



The Coalition's plan for real action on
Disabilities and Carers

**Stand up for Australia.
Stand up for real action.**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Coalition is committed to real action to assist people with disabilities and carers.

The Coalition plan for real action will support practical and affordable initiatives that recognise need and promote self-help and independence.

Approximately 20 per cent of the Australian population has a physical or intellectual disability, yet many of these people face significant challenges in fully participating in the paid workforce, family and the community. Successive governments, state and federal, have failed Australians with a disability.

Support for people with a disability is currently determined by a number of factors - where they live, whether their disability is congenital or acquired and, if acquired, whether in the workplace, a motor vehicle or some other context. It's a lottery.

There are also several million full and part-time voluntary carers who sacrifice their time, their life choices and their independent lives to look after loved ones who are elderly or have a disability. While the previous Coalition Government in particular made significant progress to give carers long-overdue support, encouragement and recognition, there's always more that can be done.

Our plan for real action includes:

1. A commitment to seriously examine the Productivity Commission recommendations in relation to a National Disability Insurance Scheme
2. An investment of \$314 million for an Education Card worth up to \$20,000 to assist up to 6,000 Australian students with a disability
3. An increase in the Education Tax Rebate and an expansion of eligible expenses to include education costs for children with disabilities
4. The appointment of an independent Commonwealth Disability and Carer Ombudsman to give Australians with a disability and carers a real, independent voice within government
5. A comprehensive audit conducted by the new Disability and Carer Ombudsman of Australia's supported accommodation
6. \$2.2 million to establish a new school for blind and vision impaired students in Victoria and an assessment of the need for additional special schools across Australia that cater for students with particular disabilities
7. \$1 million to provide digital playback devices and improved access to digital content in public libraries
8. \$500,000 to fast-track technology to make cinemas more accessible
9. \$1 million to promote voluntary guidelines for accessible housing for older Australians and Australians with a disability
10. A Disability Enterprises (ADE) Advocate

11. \$3 million for a new Young Carer Scholarship Programme
12. Maintenance of income support for carers

HOW LABOR HAS FAILED

After three years of Labor, Australia is on the wrong track.

Reckless spending, broken promises, a \$93 billion debt, six interest rate increases in a row, a \$57 billion deficit and a Labor Government borrowing \$100 million a day have put the budget in a highly vulnerable position. Labor have reverted to type and for 3 years have been a typical high-taxing, high-spending Labor government.

Regrettably, the Labor Government has driven the budget into debt and deficit. This has the potential to compromise the ability of future governments to improve support for Australians with a disability and carers.

The Coalition is determined to restore the nation's finances, to return the budget to surplus and to pay down Labor's debt. It's a problem not of our making, but one we are determined to fix. This will enable a future Coalition government to improve support for Australians who face particular challenges and those who care for them.

Labor has spent much of the last 3 years taking credit for Coalition initiatives such as the Helping Children with Autism package.

Labor attempted to scrap the Carers Bonus in 2008, denying crucial help to those who care for people with disability. Labor only backed down after a public outcry and pressure from the Coalition.

In 2008, Labor promised an additional \$100 million in capital funding to deliver 300 new supported accommodation places for people with disability. Only 40 of these have been delivered¹. And Labor has slugged users of continence aids by imposing on them delivery costs that were previously covered by the Government.

1. ABC Four Corners – 'Breaking Point' - 15 February 2010

THE COALITION'S PLAN FOR REAL ACTION ON DISABILITIES AND CARERS

The Coalition is committed to assisting people with disabilities and carers.

The Coalition has a plan for real action to support practical and affordable initiatives that recognise need, reward effort and promote self-help and independence.

Our plan includes;

1. National Disability Insurance Scheme

The Coalition acknowledges that better support for Australians with a disability is a high-priority issue and recognises that the disability sector and carers are united in their call for a solution to the unmet need for the long term care and support of Australians with a disability and those who care for them.

The current support system for Australians with a disability is a frayed patchwork that leaves many people without cover and adequate support. The Coalition recognises there is a great need for better assistance for people with disability who need long-term care and that many carers are no longer able to provide constant support.

The Coalition has undertaken to closely examine and consider the recommendations of the Productivity Commission inquiry into the long term care and support of Australians with disability. The final report is due to be released on 31 July 2011.

