# Blind Citizens Australia Positions on My Aged Care and the National Disability Insurance Scheme

Equal Support, Equal Cost, Equal Choice

## What are BCA’s Key Positions?

The Board of Blind Citizens Australia (BCA) has taken stock of recent concerns expressed by members in relation to the inequities between the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and My Aged Care (MAC). The purpose of this document is to outline our initial positions and provide some background as to how we reached them. Be assured that they have not been reached lightly and represent the first step on what we are aware will be a significant journey towards equality of service delivery for people who are blind or vision-impaired. We would like to take this opportunity to thank members for your willingness to share information with us and express your concerns and frustrations. It is only with this kind of open and ongoing dialogue that BCA can be effective.

BCA calls on governments and service providers to work with us to make sure that people who are blind or vision impaired have equal access to services regardless of age. While the introduction of the My Aged Care system is beyond our control, we cannot ignore the grave reality that some older people are experiencing disadvantage in the form of different eligibility, capped packages and co-payments. BCA believes that immediate action is necessary to make sure that nobody has to pay extra to get disability specific supports, and to ensure that older people who will ‘fall through the gaps’ during roll out do not miss out on the support they need.

BCA specifically calls for action to:

1. Ensure there is equity between the NDIS and My Aged Care systems
2. Make sure that there are no copayments for disability specific supports in My Aged Care, and
3. Make sure that people who have been blind for a long time who will be over 65 at the time of NDIS roll out have the right to sign up to the NDIS.

## What is BCA going to do?

BCA will continue to lobby government and other politicians, as well as service providers, to make sure our voice is heard on these issues. We will also continue to provide information for members about both My Aged Care and the NDIS so that you can make the most informed choices possible and be empowered to advocate as individuals. Finally, we will continue to consult with members to ensure we are in the best possible position to advocate in relation to current and emerging issues.

## What is the difference between the NDIS and My Aged Care?

People under the age of 65 will be entering the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) as it rolls out, while those over 65 at the time of NDIS roll out will get support from My Aged Care (MAC).

Blind Citizens Australia (BCA) is keenly aware of some key differences between the NDIS and MAC, including;

* Getting into MAC means you have to be ‘frail aged’ which means some people with disability who still need support may not be able to access MAC
* A cap on MAC packages where there is no cap on NDIS packages;
* Co-payments for MAC supports where there are none for the NDIS;
* An inability to self manage funding in MAC where the NDIS allows this, meaning people have more flexibility in who provides support;

BCA knows that these inequities will affect three groups of people:

* People who have been blind for a long time but miss out on the NDIS because they are over 65 at the time of NDIS roll out in their area;
* People who acquire blindness or vision impairment over the age of 65 for the first time; and
* People who get into the NDIS because they are blind or vision impaired, but have to transition to MAC when they need to use some part of the aged care system on a permanent basis.

## What has BCA said and done in the past?

For a long time, BCA – along with many other disability advocacy groups – has argued for the age cut off to be removed and for equality of supports across both systems. This work began with submissions to the Productivity Commission inquiry which recommended the establishment of the NDIS back in 2011, along with some initial Senate inquiries into the aged care system at around the same time.

As the systems have developed, there has been no support from either side of politics to change the age cut off for the NDIS. This is because the NDIS has been developed based on the idea that it will cost a certain amount, and there is already criticism within the media about the high costs for the NDIS. Both major parties want to see the NDIS succeed, so neither side is willing to take a risk by raising its cost. It is also important to know that the original assumptions around an age cut off of 65 came from State and Territory disability systems, where this cut off was often in place.

However, there are some opportunities for making the two schemes more equal. Various agreements between governments talk about equality of support for people with disability no matter whether they are in the aged care system or the disability system. At the moment, these seem to be high level agreements and it is unclear whether anything concrete is being done to make sure this happens.

## What can be done to make NDIS and MAC more equal?

BCA has to consider its position in the fight for equality carefully. Both schemes are in the middle of rolling out across the country. If BCA fights for changes to the NDIS laws at the cost of fighting for equality, many people will enter the MAC system before change happens.

That’s why BCA has decided to fight for equality across NDIS and MAC. This will allow us to seek change that can happen quickly and flexibly, and which gives us two fair systems.

This means BCA will fight for equal levels of support and equal choice. In the first instance, BCA believes that it is important to make sure that people over 65 who have been blind for a long time before the NDIS rolls out should have access to the NDIS under a grandfathering program. The grandfathering program would give certainty to people over 65 who rely on disability specific supports as both schemes roll out.

We also believe it’s important for people over 65 not to feel ‘split’ between two systems, and as people with disability age it is right that the aged care system be able to adequately meet all of their needs. It is important that no government funded system should be able to dismiss us. After roll out of NDIS and MAC, we believe that both the NDIS and MAC should be delivered to ensure that there will be no co-payments for disability specific supports. Under either scheme, people with disability, including those who are blind or vision impaired, should be able to receive the same levels of support for their disability related needs, and have the same choice to use self management.

## What will BCA do now?

BCA will work to lobby politicians for both a grandfathering system as the schemes roll out and for fair and just support within NDIS and MAC going forward. Importantly, BCA will still consider other options to get a fair and just system going forward as opportunities arise and the political landscape changes. At the moment BCA has limited resources and is choosing to focus them in certain directions going forward. We also remain committed to supporting members to put forward their own views and to work towards change in their own ways, as well as taking a targeted approach as an organisation.

Emma Bennison

BCA Board President