

Vision Australia submission to the Inquiry into a suitable model for the implementation of the National Injury Insurance Scheme (NIIS) for Queensland

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Submission to: Research Director
Communities, Disability Services and Domestic and
Family Violence Prevention Committee

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Summary

Vision Australia welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Inquiry by Disability Services and Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Committee into a suitable model for the implementation of the National Injury Insurance Scheme (NIIS) for Queensland.

Social insurance schemes such as the NIIS and the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) are important social reforms that can help people who are blind or have low vision to live the life they choose.

It is essential that people who become blind as the result of an injury should be eligible for the appropriate financial support under the NIIS for Queensland.

Eligibility

It is important that the NIIS covers a person who becomes blind due to an injury. See discussion regarding the definition of 'blind' below. When a person is confronted with sudden blindness they require support and care with their daily living in order to maintain independence and dignity. We believe that the NIIS should cover the costs of medical, allied health services and blindness rehabilitation services for people with a diagnosis of permanent blindness from an injury.

This includes but is not limited to:

- medical treatment (including pharmaceutical)
- home and transport modifications
- mobility and equipment training
- domestic services
- aids and appliances
- specialised adaptive technology training
- braille training
- library services for people with a print disability
- education and vocational training
- psychological treatment
- personal care
- child care services
- nursing care
- assistance with community access
- respite care

The above mentioned needs and supports should be included by the NIIS for people who acquire permanent blindness from an injury.

Initiating an NIIS claim

We recommend that units within hospitals identify possible NIIS entrants and that a preliminary eligibility assessment be made for patients to claim under the scheme.

We would like to ensure that NIIS funding starts from the time of admission to hospital and that the patient has access to lodge a claim for NIIS cover while in hospital. If the patient is unable to complete the claim form because of their injuries we believe that the NIIS should provide assistance for patients to complete their claim form.

In the acute period immediately following discharge from hospital, when the reality of permanent blindness is being absorbed, it is important that support services are received without delay under the NIIS. We believe that blindness rehabilitation must commence immediately to help the patient to maintain independence and to come to terms with their new reality.

Definition of permanent blindness under the NIIS

There is a definition of permanent traumatic blindness in the 'Agreed Minimum Benchmarks for Motor Vehicle Accidents' that is referenced in the Heads of Agreement between the Commonwealth of Australia and the State of Queensland on the National Disability Insurance Scheme. That definition is "Permanent traumatic blindness, based on the legal definition of blindness."

We believe that permanent traumatic blindness, based on the legal definition of blindness, should not be the minimum benchmark on which to base a person's NIIS eligibility. We propose that the NIIS define 'permanent traumatic blindness' as based

on a person's functional vision rather than being measured solely by the legal definition of blindness.

We believe that it is the functional impact of a person's vision that is important rather than a technical definition of blindness. We also recommend a functional vision standard be used under the NIIS because we believe it is important to maintain consistency with the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). Functional vision is the standard NDIS use to assess insurance eligibility.

Definition of Functional Vision

'Functional vision' is how well a person uses their remaining vision.

If a person has better vision than being legally blind, eligibility is determined by the functional impact of their vision loss, so long as the vision condition is permanent.

The functional impact of vision loss is based on what a person is unable to do because of their vision loss.

For example, if someone had previously used their kitchen appliances by visually looking for power buttons or temperature controls and they can no longer do so because of their vision loss, the functional impact on them is that they can no longer cook and use kitchen appliances. In this situation a person would require orientation training and kitchen modifications so that the person could return to doing their cooking independently.

Including integration standards in the NIIS

We recommend that the NIIS include specific measures to ensure integration across health, disability and aged care for people who are blind or have low vision. In order to ensure collaboration between Government agencies and cooperation between the non-government and private sectors it is imperative that there are integration standards implemented between health, the NDIS, My Aged Care and the NIIS. A consistent and equal provision of funding across all Australian insurance schemes and aged care services will offer consumers stability as they move in and out of these systems throughout their life.

About Vision Australia

Vision Australia is the largest provider of services to people who are blind, deafblind, or have low vision in Australia. It was formed through the merger of several of Australia's most respected and experienced blindness and low vision agencies.

Our vision is that people who are blind, deafblind, or have low vision will increasingly be able to choose to participate fully in every facet of community life. To help realise this goal, we provide high-quality services to the community of people who are blind, have low vision, are deafblind or have a print disability, and their families. The service delivery areas include:

- early childhood
- orientation and mobility
- employment

- accessible information (including library services)
- recreation
- independent living
- Seeing Eye Dogs
- advocacy, and working collaboratively with Government, business and the community to eliminate the barriers our clients face in making life choices and fully exercising rights as Australian citizens.

Vision Australia has gained unrivalled knowledge and experience through constant interaction with our 27,536 clients and their families, and also through the involvement of people who are blind or have low vision at all levels of the Organisation. Vision Australia is therefore well placed to provide advice to governments, business and the community on the challenges faced by people who are blind or have low vision fully participating in community life.

We have a vibrant client consultative framework, with people who are blind or have low vision representing the voice and needs of clients of the Organisation to the Board and Management.

Vision Australia is also a significant employer of people who are blind or have low vision, with 15.4% of total staff having vision impairment.

Vision Australia also has a formal liaison arrangement with Blind Citizens Australia (BCA) through a Memorandum of Understanding for a number of purposes, including collaboration, so that Vision Australia's systemic advocacy and public policy positions are, wherever practicable, consistent with the programs and policies of Australia's peak body representing people who are blind or have low vision.

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