



30 June 2016

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MS Australia

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Dear Andrew,

## **Re: MS Australia Election Commitments**

Thank you for writing to Bill Shorten and Labor on behalf of MS Australia (MSA). Please find below Labor's response to MSA's election platform.

**Full funding and timely roll out of the Medical Research Future Fund and assistance with prioritising an allocation from the Fund of \$25 million to Multiple Sclerosis Research Australia for the purpose of funding a number of promising, signature areas of research that will boost the chances of finding a cure for MS.**

**A specific contribution of \$15 million for the Brain Health Project; a therapeutic strategy with the potential to minimise disease activity and maximise lifelong brain health for those with MS.**

Labor believes Australia should be at the forefront of health and medical research. In Government Labor committed more than \$3.5 billion in health and medical research funding.

Labor supported the establishment of the Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF). The MRFF will be managed by the Future Fund Board of Guardians, with disbursements guided by the Australian Medical Research Advisory Board.

Labor's preference is for national medical research funds to be prioritised according to the advice of experts. Labor made some changes to the way the MRFF will operate and we continue to believe that more rigour could be applied to its processes, including a greater role for the National Health and Medical Research Council. That said, we supported the Government's legislation to establish the MRFF because we want to see more funding for health and medical research in Australia.

Disbursements from the MRFF will be guided by the Advisory Board's priorities and strategy. Labor assumes that promising research that could lead to a cure for MS would be considered favourably.

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**Immediately establishing a MS Stem Cell Research Working Group for discussing with key decision-makers how to alleviate the need for people with MS to risk travelling overseas for AHSCT treatment.**

In Australia, the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care's *National Safety and Quality Health Services Standards* make Australia's healthcare system as safe and efficient as possible.

These high quality standards mean that some treatments are not available in Australia, creating a situation in which people face the difficult decision to go without treatment or take a risk by travelling overseas.

A Shorten Labor Government will look at these issues in relation to MS, in consultation with people with MS, clinicians, researchers and others.

**A commitment to the full and timely roll out of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).**

Labor created the NDIS in 2013 – the biggest social reform since Medicare.

A Shorten Labor Government will deliver the NDIS on time, on budget, as promised.

**Specific improvements to the Aged Care/Disability care interface.**

Labor does recognise people with disability may require additional support and care as they age and it is important the aged care system is responsive to the needs of all older Australians.

The NDIS was not intended to replace the aged care system, and the age 65 threshold ensures that there is not duplication between the NDIS and aged care.

People who enter the NDIS before the age of 65 will have a choice to stay in the NDIS once they turn 65 or enter the aged care system.

The NDIS has been designed to complement the aged care system to ensure we are delivering a cohesive system that gives people with disability, older people, their families and carers the support they need.

We believe people should get the care they need in the aged care and the disability care systems and there should not be duplication between the two.

**Specific improvements to employment options and workplace flexibility.**

*Boost Employment Opportunities for People with Disability*

Labor will support businesses and not-for-profit organisations to develop their own Disability Employment Action Plans. These Action Plans will allow organisations to:

- Identify existing barriers to employment for people with disability in their workplace.
- Improve recruitment policies and procedures so they are more inclusive.
- Outline specific strategies and targets to boost employment and training opportunities for people with disability within their organisation.

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Labor will provide \$1 million to an independent, national not-for-profit disability organisation so they can promote, advise and coordinate the development and delivery of Disability Employment Actions Plans.

#### *Trial New Approaches to Disability Employment Services*

Labor will investigate new approaches that 'unbundle' Disability Employment Services funding so that participants have more control over the services they receive. This means jobseekers will be able to control their own funding, and choose different service providers to provide different employment supports, depending on their individual needs.

Labor will also invest \$5 million to trial a new approach to better integrate Disability Employment Services and the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

In selected NDIS locations, people with disability looking for work will be able to choose their own employment supports as part of their individual plan. This means they can access a range of employment assistance from different service providers, depending on their individual needs.

#### *Introduce Public Sector Employment Targets for People with Disability*

A Shorten Labor Government will task the Australian Public Service Commission with developing a series of employment targets for people with disability, in partnership with different departments and agencies and in consultation with disability advocates.

The employment targets will be national, department and agency-specific, and will include targets for leadership positions.

Commonwealth departments and agencies will also be expected to develop or update Disability Employment Action Plans to make sure these targets are met.

