

NATIONAL DISABILITY INSURANCE SCHEME

Motion

MR R.H. COOK (Kwinana — Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [4.00 pm]: I move —

That this house condemns the Barnett government for playing politics with the National Disability Insurance Scheme and failing to give Western Australians with a disability, and their families access to a better system of lifetime funding and care.

Seldom in public life do we come across issues for which there is such a clear and present problem and for which there is such a clear and present solution and such consensus that it is almost beyond belief that we have not, in the first instance, discovered this before and, in the second instance, why we do not get on and just fix it up now. Disability services is a very difficult area to work in. I came to Parliament with very little experience of it and even less knowledge. In 2010, following a meeting with some local constituents who were caring for a young fellow with muscular dystrophy, I was struck by just what a horrendous personal toll that not only the disability, but also the system takes upon people and their families. I found it very distressing to hear the stories of what was required to look after someone with a chronic disability. While I admired the strength of character of these people in what they go through just to care for a loved one, I was frightened by the processes that we make them go through in order to get the sorts of services and support they need for people with a disability to live a happy existence.

I want to start by sharing with the house some reports or stories about people who are caring for those with a disability. I will quote briefly from a letter, which states —

Over the last two and a half years, my mother has applied for accommodation support for my brother, while undergoing treatment for cancer and other related illnesses. To meet the criteria of CAP, —

The combined application process for accommodation support —

every three months our family must fill out a 4 section form containing 43 questions. On each of these occasions we have been informed that our family doesn't fit the panel's criteria. We cannot find out what the criteria are and there is no right of appeal.

We have been informed by employees of DSC and private organisations, dealing with people with disabilities in this state. The more we embellish the above form, the more likelihood we would meet the criteria.

One of my colleagues relates a story from one of her constituents about a woman caring for her 22-year-old daughter with cerebral palsy, intellectual disability and impaired vision. She has applied unsuccessfully nine times for CAP funding. Her local area coordinator has advised her to catastrophise her circumstances to make them sound worse than they are. This is a story that is shared with and told over and over again in the disability sector. People have been told many times to say that their marriage is breaking up and to make the situation sound worse just to get a chance to be one of the 20 per cent who might receive funding through the CAP system. This is the reality of disability support and services in this state.

What I find most distasteful about this system is not so much that people have an exhaustive process by which they have to apply for funding, but its non-transparent nature, the seemingly arbitrary way in which the funds are allocated and the culture of almost begging a department to provide assistance for people who are very often at their wits' end. It is very sad that people embellish or characterise their circumstances to be potentially worse than they are because they are desperate to receive the support they need. This is an area of public policy about which we should all have a single resolve to meet the challenges of disability support and to make sure that we, as one, put in place a system that is sustainable, that provides people with the support they need, that provides them with payment for an entitlement rather than a rationing of meagre resources and for which there is no lottery about which state people happen to live in. As we know, in Western Australia, a lot of the aspects of our disability support system are better than they are in other states. We are saying that even though our system is absurdly inadequate, in other states it can be worse—that is, about 80 per cent of people who would otherwise be eligible for support do not receive it.

I refer to a story on this afternoon's *The World Today*, which quotes Connor and Lesley Murphy. Connor Murphy is a 23-year-old with Duchenne muscular dystrophy. I was lucky enough to meet Connor when the member for Willagee and I participated last year in the Ride for Those Who Can't—a mountain-bike race in Dwellingup. I think it is an event that the member for Murray-Wellington is very involved in. He also came along that day to meet many of the people who are participating in that charity event, including Connor. In this interview, Connor says —

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY — Wednesday, 8 August 2012]

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Mr Roger Cook; Dr Tony Buti; Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Colin Barnett; Dr Kim Hames; Dr Graham Jacobs

I get around with the help of an electric wheelchair. In terms of like day-to-day things like eating, getting up, all that kind of thing, basically I pretty much rely on somebody to help me do all of that. So, yeah, feeding, going to the toilet, getting up in the morning, having a shower. All those kinds of things.

His mother says that getting help has been humiliating. She also says —

You have no dignity, you have no pride. In the end you are forced to do what I did which is to beg. But there's hundreds of thousands of other families out there who don't have the capability to get up and speak and stand up to bureaucrats and say "well, I don't care, I'm not taking no for an answer".

The report goes on to say that there was a breakthrough for the Murphy family. Leslie Murphy describes it as follows —

The big but was, the deal was, we had to move out of our own home so that the state would provide him with accommodation funding to allow him to have care support at home. But we weren't allowed to be part of it, we had to move out.

Essentially, we have a situation in which carers, parents and families are required to beg on behalf of their children for support services that, as all members would agree, should be supported in our society. For many years the disability sector has been working on a community campaign across the country for a national entitlements-based disability support scheme. I understand that as Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children's Services, Bill Shorten had the Productivity Commission undertake a national review of disability support services with the view of making recommendations for a scheme that would somehow improve the situation. Many members would be familiar with that ground-breaking report. It recommended that a national disability insurance scheme be put in place. The scheme would require extra funding and a national approach, and would be associated with significant benefits. The Productivity Commission identified that an extra \$8 billion worth of funding would be required. It said that it easily passed the cost-benefit analysis test and that, along with other reforms, would boost the gross domestic product by \$32 billion by 2050. I am informed by reports from the community campaign for a NDIS that another study that was undertaken revealed that if we continue with the current fragmented and crisis-driven approach, the extra funding that would be required by 2035 would be about \$45 billion. It said that we should invest now to save later. We should invest in disability support services now because the economic activity that would be created would significantly boost the gross domestic product. Of course, for most of us here it would provide a system that allows for a sustainable, entitlement-driven support service that would allow people to live happier and more productive lives and that would support their families, who so greatly support them.

As I have said, although many of us have come to the NDIS debate in the last year or so—we see it reaching a national crescendo—community groups have been campaigning for such a scheme for some 20 years. As governments around Australia consider this issue, we have a historic opportunity, an opportunity that, I am sure, was not lost on the Premiers and the Prime Minister when they met recently at the Council of Australian Governments. This scheme will provide an entitlement-based system. In the first instance, it will mean that the culture of begging will stop. It will provide a transparent system by which people can apply for support and assistance and receive that support and assistance by virtue of having a disability. It will not be an issue of rationing meagre resources, nor will there be an issue of some receiving support and some not receiving support even though they suffer the same conditions and circumstances. They will receive support because they are entitled to receive it under the scheme. That is a very important aspect of the proposal.

Another aspect of the proposal that we must be cognisant of is that it is a national approach. We will not have a situation, simply by virtue of their circumstance of living in one state as opposed to another, in which some people who live on one side of the border receive support while people on the other side do not. We will not have a situation in which these people will receive support services, but they will be very different support services. We will not have a situation where, simply because of people's geographical circumstance they receive very different support. Although a lot of people in other states look across to Western Australia and see the strengths of our program, we cannot justify a system in which people are discriminated against simply because of where they live. That national and portable aspect of the proposed National Disability Insurance Scheme process is a very important national approach to relieving a very difficult set of circumstances that people live under. The NDIS proposal provides a sustainable system for funding these things and by which public policy can support a solution that has eluded us for so long. We have an opportunity to end the culture of begging and to end the situation in which some receive assistance and some do not for no transparently observable reasons. We have the opportunity to end the situation in which 20 per cent of disabled people receive benefits and 80 per cent do not. We have the opportunity to provide dignity to people needing disability services in a way that supports people in the field, that supports people who are working in this area and most importantly that supports the people who are experiencing the disability. The historic opportunity that the Council of Australian Governments had was apparent to everyone around the country, and I am sure a number of members in this place participated

in the national rally that was held recently in Perth. I participated in that rally and it was great to see the range of people from all parts of the political spectrum involved in that rally.

[Quorum formed.]

Mr R.H. COOK: As I was saying, many of us participated in the community rally to support the NDIS proposal. People from all walks of political life joined together to support and provide bipartisan community-based support to a scheme that is widely acknowledged will unite the community. I remember walking side by side with Hon Barry MacKinnon. I do not think I have ever before or since—or will ever again—enjoyed his company on the rallies that I attend, nor he mine on those rallies that he attends. However, that is the nature of this issue: it unites everyone in their support for the NDIS.

Dr K.D. Hames: The member for Girrawheen called a quorum and she skipped out!

Mr R.H. COOK: Yes; she did make the observation that she had to scurry off!

This is an issue that unites our entire community, because we are all at one in wanting to see a solution to it. The recent Council of Australian Governments meeting provided a historic opportunity to address the wrong that we all recognise in the community. It provided a historic opportunity for the Premiers and the Prime Minister to come together to use the Productivity Commission report—not the report of one particular political persuasion or another, but an evidence-based, economically driven and rationalised report that provided a clear way forward for our nation’s leaders to implement a program that will deliver so much good to our community. It will benefit our economy, provide dignity for those who depend upon the program and provide a national entitlement-based system that everyone would benefit from. Therefore, it is devastating to see the politics that were played around that particular issue. I think there was an audible sigh of disappointment right across our nation when we saw yet another meeting of this type break down into bickering about dollars, jurisdictions and approach. I suppose it was about political credit. It is devastating to think that we do not have a clear and united way forward on a proposal that, as I said, enjoys such widespread support.

Mr C.J. Barnett: Who are you criticising?

Mr R.H. COOK: I thank the Premier for the interjection. I am criticising the lack of progress that has been made by this government and by the federal government to come together to reach a solution, because a solution must be found.

Mr C.J. Barnett: Julia Gillard had the solution in her lap and she refused it.

Mr R.H. COOK: What we saw were the Premiers of New South Wales and Victoria bickering over dollars. What we saw was the Premier of Queensland trying to punch above his weight. And, what we saw was the Premier of Western Australia enjoying the best of economic times and seemingly also unwilling to sit down and reach a solution.

Mr C.J. Barnett: We offered \$135 million.

