

Senator Dean Smith  
Chair  
Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit  
PO Box 6021  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Senator Smith,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input to the Inquiry on the Auditors General's Report 18 Qualifying for the Disability Support Pension (DSP). Our input mainly relates to the reviews of recipients continued eligibility for DSP.

The DSP provides important financial support to working age Australians who have a permanent physical, intellectual, or psychiatric impairment that prevents or limits their capacity to work. In order to apply for DSP, people have to provide medical evidence of the impairment or disability and most are required to undergo a Job Capacity Assessment. Manifest grants of the DSP are made without further assessment in the following limited circumstances: a terminal illness (life expectancy of less than two years with significantly reduced work capacity during this period); permanent blindness (meets the test for permanent blindness for social security purposes); an intellectual disability where medical evidence clearly indicates an IQ of less than 70; an assessment indicating that they require nursing home level care; category 4 HIV/AIDS; or in receipt of a Department of Veterans' Affairs disability pension at special rate (totally and permanently incapacitated).

It has recently come to the attention of Down Syndrome Australia that people with Down syndrome are receiving requests to provide further medical evidence of their disability as part of the review process that is being undertaken as part of the 2014-2015 Federal Budget which targets reviews of people under the age of 35 who are on the DSP.

Down syndrome is a permanent genetic condition in which the person has an extra copy of chromosome 21. This additional chromosome results in a number of physical and developmental characteristics and some level of intellectual disability. Down syndrome is the most common cause of intellectual disability and everyone who has Down syndrome will have some degree of intellectual disability. It is not a 'medical condition'.

Given the permanent nature of Down syndrome and the accompanying intellectual disability, it is inappropriate to ask families to provide medical evidence for a DSP medical review. This approach creates both unnecessary burden on families but also is inefficient and a waste of limited resources.

Down Syndrome Australia strongly agrees with recommendation 4.22 of the National Audit Report

*“To improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the current review process, the ANAO recommends that Human Services, in cooperation with DSS, include options in its risk profiling to better identify recipients whose medical conditions have a greater prospect of improvement”*

As part of this targeting, people with Down syndrome, and other related chromosomal disorders (fragile X, Cri du chat syndrome, Williams, Turners, etc) should be excluded from any further review of their DSP eligibility after their initial eligibility is established.

To ensure that this approach is implemented, Down Syndrome Australia recommends that Down syndrome is included in the List 1 of conditions which provide eligibility for Manifest grants of DSP which removes the requirement for a job capacity assessment as well as further medical reviews. Currently Down syndrome is included in List 2 and requires further medical evidence of an intellectual disability and eligibility may be dependent on IQ score. This is inappropriate given that all people with Down syndrome have some form of intellectual disability.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss these concerns further.

Kind Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ellen Skladzien', is written over a light grey rectangular background.

Ellen Skladzien  
CEO  
Down Syndrome Australia

4 November 2016