paid to pensioners who are of Age Pension age. The allowance will increase from \$107.20 to \$500 a year for both single people and couples. From 20 March 2008 more than 700,000 people will receive this payment at a cost of \$841 million over four years. The Utilities Allowance will also be extended to all recipients of Carer Payment, regardless of age. Currently only recipients of Carer Payment who are of Age Pension age receive this payment. Singles and couples will both receive \$500 a year.

The Coalition says more than 120,000 Carer Payment recipients will receive this payment for the first time from 20 March 2008 at a cost of \$183 million over four years.

The Coalition's election policy document states that the Government announced a new \$1.8 billion package for people with disabilities and their families in June 2007. This included increasing support for older carers through respite and accommodation, help for younger people with a disability, and investment in employment services.

The Coalition will not be putting this package through the existing CSTDA.

In an announcement at the Coalition's election campaign launch in Brisbane on 12 November, the Prime Minister, John Howard, committed a Coalition Government to providing 120,000 extra individual days and 10,000 additional weeks of round-the-clock respite care at a cost of \$223.5 million over five years.

Mr Howard said this would be sufficient to provide at least 10,000 Australian carers with at least one fully funded eight-hour day of respite each month, and one full week - 24 hours a day - each year.

### *THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY*

The ALP says it will guarantee the ongoing funding of disability services by fast tracking the renegotiation of a new Commonwealth and State and Territories Disability Agreement.

It will bring \$862 million in funding for disability services, which is currently outside the CSTDA, back into the agreement and provide it to the states and territories on a dollar-for-dollar matching basis. This will increase funding by \$1.9 billion in excess of indexation.

The party will make disability services reform the priority for the next CSTDA. It says reform priorities will include better measurement of current and future needs for disability services.

The party will move toward national population benchmarks for key disability service types and will make older carers a priority for all disability services under the CSTDA.

The party is promising improved service planning and strategies to simplify access to services. It will focus on early intervention, lifelong planning and increasing the independence and social participation of people with disabilities.

The party is also promising to build six long day care centers to provide early intervention for children with autism in addition to the \$190 million Helping Children with Autism package.

### *THE GREENS*

The Greens have announced they will strengthen and provide funding for disability advocacy services, community education programs, and the removal of structural barriers to equality of access to education, training and employment.

The party will ensure a guaranteed decent income by increasing Disability Support Pension payments to adequately cover medical, transport, equipment and accommodation costs.

It says it will restore the Disability Support Pension eligibility to the pre-July 2006 criteria as a minimum.

It will remove punitive assessment and work requirement levels and job capacity assessments introduced in the Welfare to Work Act 2005 while ensuring sufficient places for all people seeking training.

The Greens say they will provide meaningful employment and training opportunities which will take into account the specific needs of people with disability.

### *THE DEMOCRATS*

The Democrats say the Government must ensure that people with disabilities do not suffer a reduction in their income by keeping them on the existing benefits. We do not believe that reducing people's payments helps them to get a job.

They say Government should invest more in programmes that support people who face special barriers when it comes to looking for and staying in work eg more education and individualised training, personal counselling, transport and child care assistance. Many people currently out of the paid workforce want to work but need more skills, advice and support.

The Democrats will support employers to take on people with disabilities and mature aged workers. Unless there are employers willing to consider them, people with disabilities and mature aged workers will not be able to get a job however much the government punishes them.

They will encourage flexible working arrangements that can accommodate the needs of people with disabilities. The current structure of work disadvantages people with disabilities and results in the under-utilisation of their skills and abilities.

Rather than punishing people on low incomes, they will introduce strong incentives to take up full time work via reforms to the tax system, judicious use of direct cash incentives that will give people more money for their efforts. They say if wealthy need more money as an incentive, then surely those who are among the poorest people in the country do also.

The Democrats will make sure that people with disabilities are protected from harsh penalties that will see them lose their income.

## CARERS AUSTRALIA SURVEY

Meanwhile, a Newspoll survey, commissioned by Carers Australia, has found neither of the major political parties has adequately explained their position on carers during this campaign.

The national survey of 1200 adults was commissioned by Carers Australia and conducted 2 –4 November.