Mr R.H. COOK: We can come to what the Premier proposed if he sees this as simply an exercise of intransigence by the federal government, because it is disingenuous to say that it is simply a matter of the federal government responding unequivocally to the conditions and the proposal that the Premier put forward. It is pleasing to see that the two big states of New South Wales and Victoria now seem to be coming on board to have the NDIS in their states. The opportunity is there for our Premier to sit down with the federal government, to put politics aside and to ensure that Western Australia is part of this important scheme. The Premier rightly points out that aspects of our state scheme are better than they are in other states, although I must again refer to today’s radio program *The World Today* in which Mrs Murphy described the anguish and the lack of dignity associated with begging and distorting the discussions with the Disability Services Commission to make sure they can enjoy some support. The culture of begging is endemic in this particular situation.

Mrs Murphy goes on to say —

That is the situation of disability care and support in Australia today. This is the situation that Colin Barnett says is fantastic in WA.

Clearly, it is not fantastic.

Mr C.J. Barnett: Did I use the word “fantastic”?

Mr R.H. COOK: No, I am quoting Mrs Murphy.

Mr C.J. Barnett: I have never used the word “fantastic”.

Mr R.H. COOK: That is her description of the way the Premier characterises disability services in this state.

Mr C.J. Barnett: Can I just place on the record that I did not use the word “fantastic”; it is not a word I use, and I certainly didn’t describe our system as being that. I think it is the best in Australia.

Mr R.H. COOK: You have described it as the best in Australia. Perhaps that is of small comfort to those of us in Western Australia, and of very little comfort to anyone anywhere else. Although aspects of it are perhaps better in Western Australia, that is saying we are the best of a pretty bad mob —

Mr C.J. Barnett: I think that is unfair.

Mr R.H. COOK: — because the other schemes in Australia are woefully inadequate.

Mr C.J. Barnett: I think that is very unfair. Not to the government; I think that is very unfair to the people who work in the sector. I agree with you that there are deficiencies, but name me a place in the world where there is better care for people with severe disabilities. That does not mean we should not do better, but name me a place in the world that is better.

Mr R.H. COOK: I can name for the Premier a place in the world where it can be better—Australia.

Mr C.J. Barnett: I agree.

Mr R.H. COOK: I can name for the Premier a place and a time in Australia when it can be better—now. I can name for the Premier the report that provides the way forward—that is, the Productivity Commission report into the National Disability Insurance Scheme. I think the opportunity is now and it must not be lost. I referred before to the audible sigh of grief and disappointment when our national leaders failed to reach agreement the other day.

The Premier has proposed the “My Way” program, which is currently being developed in Western Australia and will have aspects similar to the NDIS proposal. It essentially involves downsizing local area coordinators, with a view to outsourcing a lot of the support services to provide tailor-made disability support for those in need. It has been characterised as individualised care. The Premier has said to the Australian government, “If you want to get something that looks a bit like NDIS, well then you should come on board with our proposals rather than have a nationally based disability support scheme.” I take from the Premier’s silence that he understands that that is a fair characterisation.

Mr C.J. Barnett: No, I think there are differences. It makes more sense to have a trial here because the Western Australian scheme is more like what is proposed for the NDIS than any other system in Australia. That is the point I made.

Mr R.H. COOK: But aspects of the Western Australian scheme proposed by the Premier still do not meet the basics of what people expect from a national disability support scheme.

Mr C.J. Barnett: Everyone conceded that; yes, that is true.

Mr R.H. COOK: For instance, it is not entitlement based, so it will continue on this basis of people applying for the meagre rations available, and then being spread across those people that pool of money can reach. We will still have a situation of some people receiving support, and others, for no particular apparent reason, not receiving any support. It fails on that entitlements basis, and it will not extend to the 80 per cent who are not successful in their applications. Essentially, it means the culture of begging will continue, and it will not be a national approach. We will still see the situation of people in some states enjoying the benefits of the support service in those states, and other people, simply by virtue of the accident of where they live and experience their disability, will be disadvantaged. We will continue to see this culture of begging, and we will have a fractured, unsustainable and undignified system. Now is the time for our Premier to go to the federal government and say, “Let’s reach agreement. Let’s compromise on the way forward.” This is too much of a good opportunity. This is too valuable an opportunity in our lives to set in place a scheme that has been wrong for so long, to do justice to those people who deserve the support from our government.

We understand that one of the main problems between the Western Australian government and the federal government comes down to the issue of governance and the age-old issue of who is going to push the button and pull the levers. It is a tired and sad historic fact of our federation. But the compromise can be reached. The Minister for Health is nodding, because he understands that a compromise can be reached, as he has done so recently.

Dr K.D. Hames: We reached a compromise on health, which you supported yesterday. That compromise is that the states retain their control of funding and management, which is what we want to do. We would be happy to have that sort of system.

Mr R.H. COOK: Why is it that we cannot reach a compromise now? Why is it that we cannot reach that agreement now?

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY — Wednesday, 8 August 2012]

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Mr Roger Cook; Dr Tony Buti; Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Colin Barnett; Dr Kim Hames; Dr Graham Jacobs

Dr K.D. Hames: Because the commonwealth says no. They say they do not want that system. They want like they wanted with the health system, which was to take over management control.

Mr R.H. COOK: Except, of course, the main difference between the comparison the minister is making is that it is not apples with apples. The main situation here is that the commonwealth will come in with the lion's share of the funding, and it will significantly revolutionise —

Dr K.D. Hames: You say that, but of the total amount of money that is being put through, \$1 billion over four years, \$657 million is establishing the commonwealth bureaucracy.

Mr R.H. COOK: The minister can make a glib reference to the commonwealth bureaucracy or he can say that it is the commonwealth's contribution to a national scheme. He can say that we think we should operate a system in glorious isolation to the rest of Australia because that is what we have always done, and continue to accept the fragmented, siloed and hopelessly parochial system of the past, or he could say that we are going to forge a new way forward. The minister can say that we are going to continue to have this situation where we have significant numbers of people unfunded and eligibility criteria that completely befuddles people and for which there is no transparency, or he can say that we will have a system of entitlement that everyone right across Australia can relate to. The minister can say that we should move forward together, or he can continue to adopt a process of states' rights and states bickering with the federal government. As I say, there is an opportunity to move forward here. It is an opportunity that everybody in the community wishes us, as members of Parliament and as governments assembled, to take.

I refer to the situation of a young man by the name of Hayden. He applied for the combined application process and got it. Hayden is an inspiring young man who does a great deal for the community. Hayden's inevitable situation, as a sufferer of Duchenne muscular dystrophy, is that his condition will deteriorate. An inevitable aspect of his situation is that the level of care he requires will need to increase. The reality of Hayden's situation is that, as his situation deteriorates, he is not getting the increased level of care he needs. Here we have a young man who is living a productive life, who is inspiring others with a disability, and who at the age of 34, if he does not get the increased assistance he needs—which he has already been rejected to get—will have his next opportunity to go back into the process in November. If he does not get the increased assistance that he needs, the inevitable situation for Hayden is that he will go into a care facility. He will cease to be a productive member of our community and he will go into care. Hayden's support group writes —

He is 34 years old, he has Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy. He is a mentor and motivator of others with disabilities. He is an example of how living with a disability, does not need to stop you from living a normal life.

He promotes this message also through his public speaking at, disability events and conferences.

He is a successful sporting coach, with the State Electric Wheelchair team, that competes interstate. His drive and motivation as a coach for the next generation of players, comes from his 10 year's experience as a previous competitor. He thrives on teaching not just sport, but also life.

This is all about to end, as his situation is dire, through lack of options, he is facing the prospect of living in a nursing home, and being taken out of the community. This will impact his ability to help others, and continue to live as an example of what people with disabilities can achieve.

His funding has not been reviewed for 8 years, and as a result of the degenerative disability he has, his needs have far exceeded the current funds allocated by CAP ...

His recent application for a modest increase of \$60,000 per year, was rejected by the CAP panel.

This increase would ensure he will be able to continue to live independently, and continue to contribute to the disability community.

...

Hayden's situation is worsening each day, and with the next panel meeting to allocate more funds in November 2012, he is needing all the help he can get to push his name to the top of the list, and have the funding allocated to him.

His supporters go on to ask —

We are asking for your help in this matter to bring forward Hayden's case to ensure his application is successful.

The opportunity is here. The dollars are on the table. The goodwill is in the community. The evidence is in. The opportunity is here to stop the begging. The opportunity is here to provide a system of entitlement, rather than a system of undignified applications and undignified begging through what is described internally as distortions of

people's situations just to get them across the line. The opportunity is here to provide a world-class disability support scheme of which this country can be rightly proud.

We have brought this motion forward today to implore the government to set the politics aside, to not worry about the Premier's "My Way" program, to not worry about how this will be viewed in the national political landscape, and to not worry about the point scoring, which inevitably occurs at the Council of Australian Governments, but to hear the cry from the community and from right across the political spectrum for this government to take the opportunity that this represents and join other state governments in a national scheme which is based upon entitlement, which is sustainable and which provides the dignity to the recipients and their families that they so richly deserve.

DR A.D. BUTI (Armadale) [4.38 pm]: I rise to contribute to the debate. This is an incredibly important issue and I do not intend to engage in a political point-scoring exercise; I just want to use this time on my feet to talk about the importance of the National Disability Insurance Scheme and also to relay the story of a family in the Armadale region. As we know, at this stage the WA government has not committed to be part of the National Disability Insurance Scheme and proposes to go on its own with the "My Way" trials. The success of that remains to be seen; it may end up being a very good system. I hope that it is a good system. I doubt the long-term economic viability of the system, but, as we mentioned yesterday in the debate on health funding, the ability of state governments to raise revenue is rather limited vis-a-vis the commonwealth government. Let us look at the magnitude of what we are facing. About 4.5 million Australians have a disability. That is about one-fifth of the population.

Dr J.M. Woollard: That is an underestimation.

