

## MEDIA RELEASE

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### **DCLS welcomes key recommendation of Senate Committee inquiry into DSP and urges immediate action.**

Darwin Community Legal Service (DCLS) is pleased to see many of its key recommendations reflected in the final report of the Senate Community Affairs References Committee *Inquiry into the purpose, intent and adequacy of the Disability Support Pension (DSP)*, tabled on 18 February 2022.

#### ***Urgently reform this broken system***

DCLS looks to the Australian government to urgently reform this system to stop the harm it is doing in the NT and elsewhere in Australia.

While many of the Committee's recommendations should be implemented immediately, the full overhaul requires consultation with people with disability, Aboriginal and other representative bodies, treating health professionals, disability advocates, community legal centres and many others.

#### ***NT organisations told the Committee DSP is broken***

DCLS acknowledges the work of:

- the Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance of the NT (AMSANT)
- the North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency (NAAJA)
- Danila Dilba Aboriginal Medical Service
- the Central Australian Land Council, and
- the NPY Women's Council

which also made submissions to the Inquiry, expressing profound problems with DSP in the NT and the effects.

#### ***NT Effects of broken DSP system***

Jess Brugmans, Senior Advocate with the DCLS Seniors and Disability Rights Service said: "People in the Northern Territory (NT) are disproportionately affected by the current problems with the DSP and its convoluted and unresponsive eligibility rules and claim system."

DCLS Principal Solicitor, Judy Harrison added, "More than 60% of NT DSP recipients are Aboriginal people, and more than 60% of NT DSP recipients reside in regional, rural, and remote areas. As can

be read in our submission to the Inquiry, these groups are disproportionately affected by the broken DSP system.”

Ms Brugmans continued: “DCLS sees clients whose physical and mental health are adversely impacted by the DSP claims process. Our clients are the most vulnerable and often isolated community members. Many of our clients, including those that are eventually successful with their DSP claims with our assistance are deeply affected by the assessment process, the unfairness of the criteria and that it’s far too slow. People experience anxiety, depression, desperation, and loss of self-confidence and this can worsen their other health conditions. The process of claiming a payment that a person is entitled to, should not be traumatising.”

DCLS, the North Australian Aboriginal Legal Service (NAAJA) and Katherine Women’s Information and Legal Service (KWILS) are also members of Economic Justice Australia (EJA), which has worked tirelessly in informing the Australian Government about problems with DSP criteria and the how it is operating.

DCLS joins with EJA in supporting immediate implementation of the various Senate Committee recommendations which do not need in-depth consultation but would immediately alleviate some of the distress DSP claimants are under. This includes:

- Removing mutual obligations for people while their DSP claim is being processed as the current system of repeated applications to suspend these obligations create stress, waste resources. and play to a myth that people who clearly can’t work, can actually do so.
- Increasing funding for disability advocacy, especially Aboriginal organisations and services, and community legal services to support DSP claimants in their claims process; and
- Improving linkages between Services Australia and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.

DCLS also welcome a further recognition from the Senate Committee of the cost of having a disability, and the financial pressure it creates. As noted by the Committee, we submitted that:

“..the [Australian] Government [is] containing costs through the DSP by, amongst other things, warehousing people with permanent disabilities on lower paid social security payments; forcing other services, sectors, and programs to fill the gap; and cost shifting to individuals, families, and communities.”

### ***DSP rates***

DCLS and many others highlighted to the Senate Committee that DSP rates are too low and should be raised.

“Payment rates need to be related to the cost of the supports required by the individual. We welcome independent research and estimates to determine a fair rate.’ Ms Brugmans said.

### ***Social security legal help in the NT***

“People applying for DSP often need legal help, but this is another big gap in the NT.” Ms Harrison, said. “There is no NT plan about availability of social security legal help and no assessment of needs. As social security is federal law, we hope Attorney-General Cash and other relevant federal Ministers, are working on this issue for the NT and other jurisdictions where it applies. We hope for progress in the upcoming federal budget’.

“The NT needs a social security legal help funding model that works at a community level across the NT, for people to have the legal help they need’. Judy Harrison said.

### **To read more**

To read more on the Senate Inquiry into the purpose, intent, and adequacy of the Disability Support Pension or to read Darwin Community Legal Services’ submission, see here:

Report:

[https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Senate/Community\\_Affairs/DisabilitySupportPensio/Report](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Community_Affairs/DisabilitySupportPensio/Report)

Submission:

[https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Senate/Community\\_Affairs/DisabilitySupportPensio/Submissions](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Community_Affairs/DisabilitySupportPensio/Submissions)

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