In this way, Labor will act as we expect others to act – providing opportunities for people with disability; like those with MS, to succeed at work.

#### **Improvements to Early Intervention Processes**

Labor understands that access to primary health care is vital to prevent and better treat illness with better outcomes for patients and the health system.

Labor will lift the freeze on indexation of the Medicare Benefits Schedule, applying to all services provided by GPs, allied health and other health practitioners and medical specialists. This will protect bulk billing to ensure that financial barriers are not created to people seeing the doctor when they need to.

A Shorten Labor Government will also reverse Malcolm Turnbull's cuts to bulk billing incentives for pathology and diagnostic imaging. Labor's measure will maintain incentives for pathologists and radiologists to bulk bill. Without it, bulk billing will fall, co-payments will rise, and patients will be forced to pay more for tests and scans - or skip them altogether.

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It is vital that patients are not turned away from care based on their ability to pay. This would mean worse health outcomes for people with MS who are not screened and diagnosed early enough in their illness.

Labor will continue to stand up for Medicare, consistent with our longstanding principle that every Australian should have access to the highest quality healthcare, regardless of where they live and regardless of their capacity to pay.

Labor will also provide an additional \$100 million over two years to strengthen primary care. Labor's investment will help develop new models of integrated primary care including the development of a unique Australian model of patient-centred medical homes – *Your Family Doctor*. Part of the patient-centred medical home model is to reward the provision of holistic and ongoing care, especially but not exclusively for patients with complex and chronic illnesses, such as MS.

A Shorten Labor Government will also invest \$300 million in a package of preventive health measures to tackle Australia's chronic disease crisis by helping families to raise healthy children, and keeping Australians healthy throughout their lives.

### **Blanket Prevention of Young People Entering Residential Care**

As a principle, Labor would like to ensure that young people never have to live in aged care. Labor understands that too many young people with disability are living in residential care because of a lack of access to appropriate housing and support alternatives.

This is just not good enough.

We are committed to preventing young people from being forced to live in residential care by improving access to affordable, specialist disability housing options.

Specialist disability housing allows people with disability to live more independently in the community. With the right support, people with disability are able to connect with family and friends, take advantage of education and employment opportunities, and access government services and community support.

Labor is committed to working to improving access to different types of disability housing options, so young people have choice and control over where they live. No young person should be forced to live in nursing homes, or any other housing that is not appropriate to their needs.

As the NDIS is rolled out over the next few years, demand for accessible housing will increase. Labor understands there is an urgent need to boost the supply of affordable housing options for people with disability.

We understand that this will require leadership from government to ensure difference models are developed which can ensure young people are not forced to live in residential care. We are committed to working with these stakeholders, to improve supply of disability accommodation and

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## **Introduce a Single and National Medical Energy Concession**

Labor understands the difficulty in meeting high energy costs that can be faced by people who require essential medical equipment, medically required heating or cooling, or both. In recognition of this, in government, Labor introduced the Essential Medical Equipment Payment as part of carbon price household assistance package. This payment remains and people with MS may be eligible for the payment if their need for heating, cooling or both in the home to regulate body temperature comes as a result of their medical condition.

Labor understands the importance of a nationally consistent approach to concessions and a Shorten Labor Government will add this to the COAG agenda as a priority. .

## **Full implementation of Australia's Liveable Housing Design Guidelines by 2020**

Liveable housing is an important issue to the Australian Labor Party. We note that the *Review of the Access to Premises Standards* was recently completed. These standards, as you are aware, aim to provide people with disability with dignified and equitable access to buildings, and provide certainty to industry that they are complying with the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA).

It is disappointing that the outcomes of the review have not been released.

In considering the findings of this review and responding to it, a Shorten Labor Government will address the proposal from the Australian Network for Universal Housing Design (ANUHD).

In deciding whether or not to embark upon changes to the *Access to Premises Standards* we will need to carefully consider the effectiveness of proposed changes, and the view of industry and community stakeholders along with State and Territory governments. We look forward to working with the ANUHD and MSA to build consensus around these issues post July 2<sup>nd</sup>.

Thank you again for writing to Bill Shorten and Labor. We look forward to working with you in Government.

Regards

## **ALP Information Services Unit**

**Australian Labor Campaign Headquarters**

[www.alp.org.au](http://www.alp.org.au)

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