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is always an underestimation because it is very hard to record everyone who has a disability. Of that, about 760 000 are people who are under 65 years of age with a severe disability. By "severe" or "profound" we mean that they require help with core activities or tasks. About half a million Australians are primary carers of people with disabilities, which is basically equivalent to the population of Tasmania. A further 2.4 million people, or 10 per cent of the nation, are non-primary carers. Yet, for a long time, disabilities services has been a minor issue on the political landscape. I am not sure whether even today there is a minister for disability services in the federal cabinet. I do not think there is. I think it is an outer ministry at best. Bill Shorten was the parliamentary secretary when he was the driving force behind the NDIS. We would think that with those statistics disability services deserves to have a ministry within the federal government.

One of the statements that the Premier has made in Parliament a number of times is that we have a very good system. We may have a system that is better than those in other parts of Australia, but of course—I do not think anyone would argue with this—it is not a perfect system. It is very hard to have a perfect system when we are looking at disabilities. However, the fact that a government may fund non-government organisations that service people with disabilities does not of itself make it a good system. Funding of NGOs to provide services to people with disabilities is only part of the deal. One of the attractions of the NDIS is that basically it sets up an insurance scheme. It sets up an insurance scheme for all of us, because one day we may become disabled due to an accident. In Australia we do not have a system of insurance for every person. We should have a system of insurance because we may end up with a disability. That is one of the attractions of the NDIS; it provides a comprehensive insurance scheme for every Australian. It will not matter whether we were born with a disability or we acquire a disability, under the NDIS everyone will be able to benefit from that scheme.

The problem with the limited funding of disability services is that it becomes a competitive game. There is competition between NGOs to obtain funding, whether from the state or federal governments. There ends up being competition between people with various disabilities because the pool is limited. The pool for anything is limited because of economic choices that we have to make as a society. It becomes a very competitive system. It becomes like a misery Olympics whereby someone has to show they are more disabled than the person they are competing against for funding. That is a deplorable situation that we have to face; people have to try to show they are suffering more than someone else who also needs assistance.

I have not been able to verify whether this figure is correct, but in an article published in *The Monthly* magazine, Anne Manne writes —

In Western Australia, about 85% of applications for high-level care support are rejected.

If that is the case, that is incredibly high—85 per cent of applications for high-level care support are rejected. We have all heard of stories in which people with disabilities have to end up in aged-care facilities to receive treatment, so people who may be 20, 30 or 40 years of age are ending up in aged-care facilities. That should not happen. Also, that is a problem in the sense that we then reduce the ability of people who are in need of aged care to receive aged care. People with a disability who are 30 or 40 should not be in an aged-care facility.

The economics for people with a disability are very bleak. They have a great chance of being unemployed or underemployed. In the 2009 report “Shut Out: The Experience of People with Disabilities and their Families in Australia” it was stated that a person with a disability is more likely to be unemployed and on income support and to live in public housing or be renting. They are also less likely to have completed secondary education. Of course, the figures are worse for people who have an intellectual disability. As we know, some people, but not many people, with an intellectual disability end up in jail. For children with a disability, one of the keys in trying to alleviate the problem of living in the community with a disability is early intervention, because often it is important to try to minimise behavioural problems that may result from the disability and the effect that may have on their educational progress. Then we need to look at carers. The stress placed on carers is enormous, and depression among carers of people with a disability is enhanced. Just imagine being the carer of a person with a disability. If the carer is the parent, they may be dealing with guilt if the disability is due to a genetic disorder. The carer may also be dealing with the guilt that sometimes they just wish their child was different. So the parent has to be a carer, they have to provide over and above what a parent would normally have to provide, and they have to deal with issues of guilt and incredible stresses on family structures.

We have to remember that the National Disability Insurance Scheme —

Dr J.M. Woollard: On the whole family.

Dr A.D. BUTI: On the whole family—exactly—and often the extended family.

As the member for Kwinana mentioned, although the NDIS has received much greater political and media attention in the last few years, this has been a long process. The member for Kwinana mentioned about 20 years. It has been at least 20 years that people have been trying to advocate for a better deal for our population of people with a disability. The catalyst for the NDIS debate was a Productivity Commission recommendation. The Productivity Commission is not some radical body. I am sure that even the member for Jandakot, who seems to like to bring in socialist conspiracies et cetera, would agree that the Productivity Commission is a respected economic and policy development instrument in the Australian political system. It was the Productivity Commission that recommended an NDIS. As Paul Keating, a former Prime Minister, said, “Always back self-interest because you know it’s trying.” Although there is a charitable part to an NDIS, it is also in our self-interest to have an NDIS for a number of reasons. One is the fact that any of us could be disabled tomorrow. We could be driving home tonight and have an accident, and we could wake up tomorrow severely disabled. If we do not have a proper insurance system, a number of factors are triggered. Also, if we have a National Disability Insurance Scheme that provides greater funding for early intervention in the development of children with disabilities, there is a greater chance that those children can grow up to be individuals who can make a contribution to society. It is very interesting in Western Australia, where we have major stresses on our labour market because of a shortage of labour, that there are many people with disabilities who could be in productive work but who are not for a number of reasons, such as the lack of support and societal attitudes. Therefore, an NDIS and all the associated benefits that entails is not only a charitable action, but also an action of self-interest.

What is important about the NDIS? It is an insurance policy for everyone, whether they are born with a disability or become disabled later in life. I mentioned the issue of early intervention. It is interesting that in Western Australia the ability to receive educational support and assistance is based on a program called Schools Plus. There are a few problems with Schools Plus. Obviously, a person has to be diagnosed with a disability to access Schools Plus funding. However, as has occurred in my electorate, there is a major waiting list in the public health system to be assessed. I was going to pay the Minister for Health a compliment. I have written to the health minister a number of times about constituents in my electorate whose children waited for more than two years to be assessed and therefore were not assessed when they started their educational process and were unable to receive the assistance or support that they would receive if the Schools Plus funding came into operation. After writing to the minister, on I think two or three occasions, he ensured that the process occurred more efficiently than it had when these people were subject to a two-year waiting list.

The other problem is that for whatever reason the state government has changed the assessment process. There are four criteria for Schools Plus. Once upon a time people had to come under any one of the four criteria—they could be mutually exclusive. Now, people have to meet all four criteria. That of course makes it a lot harder to receive Schools Plus funding. The problem if someone does not meet Schools Plus funding is that they do not receive the education assistance that they require; therefore, either the child cannot attend a mainstream school that they may benefit from, or they may attend a mainstream school without the assistance that they require, which of course has disruptive effects on the rest of the class and the school population. Therefore, it is regrettable that the state government has made the ability to obtain Schools Plus funding a lot more difficult than it once was.

One of the problems in the historical debate and advocacy for a better deal for people with disabilities has been the tension that has often developed between carers, service providers and the people with disabilities. Often

people with disabilities rightly say, “I’m the main person here, provide the funding to me”, while the carers will often say, “I need assistance; I need respite. What about funding for me?” Then there are the service providers who want funding so that they can provide services to the people who require them. It would be simplistic to see this issue as a case of one or the other; all three parties are important and the most important part is the person with the disability. Of course, both carers and service providers are also important, but we must always be mindful of the fact that the primary focus should be upon the person with the disability, and one of the advantages of the National Disability Insurance Scheme is that the person with the disability is the main focus. The carers receive support and the service providers receive funding, but we should not have a system in which governments consider that they are doing their bit for the disability sector by saying, “We fund disability service providers”. That does not in itself deal with the issue. Of course disability service providers need to be funded, but just because they are being funded does not necessarily mean that people with disabilities are receiving the help they require.

[Member’s time extended.]

Dr A.D. BUTI: Leaving the funding issue aside, there is also a societal attitude issue that we need to address, because in the end one of the greatest barriers is the societal barrier. It is the barrier that we impose upon people with disabilities. Rather than looking at their capacity to do things, we look at their disability and inhibiting factors. When we look at people with disabilities, we should look at their capacities; people would be surprised at what talents, capacities and opportunities people with disabilities can provide society. It was noted in the 2009 report entitled “SHUT OUT: The Experience of People with Disabilities and their Families in Australia”, prepared by the National People with Disabilities and Carer Council and launched by Bill Shorten, that while we may wish to give greater freedom to people with disabilities, it should not correlate with a decrease in funding. At times it is like we have two nations: a nation of people who do not have disabilities, and a nation of people who have disabilities. Of course, that is not the case; it is one nation, because people with disabilities make an impact on the greater society, and the greater society has an impact on people with disabilities. They should not be excluded. We should be looking towards social inclusion, not trying to shut out people with disabilities.

Dr J.M. Woollard: Member for Armadale, can I ask you a question that you have probably considered in relation to this debate? If there is one system for the other states that goes across the other states, and a different system for WA, wouldn’t people who had disabilities in WA be able to take the lack of funding that was available to them to the discrimination commission and say that there was discrimination in terms of support for them in WA that people were getting in the other states?

Dr A.D. BUTI: Interesting. We have taken the Department of Corrective Services to the commission. That is a possibility, but I would need to think about that a bit more. It would be a deplorable situation, though, if we had to do that, but the point is well taken.

Dr J.M. Woollard: We did that in relation to the companion card, when the previous government did not support the companion card.

Dr A.D. BUTI: There was a case that I was involved with at the Aboriginal Legal Service many years ago in relation to two prisoners in Casuarina Prison who were HIV-positive and were being segregated. We took a claim under the federal Disability Discrimination Act against the Department of Corrective Services and were successful. There probably would be some possibility of that.

I will refer now to a local story. We can stand in this place and talk about the greater picture, but in the end it all comes back to the families of people with disabilities. I want to read out some correspondence I received from the mother of a person with a disability who lives in the Armadale region. She states —

My son’s name is Joseph Rendell, he is 20 years old, he was born with a rare genetic disease called Mucopolysaccharidosis Type 1, also known as Hurlers syndrome. Although my son is 20 years old he is less than 1 metre tall and weighs just 20 kg. He requires 24 hour a day care as he has no speech, limited mobility, intellectual impairment breathing difficulties requiring BiPap at night, and special dietary requirements.

I have not really been able to work during my son’s lifetime due to the demanding nature of his health issues, although I have tried to hold down a few jobs without success. We have had to rely solely on my husband’s income to support us for the past 21 years.