It found that 94 per cent of voters believed that all parties contesting the election should have a specific policy to address the needs of Australia's 2.6 million unpaid family carers.

However, when asked if either of the major parties had clearly explained how they would address carer issues over the course of the campaign, 68 per cent of voters believed they had not.

This finding follows the survey commissioned by the Taskforce on Care Costs less than a month ago which found nearly one in three voters would be a lot more likely to vote for a particular party if that party made a commitment to provide additional support to carers of the aged and people with a disability.

Carers Australia President, Ben Chodziesner said these new findings highlight yet again that political parties are missing a huge opportunity by not giving carers a higher priority as a campaign issue said.

**By Murray Sutherland**

In a separate announcement released on 12 November, the Coalition promised to establish a new summer school for teachers specialising in special needs students.

The school will offer 200 places each year and teachers who complete the program will receive a \$5,000 bonus. They will have a choice between 10 consecutive days or ten days split into two blocks running from Monday to Friday over a two-week period. Weekend meals and accommodation will be provided.

The Coalition will invest \$14 million over four years in the new school, which will begin in 2008.

# *The Positions of the Candidates*

Advocacy for inclusion got in touch with the ACT candidates from the major political parties and asked them to answer a few questions stating their position on disability issues. The questions were –

1. What do you see as the three major issues affecting people with disability and how would you support your constituents in addressing these issues?
2. How do you see the role of advocacy in supporting people who have a disability?
3. Does your political party support the additional funding to disability of \$1.8 billion as is policy of the Liberal and Labor Parties and if so would they be prepared to distribute that money through the existing Commonwealth State Territory Disability Agreement (CSTDA)?

We received responses from the Senator Garry Humphries (Liberal), the Federal Member for Canberra Annette Ellis (Labor), and Kerry Tucker, the Senate candidate for the Greens.

We have attached these responses here to help clarify their positions on disability and help inform our readers.

## ***LABOR RESPONSE – Annette Ellis MP (Labor)***

### **1. What do you see as the three major issues affecting people with disability and how would you support your constituents in addressing these issues?**

I believe that the first priority for assisting people with disabilities from my electorate, and around Australia, is finalising the negotiations for the next Commonwealth State Territory Disability Agreement.

I find it completely outrageous that, as it stands under the Howard government, disability funding is not guaranteed after the end of December this year, some seven weeks away. People with disability and their carers deserve much better than this level of uncertainty.

Labor will end the blame game and renegotiate the CSTDA with state and territory governments as a matter of priority.

Federal Labor will address the needs of people with a disability by appropriately funding the states through the CSTDA. Federal Labor does not support the current approach by the Coalition Government to tender for accommodation and respite services outside the CSTDA framework.

Another major issue is the identification and funding for growth in demand for disability services. Over the last twelve months of negotiations between the Commonwealth and the States and Territories, the Howard Government offered only 1.8% indexation of funding, well below the rate of inflation and the lowest indexation rate in the country. As an example, here in Canberra the ACT Government has planned for 3.7% indexation.

Finally, Federal Labor recognises that effective disability possibility has many elements. We need to increase access to mainstream services like transport and health, recognise and value the support that families and carers of people with a disability provide, and make the system work for people with disabilities and not the other way around to ensure that people with disabilities can participate fully in our community.

## **2. How do you see the role in Advocacy in supporting people who have a disability?**

The role of Advocacy and other groups in the disability sector is vitally important to achieving improvements in the lives of people with disability. Groups such as Advocacy play a key role in ongoing public policy debate on how best to provide services to people with a disability and their carers through the media and in community forums.

Advocacy also plays a major role in raising issues effecting people with a disability in the wider community through engaging in public relations campaigns.

Many people who are involved in advocacy groups for people with a disability have often been personally touched by the issues, either by having a disability or in a carer role. I strongly believe that the more the public become aware of issues that impact on people with disability, the more they support increased government funding and services in the sector.

As a long time member of the Parliamentary Friends of People with Disability, I will continue to raise issues of concern to people with disability and their carers in the Federal Parliament and our community.

