

Briefing Note for Minister Salesa: May 8th Meeting

Progress over the past week (up until late Thursday May 7th):

- **Disability Specific PPE guidance** – finally became available late Thursday. This has taken far too long. Still periodic supply issues. Concerns about the supply chains ability to respond to increased demand with the change in guidance.
- **Guidance for level 2.** An initial draft is being worked on – waiting for government decisions. NZDSN distributed the draft with the caveat that it was work in progress and may change. We felt it important that providers could get started with some indications of what level 2 would be like. This has been well received.
- **Guidance for the return of the vulnerable workforce.** A near final version has been circulated for feedback. Not yet released – this is urgent.
- **Infection control audit.** After some initial hiccups this is proceeding. There are 4 different audit tools/processes being used that we know of, so will be interested in the results.
- **Reimbursement of COVID related costs** – on hold awaiting government decisions. Concern remains about additional costs under levels 2 and 3.
- **Letter of variation regarding surety of contracted funding.** Providers found this confusing and contradictory. We made a request for a revised letter with identified points clarified or at least an email to provide clarity and an acknowledgement of the confusion. Nothing forthcoming. This has been further complicated by the May 4th advance contract payment run (sent on May 6th) which was sent with numerous errors where payments were sent to the wrong provider.

As we discussed last week we need to better understand why these failures and delays appear to be ongoing and what can be done to ensure it doesn't continue.

Priorities going forward: creating momentum for change and sustainability

1. Implementation of RPM/contract price uplifts
2. National roll out of FDS contracts

As we begin to re-emerge into a more business as usual environment we are very concerned that long standing and well documented funding issues will continue to go unresolved. **We must use the COVID-19 crisis as a springboard for the change we want to see, not an excuse to stand still and lose the momentum that it has created.** These two priorities are inextricably linked – we can't assume the innovation we are wanting from FDS unless there is a sustainable funding platform.

Investing for Innovation

We think it is useful to think about the outcomes we all want to see as: **“Investing in better lives for disabled people and families”**

It has not been lost on any of us that the COVID-19 crisis has propelled funders and providers to explore greater flexibility and approaches that better reflect EGL principles. There is strong momentum to continue in this way and not to return to the way things were before the crisis. Maintaining this momentum will need to be supported by continued flexibility around contracting and sustainable funding to embed new innovations as everyday practice.

A funding regime that offers certainty and sustainability for providers is essential to firstly maintain acceptable levels of quality and safety in current services and secondly to spur investment in the changes and innovations that are required to embed EGL practices - and that are increasingly demanded by a younger generation of individuals and families.

We also need to acknowledge that there is a cohort of mostly aging families who are unlikely to be convinced of the need for any changes to the current models of residential care. Providers are therefore faced with the dual demands of maintaining legacy services for some time into the future while at the same time moving towards supporting more personalised approaches to housing, living arrangements and wider community participation, including inclusive employment options.

In order to embark on a programme of change and innovation providers need to do so on the basis of a financial position that enables investment in the change process, its workforce and the innovation itself. The latest iteration of the RPM for example will, in most cases, provide that financial base and the confidence to move in new directions that are consistent with the Enabling Good Lives principles. More broadly, regular contract price uplifts that match cost of living increases will contribute to the ongoing financial sustainability that is a prerequisite to achieving the changes we all want to see.

This change will involve things like:

- Engaging with FDS contracts and the range of opportunities this opens up – both for some people already in residential services and for new referrals
- Engaging with initiatives such as IChoose and FFC
- Investing in a range of new technologies that compliment staff support activity and safeguarding
- Investing in workforce development that embeds EGL practice frameworks (as part of a matching workforce development strategy)
- Developing staffing and organisational models that shift greater authority and decision making to the front line of organisations – creating a greater range and diversity of support roles – and driving the recruitment of a younger and more diverse workforce.
- Establishing living and community participation options that are more individualised, and enable real choice for people over with whom, how and where they live (rather

than the current tendency for cluster housing, larger group homes and facility based day programmes that is largely driven by cost issues)

A sustainable funding regime enables both providers and the Ministry to realise jointly held goals for disability support services that implement the Enabling Good Lives principles in practice (a key plank of the DDS draft Disability Directorate Strategy 2020). NZDSN understands that implementing the latest iteration of the RPM along with broader contract price uplifts that match cost of living increases in one budget cycle is not possible, **but what we do want is a commitment to make a start to close what is now an agreed and very transparent funding gap over time.**

In the absence of this we will all get frustrated by a lack of tangible change – providers will be constrained by inflexible contracts and funding shortfalls and the Ministry will not see the outcomes it is seeking for the lives of disabled people and their families. There are also a couple of other challenges we need to work on together that rely on the participation of other parts of government:

- A national affordable and accessible housing strategy - including a scheme that enables disabled people to acquire equity to invest in housing (Canada has a scheme that is well worth a look).
- A coherent workforce strategy that provides consistent qualification pathways that match the future we are all seeking. At present investment in this area is limited and very fragmented with extremely variable outcomes.

Garth Bennie

NZDSN