I am now 56 years old, and have had my fair share of health issues, including breast cancer, and major back problems. I have to lift Joe in and out of the car, and the bath and toilet etc, and lift his wheelchair in and out of the boot of the car which frankly is a killer.

I love my son to bits, he is a tough fighter with a beautiful nature, but there is no denying life is hard as hard can be, there are no holidays for us, not even a weekend break. I do envy people than can just pick up and go, it’s impossible for us.

She further states —

Joe is incontinent and requires a substantial sum to be spent on nappies to keep him dry and comfortable, the current amount we receive to provide these items doesn't even cover half the cost. He would benefit greatly from pressure sore preventative measures such as a Roho seating system which uses air chambers to relieve pressure when constantly seated or laying in the same position. Things like this are relatively small in the scheme of things but make the most enormous difference to my sons life.

There is an amazing deficit in services when your disabled child leaves school, you go from having regular access to school age services to, well nothing really, this has an enormous impact on family life. The NDIS would address this deficit and seamlessly ease the transition to adult life.

She further states —

A national disability insurance scheme could put us on a level playing field with all other Australians. If my son needs a particular therapy or piece of equipment at the moment we have to wait for funding and also hope it can be found, it's not always there, even after a long wait. To have funding available for essential needs without waiting endlessly would be an enormous weight lifted from our shoulders and would help improve my son's wellbeing and quality of life. Flexibility of funding to meet individual needs would be a wonderful help.

She goes on —

To conclude, anything that makes my sons life better and increases his quality of life will have a big affect on the entire family. Long term, the decreased pressure on our finances and reduced stress levels will have a beneficial effect on our wellbeing and health also. This can only benefit everyone as a healthy family in both mind, spirit and physical health will provide a much better environment for good health and social interaction to flourish.

I am sure everyone would agree that that is an incredible demand placed on Mrs Rendell for support and love for her son who is 20 years of age.

The whole issue around the National Disability Insurance Scheme is an issue of incredible public importance in which all members of this house should be interested. I plead with the state government, without attributing blame to the state government or to the federal government, that I just want a solution to be found. In the end, if a solution is found, people with disabilities in Western Australia will receive what they are entitled to receive as citizens of this nation, and not be treated as citizens in a separate nation; also their carers such as Mrs Rendell and Joseph her son can receive some dignity and quality of life. Another issue relating to the NDIS is the portability of it. I agree that the history of things being administered from Canberra is not good. If we do not have a national scheme and we have separate state schemes, there is no ability to transfer from one state to another. The mobility of families is decreased if we do not have a compatible system across the nation. That does not necessarily mean that states cannot administer the system; it just needs to be compatible with systems in other jurisdictions.

I came across an article in today's *Herald Sun* written by Jeff Kennett, a former Premier of Victoria. He talks about how important the NDIS is. He actually considers the NDIS as being one of the most important public policy issues confronting a federal government and, therefore, all the other governments in the commonwealth of Australia. He talks about the funding issue—that is how I started my contribution today—by saying that a properly funded system has to come from the federal government. He states that the federal opposition should scrap its so-called parental leave policy and fund the NDIS because if we scrap the very generous Tony Abbott parental leave policy, that will fund at least a third of the NDIS. That is another issue. As Mrs Rendell said, if someone has a child with a disability and they are unable to work, they will not receive any generous parental leave under the Tony Abbott scheme; they will receive the basic carer's allowance. How can it be fair that people who are caring for their children under incredibly difficult situations receive the carer's allowance but under Tony Abbott's very generous parental leave policy, people who have the ability and freedom to work can go off work for a period of time and receive a very generous parental leave allowance? I would be interested in the Premier's views on that. I hope that we can reach an agreement on NDIS because it is a policy area that should be of major importance to Parliaments across Australia for a long period. At last it is receiving the due attention that it should receive. It may not be perfect but it just provides an insurance scheme for all Australians regardless of their disability. They need support and their families need support. It is in the best interests of all Australians and the Australian nation that we have a properly funded National Disability Insurance Scheme.

MR C.J. TALLENTIRE (Gosnells) [5.09 pm]: In rising to speak in support of the motion, it hits me how any one of us or any member of our families could be struck by a disability. I know there are members in this house who have family members with some form of disability. That is not my situation, and I think it is because of that that I am particularly fearful of suddenly having a severe disability or any of my family members becoming

severely disabled. We make comparisons. If we are struck by bad health, yes, we do have a good health service. We have insurance schemes to cover problems to do with health. If we have social security needs, we have a scheme that can take care of those needs. These schemes have been designed to be entitlement schemes based on need, and that is how it should be when it comes to disabilities. It should help people deal with their disabilities and the needs of the individual and the carers of the individual. That is how the system needs to be designed. It makes perfect sense to me for the National Disability Insurance Scheme to be designed in that way. It also makes perfect sense to me that we have a scheme that is as large as possible. I saw in the Productivity Commission's report reference to the alternative approach, which I guess is the one we have now, which is a federated insurance scheme. It seems to me that if a national insurance scheme of this nature is as pooled and as large as possible, and that captures the whole nation, it will be a more efficient scheme.

I hear comments from members opposite that they have concerns about ceding power to Canberra—handing money over to Canberra and things like that. That sort of discourse is a very easy political line to run, but it denies the fact that this National Disability Insurance Scheme will be designed around the federal component being one of an assessor and a funder. The actual provision of care and support would not be its role. That would be left for non-government organisations, disability service organisations and state and territory disability service providers. If members opposite can understand that, it might allay some of their concerns about the ceding of power to Canberra. How we design the mechanism can seem a little removed.

As I say, I am always struck by how close anyone of us can be to the need of this kind of service in the future. I, of course, hear from constituents who are in this state of need. When I see the situations they are in and how life changing a few seconds of inattention on the road or in some sort of recreational activity might be, it brings home just how close we all potentially are to the need of some form of insurance scheme and why we should have the best possible insurance scheme—a national one.

I must say that when I talk to people who have a family member who has a disability I am struck by how life changing it is, obviously, for the individual who has had the accident. I will relate the circumstances of three of my constituents, Scott Adams, his mum, Brigit Rickman, and his dad, Jarad Adams. Scott went one afternoon for a trail bike ride in Gosnells. He thought he was going to quickly test out the servicing he had done on his vehicle when he had tuned it, and within a few seconds of heading out from the family home he had a very severe accident and he has never recovered from it. That brought about a huge life change for his family and their work prospects. For a considerable time the family has not been able to undertake ordinary work because they have been dedicated to caring for their son. These sorts of life-changing events are very dramatic and, as other members have said, they have impacts on whether people can go on holiday, for example. They change people's circumstances dramatically. That happens in cases in which people acquire an injury. Of course, some in our community are born with some sort of disability. I have had the experience of working alongside disability carers at Nulsen Haven, a wonderful institution. I must say that the homes people are in there provide a genuine home-type of atmosphere. There is no sign of a cold, austere institution about these places; they are genuinely pleasant places to be, as they should be. That takes a great deal of care, love and understanding on the part of the people who work in those homes. The model that has been devised by Nulsen is a wonderful example. We must make sure we have the funding capacity to meet community need at that level of quality. I do not dispute that the present level of quality in Western Australia is quite good. Earlier I mentioned Scott Adams, and a while ago I received a frantic call from his parents about maintenance on the suction machine that helps him with his breathing. The weekend was coming up and they needed to quickly get a new part for their son's suction machine, otherwise it would make breathing difficult for Scott. I was able to contact the Disability Services Commission, and I was very thankful that at short notice it was possible to get the new part needed and the necessary maintenance done. That is an example of how our current system can work at an amazingly rapid rate to get a problem solved. But I note that it did require the family to come to me as their state member, because I think their previous calls for assistance had not been given the level of priority necessary. It could be said that that sort of situation could still occur under the National Disability Insurance Scheme. The difference would be the level of funding that would be available and therefore the quality of service available. We would be able to improve that quality of service because there would be more money as we would be part of a national pool. I note that the Productivity Commission report on disability care and support talks about the costs involved and cost effectiveness. The report states —

The NDIS would only have to produce an annual gain of \$3800 per participant to meet a cost-benefit test. Given the scope of the benefits, that test would be passed easily.

I think we are very fortunate in Western Australia, and by being in a national scheme we would develop the economies of scale that would mean we would have a very cost effective system in operation. As I said before, the alternative of a federated system has all sorts of problems. There is always that risk of agreements breaking down and arguments about who is going to pay. It is a system that seems fragile, whereas a National Disability Insurance Scheme would have robustness about it, as well as that pooling of funds from right across the nation.

I want to conclude my remarks by mentioning an option that is open to all members through the Developmental Disability Council in Western Australia, which runs the adopt-a-politician program. That program enables members to be involved with a family who have a family member with a disability and who have that constant reminder of what it is like for people who live with a disability, and it gives some insight into the day-to-day problems that people have to deal with when they have disabilities. The adopt-a-politician scheme that is run by the Developmental Disability Council is a very worthy initiative. Certainly, for someone like me, it provides a level of insight that I would not ordinarily have, yet this is something that is so pressing for many people. It is an issue that we have all got to understand so that we can use our position to develop a system that best meets the needs of everyone in our state and to work with everyone right across the country.

I support this motion that this house condemns the Barnett government for playing politics with the National Disability Insurance Scheme and failing to give Western Australians with a disability and their families access to a better system of lifetime funding and care.

MR C.J. BARNETT (Cottesloe — Premier) [5.20 pm]: The government will not support this motion, and not because we do not share equally—perhaps even to a greater extent—the concerns for people with a severe disability and their families. This motion “condemns the Barnett government for playing politics”; the mere moving of a motion like that is, by definition, playing politics. That is what the opposition is doing. It is bringing a motion before Parliament about politics in the National Disability Insurance Scheme. I am going to answer that part of it, but I would also like to provide a little more background and factual information.

