

# Strategic Directions 2007-12

Revised May 2011

## 1. Equip members to adapt to the new world

Disability service providers face a demanding future: a rising tide of regulations, intensifying competition, increased accountability and reporting requirements from governments. The financial pressure on organisations is increasing, placing at risk their ongoing viability.

To survive, or indeed thrive, in this complex world, service providers require systems to collect and manage data; skills in preparing tenders and identifying evidence of outcomes; sound internal auditing systems, and well-developed business planning and financial skills. They have to make astute judgements about the optimal structure and configuration of their organisation.

Service providers need to work out how to comply with stringent obligations regarding occupational health and safety without compromising their mission to expand the opportunities and choices available to people with disability.

Personalisation in service planning and funding is growing. Although driven by attractive values such as consumer choice and personal empowerment, the design, implementation and management of individualised funding models – depending on which version is chosen - raise complex and contentious issues.

### **ACTIONS**

NDS will:

- continue to inform members about this new world and its implications
- assist members with skills and strategies to achieve sustainability
- influence governments to reduce red tape and implement funding models that fully reflect the cost of service delivery, including compliance
- influence the development and implementation of personalization and individualised funding
- help prepare the disability sector for new workplace health and safety regulations
- influence the Government's vision for Australian Disability Enterprises, the outcome of the ADE Price Review and Government procurement from ADEs
- secure improvements in the Disability Employment Services program, minimal competitive tendering for the 2012 DES contract and expanded government employment of people with disability

## **2. Identify and respond to the unmet need and changing demand for disability services**

The disability services system is under severe strain. Every jurisdiction has queues for disability services, including accommodation support, respite, community access, therapy, employment and assistive technology. Accelerating and re-shaping the demand for services are factors such as: population ageing, the growing prevalence of autism, increasing recognition of the rights of people with disability; and changing community expectations about the role of government.

The proposal for a National Disability Insurance Scheme, which NDS has strongly promoted, presents an historic opportunity to increase the funding and system changes that are needed. Realising this opportunity will require a large, coordinated and sustained effort.

### **ACTIONS**

NDS will

- continue strongly to urge governments to establish a National Disability Insurance Scheme and National Injury Insurance Scheme which provide equitable no-fault entitlement to disability services for all Australians who require long-term support
- promote the continued expansion of *non-government* disability services in response to unmet need because they are generally more efficient, responsive and mission-driven than government services and for-profit services
- seek funding formulae from governments that represent a fair price and reflect the changing support needs of clients

## **3. Respond to workforce development, recruitment and retention issues**

Across the disability sector, service providers have difficulty recruiting and retaining appropriately qualified staff. Contributing to the shortage are the low public awareness of careers in disability services and the availability of more generous employment conditions among government-owned disability services. At the same time, more complex skills are required from disability support workers as service models and philosophies evolve. Rather than just providing personal care, workers now support individuals in managing personal relationships, in creating and pursuing their own goals in the community, in learning empowerment skills, and in managing challenging behaviours.

Staff quality is the most important determinant of service quality and should thus be a matter of interest to all stakeholders. Traditionally, investment in skills development in the cash-strapped disability sector has been low, but the

demand for training and professional development to equip workers with relevant skills is growing.

## **ACTIONS**

NDS will

- continue to seek an outcome from the Equal Remuneration Case that results in increased wages for disability service workers, fully funded by Commonwealth, State and Territory governments
- drive the disability workforce agenda with governments, including through the implementation of the National Disability Workforce Strategy and the promotion of carecareers around Australia

### **4. Reduce cross-program barriers that prevent services from responding to the needs of people with disability**

Bureaucratic and jurisdictional boundaries are barriers for people with disability whose service needs are complex or alter as they reach a new life stage. These barriers adversely affect people ageing in group homes unable to access community aged care programs; people moving from school to employment; and people wishing to retire from supported employment.

The Australian Government's focus on increasing workforce participation provides an opportunity to strengthen the employment pathways and reduce the risk for people with disability

The National Disability Agreement includes a commitment, which NDS helped secure, to make community aged care package funding available to people ageing in group homes, but has done little overall to improve service pathways. The National Disability Strategy, endorsed by COAG in February 2011, is major opportunity to advance a whole-of-government perspective.

As the only organisation that represents the broad spectrum of disability services at national and state levels, NDS is uniquely placed to negotiate across programs and levels of government to find solutions to cross-program barriers.

## **ACTIONS**

NDS will seek to influence

- the development of an implementation plan for the National Disability Strategy
- the implementation of the National Health Reforms, including the redefined responsibilities for Home and Community Care, to ensure improved health care is available for people with disabilities
- the Productivity Commission's Report on Aged Care Reform in terms of its disability implications and Government's response to the Report
- the Government's workforce participation agenda, with a view to increasing the employment opportunities available to people with disability
- local government uptake of access and equity infrastructure

## **5. Promote service improvement through promoting research and disseminating research findings**

Governments invest little in disability research. NDS sought and welcomed the increase in research funding under the National Disability Agreement which Ministers announced in March 2008. However, the research commitment is still only a small fraction of total expenditure.

Good research and reliable data are needed to drive service development and innovation. With support from the NSW Government, NDS has established a national policy research capacity which will enable it to foster policy and service innovation and form research partnerships.

### **ACTIONS**

NDS will

- continue to engage with stakeholders to develop a national disability research agenda that is responsive to the needs of the sector
- undertake in-depth work relevant to policy development and service practice through the new National Policy Research Unit
- form research partnerships and bid for available funding from government and philanthropic sources for research projects that can deliver benefits for the disability sector

## **6. Be seen as the peak voice for disability service providers**

To achieve the above strategic actions NDS needs to be recognized by governments and others as the leading non-government voice on disability service issues – an essential source of advice for both state and federal governments, parliamentarians, media and peak bodies in allied fields. NDS will be seen as authoritative, reasonable and progressive.

### **ACTIONS**

NDS will:

- engage in regular interaction with governments, including through representation on relevant advisory committees and meetings with Ministers and departmental officials
- respond to all governmental and parliamentary inquiries relevant to disability services
- raise and respond to issues through the media; and
- promote disability issues in the public arena where resources allow

## **7. Build NDS's capacity, consistency and sustainability**

To position itself effectively as a strong, influential and consistent voice for disability services, NDS must function effectively and efficiently as a national organisation. NDS will ensure that its governance arrangements, structures, systems and processes; its exchange of information across offices and its utilisation of staff skills all enable this to be achieved.

The growth of NDS over recent years has been substantial but uneven. NDS's structure as a national company should enable it to support capacity growth in all States and Territories.

A diversity of income sources is an important foundation for NDS's independence. Income from diverse projects has grown over recent years, but project funding presents its own challenges. It is time-limited, requiring good management skills to ensure that expectations are met and budgets are managed and benefits are sustained.

### **ACTIONS**

NDS will

- finalise the review of its governance policies achieving an appropriate balance between local decision-making and central accountability
- use its national structure to develop capacity and influence across all State / Territory divisions
- move to a unified financial system and continue to improve and streamline financial reporting and risk management systems
- continue to increase its capability for developing and managing projects
- strengthen its financial sustainability by broadening its funding base
- bid for projects that enhance the capacity of member organisations to deliver high-quality disability services