The Leader of the Opposition, Tony Abbott, has said:

*"There are millions of Australians who are involved with this, not because they necessarily have a disability themselves, but because their loved ones do and they are rightly, rightly very interested in the outcome of this Productivity Commission inquiry and we won't let them down."*²

2. Education Card for children with a disability

The Coalition has previously committed to the introduction of an Education Card worth up to \$20,000 per year to provide real choice for parents of children with a disability. The Card will initially support up to 6,000 students with the greatest need.

The problem with existing systems of support for students with a disability is the lack of portability. Support and assistance traditionally goes to the school, does not follow the student with a disability and varies according to the school system.

The Coalition will commit \$314 million over the forward estimates to commence the portability of funding for students with a disability through an Education Card. The Education Card will be worth up to \$20,000 per year.

2. Leader of the Opposition Tony Abbott MHR, doorstep interview, Adelaide, 7 May 2010 (<http://www.liberal.org.au/Latest-News/2010/05/07/Abbott-Doorstop-with-Christopher-Pyne-and-Mitch-Fifield.aspx>)

The entitlement attached to the Education Card will follow the student. It will be indexed to inflation and will be paid to educational institutions in addition to existing support.

The Education Card will provide targeted assistance to specific areas of the schools population. The purpose of the card is to provide students with additional education needs with a financial opportunity to access the very best schooling options available.³

3. Education Tax Rebate – Increase & Expansion

The Coalition has previously committed to increase and expand the Education Tax Rebate to include, for the first time, special education costs for children with disabilities. The rebate will be increased to up to \$500 per year per child in primary school and up to \$1,000 per year per child in secondary school.⁴

4. An independent Commonwealth Disability and Carer Ombudsman

The Coalition will establish an Office of the Commonwealth Disability and Carer Ombudsman to give Australians with a disability and carers a real, independent voice and policy activist within government. The Ombudsman will independently investigate complaints, assist Australians with a disability and carers to resolve disputes with government departments and ensure that the Commonwealth Government is accountable to Australians with a disability and carers. The Ombudsman will report regularly to the Parliament and will also undertake inquiries as directed by the Government.

The Coalition will provide \$6 million towards this initiative.

5. A comprehensive audit of Australia's supported accommodation

Australia's system of providing supported accommodation and respite for Australians with a disability is inadequate.

Whilst the Commonwealth provides much of the funding, the States are often responsible for delivering the places and funding their recurrent costs. The result is a blame game mess.

Labor has a poor record on supported accommodation. In 2008 they promised 300 additional places, but it was revealed in February 2010 that only 40 of these had been delivered.⁵

In this election Labor has promised an additional 150 places but there can be no confidence that these will be delivered.

Further, there are examples of community organisations and individuals raising their own funds to build supported accommodation facilities only to be refused individual support packages for those places by the States. The result is brand new facilities lying unused and empty.

3. The Coalition's Plan for Real Action to Help Students with a Disability and their Families – Election Policy 2010

4. Real Help for Families – Expanding the Education Tax Rebate – Coalition Election Policy 2010

5. ABC Four Corners – 'Breaking Point' - 15 February 2010.

To address these issues properly, the first step must be to establish the current state of Australia's supported accommodation. A Coalition Government will direct its newly established Disability and Carer Ombudsman to conduct a comprehensive audit of Australia's supported accommodation, identifying the gaps in both capital and recurrent funding. The Ombudsman's findings will be considered alongside the Productivity Commission's report into a National Disability Insurance Scheme.

The costs of this audit will be absorbed within the Disability and Carer Ombudsman's allocated budget.

6. A new school for blind and vision impaired students in Victoria and an assessment of the need for additional special schools across Australia that cater for students with particular disabilities

Victoria's only dedicated blind school was closed in December 2009. Integration into the mainstream school system is appropriate for some but not all children with a disability. Parents deserve real choice when it comes to selecting a school for their child.

There are six schools for deaf and hearing impaired students in Melbourne alone, but not a single school for the blind anywhere in Victoria.

A group of dedicated parents have put forward a well-developed proposal to re-establish a blind school in Victoria. A Coalition Government will provide \$2.2 million for the capital establishment costs of the *Insight* School for the Blind and Vision Impaired.

Further, the Coalition will conduct a comprehensive nationwide audit of special schools that cater for particular disabilities to establish the need that might exist across Australia. The audit will be conducted by the Disability and Carer Ombudsman.

7. Improving Library Accessibility

The Coalition will commit \$1 million towards Australia's public libraries for improvements such as better access to digital content and digital playback devices. Funding for this commitment is fully provided for in the Budget.

8. Accessible Cinemas

A Coalition Government will work in partnership with Australia's cinema operators to fast-track technology to make cinemas more accessible for people with sight and hearing impairments.

