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Mallee families face a disability support “postcode lottery”, Mallee Family Care warns

Mallee Family Care has called on the Victorian Government to place regional equity at the centre of the next State Disability Plan and Victorian Autism Plan, warning that families in the state's north-west face a “postcode lottery” when seeking disability support.

The call comes in the organisation’s submission to the Government’s consultation on the 2027–2031 plans. The submission draws directly on the experiences of local carers who support family members with autism, ADHD, disability and complex health conditions. Those carers took part in a dedicated workshop facilitated through Mallee Family Care’s Mental Health and Wellbeing Connect Centre.

Asked what came to mind when they thought about the supports available in the Mallee, one workshop participant summed up the regional experience in a single phrase: “a lack of supports.”

Mallee Family Care CEO Teresa Jayet said the message from carers and practitioners was consistent and confronting.

“Services and initiatives celebrated as achievements are frequently invisible in the Mallee. They exist on paper, but distance, transport barriers, workforce shortages and thin markets mean families here cannot access them – or they simply do not operate in our region at all,” Ms Jayet said.

“What exists in Melbourne often does not exist in the Mallee, and what exists in Mildura does not exist in our smaller communities. That is a postcode lottery, and it is not good enough.”

The submission calls for the next plans to embed regional equity as a design principle, backed by the reporting to prove it.

“Our central recommendation is straightforward. Commitments, funding and outcomes under both plans should be reported region by region, not as statewide averages that conceal regional disadvantage. Where the plans claim progress, communities like ours should be able to see and verify that progress locally.”

The submission also highlights critical gaps in specialist safety services, noting there are only eight specialist disability family violence practitioners statewide, with the closest to the Mallee based in Bendigo.

“For a group of people at markedly elevated risk of violence, abuse and neglect, that is not an acceptable level of coverage,” Ms Jayet said.

Ms Jayet said families were also carrying the risk of national disability reforms. Carers reported supports being removed or reduced under the transition to “foundational supports” – a new tier of disability services being developed by the Commonwealth and the states to sit alongside the NDIS – while local alternatives remain scarce.



Media enquiries

Mieka Symes | Communications Manager

T: 03 5023 5966 M: 0439 850 638

E: misymes@malleefamilycare.com.au



“In thin regional markets, a support withdrawn from a family's plan is rarely replaced by an accessible alternative in the community,” Ms Jayet said. “As Victoria works with the Commonwealth on these reforms, regional families must not be the ones absorbing the risk.”

Ms Jayet thanked the carers who contributed their experiences and said the organisation stood ready to work with the Government on the next plans.

“The families who contributed to our submission are not asking for extraordinary things. They are asking to shop, play sport, attend school, work and live safely in their own community, with the same access to support that a family in metropolitan Melbourne can expect. Mallee Family Care remains committed to working collaboratively with governments, communities and partner organisations to make that a reality.”

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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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