

Tuesday July 27, 2021

Senator the Hon Linda Reynolds CSC
Minister for the National Disability Insurance Scheme and Government Services

Via email: senator.reynolds@aph.gov.au

Dear Minister,

RE: Urgent support required to assist the disability sector responding to NSW Health orders

The Australian Services Union NSW & ACT (Services) Branch (the ASU) is the Union for disability support workers in NSW.

I am writing to you in your capacity as the responsible Minister for the National Disability Insurance Scheme to request that:

1. the NDIA implement measures to better enable disability support workers living in Greater Sydney to comply with NSW Health Orders relating to COVID19 testing.
2. the NDIA implement urgent continuity of service funding supports to day programs in the Greater Sydney area to keep disability support workers employed, receiving an income, without which could lead to a loss of critical jobs in the disability sector.

Greater support for NSW Health Orders – COVID Testing Requirements

As you would be aware, the current NSW Health Orders require workers who provide services to people with disability who cannot work from home and need to leave an “affected area” to work, to undertake COVID surveillance testing. As of July 26, the affected area includes workers living in the Fairfield Local Government Area (LGA) who need to leave that LGA for authorised work and must undergo testing every 72 hours, and workers who live in Greater Sydney who work more than 50km outside greater Sydney who must undergo testing over seven days.

The ASU appreciates that as the Sydney COVID outbreak continues, the current affected areas or requirements for COVID surveillance testing may change and include other areas or requirements. We want to ensure that all disability support workers impacted by the NSW Health Order requirements for COVID surveillance testing, can comply with these orders in a way that minimizes any impact on continuity of service for people with disability, or on the hours of work and income for impacted workers.

The Governments own data in its workforce plan details the high levels of casualization in the NDIS. If casual workers do not have access to paid leave for testing it could undermine the NDIS if they chose to then seek other employment, as they cannot afford to take the time to be tested.

We therefore request that the NDIA provide support to providers in affected areas, for COVID testing of impacted disability support workers to occur in rostered time. This will ensure that workers can fulfill health order requirements and maintain the workforce required to continue essential service provision to people with disability.

Urgent need for funding support to group activities and day program providers in Greater Sydney

NSW Health has advised that all day programs in Greater Sydney should cease providing group activities by 6pm today until August 10th.

During 2020 the JobKeeper program was available for disability providers impacted by health orders, to maintain employment of their support workers and to ensure continuity of service through the outbreak and as restrictions eased. In the absence of a JobKeeper 2.0 across the economy today, it is vital that the NDIA urgently provide financial support to day programs in Greater Sydney, so they can continue to pay their workers and maintain employment of support workers over the next fortnight while this Health advice is in place. It should be an explicit condition of such emergency funding that providers continue to pay and employ their support workers in day programs.

Without such support there is a serious risk that hundreds of support workers across Greater Sydney will become disconnected from their employer, and this will impact supports for people with disability. When group activities recommence, there will not be the workers ready to assume group activities and the recruitment, selection and onboarding processes would be a waste of NDIS resources.

I look forward to hearing from you in relation to the above urgent requests for assistance for essential support workers in NSW.

Yours Sincerely,



Natalie Lang
Branch Secretary
ASU NSW & ACT (Services) Branch