

Disability disaster on our doorstep

All decent minded Australians must have been shocked to learn that so many of our fellow citizens with disabilities are unable to get the basic service support they need (The struggle for care, Weekend Australian Magazine, 28-29 March).

What is even more shocking is that the Governments of Australia have known about the crisis in disability services since at least the mid 1990s. A decade and a half later the crisis has blown out to inhumane proportions with devastating consequences, not only for Australians with disabilities, but for their families.

If the UK can guarantee the right of its citizens to get the disability service support they need, why is that in Australia support is only available when the person, or their family, breaks down in crisis – and in many cases not even then?

What can we conclude, other than our Governments do not rate meeting the basic human needs of people with disabilities as a political priority – a vote winner? Beyond the rhetoric about equal value and equal rights, and the public statements on how much disability services funding has increased over time, the bottom line is the bottom line. Years of chronic underfunding (even when the economy was booming) has seen the costs of correcting the crisis continue to escalate. Cost considerations have become both the excuse and the impediment.

The proposal for a National Disability Insurance Scheme, to which your article refers, and which is currently being widely promoted by disability organisations across Australia, provides a sensible solution.

Overseas countries (e.g. Germany, the Netherlands, Japan and Israel) successfully operate similar insurance schemes to fund the cost of their disability support services, why can't we?

If we don't come up with a new disability services funding strategy as a matter of urgency, a human disaster awaits us as ageing parent carers currently providing home based care pass away in their thousands. If we think we've got a problem now, in years to come the current crisis may well be remembered as the good old days.

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