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Unions welcome long overdue proposal for a National Disability Insurance Scheme

A National Disability Insurance Scheme is long overdue and could stand alongside Medicare and compulsory superannuation as a landmark social reform, say unions.

Commenting on the release of the draft report from the Productivity Commission's inquiry into disability care and support, ACTU President Ged Kearney said the NDIS was an idea whose time has come, and which would make immeasurable difference to the lives of people with disability and their carers.

"Just as Medicare and superannuation help to spread risk across lifecycles and across the population, to promote social inclusion and to reduce social inequity and hardship, a National Disability Insurance Scheme could do the same for people who require care and support," Ms Kearney said.

"Existing arrangements to support people with disability and their carers are clearly inadequate. They provide a safety net, at best - but not the comprehensive and universal level of support that meets people's needs.

"This chronic underfunding leaves many people with disability and their carers living in poverty.

"A National Disability Insurance Scheme would be the cornerstone of the Australian disability support system.

"A national scheme is also needed to create the environment to attract more carers into the disability support workforce, which would be necessary to expand services.

"Proper funding would transform the system with greater pay, more jobs, better working conditions and career structures, and the resources to do the job properly."

On the question of funding, the ACTU believes the Government should consider a Medicare-style levy.

"Most Australians accept they have a collective responsibility to provide for the vulnerable and those who are unable to look after themselves," Ms Kearney said.

"A levy would involve a small increase in personal income tax, but it is preferable to funding the cost of the NDIS solely through cuts to other government spending. And it may be the best way of ensuring there is adequate revenue for the level of care and support that is needed.

"Most importantly, a sufficient revenue stream would mean all Australians would be guaranteed of support should they have a disability, either one they are born with, or one they acquire later in life."

Media contact:

Mark Phillips ph (03) 9664 7266 or 0422 009 011; mphillips@actu.org.au