## **3. Does your party support additional funding of \$1.8 billion as is policy of both the Liberal and Labor parties and, if so, would they be prepared to distribute that money through the existing Commonwealth State Territory Disability Agreement (CSTDA)?**

Yes. However, Federal Labor has announced that it will ensure that \$962 million allocated by the Coalition is brought back under the Commonwealth State Territory Disability Agreement. Used on a dollar for dollar approach with the States and Territories this will result in an injection of \$1.9 billion in funding to people with disabilities through the CSTDA.

Federal Labor will fast-track the renegotiation of the CSTDA which has been taking place over the last 12 months with no sign of agreement being reached because the Federal Coalition Government would not offer an extra funding to allow for growth in demand for disability services.

Federal Labor does not support the current competitive tendering process for the National Disability Advocacy Program based on the Coalition's narrow criteria. Labor is committed to addressing gaps in service delivery by working with advocacy providers, such as Advocacy for Inclusion.

I would be pleased if you could include my responses in your next publication. More information on Labor's policies can be found at [alp.org.au](http://alp.org.au)

## **COALITION RESPONSE – Senator Garry Humphries**

### **1. What do you see as the three major issues affecting people with disability and how would you support your constituents in addressing these issues?**

- **Adequate funding to ensure availability of Services**
- **Access to Services.**
- **Strong Advocacy to keep the specific needs in front of decision makers.**

I have lobbied continuously to improve the lot of disabled and disadvantaged groups within the community in my role as Senator and particularly through my work as Chair of the Senate Community Affairs Committee.

As I noted in my speech when tabling the of Senate report on Commonwealth State/Territory Disability Agreement, after Indigenous Australians, those affected by disability rank as the most disadvantaged Australians today. I personally support the report's recommendation that Commonwealth, state and territory governments should jointly commit as part of the fourth CSTDA to substantial additional funding to address identified unmet need for specialist disability services, particularly accommodation services and support.

The next CSTDA should attempt to focus on services from the perspective of those who consume them. There should be, for example, a whole-of-government, whole-of-life approach to services for people with disabilities; there should be a partnership between governments at all levels, service providers and the disability community to set priorities and improve outcomes for people with disabilities; and it should be clear to the people who approach those services where they need to go to obtain a service if it is available.

Unfortunately, the burden of disability weighs very heavily on the families of people facing a disability. They often lack the time to bring their concerns to national attention so continuous lobbying is important to keep these needs to the forefront.

I intend to continue with my efforts on behalf of this important group in our community.

### **2. How do you see the role of Advocacy in supporting people who have a disability?**

Any organisation which is able to distil the varying needs of those with a disability and to assist and advocate on behalf of that group, is of immeasurable benefit to both those needing the assistance and those who are responsible for policy development.

### **3. Does your political party support the additional funding to disability of \$1.8 billion as is the policy of the Liberal and Labor parties and if so would they be prepared to distribute money through the existing State Territory Disability Agreement (CSTDA) ?**

The Howard Government has markedly increased the degree of assistance to the disabled and the chronically ill and their carers with: \$4.9 billion in funding over five years to State Governments for disability services; an increase in investment in the Carer Payment from \$182 million (in 1995/96) to an estimated \$1.2 billion (in 2005/06), with eligibility increased from 25,000 to 105,000 Australians; the Carer Allowance, totalling \$1.3 billion in 2005/06, paid to 366,960 Australians; and, for the first time, recognition of young carers.

Recently, the Howard Government announced a further \$1.8 billion package of assistance for people with disabilities, their families and carers, including a \$1,000 payment for families with children with a disability, new federal high quality supported accommodation service for older carers and their families (despite this being an area of state responsibility) and greater support for people in disability business services.

It must be recognised that assisting people facing disadvantage is not just a Commonwealth Government responsibility. It is a responsibility that must be shared by all levels of government, by communities, by churches and other altruistic bodies, by business, by families and by individuals.

The Commonwealth Government has however sought to support these important groups in our society. It acts in partnership with state and territory governments on important issues such as disability and housing through Commonwealth-State agreements.

Unfortunately to date, the States have not signed the latest CSTDA.