I will start by just simply presenting some facts. At present, the Disability Services Commission in Western Australia provides support to approximately 22 500 people—a significant number. More than 6 000 of these people access substantial packages of funding support. What is meant by that is over \$50 000 a year; and more than 30 people access funding and support packages of over \$100 000 a year. Some people with a disability have support of over \$200 000 a year. They are very significant amounts of money and they are warranted, because people with severe disabilities have all sorts of services and therapy and associated costs. I just want to make it clear that the Western Australian public—the taxpayers, if members like—through government, supports 22 500 people, 6 000 or more to the extent of over \$50 000 a year. The scheme in this state is better funded than any other state in Australia.

Of the 80 per cent of people who have been talked about who may apply and not get support through the Disability Services Commission, over 90 per cent—nearly all of those—receive support in other ways, including local area coordinators, smaller funding packages often down to the order of \$5 000 or less, and family and community support. So I think collectively, not only through government but also through the wider community, there is a strong level of support.

I also want to comment on some of the lead-up in this state to the disability scheme. Members opposite seem to have totally forgotten—totally forgotten—that in the 2011–12 state budget this government provided a first for Australia in terms of increased funding for not-for-profit organisations predominantly in the area of disability services; there was an additional \$604 million over a four-year period—an average 25 per cent increase in funding. Funding was provided to groups like Activ Foundation, the Autism Association of Western Australia, Rocky Bay, the Centre for Cerebral Palsy, and so on—a large number. In fact the state government, through not only the Disability Services Commission but also other areas—maybe, for example, in suicide prevention and the like—has approximately 1 000 contracts with over 500 non-government organisations. The Disability Services Commission provides 70 per cent of its funding, in terms of services to people, through the not-for-profit sector—again, well in front of any other state. The closest would be Victoria, which is trying to copy what happens in Western Australia. That funded not-for-profit sector employs about 36 000 people and provides services to around 400 000 people. So this state government—as have previous state governments but never to the extent as at present—is providing massive increases in funding that reach potentially up to 400 000 people. That was not mentioned by the opposition. I remind the house that no other government in this state’s or Australia’s history has ever done that, and not one member opposite acknowledged that—not one member opposite.

Dr A.D. Buti: Premier, I did.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: All right; okay. If the member did, I am pleased he did.

Several members interjected.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: The opposition is not exactly ignorant, is it? The opposition even tried to discredit that funding at the time it came out, and yet the not-for-profit sector, people with disabilities and parents of children with disability were consistent in their support for what was being done. That is just a bit of background. We also set up social innovation grants and a social enterprise grant.

But moving on to the proposal now for the National Disability Insurance Scheme, as it is called. The Productivity Commission produced its report on disability care and support in August 2011, about a year ago. Not that long ago—about one year ago. It quite correctly talked about the scheme being underfunded, unfair to individuals and fragmented. It proposed what it called a National Disability Insurance Scheme—I do not think it really is an insurance scheme as such, but that is the title used—and a national injury insurance scheme. They also made the point that this scheme probably needed around \$7 billion a year in additional funding. The recommendation was that the commonwealth would need to provide that. I just place on record, as I placed on record at the Council of Australian Governments meeting in Canberra in April, that while the commonwealth is out there talking about the National Disability Insurance Scheme and how important it is and how the states have to play ball, in this state 83 per cent of disability services are funded by the state government. Only 17 per cent are funded by the commonwealth government. The level of funding in this state is significantly higher than in any other state in Australia. If members look right across every Australian state and territory, at least 70 per cent of the funding is by state governments. The commonwealth does not even get to 30 per cent at a national level, and yet the commonwealth talks about the states not contributing and not bringing money forward. It is a complete political deception portrayed by the commonwealth government, because it is the states that do it. It is the states that have a relationship with the individuals, and it is the states that work through both government-provided services and the not-for-profit sector—the Activ Foundation, Rocky Bay; all of those groups—and that has just been ignored. I have to say that I went to some effort at the press conference in Canberra to make the national media understand that, because it had never been told that by the federal government. The impression was that this is a federal scheme, that the federal government funds it. In this state it is a 17 per cent part-player—the minor contributor. The federal government plays no role virtually in the administration, management or delivery of services to people with a disability. That is the starting point. We would be naive and fail as parliamentarians if we did not at least recognise where the system is in Australia today.

Not long after that, at a COAG meeting in August 2011 all states and territory governments agreed in principle about developing a national disability scheme straight away. There was not any politicking. There was a realisation by different state Premiers and ministers about some of the complexities. I can tell members that there was a very real concern about raising expectations of people too high—expectations that could not be realised in the short term, maybe at least 10 years away. Every state Premier had a concern about that, as the commonwealth created an expectation that this was all going to come in very quickly and the sorts of things that we might all aspire to, and people with a disability would aspire to, were going to happen almost immediately. There was a great concern about false raising of expectations. It was the states that had their feet on the ground and were trying to be realistic and honest and fair to people.

The COAG meeting in April 2012 was the first serious discussion about the scheme. Again, as I said, the states made the point: “We fund it; we know a bit about this area, but we are, in good faith, because this is a worthy cause, prepared to go down this path.” COAG always starts with a meeting, usually a dinner, with the Prime Minister and just the Premiers in The Lodge. It is meant to be confidential, but I think that convention has now well and truly gone. At that meeting it was mentioned that Queensland has a particular problem. The new government in Queensland has inherited a \$62 billion debt, that no matter what they do will rise to \$85 billion. The Queensland Premier made the point: “While I support the national disability scheme, I have got to say, we have no money at the moment.” Other states also could not see the growth in revenues to help fund this. At that dinner there was disagreement. At least one state said that it could not take part in this. The Prime Minister almost walked away from it. I can remember quite distinctly—I was not the only speaker—that I made the point that this is worth doing; we should be doing this. At that dinner, people then started to come back together. Members opposite accuse me in this motion of being political or playing politics. Do members know what I did? I am not trying to be a hero. I said that I would go away and draft what I thought our collective position was, or where we had got to. I got up the next morning at five o’clock—I missed out on my walk around Lake Burley Griffin—and I drafted about 10 principles on which I thought we could all agree. They were to recognise the funding split, to recognise that we should pursue this and to recognise that we should try to build on existing schemes. And do you know, everyone accepted it, including the Prime Minister.

Members opposite accuse me of playing politics. I would say that I certainly did not save the NDIS, but at least for that COAG meeting I got it back onto the agenda with people agreeing. Members opposite come into this place and accuse me of being tricky and playing politics. That is why I oppose this motion. Members have not done their homework. They do not understand what actually happens at the Council of Australian Governments, and why should they? They have not been there. But it is another thing for members to come into this place and accuse me of playing politics when I did everything I possibly could to save the National Disability Insurance Scheme from breaking apart, as it could well have done at the April COAG meeting. But it did not, thank goodness, and we moved on.

We then had the most recent meeting in July. As the COAG meeting started, the Prime Minister made it very clear that she wanted to introduce what she calls launch sites. I might say that at the previous August meeting when she talked about launch sites, one of the Premiers asked what a launch site was, and the Prime Minister could not answer the question. She did not know what a launch site was at that stage. She did not know; she could not answer the question. That is truthful. By the time we got to the July meeting, the Prime Minister wanted launch sites introduced. Yes, they are sort of pilot programs, which most of us had probably guessed in any case. That is all the Prime Minister wanted. When we had the pre-COAG dinner—again, led by Queensland and then probably Western Australia—the point was made by Campbell Newman that launch sites and a pilot program are all part of the development, but he suggested that we get to the real issue of how we are going to move towards a national scheme and how we are going to fund it. That is the biggest issue. In fact, as the conversation went on in a fairly relaxed way, Campbell Newman made the point, “Why don’t you, Prime Minister, plan to introduce an extra Medicare levy to fund disability services?” I indicated my support, because I think the Australian public would be willing to pay more in a health levy for disability services. I think everyone across Australia would agree to that. I think the measure was to be half of one per cent or something like that. Interestingly, there was a bit of discussion about that. Every state and territory leader, both Liberal and Labor from both big and small states, said that they thought that would be the way to go.

Mr R.H. Cook: The levy?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Yes, that the federal government should do it. The federal government has no plans for how it will fund the extra \$7 billion a year. I remember saying to the Prime Minister across the table, “This is the best offer you are ever going to get.” Other Premiers said, “We will go out tomorrow and stand side by side with you, Liberal and Labor from big states and small states, and support the introduction of a levy to fund this.” Do members know what the Prime Minister said? She said nothing. She would not discuss that. For the second time in successive COAG meetings, the NDIS was on the brink, yet members opposite come in here and accuse me of playing politics. It has been the states that have kept this scheme going.

Ms M.M. Quirk: Why didn’t you have the position ready before you went to COAG, Premier?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: We did.

Ms M.M. Quirk: And you changed your mind.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: No. The member is wrong. She should not jump to erroneous conclusions; she should do some homework if she is genuine about this.

Ms M.M. Quirk: But, Premier, you put up a new proposal.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: The member has just walked into the chamber and interrupted rudely. Treat the debate seriously; sit and listen.

The federal government came into the meeting with a proposal for these launch sites. When the Prime Minister arrived, she had already reached agreement with Tasmania, South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory. The ACT is hardly representative of mainstream Australia. It is the most privileged and cushioned community group in the country. It is not typical of the big states. It is not typical of the states with country towns, Aboriginal populations, distance issues, sparsity of populations and the like.

Mr R.H. Cook: I thought you said that the Tasmanians were the most privileged.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Let us have a look at it.

Ms M.M. Quirk: You haven’t been to Queanbeyan for a while, obviously.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: The member can speak later.

What was Tasmania’s trial to be? It was to be a trial of 700 people aged between 15 and 25 years. That is a teenage cohort. Is that a national trial of a proposed national scheme? I do not think so. What was the South Australian proposal? It was to look at children under the age of 14 years. Is that a national trial of a disability scheme? No, it is nothing like it. Is the ACT trial, which at least was to be of the whole population, a trial of a representative population of Australia? I do not think so. It is the highest income earning and most cloistered group in Australia.

