

# Australia: Workers and students speak out against Labor's assault on disability support

Our reporters  
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The Australian Labor government is rushing to pass legislation that will enforce \$38 billion in cuts to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), the federally-funded program on which more than 770,000 disabled people rely for daily care, therapy, mobility aids and community participation.

The NDIS Amendment Bill 2026 would provide the legal machinery for cuts announced in Labor's May austerity budget, which slashed \$63.8 billion from social spending while pouring record sums into the military. The government's own modelling projects that 241,000 existing recipients will be forced off the NDIS over four years, with more than 100,000 others denied access.

The bill has provoked widespread opposition. A Senate inquiry, compressed into barely a month with only three days of public hearings, received more than 4,000 submissions overwhelmingly detailing the devastating human consequences.

As part of its continuing coverage, the *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to NDIS recipients, family members and disability workers about what the cuts will mean.

**Peter**, whose son John was diagnosed with a severe to profound hearing loss at the age of two, spoke about how accessing social and community participation support through the NDIS made a "world of difference" to his family.

Before NDIS support, John was isolated. "He was just sitting at home. The only time he'd go out would be with us as his parents. He would have no outings," Peter said.

"It was heartbreaking." At school, while his twin brother was socially active with many friends, John "wandered around the playground by himself, pretty much."

Accessing NDIS support at the age of 12 began to have a positive impact on John and his family. About three years ago Peter's family found a service run by two young men who have made an "enormous difference." They take John out for social activities several times a month. Their stated goal, Peter explained, is to help John "find his people"—to connect with friends and a community where he feels he

belongs.

All of this is now under threat. Under the government's new "functional assessment" regime—which replaces medical diagnosis with crude tests of whether an individual can perform basic daily tasks, such as walking to the shop or catching a bus—John's social and community participation support is set to be eliminated. "There's no science or medicine attached," Peter said. "Saying that if someone can walk to the shop, they're okay, they don't need any help—that's just cruel."

The legislation explicitly requires functional capacity to be assessed "in a context that excludes, as far as possible, the impact of the person's environmental and personal circumstances," repealing a clause in the original 2013 legislation that required supports to take personal circumstances into account.

Peter rejected this approach: "They can't use a tick-box assessment and get people to walk in a straight line and think they're the ones that don't need help. It's got to be more health-based, scientific-based."

The removal of support would be devastating for John, Peter said. He would be "cut off from the outside world" and experience "if not an immediate, a fairly quick decline in confidence and likely become a recluse."

"This means it goes back to the families who are, for many of them, at their wits' end as it is. And then, asking them to take this on, it'll be a breaking point for many families."

**Shara** is a single mother, student and worker in the Newcastle area. She and her three children receive NDIS support including psychology, cleaning and lawnmowing.

She described how even modest supports have been transformative: "I didn't think that I needed cleaning until I actually got it. It makes other things possible. My cleaner only does the floors and helps me organise an area. I've managed to now live with a clean kitchen. It is really beneficial having that time to work on something else."

On the new functional assessments, Shara stressed that functionality is inherently variable: "With autism that could look different day to day, week to week, month to month. I

can clean my house, but when I am burnt out, my house does not get cleaned.”

Shara also identified the connection between the NDIS cuts and war spending, asking rhetorically, “and how much for those submarines?”—a reference to the \$368 billion AUKUS nuclear-powered submarine deal. She also rejected government and media fearmongering about Chinese “aggression” as a pretext for militarisation: “How many wars has China started in the last 20 years?”

**Claire**, a speech pathology student working as a therapy assistant in disability support, described the NDIS cuts as “absolutely abhorrent. They show how disabled people in capitalist society are the first ones to be discarded.”

“They go for those who are vulnerable. And we can see in these changing times with the cost-of-living crisis, with the global drive to war, how the government is prioritising its spending, and it is truly not interested in the working-class Australians who are vulnerable members of our society. They are protecting the top one percent who are the only ones benefitting from capitalism. This is directly affecting people’s intrinsic quality of life, cutting funds to healthcare is a matter of life and death. It’s insane.”

**Zoe**, an NDIS recipient with five disabilities, only one of which is recognised by the scheme, described the cuts as “disturbing, disgusting, scary, horrible—it is every bad word in our dictionary. It is incomprehensible.”

Despite extensive reporting about her conditions, she remains severely underfunded: “I was recommended 52 hours of psychology a year and was only given 12.” She anticipates being thrown off the scheme entirely: “If that were to happen, I think there’s a big chance I would die, which is really scary.”

The consequences would be devastating for thousands: “People are going to die; people are going to be suicidal. People are going to self-harm. People are going to be isolated. People will be starving because they don’t have support to eat or to get groceries or to prepare food. People are going to have a real decline in their mental health.”

Zoe pointed to the media’s complicity in the assault: “The media does not focus on things like the submarines, or the weapons, or the wars or the tax handouts that go to property investors and big corporations. The media targets people on the NDIS and people with disability because they are an easy target, they are a vulnerable community and do not always have the ability to stand up for themselves.”

**Olo**, a disability support worker who spent six years working with an Aboriginal community in the Northern Territory, stressed that the cuts “are going to affect so many things, they will affect the community at large, because the statistics of disability are increasing and there are lots of disabled people in society.”

The consequences are already fatal, Olo continued. She described how her friend from one of the remote communities where she worked had told her that a cousin had taken his own life after learning that assistance from the regular NDIS carer—who had become like part of the family—would be drastically reduced.

“He was not happy with it, and it was part of why he killed himself,” Olo said. “And I don’t think that it’s going to be a single instance.”

Asked about the role of the unions and media, she said: “They’ve decided to play along with the government because they are part of politics.” Of the broader political establishment, he said: “The people that we put in politics, when they get there, they forget the human factor and they’re thinking of their pockets. So, human beings become like a piece of paper, an instrument in their hands.”

Olo welcomed the resolution passed unanimously by the Health Workers Rank-and-File Committee (HWRFC) at its meeting on May 6, which denounced the cuts as “a major attack on the working class and most vulnerable sections of the population, that will destroy lives.”

The HWRFC resolution called for the immediate reversal of all cuts, the scrapping of the functional assessment regime, and the redirection of military spending to social need. It urged disability workers, health workers, NDIS participants and their families to build rank-and-file committees independent of the trade union bureaucracies, which have subordinated workers to the Labor Party through decades of austerity.

“I think it is the best idea, and this is voicing out and becoming advocates for the disabled people in society,” Olo said. “I think we need to do more and bring in more people to support this motion.”



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