

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **Urgent action needed to implement Senate Committee recommendations on DSP**

EJA is pleased to see the obstacles limiting access to the DSP for vulnerable cohorts of people with disability comprehensively brought to light in the report of the Senate Inquiry into the purpose, intent and adequacy of the Disability Support Pension (DSP) released last week.

The report reflects the recommendations that EJA has been making in relation to these issues for many years, with EJA's key recommendations urging:

- Reintroduction of a treating doctor report (TDR) as a mandatory component of DSP claims, and billable under Medicare, with a new Medicare item number introduced for report completion and clear guidelines for treating health professionals regarding the type of evidence required for DSP claims
- Removal of the 'fully' qualifier from references to a condition being diagnosed, treated and/or stabilised in the preamble to the DSP Impairment Tables
- Abolition of the DSP program of support requirement

EJA CEO, Leanne Ho, said "The clients our member community legal centres assist will be understandably disappointed that the Committee has recommended consideration of these matters rather than immediate action to amend the DSP qualification criteria and claim processes. Our members report they see clients who are hospitalised with the stress of the DSP claims process and experience immense suffering while struggling to comply with JobSeeker mutual obligation requirements when they should really be on DSP. Those who cannot maintain JobSeeker mutual obligations and cannot provide the evidence required to be granted DSP, end up without payment for long periods and fall into a dire situation of poverty".

Poverty among people with disability is highlighted in the inquiry report but the Committee did not make recommendations to directly address the additional cost of disability – neither for people on DSP nor for people living long-term on JobSeeker Payment. This is disappointing.

EJA urges the Government to establish the consultation processes proposed in the report as a matter of urgency, with tight reporting deadlines. Given the complexity of the issues involved, an extensive and targeted consultation process is warranted, including with:

- People with disability and representative peaks;
- Treating health professional peak bodies;
- Disability advocates;
- Social security advocates (as represented by EJA); and
- Employment Service Providers.

A robust consultation process makes sense for ensuring that this historic DSP inquiry results in fundamental changes that truly enhance access to DSP for the vulnerable cohorts who need this support the most. However, there are some changes which would immediately alleviate some of the financial hardship endured by people with disability who are reliant on Social Security.

Recommendations made by the Committee which do not require such consultation and could be implemented immediately to reduce the distress of people struggling to claim DSP include:

- Removing mutual obligations for people during the process of their claims;
- Increasing funding for disability advocacy, community legal services and First Nations organisations to support DSP claimants in their claims process; and
- Improving linkages between Services Australia and First Nations organisations.

“An increase to the basic rate of the Jobseeker Payment is urgently needed, along with introduction of an allowance for all income support payments, including DSP, that recognises the additional costs of living with disability”, said Ho. “The income support system is not working as intended to support people with disability and urgent action is required to fix it”.

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