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Senator the Hon Linda Reynolds
Minister for the National Disability Insurance Scheme
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Senator the Hon Linda Reynolds,

Subject: **Government's ongoing war on autistic Australian**

Autism Aspergers Advocacy Australia (A4) deplores media reports (see Annex below) saying that "The Minister responsible for the National Disability Insurance Scheme has blamed an uptick of Australia's aged, autistic and obese people for the 'unsustainable' rising costs of the service". [Your government's war on autism](#) is unacceptable. We complained about it before and [were ignored](#).

Aged autistic people are one of the smallest subgroups in the NDIS: there were just 125 of them in June 2021, just 0.8% of 14K+ NDIS participants in that age group. While their funding level is higher than average for the NDIS, we doubt the numbers in this very small group will increase significantly for some time. We have not found NDIA reporting on obesity; we doubt the NDIS even has reliable data on obesity of NDIS participants.

Possibly, you meant either aged, autistic, obese or a combination of the three ('or', not 'and'). We note that:

- the AAT ruled that obesity is not an eligible condition for NDIS participation.
- The NDIS was designed for people up to age 65 years; beyond that age, the aged care system *should* be more attractive, and people should prefer to transition to the aged care system, but that is not currently the case. Including the aged in the NDIS is a choice of the Coalition Government and was not part of the original NDIS costings.
- The NDIA refuses to understand or even properly discuss autism and the NDIS.

The cost of NDIS participants 65 years of age and over should be credited against age care support, but you don't do that. That is dishonest economic practice. Similarly, obesity is a health issue and associated costs must be treated accordingly.

A4's focus is autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Since the Coalition's election to government in 2013, successive NDIS Ministers have refused to discuss support issues and poor outcomes for autistic Australians, with A4, the disability representative organisation (DRO) for autistic Australians recognised on [the DSS national DRO webpage](#). The NDIA excludes A4 from its CEO Forum.

You are reported to have said "We've got many more young children with autism and early developmental (issues), who despite us providing early childhood intervention, are not leaving the scheme as we thought that they would". The NDIA rejects expert advice about autism and tells families that [the NDIS doesn't fund evidence-based early intervention](#), that is EIBI/ABA programs, for autistic children. A4 has raised concerns that NDIS officials refuse to fund evidence-based early intervention for autistic children. The evidence is clear that autistic children who are denied best practice early intervention for their autism have substantially increased support needs through their lives. There is no reason to expect, after the NDIA denying them effective early intervention for their ASD, that they would leave NDIS Tier 3; this shows the NDIA inadequate understanding of ASD. Most autistic children are diagnosed after the NDIA's (premature) cut off age for early intervention, so the NDIA simply denies autistic children effective early intervention. This is not "using insurance principles" and any consequent "cost blowout" is due to the NDIA, and not autistic people, their families and associates.

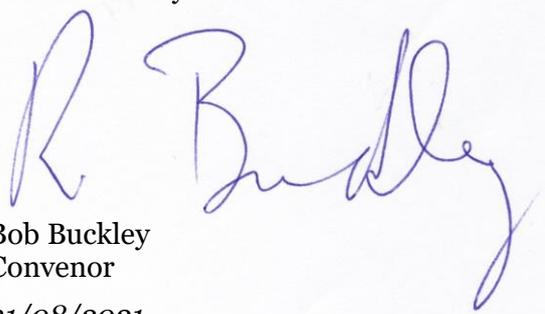
Isn't it time that your government declared an armistice in your unconscionable *war on autism* (see <https://a4.org.au/node/2243> and <https://a4.org.au/node/2288>).

Some autistic children need to be NDIS Tier 3 participants because the NDIA has not implemented NDIS Tier 2 services that were part of the original NDIS design.

The NDIA cuts off early intervention for autistic children before half of them are even diagnosed. The NDIS also encourages people to be diagnosed with Developmental Delay or Global Developmental Delay instead of ASD which denies them access to early intervention for ASD. For them, early intervention doesn't fail; it just never happens.

If you really were concerned about the future of autistics and the NDIS, you would meet recognised representatives of the autistic community and discuss the problems and what can be done to address them rather than attack this vulnerable group in the media.

Yours sincerely



Bob Buckley
Convenor

31/08/2021

Annex: recent media reports.

- <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/nation/politics/ndis-to-outstrip-cost-of-medicare-within-two-years/news-story/6c60f8ec50ab6ef03b793ad0250e0d19>
- <https://au.newschant.com/national/ndis-minister-blames-uptick-in-elderly-obese-participants-as-ndis-costs-increase/>
- <https://sydneynewstoday.com/ndis-minister-condemns-the-increase-in-elderly-and-obese-participants-as-ndis-costs-increase-2/327299/>