

# PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION 2019-2020

## Goulburn Options Disability Services



Goulburn Options is a rural oasis of quality support for people with disability in regional Victoria. ([www.goinc.org.au](http://www.goinc.org.au))

Participants travel long distances to be part of the community. After almost 40 years of service, the organisation has a deep understanding of the needs of its constituency and the unique challenges for people with disability in rural Victoria.

Some eloquent pre-budget submissions have been put forward by others on behalf of the Disability sector. (*Pre-Budget Submission 2019-2020 NDS WA Budget Priorities*)

Goulburn Options offers a short and practical contribution with the focus on just a few key issues related to the NDIS.

- **Administrative software**
- **Realistic pricing for group programs**
- **NDIS support for crisis management**
- **Transport and rural areas**
- **Training**

### **Administrative software**

Transferring responsibility for Disability services from the State to Federal government has generated massive pressure on certain areas of operation. Specifically, the change to funding models has challenged small services with limited administrative support. Small services are passionate providers of quality care and they dig deep to ensure they evolve and respond to the challenge. However, they are usually left to struggle through an administrative revolution with no additional resources to aid the transformation.

An entire nation of small services has been left battling to individually identify and install appropriate client management systems, reporting systems and policies. **Why do we not have nationally approved and funded systems and templates that would ensure efficiency, compliance and a large cost saving?**

**Our Vision:** A community that values and promotes the independence and full participation of people with disability

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### Realistic pricing framework for group programs

The NDIS system introduced for pricing in group programs is **complex, impractical and almost impossible to execute accurately**. The system is built around a ratio of clients to staff. Quotes for service have to be generated before the service begins and this means changes are extremely difficult to manage if clients choose to move to other activities with different ratios. **Ironically, flexibility and choice are reduced**. The ratio of supports will vary for an individual client several times each day as they move through different activities adding to the complexity of planning and billing. Some unplanned absences can be billed, but planned absences cannot. If the pricing for a group has been set around a ratio, and that changes, the provider can be out of pocket. Such gaps in programs are unlikely to be filled by others (unlike a therapy setting). **Providers of group programs need to be supported with realistic frameworks for pricing.**

### NDIS funding for crisis management

Provision must be made within the NDIS to respond to crises. The issues may be participant-related or provider-related.

Any government system that purports to oversee the needs of people with disability must ensure that a budget is allocated to crisis management. The NDIS must have a department that is adequately staffed and funded to deal with crises as they occur in a timely manner.

### Transport and rural areas

There is a great deal of conflicting advice being provided to participants and providers regarding what is acceptable under NDIS and what is not. This is particularly noticeable in relation to transport and rural areas. Some families agree to accept the transport assistance funding that replaces the mobility allowance not realising that this will provide them with less than the cost of their usual taxi (for example, to a centre 5 days each week), and less than the funding that was provided to them under their State schemes.

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The NDS (National Disability Services) report *'Getting Transport on Track', May 2018*, makes several important points. It notes that **for '... most NDIS participants who can't use public transport, the funding levels are insufficient** to cover regular trips to and from community activities or work. Level 1 funding, for example, averages just \$4.40 a day. Many NDIS participants who can't use public transport are recipients of the Disability Support Pension and do not have the financial capacity to cover transport costs.'

'Funding allocations should also reflect the higher transport costs in some regions of Australia, especially where distances are large and there are few or no local support providers. Transport assistance funding in these parts of Australia does not reflect the full impact of local conditions.'

**'A related problem is that too few NDIS planners make provision in a participant's Core supports budget for the cost of regular transport.** Planners should always ask participants whose plan includes 'assistance with social and community participation' or employment, how they intend to travel to and from those activities and how much time over the course of a plan that will take. A participant's budget allocation should reflect that discussion.'

'Block funding of disability service providers allowed for cross-subsidies that helped maintain transport services. With the transition to NDIS individualised funding, service providers find it financially difficult to maintain vehicles. Some are reducing their provision of transport and considering disposing of their transport fleets because of financial loss.'

'Once these transport fleets are gone, they will not be re-established and adequate cost-effective alternatives are not yet available.'

### Training

Regional areas are short of qualified staff. At times this becomes critical and threatens continuity of care. Disability training is required in regional areas with a strong practical curriculum that produces workers that are well trained and work-ready.

**Subsidised ongoing training is crucial.** Organisations are struggling in this time of change and resources are limited. The provision of ongoing training is crucial to maintain and develop the skills of those working in the industry. **The Federal government must lead the way and demonstrate a strong commitment to the training and development of a highly skilled work force.**

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