Mr R.H. Cook: No, but if you pull it together you will have a national —

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I am speaking now. I listened to the Deputy Leader of the Opposition in silence. Those were the three trials. The point I make is that the Prime Minister had been discussing this with those small and Labor states prior to the Council of Australian Governments meeting. The first question asked by one of the other Premiers was, “If the rules have changed for these trial demonstration launch sites, can you bring us all into it? Will you tell us what the new criteria are?” No, she would not tell us. Both the New South Wales and Victorian Premiers had particularly expressed their desire to be part of a scheme. Western Australia was equally

willing. It was clearly important that if it was to be a genuine trial, it had to be in one of the big population states of either Victoria or New South Wales. If we could not do it in one of those two states, it really would not be in any sense representative or useful in developing an insurance scheme.

During the morning the Prime Minister had meetings with Barry O'Farrell from New South Wales and Ted Baillieu from Victoria and threatened them. She threatened them along the lines of, "If you don't agree to what I want, I will go out and criticise you for not caring about people with a disability." That is what happened at COAG, yet members of the opposition come in here and accuse me of playing politics.

Mr R.H. Cook interjected.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: I am telling members what happened at COAG. True to her word, Julia Gillard went directly out and did that; that day she went out and criticised the Liberal Premiers of New South Wales and Victoria. Only one person was playing politics at COAG and that was the Prime Minister.

Several members interjected.

Mr C.J. BARNETT: That is what happened. I am telling members opposite what happened. They do not like to hear the truth, but I was there and that is what happened.

Western Australia put forward a proposal. The Western Australian scheme is different. We have the highest level of funding. If we were to go to a national scheme right now, funding would be reduced for a significant number of people. No-one would support that. I certainly do not; this government would never do that. That is what the national criteria would imply. We will maintain our level of funding; we will never lower it. The unique feature of the Western Australian scheme is that the majority of the money, 75 per cent, is distributed through not-for-profit organisations. There may be some criticism, but this state is trying to develop and prove up the My Way scheme, which gives people with a disability funding packages rather than services; a choice of a mix of services; a choice of provider; empowerment and, hopefully, the dignity that will go with that. That scheme will give people with a disability control and choice over services. The NDIS is about that; it is about moving to a devolved model using not-for-profit organisations. It seemed sensible to us that one of the trials would be held in Western Australia because it was closest to what the NDIS model would seem to be. The only other state that came remotely close to Western Australia with that structure is Victoria.

The state government offered to split the funding on a 50–50 basis so that the state would put in \$135 million and the commonwealth would put in \$135 million. For whatever reason, the commonwealth did not want to do that. The commonwealth—I give the Prime Minister credit for this—at the press conference and during the COAG meetings made it clear that the Western Australian scheme was the best-funded scheme and that the structure of devolving resources and using the not-for-profit sector was the most effective way. She mentioned the My Way proposal on a number of occasions as an example of the sort of thing we should be working towards. There was no disagreement between the commonwealth and the state about the level of funding in Western Australia or the structure and direction of the scheme. There was no question about the funding and the Western Australian government putting forward \$135 million. It would have been a broad, wide-ranging scheme covering around 8 000 people in the city, metropolitan area and more remote locations.

The one point of difference was the management of the scheme. The commonwealth essentially wanted to run the whole proposal. That is not acceptable. We cannot simply take services from people and hope they will succeed. If we are to get a national disability scheme, in my view, and in the view of other states, it will need to be built on existing services. It will need to be a cooperative scheme along some sort of federalist model. That does not mean a fragmented scheme. Equal criteria, no-fault insurance and portability can all be in place. I do not believe anyone in this house seriously believes that we can deliver services to individual people in city, metropolitan and remote locations through a Canberra-based bureaucracy. That is the model that Canberra wants. It is not what was demanded by the NDIS. Think of the scenario. Whether it is a Liberal or Labor government, what Premier or Treasurer would walk in here with a bill to transfer, on current volumes, \$700 million from the state Treasury to the federal Treasury? I would never do that. I cannot imagine any Premier of Western Australia ever handing \$700 million across to the federal Treasury. That is what the federal government is proposing.

If the NDIS is going to work, there are two big issues to be resolved. The first is: how is the federal government going to increase its funding—an extra \$7 billion a year—bearing in mind the states provide 70 to 80 per cent of the funding? If we are to get an increase in coverage and better services, the commonwealth will somehow have to find most of that \$7 billion. Every state Premier said that we would all contribute more, but we will not be able to get up to \$7 billion extra a year. We already spend that collectively. We cannot double that overnight. We will contribute more, we will spend more, but the commonwealth will have to come in with a big dollop of money. The only way for it to happen that we can see is with a new tax levy in the Medicare format, and we are willing to support that.

The other big issue will be the management of the scheme. I think by definition that a devolved system requires, if we like, joint commonwealth–state management at a state level—a bit like the pooling arrangements that have been put in place for public health. The commonwealth will not even talk about that.

Mr R.H. Cook: Have you proposed that?

Mr C.J. BARNETT: Yes, we have. After the Council of Australian Governments meeting I wrote to the Prime Minister outlining the way in which we thought a trial here should be conducted. Indeed, it should be on that cooperative model, jointly managed, and a devolving local operation, because that is what one of the main features of the NDIS is meant to be about. I have restated that and to this moment Western Australia remains absolutely ready to do that.

The model in this state of using not-for-profit organisations, with 70 per cent of the funding, has developed over the last 20 years or so. It is one that seems to be supported. Victoria, in particular, is trying to follow Western Australia on that. If we simply bring in an NDIS and rely on not-for-profit groups to provide the services, there are vast areas of Australia—I am not talking about remote areas—where there are no not-for-profit organisations of either the quality or diversity to provide realistic services for people with a disability. They have grown over time here. They are probably similarly developed in Victoria, but that is not the case in the other states. I agree that this system of giving people entitlements, if we like, and access to a fund to go out and buy services is a great concept, but the services are not there, so where does that leave people? It leaves them with an entitlement but no services. Who will come in? We will get corporate entities. We will get fly-by-nighters coming in and saying that they can offer this. It is a bit like what happened to the training sector in Victoria, which has been reported in the media in the last few days. We cannot create credible, professional not-for-profit organisations overnight; we have to grow the system. Fortunately, in this state it is fairly well grown. It is not perfect, but they can go further. Funding, control and the role of the not-for-profit sector, whether it exists or not, are all incredibly important issues. Also, we will not get there unless we have this cooperative federalist structure. We must have some decision making at state level. We have heard about the adopt-a-politician program. Do members think that any member of this Parliament, now or in the future, when they are faced with the situation of a person with a disability, or a child, and a genuine concern about funding for services, will stand in this chamber and say, “It’s not my problem. It’s the National Disability Insurance Scheme. Write to Canberra”? None of us would do that. None of us in good conscience could ever do that. We will always, forever and a day, as elected members of this Parliament, have a responsibility to our community and to our constituents to help people, and we will not do that by handing over total responsibility to Canberra. Therefore, we have to devise a shared way of management of and responsibility for this scheme. No government will hand over, on current levels of funding, \$700 million. That is what the states spend. This state currently spends \$712 million a year on disability services. That is the 83 per cent.

Under this trial proposed by the commonwealth, the Prime Minister talks about \$1 billion. Of that \$1 billion, \$650 million will go into creating IT and a bureaucracy in Canberra. Two-thirds of the \$1 billion is going directly into bureaucracy before we even start the trials, the so-called —

Mrs L.M. Harvey: Ridiculous!

Mr C.J. BARNETT: It is ridiculous. What does that mean for Western Australia? There is \$350 million over four years actually left. That is \$350 million of, yes, additional commonwealth money that might find its way into services. Do the maths: \$350 million, of which WA gets about 10 per cent on a population basis so we will get \$35 million over four years, divided by four, we are talking about \$9 million. That is \$9 million a year additional coming into Western Australia compared with the \$712 million this state already spends. Of course it has to be jointly managed and of course it has to be a cooperative system on a federalist structure, and the Prime Minister refuses to talk about it. Maybe she will in time—I hope so—but at the moment she refuses to talk about that and about any role of the states in the service. The Prime Minister wants it all in Canberra and she refuses to discuss the issue of how the commonwealth might find its funding.

I do not say much at these press conferences in Canberra because I cannot compete against the Prime Minister and the Premiers of New South Wales and Victoria; they fight for attention on the national stage, so we lesser beings sit back and wait our turn. The only comment I made at the press conference was that it was an opportunity squandered, and I sincerely believe that. The Prime Minister had it in her hands to have every state stand by her the next morning side by side and make the case for an extra tax levy—not immediately, but to be phased in perhaps in three or four years—to fund services across Australia for people with a disability. I have never experienced a Prime Minister being given an offer by Liberal and Labor Premiers and big states and small states, all with our different issues. Every state has a different issue. For us, for example, it is motor vehicle accidents. We do not have a no-fault system. I think we should. Not all of them, but other states—I think New South Wales is one—have a no-fault system. No-fault insurance on traffic accidents, yes, the principled and correct way to go, will cost motorists probably another \$200 a year. Convincing motorists that that is a good idea

is a problem that Western Australia faces. Other states have their own unique problems. We cannot just lump all this into a \$650 million Canberra bureaucracy and ignore state systems—which are 80 per cent of the funding—the not-for-profit sector and existing services and say that we will have a national scheme and off we go. This state cannot and should never contemplate withdrawing or changing services; we have to keep that, if we like, safety net. Maybe it is not as good as the entitlement ideals—I know that—but we have that safety net of existing services for people with a disability and we want to maintain it. Do we want not-for-profit services organisations to collapse one by another as their funding disappears? I do not think so. This will take a lot of care and a lot of sensitivity to introduce, yet every state said that it was worth doing. When the conversation in April broke up, I can remember saying, “This is worth doing. We need to do this.” Everyone sat around the table and said, “Yes, we actually need to do this for the people of Australia and we can.”

As I said, I am learning about this sector and I do not pretend to know much more than I have said, to be honest. I will not take it personally, but the member walked into this place with a motion that accuses me, I suppose, of playing politics. Yes, there is a bit of politics in this, but the goodwill and the politics, certainly from Western Australia, has been about trying to make this scheme work and keep it on the rails and do the right thing. I take some of it personally, because it is a personal motion that the member moved. He implies that I do not care about people with a disability. The member is wrong; he is absolutely wrong.