## ***Australian Greens***

### **1. What do you see as the three major issues affecting people with disability and how would you support your constituents in addressing these issues?**

The Australian Greens firmly believe that all Australians have a right to independence, self-determination and choice in their lives and that people who experience disability, and their families and carers, should have the opportunity to actively participate in policy development, in service planning and delivery.

We believe the three major issues affecting people with a disability include:

- The need for a substantial increase in funding to meet unmet need, particularly in accommodation and respite support services. The Australian Greens are strongly committed to increased funding for disability support services to meet the current need and appropriate on-going funding to ensure services are sustainable. We also support the realistic indexation of funding.
- Ensuring a guaranteed decent income by increasing the Disability Support Pension to adequately cover medical, transport, equipment and accommodation costs and removing the punitive requirements of the Welfare to Work legislation. The Greens are committed to ensuring a decent income for people with a disability and repealing Welfare to Work.

- The implementation of the recommendations of the Senate CSDTA report, which the Australian Greens fully support. Senator Rachel Siewert was involved in the Senate CSTDA Inquiry and supports its recommendations. In particular, we support the following key recommendations of the review:

- Substantially increased funding to address unmet need,
- That the CSTDA should involve a 'whole of life' and whole of government approach, which would enable easy transference between jurisdictions,
- The need to develop clear indicators of unmet need and commit substantial additional funding committed to address unmet need, particularly for accommodation and support,
- That individualised funding, in□house care, early intervention and a range of flexible options are also important.

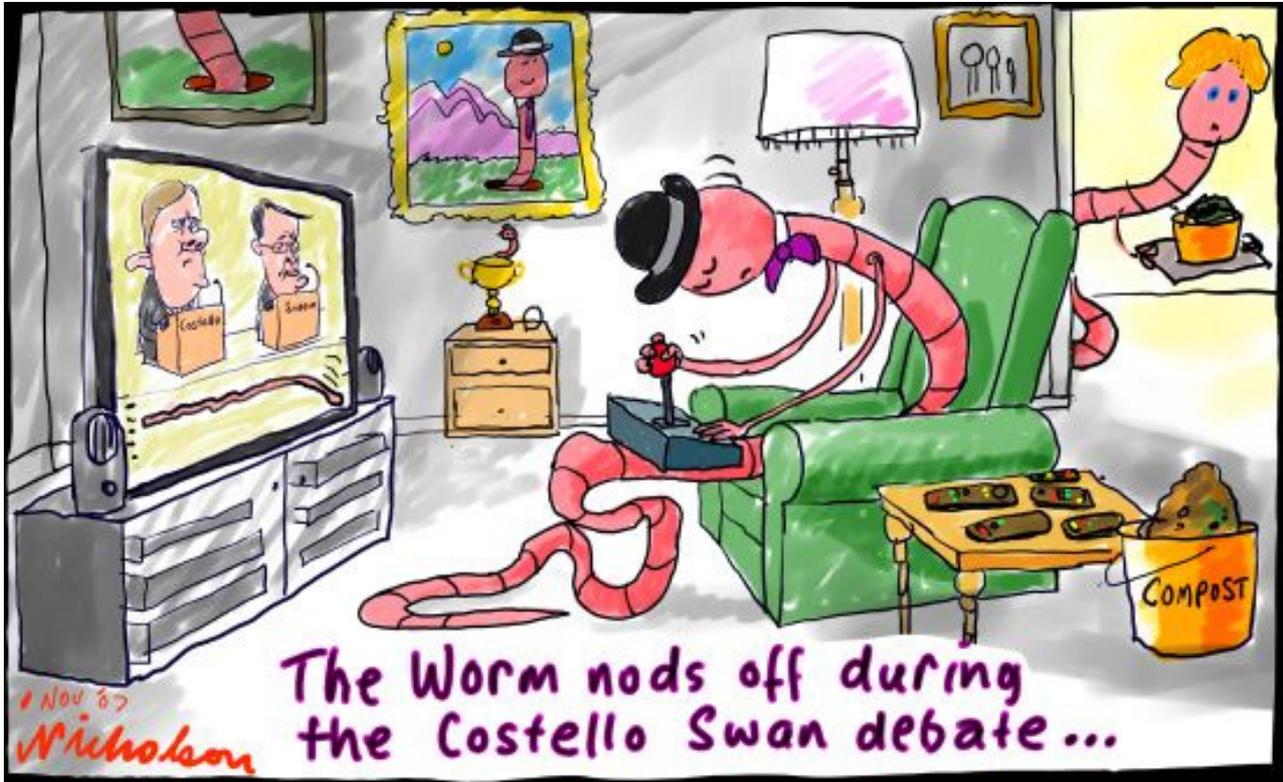
## **2. How do you see the role of Advocacy in supporting people who have a disability?**

