

Budget 2021 – Women with Disabilities

Overview

There are some welcome measures for women and girls with disabilities in the 2021-2022 Federal Budget, but many questions remain unanswered.

The Federal Government has, for the first time ever, announced it will fund a new National Women's Alliance specifically for women with disabilities. For the first time, there is also an allocation of \$9.3 million for preventing and responding to violence against women with disability who experience disproportionate levels of violence.

However, key structural reforms have been left unaddressed:

- there has been no consideration of the need to address the large gap in National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) participation rates between women and girls (37 per cent) and men and boys (73 per cent), nor any intention to abandon independent assessments which will present a specific barrier to women trying to access the NDIS
- no funding has been allocated to the National Disability Strategy, which is the key structural reform document for disability, particularly in relation to improving the status of disabled women and girls
- there is a lack of gender analysis of the Disability Employment Strategy to address the imbalance in employment rates between women and men with disability
- there is no clear strategy to transition away from systems that segregate people with disabilities in employment and education.

The National Disability Strategy (NDS)

The Budget

Table 3.1: Departmental Expenses Table (continued)

	Estimates				
	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
	\$m	\$m	\$m	\$m	\$m
Social Services					
Department of Social Services	458	520	486	439	431
National Disability Insurance Scheme Launch					
Transition Agency (NDIA)(c)	24,840	27,969	29,724	30,696	33,254
NDIA administered in nature	23,323	26,487	28,257	29,425	31,884
NDIA departmental in nature	1,517	1,482	1,466	1,270	1,370
Services Australia	5,699	5,225	4,471	4,154	4,101
Total	30,997	33,713	34,681	35,289	37,787

Source: 2021 Budget Paper No 4, p. 172

Why is this an issue for women?

The NDS is Australia's roadmap for implementing the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). The CRPD contains specific recognition of the extra layers of discrimination and disadvantage experienced by women and girls with disabilities.

What are the 2021 Budget impacts on women?

No funds have been allocated to implementing the NDS, which is the key structural reform document for disability, particularly in relation to improving the status of disabled women and girls.

Without effective resourcing for the NDS, women and girls with disability will continue to experience greater disadvantage than men and boys with disability, and non-disabled women and girls.

There remains no recognition of, nor intention to address, the significant gap (approx. 25 per cent) between the participation of men and boys, compared to women and girls (NDIA 2019, p. 3). Women and girls face disproportionately higher barriers to accessing the NDIS, and risk falling further behind overall in economic participation and disability support once the proposed independent assessments are introduced. The NDIA has now stopped publicly reporting on the gender breakdown of participants, despite the CRPD expectation of a gender lens being applied to disability policy and programs (CRPD article 6).

Independent assessments favour those with a more certain disability experience who have more natural supports and advocacy around them; and both are more likely to be the male experience of disability. More than 80 per cent of traumatic spinal cord and traumatic brain injuries occur in men and boys (AIHW). Disabled women and girls receive fewer natural supports from family

(WWDA) and are more likely to experience complex and progressive conditions which take longer to diagnose.

Recommendations

NFAW recommends that the government halt the introduction of mandatory independent assessments, a measure that will specifically disadvantage women and girls with disability.

Priority should be given to developing an NDIS Gender Strategy, in consultation with women with disability and their representative organisations (WWDA, 2014). This is particularly important for more marginalised groups of women with disability, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women with disability who currently receive lower amounts of funding on average through the NDIS than the broader disability population.

Employment

The Budget

Despite the current consultations on a new National Disability Employment Strategy, there has been no clear funding allocated to support its implementation, nor to address the structural barriers that prevent the full and equal participation of women with disability in the workforce.

While the budget papers make some reference to supporting the 'Disability Employment Services' (2021 Budget Related Paper No. 1.4: Education, Skills and Employment Portfolio Education, Skills and Employment Portfolio, p 27, 78) there is no recognition of how these services reinforce the segregation of the people with disability in the workforce, nor any reference to programs that support the disability community in mainstream employment. Nor is there any reference to the poor performance of the Disability Employment Services, particularly for multiply marginalised people with disability.

Why is this an issue for women?

Only 53 per cent of working age people with disability participate in the labour force, compared to 83 per cent of non-disabled people. This is worse for women with disability, where less than 45 per cent are employed (ABS, 2018). In addition, women with disabilities who are employed are often in low paid jobs far below their capacity and are denied opportunities for further training and job advancement. This situation has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Across the workforce, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been greater for women, who have lost more work and have been less likely to receive government support (Grattan Institute 2021, p. 3). People with disability in the labour force have also been impacted, with women with disability disproportionately burdened.

The Federal Government is in the process of implementing a National Disability Employment Strategy to tackle the disadvantages faced by people in seeking and maintaining employment; yet the 2021-22 budget lacks any clear targeted measures to address the underlying structural barriers that inhibit the workforce participation of disabled women (DPOA, 2018).

