

Living With Disability in Australia - A Comparison by Jenni Hart

Living with a disability can be a challenge in itself and with [recent changes in Victoria](#), for example, making ends meet is becoming increasingly difficult for many residents of group homes.

The question of just how good (or bad) the support networks for people with disabilities in Australia is an ever pressing question, and certainly not a new one, but by briefly examining some of the systems in place in other parts of the world, we can come to a better understanding of not only how to implement successful models, but also what to avoid.

Furthermore, being able to look at Australia's level of care, and services available, in comparison, can clearly show areas that need to change.

Current Services in Australia

The biggest recent developments from government regarding disabled care has been the gradual rolling out of the NDIS, or [National Disability Insurance Scheme](#).

This scheme has been announced with much fanfare, and promises to introduce financial and general support, tailored to the individual needs of carers, those with disabilities, and their families.

The official site for the NDIS states that in addition to tailoring funded support for items such as [new wheelchairs](#) or other crucial equipment, the overall goal is to help disability sufferers achieve their goals, become involved in the community as much as they desire, and offer access to information, advice, and support networks.

While this all sounds like a step in the right direction, it is important to remember that currently a large proportion of people with disabilities are living below the poverty line.

Both official news sources and non-profit organizations, such as ACOSS, have vocalized [serious concerns](#) at figures released last year. Due to government changes in the way disability benefits are assessed, such as the Disability Support Pension, many have been downgraded to Newstart Allowances as a result of changes to 'partial work capacity'.

This essentially means that some people with disabilities have been deemed for part time work. While this may be the case for some, the fact is that there is little to no support when it comes to finding work for those that can, and want to do so. Coupled

with the fact that employers in general are effectively locking people with disabilities out of the workforce, and the results are severe.

This translates, financially, into a loss of around \$150 a week for anyone with a disability, and if they are incorrectly identified as having ‘partial work capacity’, there is no other way for them to earn.

This is unfortunately, not a new problem, and while the government does appear to be attempting to finally address the issue, is the NDIS really going to address the underlying issues?

Firstly, understanding the scale of the difficulties faced by people with disabilities in Australia is important, because according to ACOSS, comparing the 60% poverty line used by the UK and European countries for example, puts things into perspective even more.

The problem with the NDIS, so far as we have seen in Victoria’s case, is that most regional DHS services are likely to bleed residents to make up for lost finances to continue as NDIS service providers and offset NDIS funding.

Comparisons with Services in the UK and Europe

What is clear so far, is that Australian services for disabled people still have a long way to go. One of the promising features of the NDIS, however, is the vast [increase in caring staff](#) that will be required.

So far, although the scheme doesn’t seem likely to deliver as much as promised on the financial (and arguably most crucial) front, signs that carers will be more freely available is at least potentially an improvement.

While we know there are problems, how does Australia’s level of services compare with countries such as the UK and other European countries? What can be learned from the successful systems there, and are there similar problems.

If we take the UK as our starting point, then the answer might be both a ‘yes’ and ‘no’. Interestingly, the UK government has made similar moves to Australia in cutting down on both the eligibility and amount of state benefits that disabled people in the UK receive - often to much public outcry.

Much like in Australia, the problem lies in the fact that employers are slow to get on board, despite claims by the UK government that targets are being met. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this is leading to an [increase](#) in people with disabilities living under the poverty line, just as in Australia.

That said, there are a wide range of resources that disabled people are able to draw upon, but are generally not widely known. For example, domestic financial site

money.co.uk offers guidance to resources designed to help disabled people understand, manage and get the most financial help possible, as well as additional government and local support in one place, which offers a good starting point.

However, as with many of these services, they are often not common knowledge, and require some proactive action from disabled people. When looking at Europe as a whole, unfortunately we find a similar trend. Although there are of course nuances in each individual countries approaches and support services, the general consensus is that people with disabilities have been hit especially hard by austerity measures in the last few years, and many are at risk of, or already, well below established poverty lines.

Positive Change

With even this brief comparison, what is clear is that the way government's around the world, not just Australia, need to seriously rethink their approach to care and services for people with disabilities.

Simply ignoring the problem, or using attempted 'quick fixes' which in effect make no real impact, or benefit a few select companies that for example, choose to enrol in disability employment schemes for payouts from the government (as is the case in the UK).

Support networks and services need to be entrenched properly, but also an increased awareness, for both the public, and the government, needs to be reached if meaningful and lasting measures that protect those in society whose voices may not be as loud, is to be achieved.

LISA Comment: Most will agree with your views, Jenni. [JacksonRyan Partners certainly do](#). They say, "*Deception is the name of the game ,and power plays, threats and diversions, and the meeting treadmill are tactics and strategies used by service providers to keep control of the illusion that they are doing a good job.*"

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