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NT Disability Advocacy Consortium warns Federal Budget NDIS changes could leave Territorians behind

The NT Disability Advocacy Consortium is raising concerns about proposed National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) reforms announced alongside the Federal Budget, warning the changes could disproportionately impact Territorians with disability, particularly people in remote communities and First Nations people.

The Consortium, made up of Darwin Community Legal Service (DCLS), Integrated Disability Action (IDA) and Disability Advocacy Service (DAS), says the NT already faces major gaps in safe, ethical and culturally appropriate disability supports.

Rachael Bowker, CEO of Darwin Community Legal Service, said the issue in the Northern Territory was not a lack of providers, but a lack of quality and safeguards.

“We are seeing serious concerns about unethical and predatory practices targeting vulnerable people with disability, particularly in remote and First Nations communities.

Many Territorians are already struggling to identify safe and reliable supports. Any reforms that reduce funding, increase confusion or weaken safeguards risk making these problems worse.”

The Consortium says it is concerned about tighter eligibility criteria, new assessment processes, reduced participant growth targets and increasing reliance on automated planning systems within the NDIS. Recent reporting about proposed computer-generated NDIS plans and reduced external review powers has added to fears across the disability sector.

Scott Richardson, CEO of Disability Advocacy Service, said reforms must focus on participant safety and quality.

“The NT disability sector has repeatedly raised concerns about exploitative practices, overservicing and providers exhausting participant plans within very short periods of time.

The focus of reform cannot simply be reducing participant numbers and cutting costs.”

Tania McInnes, CEO of Integrated Disability Action, said there were also serious concerns about the lack of foundational and mainstream supports in the Northern Territory.

"We keep hearing people will be redirected into foundational supports or mainstream systems if they lose access to the NDIS or have supports reduced.

The reality is many of those services either do not exist, are already overwhelmed, or are extremely difficult to access in the NT, particularly in remote communities.

There is also very little detail about how programs like Thriving Kids will operate in the Territory."

The Consortium says reforms must not move ahead without genuine consultation with people with disability, advocacy organisations and remote communities.

"People with disability are not budget savings measures," Consortium members said.

"These reforms will affect people's safety, independence and ability to participate in community life."

The NT Disability Advocacy Consortium said it will continue advocating for reforms that protect the rights, dignity and safety of Territorians with disability.

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