Recommendations

That the Government implement measures that work towards ending the segregation of, and discrimination towards, people with disability in employment, including in Australian Disability Enterprises (ADE's); and introduce temporary special measures to accelerate the participation of women with disability in employment and in political and public life (Frohman, 2020, p 7-12).

Violence

The Budget

Budget 2021-22 has allocated \$1.1 billion for women's safety measures, including the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, with some measures for disabled women (Women's Budget Statement, p 2). As well as funding a new National Women's Alliance for women and girls with disability, the Government has allocated \$9.3 million for preventing and responding to violence against women with disability (Ibid, p 19, 24).

Following a major campaign by disability advocates, the Federal Government has granted an extension of 17 months to the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (Disability Royal Commission), pushing back the Commission's final reporting date to 29 September 2023 (Mirage News 2021). Whilst this extension is welcome, there has been no indication of additional funding to extend the free and independent counselling and advocacy support for people with disabilities engaging with the Disability Royal Commission.

Why is this an issue for women?

The new National Women's Alliance specifically for women with disability is a welcome measure, meaning that women with disability will finally be included in national discussions around how to make real progress towards gender equality. The sector also warmly welcomes the \$9.3 million for prevention efforts and hopes that this funding will be the beginning of long-term measures that are needed to address the disproportionate rates of violence that are experienced by women and girls with disability (CRE-DH 2021).

The extension to the Disability Royal Commission is another welcome move, allowing women and girls with disability to continue telling their stories of violence. Since the Disability Royal Commission was launched in April 2019, the inquiry has heard many shocking stories from people with disability. It is imperative that individual and systemic advocacy services, alongside support services such as Your Story Disability Legal Support, continue to be funded to match this extension, ensuring women and girls with disability have access to free, independent and trauma-informed support to share their stories.

Recommendations

That Government:

- Ensure the availability of funding for individual and systemic advocacy services, alongside the extension of time for the Disability Royal Commission.
- Implement accountability mechanisms that monitor the implementation and effectiveness of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and Children for all women (Frohman & La Paglia, 2021).
- That, consistent with Rec 2 of the Senate Inquiry into Violence, Abuse and Neglect Against People with Disability in Institutional and Residential Settings, the Government establish an independent, statutory, national protection mechanism to protect, investigate and enforce findings in relation to all forms of violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect against people with disability (*Ibid.*).

Closing the Gap (see also Impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women)

The Budget

Half of all Indigenous people are disabled people, which makes intersectionality a serious concern for women with disabilities.

As expected, the National Agreement on Closing the Gap did not have specific budget allocations, as those are forthcoming later this year. However, the Change the Record Coalition said they were concerned that no funding was allocated to prevent deaths in custody.

National Family Violence Prevention and Legal Services has said that 14 family violence legal prevention services required an additional investment of at least \$28 million per year. The 2021 Budget delivered less than a quarter of that funding and contains no dedicated funding for the National Family Violence Prevention and Legal Services Forum, denying First Nations women a voice shaping the policy decisions that affect their lives.

Young Women

The Budget

Many of the measures impacting women with disability will potentially have a significant impact on young women with disability. In particular, the investment in the NDIS and the new funding for preventing violence against women with disability will support the wellbeing of young women with disability into the future.

The specific measures in the 2021 Federal Budget that are aimed at young people omit the specific needs of young women with disability. While the Government has provided an additional \$481.2 million over four years to expand and strengthen the youth employment services program, Transition to Work, there is no indication that this funding will do anything to address the unique barriers that face disabled young women in seeking or maintaining meaningful employment under award wages (bp 1.4, p 19).

The funding cut to universities of nearly 10 per cent over the next three years, and TAFE funding cut by 24 per cent (bp 1.4, p. 57) are both of great concern to potential students from the most disadvantaged cohorts, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and young people with disability who already face significant barriers to tertiary education.

Why is this an issue for women?

Previous funding cuts to the tertiary education sector have been passed onto students or resulted in cuts to staffing and student places. For young people with disabilities, any increase in the cost of studying results in a negative impact on participation rates. Statistically, people with disability are already much less likely than non-disabled peers to have a Bachelor degree or higher (with a gap of almost 13 per cent); and are more likely to defer or drop out of courses for financial or personal reasons (Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education and Training, 2021). An increased financial barrier will be a further impediment.

As the Budget also fails to address the specific barriers experienced by disabled young women seeking employment; the lack of investment in education is particularly concerning.

Recommendations

NFAW recommends that the government work with children and young people with disability and their representative organisations to develop a plan to support young people with disability to overcome the barriers young people with disability face in securing and maintaining work in open employment, and commit to investment in a National Inclusive Education Plan that provides a roadmap to transition out of segregated education arrangements, and supports children and young people with disability to participate in inclusive education on an equal basis with their non-disabled peers from early childhood to tertiary education levels.

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Commonwealth of Australia (2021) Budget Related Paper No. 1.4: [Education, Skills and Employment Portfolio](#)

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