

Communiqué

Special Meeting of Disability Ministers, Melbourne

Friday 1 February, 2008

A new era of cooperation on disability services was welcomed today in Melbourne by Commonwealth, State and Territory Disability Ministers.

The meeting, chaired by the Federal Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Jenny Macklin, and supported by Federal Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children's Services, Bill Shorten, marked the start of talks on the fourth Commonwealth State and Territory Disability Agreement (CSTDA 4).

The Ministers formally agreed to the key priority areas which will guide the development of the Agreement.

The Australian Government is looking forward to working with the States and Territories, disability stakeholders and the community to get a better deal for people with disabilities.

Also on the agenda was the development of the Australian Government's National Disability Strategy, which will provide leadership in disability policy and draw on the experience of States and Territories.

The National Disability Strategy is an historic opportunity for the Commonwealth, States and Territories to work together with the community to ensure the needs of people with disabilities and their families are addressed through coordinated and comprehensive policy planning – across all Government Departments and services.

The National Disability Strategy and the CSTDA 4 are also vehicles through which Ministers can work together on the eight key priority areas identified by Labor at the election:

- Better measurement of current and future need for disability services;
- Moving toward national population benchmarks for key disability service types;
- Making older carers a priority for all disability services under the CSTDA;
- Quality improvement systems based on the National Disability Service Standards for all Agreement services;
- Improved service planning and strategies to simplify access to services under the CSTDA;
- Focusing on early intervention, lifelong planning and increasing the independence and social participation of people with a disability;
- Improved workforce capacities, and;
- Access to services by Indigenous people with disabilities.

Ministers agreed to progress specific initiatives in relation to autism and also reported back on the progression of young people with disabilities in residential aged care COAG initiative.

Many States and Territories have undertaken reform processes aimed at improving outcomes for people with disabilities, their families and carers.

The Ministers have committed to working together to ensure the momentum for change and improvement continues, recognising the huge challenges ahead of us in this area.

The opportunity to progress disability as part of the Australian Government's social inclusion agenda highlights the commitment to improving the quality of life for people with a disability.

The Disability Ministers have agreed to meet again in March to continue work on the new Agreement.