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Australian NDIS workers and participants oppose Labor’s cuts to disability support

Our reporters
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Last week, the federal Labor government announced it would slash $35 billion in funding for the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) over the next four years, forcing hundreds of thousands of people off the scheme entirely and drastically cutting the support provided to those who remain.

The *World Socialist Web Site* is speaking with NDIS participants and disability support workers about the implications of Labor’s brutal measures for their lives and livelihoods. Contact us today to share your story.

Rosa, a Melbourne student, said she relies on “support workers to help me with daily tasks so I can do other things. I have physical therapy to help me gain mobility and maintain my health. I have driving training (because disabled people need approval from an Occupational Therapist to drive). I have speech therapy to focus on and build skills around my muscles spasming. I also have mobility aids, without which I can’t independently move, learn or work.”

Rosa said Labor’s NDIS cuts were “an attack on the disability community,” who are being “punished.”

Asked about Labor’s plan to slash social and community participation funding, Rosa said, “disabled people, just like any people, are social, we need to interact.”

“It’s a real erosion of the rights of people with disabilities. Once disability rights go, human rights normally tumble behind. In Nazi Germany, disabled people were attacked on the basis of eugenics.

“It’s frankly quite insulting to see that the government is basically reinstating the ugly laws where disabled people are seen as a problem that needs to be managed. We’re seen as expenditures, whereas the cost of warfare is seen as a priority.

“I think ultimately the Albanese government is defending big business. He doesn’t represent the average Australian working-class kind of person.”

Stefanie, an NDIS participant in Brisbane who suffers from muscular dystrophy, currently receives home support for help with personal and self-care, home maintenance and social and community participation, including art projects.

“The proposed changes to the NDIS create deep uncertainty for me,” she told the WSWS. “I’ve already been through an assessment last year, and now I’m facing another before 2028 that will determine whether I continue receiving the supports I rely on.

“These supports are not optional—they are essential to my daily survival, including help with eating, hygiene, dressing and maintaining basic safety and wellbeing. Any reduction puts me at real risk of serious harm, including deterioration in both physical and mental health, potentially leading to hospitalisation.

“For me, the NDIS is about being able to live with dignity and independence, as I did before acquiring my disability. It allows me to participate in life—medically, socially, politically and within my community—in ways that most able-bodied people take for granted. Without consistent support workers, that participation becomes impossible.

“Losing this support would not just limit my independence; it would undo years of hard-fought progress and likely result in severe personal consequences.”

Asked about Labor’s role in slashing access to essential assistance for people with disabilities and their families, Stefanie replied:

“I am deeply concerned about the government’s direction. Rather than cutting essential assistance for disabled people and their families, there should be a focus on fair taxation and reducing subsidies to corporations and military surveillance projects like AUKUS and Palantir. Targeting vulnerable people instead sends the wrong message about priorities and values.

“The disability community has already been through a Royal Commission that exposed widespread neglect, discrimination and systemic failures. These proposed cuts risk taking us backwards to those conditions—something no one in our community wants to see repeated.”

Gloria is a student at the University of Newcastle who works as a disability support worker. She spoke to the WSWS about what further cuts to the NDIS will mean for participants and workers alike.

Gloria currently supports a client with cerebral palsy: "She's immobile and uses a wheelchair. I assist with feeding and behaviour support. The client is kind of depressed, she's dealt with a lot of grief for the past three years. So the support workers are also emotional anchors for the client, apart from the physical support.

"The physical support entails taking her to community groups, giving options so that she can have some sense of control in her life, where she feels like she's making a choice. She was born with the disability. It frustrates her that she can't do mundane tasks on her own. She has to wait for someone to help her."

Gloria described how earlier rounds of NDIS funding cuts had already degraded conditions for both workers and clients. Providers had reclassified overnight shifts from "active nights"—paid hourly—to "sleepover shifts," paid as a flat rate regardless of what actually happened through the night.

"For a sleepover shift you get paid per shift, let's say $150 for 10 p.m. to 6 a.m.. Your hourly rate for an afternoon shift is around $44. But there are sleepover shifts where you're not going to sleep at all, because you have to take care of the client. When you raise such issues, they say, 'Oh, they don't have funding for that.'

"We complained, but nothing happened. It was frustrating. You're working the night shift, then from 6 a.m. to 2 p.m.. You would have been up all night, and you also have to be active to take the clients to day programs. By 2 p.m., you're burnt out. If you're a student, you are unable to focus in class. I went to a different sector after that."

On the government's announced 16 percent cut to social and community participation funding, Gloria said: "That's going to restrict movement for clients who have a regular schedule. For example, a client I was working with was going dancing on Fridays and doing art on Tuesdays. Then it was, 'You have to pick one because we cannot do another one anymore.' These are clients who expect the support they need because they are being covered by the NDIS."

Asked what she thought about the federal Labor government cutting $35 billion from the NDIS at the same time as it is committing $53 billion in new military spending, Gloria said: "That is very concerning. They're taking from the most vulnerable group to fund the war machine."

Josh, a disability worker, said Labor's attack on the NDIS "affects me as a client advocate, because now I don't only have to fight for my guys to get the funding they need, I have to prove that the disability they were born with is worth any help.

"It makes my clients feel lost, as the funding they've had access to for a quarter of their lives is being taken away. The entire idea of the NDIS in the beginning was to help my clients live a normal life, to help them not feel disabled. Now, they're having to go in and have their disability thrown in their face and are being told they don't need help.

"It will save money, but it certainly won't save lives. My clients are just trying to survive and enjoy little things, to live normally. They genuinely believe they're being punished."

Elena works as a support coordinator as well as supporting people in the NDIS scheme. She is also a full-time student.

She is worried about the impact of the changes on her small business as a provider, but "much more importantly, [on] the participants," particularly in the area of "social and community participation."

Elena said, "Many of my clients have no informal support networks. Without their funding they will be completely isolated.

She spoke about Labor's plan to dramatically restrict access to the NDIS by deciding eligibility through "functional capacity" assessments rather than medical diagnoses: "The assessments will not take into consideration the functional capacity to engage in certain things. The assessors will only see a small amount, they won't see the extent of the disability. Funding needs to be proportionate to a client's disability, it is unlikely that the assessment processes will really measure their needs properly."

Elena said many of her clients aren't able to advocate for themselves. She said some of the clients she works with are facing homelessness and can't access private rentals due to their disability.

"One client has level-two autism. He is currently homeless, sleeping in a 24-hour library. He has no family locally and English is his second language. I spent the day organising accommodation. He is heavily reliant on our services, but the categories he is eligible for are the ones facing funding cuts. Who will support him?

"This government wants to spend on defence and war rather than actual welfare."

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