\$500,000 will be directed towards this initiative from existing Budget allocations.

9. Accessible housing for older Australians and Australians with a disability

The Coalition will work with the residential building and construction industry to promote voluntary guidelines for accessible housing for older Australians and Australians with a disability.

\$1 million will be provided for this initiative from existing Budget allocations.

10. A helping hand for Australian Disability Enterprises

Australian Disability Enterprises (ADEs) are commercial businesses that provide real work opportunities for more than 20,000 people with disability across Australia.⁶

The Coalition will take real action to ensure that the Commonwealth Government leads by example in the procuring of goods and services from ADEs.

Department of Finance and Deregulation (Finance) procurement guidelines provide a tender exemption for Commonwealth departments and agencies that purchase goods or services from an ADE. Finance does not, however, monitor the use of the exemption provision.

The Coalition will ensure that Finance formally monitors and reports each year on the use of the tender exemption.

The Coalition will also appoint an "ADE Advocate" to work within government to highlight the opportunities for using ADE services. The ADE Advocate will be a retired senior military officer with a logistics background and he or she will be assisted by unpaid portfolio-specific champions who will promote use of ADEs in both the government and private sectors.

The ADE Advocate will also be tasked with examining procurement processes to recommend further reforms that will assist ADEs to secure government business.

By encouraging more Commonwealth Government purchasing from ADEs, the enterprises will be better placed to support employees with disability.

National Disability Services, the peak body representing disability service providers including ADE's, currently has a Commonwealth funded ADE purchasing officer to assist ADE's liaise with government. Funding for this position expires at the end of 2010, and the Coalition will extend this for two years as part of the ADE Advocate programme.

Supported Employees – Transitioning to the open workforce

Many Australians with disability who work in supported employment are willing and able to move into roles in the open workforce. The Coalition believes that those who wish to attempt this transition deserve strong support.

Unfortunately, many people with disability are reluctant to attempt this transition for fear of losing their supported employment place and therefore being unable to return should their experience with the open workforce be unsuccessful. This barrier needs to be addressed so that more people with disability can feel confident challenging themselves by having a go in the open workforce.

The Coalition will ensure that this transition issue will be a key focus of the recently announced review process to develop a new ten-year vision for ADEs.

6. Australian Disability Enterprises (<http://www.australiandisabilityenterprises.com.au/en/About.aspx>)

11. Young Carer Scholarship Programme

The Coalition will take real action to further value the work of young carers.

Around 400,000 Australians aged under 26 care for a person with a disability or long-term illness. Australian Bureau of Statistics data show that 6.6 per cent of carers are aged 18 years and under.⁷

Many of these young carers are missing chances to further their education, or to take part-time work to help them through secondary school or university.

To assist young carers through their study the Coalition will introduce a Young Carer Scholarship Program for secondary, TAFE and university students.

At least 150 annual scholarships valued up to \$10,000 will be awarded depending on the level of education involved.

The Coalition will make an initial commitment of \$3 million over three years towards this programme and will look to expand it once Labor's debt is under control and the budget position is repaired.

12. Income Support for Carers

The previous Coalition Government introduced a range of payments to support carers, such as the Carer Allowance, Carer Payment and Carer Bonus which Labor has since re-badged as the Carer Supplement. The Coalition is committed to maintaining these payments and notes that they are already fully budgeted for in the forward estimates.

7. Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Caring in the Community*, January 2005: data reprinted in Access Economics, *The Economic Value of Informal Care*, August 2005 <http://www.accesseconomics.com.au/publicationsreports/showreport.php?id=6&searchfor=2005&searchby=year>

COSTINGS

In addition to the \$314 million previously committed for the Coalition's Education Card for children with a disability, the Coalition will commit \$14.7 million over the forward estimates towards these further initiatives.

This funding will be provided from the nearly \$30 billion in recurrent savings that have been identified by the Coalition over the forward estimates.

These savings are a result of cutting Labor's waste and mismanagement and redirecting funding from inefficient and poor performing Labor Government programmes.

| | 2010/11 \$M | 2011-12 \$M | 2013-14 \$M | 2014-15 \$M | TOTAL \$M |
|--|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|--------------|
| Disability and Carer Ombudsman | 0 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 6 |
| <i>Insight</i> school for blind and vision impaired students | 2.2 | - | - | - | 2.2 |
| Young Carer Scholarships | - | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| Assisting Australian Disability Enterprises | 0.5 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3.5 |

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