DR K.D. HAMES (Dawesville — Minister for Health) [5.49 pm]: I want to make some comments because not only do I represent the Minister for Disability Services from the other place in this house, but also obviously as Minister for Health I have had considerable involvement in national schemes. In fact, two national schemes have been put in place since I became the minister; one was the national registration scheme and now there is the national health scheme. The first thing I did when I was elected was rock up to the collection of ministers putting in place the national registration scheme, which had been agreed to already by all of the ministers, but it became immediately apparent that it was a dog’s breakfast. It completely took responsibility and involvement away from the states and based it all within Canberra.

Mr R.H. Cook interjected.

Dr K.D. HAMES: What does that have to do with the start of my conversation around national registration? Perhaps ask me when I am further into my speech; it might be easier.

We turned up to that national registration scheme meeting and it was made clear by our government that we strongly supported a national registration scheme; it was just that the one that was proposed was a dog’s breakfast. So I redesigned the scheme in a way that I thought would be far better for the state and every other Premier—remember that they were all Labor—fell in behind the alternative scheme. It was not as though it took any great skill on my part; it was just that the problems with the original scheme were so obvious and so apparent that I am sure anyone in this chamber could have done exactly the same. However, under the direction of Canberra, they had reached agreement on what this scheme should be and, really, it would have severely disadvantaged every state. Once we had developed prospective changes that everyone could agree to, we all worked together as an excellent team, I believe, and put all those changes in place. We then got to the national health scheme meeting and once again the bureaucrats in Canberra, under the direction of the then Prime Minister of Australia, Mr Rudd, had put in place a scheme to run the health system wherein the federal government took all responsibility away from the states and created, as this scheme does, a huge bureaucracy in Canberra to run it. In return, the states were to sign over 30 per cent of their GST payments to Canberra and the Canberra bureaucracy would run the scheme for national health services in this state. Everyone will recall that this state said, “No, we are not going to do that; we will not be part of such a scheme”.

Once the Prime Minister of the day moved on to different responsibilities, we started to make some progress, but at that time even the then federal health minister, Nicola Roxon, with whom I got on very well, had virtually no say in the national scheme that was being put forward by Mr Rudd. We would not wear that, and neither would the other states, apart from the Labor states, which all agreed with it—the same Labor states that are agreeing with this scheme now. They all agreed that they would do it, but we, as the only state Liberal government at the time, said that we would not, and we were subsequently followed by other states that refused to be part of such an arrangement.

We changed it and created a national disability scheme in which the health system would continue to be run by the states, and in which the states would retain responsibility for services. Only yesterday the opposition voted to support the arrangements we put in place for that national health scheme—a funding pool in which we put our money and it is still joined with federal money, but under a system that is still controlled and run by the states. Under that scheme the state government funds about 70 per cent and the commonwealth government about 30 per cent; yet here we have a disability service in which the state funds 83 per cent, which would be by far the lion’s share of all funding for disability services—and people wonder why we do not want to hand it over to the commonwealth government! We have seen things such as the pink batt scheme run by the commonwealth

government. What schemes have we seen run by the commonwealth government from Canberra that work really well, and about which we can all say, “What a fantastic scheme; how good are they”? I do not know of any; I do not know of a single one. Certainly, the aged care service is not run well from Canberra, so for us to expect that people sitting over there will run our disability service better than we do is an absolute joke. As the Premier said, as a state government, we have put a lot of money into increasing disability services.

Mr R.H. Cook: So you support the current fragmented system between different states?

Dr K.D. HAMES: No, I do not. As the Premier said, we agree with a national funding system, but we have to have funding. We need to have the sort of system that we put in place for health services. We need a system in which the funding goes into a pool that is not controlled by Canberra but is controlled by the states. We need to have a clear delineation between what the states put in and what the commonwealth puts in. The commonwealth needs to significantly lift its share, as was recommended by the Productivity Commission. We are aware, as are most of the other states, of the financial difficulties the commonwealth has. It seems to me, therefore, that a Medicare levy —

Ms J.M. Freeman interjected.

Dr K.D. HAMES: The member for Nollamara is not allowed to talk from where she is sitting.

A Medicare levy seems to be a sensible option and the only way that we can proceed to fund something that has such a huge cost. We would support doing that, but it needs a scheme like the scheme in the states that are devolving to non-government organisations the day-to-day management and responsibility of providing that service. As the Premier set out, not only have we increased funding to those organisations by 25 per cent just recently, but also through the ministry of Health we have increased funding to a lot of those disability organisations. The first thing we did in coming into government was increase funding for services to motor neurone disease, cystic fibrosis and muscular dystrophy. Each of them got an additional \$100 000 to \$200 000 to help provide services to people in those communities, and we have provided a range of different funding packages since then. For example, they got not only that additional funding that came from the health budget, but also a 25 per cent increase in their previous funding and that additional funding that we provided as well. That therefore was a significant boost to their funding pool. That helps them provide a range of services, but it does not get down to the people the member for Armadale spoke of, who need individual services on the ground. That is why we recognise that we need a no-fault scheme that has a lot more money in it and that will help provide services to those individuals we find along the way.

The member for Armadale and I have spoken about disability services. We recognise that both of us have people with disabilities in our family. We know what the system is like and how difficult it can be to get support. But there needs to be a bigger funding pool to do that. In addition to the \$700 million that the state has put in now, we have offered—I think the Premier said—an additional \$135 million. But it needs a lot more than that and it needs the commonwealth to come up with extra funds if we are going to make the service better; otherwise we have to plod along with the limited resources that a state government has to try to improve things along the way. Members opposite spoke about research funding for someone with muscular dystrophy, for example. We have specifically funded to the tune of hundreds of thousands of dollars a research program for people with muscular dystrophy that is looking at a new method of treating them by injections of the particular enzyme of which they are deficient and which causes the dystrophy in the first place. That experimental work has been going on here at a university in WA, which is the first in the world to do that work. There is, therefore, funding along the way. But that does not get to the issue raised about a national disability insurance package; it is far broader than that. I do not want to trivialise the debate by talking about individual funding packages like that. I talked about it to suggest that we are very much aware of the needs of people with disabilities and we are very much aware of the need for a national package that has increased funding in it. However, we contend that handing over responsibility for management to the commonwealth government would be an absolute disaster. That is particularly so when we hear that out of the \$1 billion in the fund over the four years, \$342 million will go to people with disabilities and \$657 million will go to establish the bureaucracy. As we know, Western Australia traditionally gets 10 per cent of any funding package, if we are lucky, so over four years that would be \$34 million to this state. That is an absolute pittance when we compare it with the \$700-plus million that we are already spending. We would therefore send \$700 million over to Canberra and get back \$75 million. Wow! Whoop-de-do!

Mr R.H. Cook: Can I just ask which officers of the WA government are actively discussing this issue with the federal government at the moment?

Dr K.D. HAMES: I cannot tell the member that because I am not the Minister for Disability Services. In those Council of Australian Governments discussions the Premier’s office is sharing that responsibility with the Minister for Disability Services. I recall listening to the Premier’s conversation. I thought he strongly indicated that that was the case, because he has just sent a letter to the Prime Minister.

Mr R.H. Cook: He strongly indicated that he sent a letter, not that they are in discussion.

Dr K.D. HAMES: What is sending a letter if it is not in discussion?

Mr R.H. Cook: The Victorian and New South Wales governments, in stark contrast to yours, sat down several days after COAG and nussed out an agreement. They were on board to start with. What is wrong with your government? Why could you not engage in a similar fashion?

Dr K.D. HAMES: Because conversations are two-way; they are not just one-way.

Mr R.H. Cook: They managed it. Why couldn't you?

Dr K.D. HAMES: Because the commonwealth has obviously made a decision to talk to the states about how they might get around that system in the states. It made no such offer to us that I am aware of. This state has written to the commonwealth government offering alternatives. As I said, I do not know, so it is no good asking me. If the member wanted to ask that question, he should have asked the Premier.

Mr R.H. Cook: I tried but the Premier was tired and emotional and scurried out before we had the opportunity.

Dr K.D. HAMES: He was not tired, nor was he emotional and nor did he scurry out. He put a very comprehensive case. The member refused to accept the evidence from someone who was actually there and involved on the day. He would much prefer to get second-hand, backdoor information or read what is in the press rather than take note of someone who was there on the ground telling him what happened. He is not really in a position to criticise what the Premier says.

Mr R.H. Cook: You expect me to believe that he has actually done something when he has contrived a situation where there is a lack of agreement.

Dr K.D. HAMES: If I let the member interject and he does not let me respond, what is the point? It works both ways. If the member really thinks that us accepting the commonwealth taking over management of disabilities, taking this state's funding and then managing disability services in this state is a good recipe to increase the standard of service for people with disabilities in Western Australia, he has rocks in his head.

DR G.G. JACOBS (Eyre) [6.03 pm]: I would like to make a small contribution to this debate. As my previous occupation gave me stark experience of people with disabilities, I am aware of the pain, both physical and emotional, that creates for the individual and also for their family and loved ones. I suppose we are not in a perfect situation. Supporting people with disabilities is a very difficult area, but I have to say that WA probably does it better than most other jurisdictions in Australia. We know and understand—I had some experience as shadow Minister for Disability Services for a little while when we came into opposition in 2005—that the combined application process was not perfect either and people missed out on receiving appropriate funding for their disability. However, I know that Western Australia had the first Disability Services Commission of all the jurisdictions in Australia. In fact, the member on the other side, the previous Leader of the Opposition, was the first Minister for Disabilities with the newly created Disability Services Commission. We were the first state to do it. In fact, I believe that it runs on a model of purchasing and procuring services that are appropriate for people with disabilities. As the Premier has elucidated, it funds a significant number of people in the state. In fact, there are 22 500 disabled people, 6 000 of whom receive funding support of \$50 000 or more, 30 people receive \$100 000 and some receive \$200 000 per year in support.

