26 June 2014

Next week marks the first anniversary of the rollout of the National Disability Insurance Scheme. It is timely that we take a moment to reflect just how far we have come in that year, and also to name some of the challenges we will face going forward to full scheme rollout in coming years.

The significance of the NDIS should not be underestimated. Australia has not seen a social policy change of this scope since the introduction of Medicare. We are turning around a system that was identified by the Productivity Commission only four years ago as ‘unfair, fragmented, underfunded and inefficient’.

It will transform the lives of people living with disabilities now and into the future, as well as providing their families assurance that their loved ones will be supported to fulfil their potential. We are building a scheme to make a real difference now and for the future.

The first year has very much been a year of learning and building, advised by the people who are at the heart of the NDIS – the participants. We have rolled out trial sites in Victoria, New South Wales, South Australia and Tasmania, and brought more than 6000 people into the scheme. This has been a massive undertaking, however this is a modest kick-off to what will be exponential growth of the scheme in coming years. In six years, we will have brought some 40,000 Australians into the scheme, and tripled the size of the service provider sector.

On July 1, we are opening three more trial sites in the Australian Capital Territory, Western Australia and the Northern Territory. These sites will provide further lessons for the scheme as we continue to build to full rollout, and see more than 10,000 more participants take advantage of the choice and control of individualised care plans.

With these plans progressing well, the National Disability Insurance Agency is turning its attention to another important, and possibly less understood part of its role – developing and facilitating the service provider sector to develop a robust, responsive and efficient marketplace. This is a massive undertaking, working in partnership with service providers to build capacity to thrive in a rapidly expanding marketplace. This includes moving to price efficiency which protects participants, allows a robust service sector, and gives society assurance that the system is sustainable and value-for-money.

Listening to service providers, participants and a range of medical and economic experts, we are learning every step of the way through the rollout. We have much to do, and in coming weeks we will get the fourth quarter data on the rollout. This data, when combined with the independent expert advice and the qualitative feedback from participants and trial site staff, will give us yet more visibility about the scheme’s successes and opportunities for improvement, for while the early research is showing a very high rate of satisfaction among participants, there is always more to do to ensure we are building the best scheme we possibly can for all Australians. We cannot afford anything less.

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