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Mildura, Victoria

Mallee Family Care backs NDIS changes, but warns regional Australians can't be an afterthought

Mallee Family Care (MFC) has backed the direction of two major changes to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) but warned that changes designed for people who live in cities risk leaving people in the Mallee without the support they need.

Mallee Family Care has made submissions to recent consultations by the Australian Government's Department of Health, Disability and Ageing on changes to how people qualify for the NDIS, and on a new support coordination service that will replace current arrangements from 1 July 2028.

"We support in principle where these changes are heading," MFC CEO Teresa Jayet said.

"Looking at how someone's disability affects their everyday life, not just their diagnosis, makes sense – we've seen the inconsistent decisions that the current approach produces. And changing the way support coordination is funded is a chance to do this work the way our team has wanted to for a long time."

"But an NDIS designed for people who live in cities won't work the same way out here. These changes need to reflect the reality of rural and regional communities, where services are limited and distance makes everyday challenges harder. If they don't, it's people in the Mallee who will miss out."

Ms Jayet said a fairer NDIS functional capacity assessment only works if people can actually get one. In the Mallee, a professional assessment can take up to 12 months to get, and reaching specialist treatment in Melbourne or Adelaide can mean a 12-hour return trip by bus. Towns like Ouyen, Robinvale and Walpeup have no National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA), Local Area Coordinator or partner presence at all.

"If getting to treatment means a 12-hour round trip you can't afford, that treatment isn't really available to you," she said.

MFC is also calling for the NDIS to take responsibility for reaching people who can't stay in contact, rather than leaving it to them to find the system.

"Right now, if someone doesn't respond after a set number of attempts to contact them, their plan can be suspended – even if they're in hospital, have no fixed address or phone, or are too unwell to answer. When someone goes quiet, that's very often the clearest sign they need help. It should prompt someone to reach out, not cut them off."



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MFC wants the new service funded around what people need, not by the hour, and delivered face to face by default. It also wants local organisations given weight when providers are chosen, and experienced workers kept on.

“Support coordination works in the Mallee because of trust built up over years – often with people who’ve disengaged from every other system,” Ms Jayet said.

“If the new system rewards providers for scale and efficiency without valuing local presence, those relationships are at risk. In other programs, we’ve seen people moved to statewide or national providers, drop out of the system, then come back in crisis. That’s a cost for them, and for the local services left to pick up the pieces.”

“We’ve delivered support coordination in the Mallee since the NDIS began here, and we can see an opportunity for meaningful improvement under the new system. We look forward to working with the Department and the NDIA to make sure these changes work for people in our region.”

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About Mallee Family Care

Mallee Family Care is a dedicated, place-based community service organisation that has been supporting the regional, rural and remote communities of North-West Victoria, Far West NSW and South Australia’s Riverland region since 1979. With around 300 staff delivering more than 70 programs, MFC supports thousands of people across the Mallee each year, providing vital services in areas including family and youth support, mental health, financial counselling, tenancy advocacy, legal assistance, early childhood education and care, and disability services.



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