The Australian Greens strongly support the role of advocacy in supporting people who have a disability. Senator Rachel Siewert, the Greens spokesperson on disabilities and co-convenor of the Parliamentary Friends of People with a Disability, has met with numerous organisations to discuss the National Disability Advocacy Program and the issues concerning the delay in finalising the review and the inadequacy of the resourcing. We support a program that is grounded in appropriate consultation and adequately resourced to allow for genuine advocacy services to be provided.

## **3. Does your political party support the additional funding to disability of 1.8 billion as is policy of the Liberal and Labor parties and if so would they be prepared to distribute that money through the existing Commonwealth State Territory Disability Agreement (CSTDA)?**

The Australian Greens support the additional funding to disabilities of at least \$1.8 billion. We believe the additional funding should be delivered through the CSTDA.

# Something to think about...



Your Vote does count - Use it to make a difference

# News...Information...News...Information

## CSTDA Alliance members

### The Disability Alliance and Launch of Coalition and Labor Election Campaigns

The Disability Alliance placed a full page add in the Australian today. It is prominently located on page 5 and very clearly and powerfully delivers the message to Mr Howard and to Mr Rudd that **the 8 million Australians affected by disability, either directly or indirectly, will be watching very carefully as they launch their election campaigns this week.** The add concludes with the statement **“Mr Howard and Mr Rudd, 8 million people affected by disability will support the party that supports them.”** The add coincides with the launch of the Coalition’s Election Campaign in Brisbane today. Labor will be launching their campaign in Brisbane on Wednesday. *If you would like more information about the Alliance, or would like to sign up as a supporter, go to [www.disabilityalliance.org.au](http://www.disabilityalliance.org.au)*

### Western Australians Outraged!

The long awaited letters concerning the Bilateral Agreements with WA, ACT and NT finally arrived (after the election had been called and the government was in caretaker mode, and over 4 months after the offers were originally submitted).

We understand that the commitments to ACT and NT were honoured, but **Western Australian people with disability and families are devastated. The Commonwealth Government has offered to match only 55 of the 156 million dollars the Western Australian Government offered to put into accommodation and respite over the coming five years.** The argument is being put by the Commonwealth that WA only offered \$55 million, based on a misunderstanding arising from the first letter the WA Minister forwarded with the offer and a subsequent media release.

**WA families know this is blatant dishonesty, as they were told, publicly, at the Ministerial meeting in Sydney on 25 July by Minister Brough that there was some confusion re the WA offer, it was either \$55 or \$156 million, but this was being sorted out and whatever it was, either 55 or 156, the Commonwealth would definitely match it!**

The WA Minister submitted a letter on 27 July clarifying beyond any possible doubt that the WA government was offering \$156 million cumulatively over the five years, which would amount to a recurrent increase by the fifth year of \$55 million. **The WA disability community will be taking whatever action we can to seek a commitment from both major parties to honour the promise that was made to Western Australians.**

### Labor Disability Policy

Feedback received to date has been that while some components of the policy are welcome and appreciated, in general, it is deeply depressing and bitterly disappointing.

**It seems that both the major parties intend to go to the election essentially ignoring the Senate Report and the ongoing, and growing, crisis being lived by thousands of Australians with disability and their families. In effect, they will “tinker around the edges” while ignoring the main problems!**

**Unfortunately, the crisis cannot be so easily ignored by those living it! Therefore, the hard work of so many groups and individuals across Australia will continue until it is properly addressed!**