The origins, I suppose, go back to the Productivity Commission. There is no argument from this side about the need for a national disability service insurance scheme, but the questions are about how we get there, how we fund it and how we implement it. The Productivity Commission saw that most families and individuals cannot adequately prepare for the risk and the financial impact of disability and particularly significant disability, and people in this house have said that previously. The Productivity Commission recommended that there should be a new national scheme that provides insurance cover for all Australians in the event of a significant disability, and the main function of this NDIS would be to fund long-term high-quality care, not income replacement, for people with a significant disability. I suppose that the issues of contention are how the scheme would work, not the concept of the scheme itself. The scheme will work with the contribution of \$8 billion a year more than the states currently spend on disability. The contributions at the moment are such that the Australian government currently provides funding of around \$2.3 billion to the disability sector, while the state and territory governments provide funding of around \$4.7 billion to \$5 billion. That is a total of over \$7 billion. On top of that, to run an NDIS scheme, another \$8 billion would be needed to make the system work.

Payments will be given to the most seriously disabled people in Australia based on need, which is a good concept. It will require a system for assessing just who those people most in need are. The people concerned will be able to spend those payments as they see fit to procure the services they need, particularly from non-government services such as non-government organisations, and they will no longer have to apply for the limited numbers of payments, similar to the cap system we talked about, nor will they have to pay for services only

offered in capital cities. They can make up their own minds about what support they need most. These concepts are good. Some money will be allocated on vastly improving the disability support sector. I put a little question in my notes about how much it will be improved and what improving the disability support sector means. We do not want another layer of the status that I have just tried to outline. We have a system and some structure to deliver services, which is called the Disability Services Commission, and we have a procurement and purchasing process to provide services for people. We do not want to reinvent the wheel with moneys from the federal government to vastly improve the disability support structure and in fact fail to deliver that money on the ground.

The discussion that the Premier had on Paul Murray's radio show, which I think must have been on this morning, was about our agreement with the concept of a disability insurance scheme, and how much, after the Council of Australian Governments meeting, we were able to provide in trying to establish a trial in Western Australia. In response to the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, we offered a quote to conduct a trial in Western Australia after the COAG meeting. After that meeting the Premier wrote to the Prime Minister restating that the state government was willing to put \$135 million into that. He went on to say that, to her credit, Julia Gillard made the point that the Western Australian system was a lot better funded than are the other states' systems and it is a better system than any other state has, which is a point I made earlier. We remain prepared to do that. The issue is about the management of the service, not so much the funding. The question has been asked previously: what confidence do we have about the implementation of a disability service and a scheme to cover the significant costs of people's disability being administered better from Canberra than it can be in the state of Western Australia?

Mr P. Abetz: None at all.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: We saw the absolute debacle with the installation of the pink batts. We had some issues in administering the economic stimulus program, the Building the Education Revolution system, which worked quite well for us in Western Australia. But the BER system did not work in a lot of jurisdictions and there was evidence of some wastage of funds in implementing that program. We do not have a lot of confidence in the implementation of a scheme from Canberra. It is important that we develop that confidence before we go along with this scheme. It is really important that we understand and gain confidence that a scheme will be administered that will be appropriate, flexible and responsive and, in fact, will deliver the funding needs of unfortunate people in Western Australia with a disability.

It has been put to me from people in the disability sector that a funding system under the NDIS model may provide a lower rate than we are already achieving in Western Australia. In some areas, if today we were to adopt the NDIS criteria, some people would see their funding reduced. These are important details in the implementation of the NDIS. Yes, we agree with the concept; it is a good concept but it is about not only the funding but also the implementation—implementation at a distance from Canberra and implementation of NDIS under the criteria. We do not want to see people with disabilities and ongoing costs receive reduced funding under this program. That is not what we are prepared to do. It is not about politics. It is not about playing politics; it is about making sure that people with disabilities have a scheme that is better than what they have now, and there is a better scheme in this jurisdiction than in any other jurisdiction in Australia. It is also about the issue of implementation and, of course, the significant ongoing extra funding of \$8 billion a year to run the program over and above the \$7 billion to \$8 billion that the states already contribute. I will not support this motion. I do not believe we are playing politics with this; we are trying to get a better system comprising concepts we agree with. But implementation and the levels of funding are important considerations in making the scheme sustainable.

I listened to the contribution by the member for Armadale, from my room. He mentioned Schools Plus, which is not the central part of the debate; however, the Education and Health Standing Committee has been dealing with the Schools Plus criteria and what assistance that is able to attract in the classroom for students with disability. By way of information, under the primary eligibility criteria in the Schools Plus checklist, choosing one of the eight criteria attracts assistance. Members of the Education and Health Standing Committee have an issue with that, as we believe a significant number of children, particularly those children with foetal alcohol spectrum disorder, do not fit any of these criteria. The committee has gone to some of the schools in the Kimberley and the anecdotal evidence is that in any one class a cohort of anything up to 25 per cent of students with foetal alcohol spectrum disorder do not fit the Schools Plus criteria and so the school does not get anything extra to support those kids in the classroom. The terms of reference of the Education and Health Standing Committee focus on early childhood education, so we were particularly interested in the Schools Plus criteria. The member for Armadale is right that in the department's checklists for "Student's Primary Eligibility Type" applicants are required to choose only one of eight, whereas with the "Student's Comorbid Eligibility Type(s)"—autism spectrum disorder, global developmental delay, hearing impairment, intellectual disability, physical disability, severe medical/health condition, severe mental disorder, and vision impairment—they choose "all that apply".

Dr A.D. Buti: I thank the member for Eyre for that, but when I was at a school only two days ago they said that the change in criteria for the second one, for which you listed the eight criteria, is causing a major problem in the ability to obtain Schools Plus funding for a number of students they believe need it.

Dr G.G. JACOBS: I agree with the member in that that is one of the issues that the Education and Health Standing Committee has about this very prescriptive criteria, as we believe that a significant cohort of students are missing out on what is much-needed support in the classroom because they do not fit these criteria.

MR R.H. COOK (Kwinana — Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [6.18 pm] — in reply: I will not take up much more of the chamber's time, but it is important to clarify where we are at in this debate. Today we have heard some very inconsistent information from representatives of the government on where it is in communication with the states and the federal government. I tried to get that, by way of interjection, from the minister representing the Minister for Disability Services. As we saw from the media surrounding this issue, there was a very active engagement between the federal government and Victorian and New South Wales governments, remembering that South Australia, Tasmania and the ACT had already agreed with the federal government in the Council of Australian Governments; and I take on board what the Premier had to say about some of the dynamics around that conversation. However, we know that the Victorian and New South Wales governments were very actively involved in discussions with the federal government after COAG and subsequently have joined with the federal government to make sure they have sites in their particular states. It was clear that those governments had charged their representatives—maybe ministers, but certainly representatives of the government—to actively engage with the federal government to ensure that they did not lose this opportunity. Although the Premier was happy to interject on my speech, he was not happy to take an interjection so that we could clarify that point. That was disappointing. The minister representing the Minister for Disability Services was unable to actually clarify it. We know there is a letter from the Premier to the federal government—most of us have seen a copy of it—and to paraphrase it, it essentially reads, “We are doing a bang-up job here; we think you should come in and fund our model.” The nub of the problem—this is why the analogy of the Minister for Health, representing the Minister for Disability Services, around the funding arrangements he agreed to in the context of the national health reform agreement is not accurate—is that what clearly was the problem in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria was that they were arguing over the dollars. There may have been some arguments around the margins and the way it was administrated, but essentially what they were doing was arguing about the dollars. Queensland was not able to continue that discussion because, having flooded two-thirds of the state and having large deficits, it could not come to the party in terms of that debate. Clearly, the New South Wales and Victorian governments were able to negotiate successfully around those dollar arrangements. In Western Australia we are not talking about the issue of dollars; we are talking about the issue of control. Although the Minister for Health was successful in getting his colleagues in other states to understand the point he was making, and he was able, with the assistance of the negotiation process, to agree on a joint funding model in relation to the national health reform agreement, this is not what we are talking about here. Western Australia is the only state sitting out there arguing around the issue of control.

Essentially, the Premier says in his letter to the Prime Minister that, “You, Prime Minister, should agree that what we are doing is really good, and you should put your money into a joint account that we will control and administer on your behalf. You should accept that what we are doing is as close as you're going to get to the NDIS model, and what we do in Western Australia is better than any other state so you should give us that money and let us go away and test this model.” But it does not test this model out, because as people in the sector will tell members, the model that the government is talking about will not change the culture of what we are doing here. It is not an entitlement-based model; it is not a system by which people who either have an acquired disability or are born with a disability can have the assurance that they will be looked after. The begging will continue. It does not solve the problem, and that is why it is not appropriate for the Premier to say, “What we are doing is the NDIS model and you should give us money to do it.” It is not appropriate for the minister representing the Minister for Disability Services to say that the federal government should come on board in the same way it came on board for the National Health Reform Agreement, because it is not the same thing.

This government is arguing over control. Other governments had problems with the dollars, but this government is standing on its digs about the issue of control. So when I asked the question: are you trying to overcome these issues? The answer was, “No; we've sent a letter.” If the government was serious about overcoming these issues, we would have today had, chapter and verse, a detailed description of what it is doing to try to resolve the deadlock. But there is no resolution and there will not be while the government continues to be so intransigent about this issue.

The Premier raised the issue of the levy. Each of the state governments—he said, as one—suggested there should be a levy in relation to this issue: the Liberal Premier of Victoria, the Liberal Premier of New South Wales, and that strange amalgam beast the Liberal–National Party Premier of Queensland—that is an interesting title!

Perhaps the Minister for Health should be looking for that sort of title in Western Australia; a similar arrangement! No, that is right; they split in cabinet, do they not?

Dr K.D. Hames: Then I would not be Deputy Premier, would I? It would be Deputy Premier Grylls!

Mr R.H. COOK: So the Liberal–National Premier in Queensland and the Liberal Premier in Western Australia said, “Prime Minister, you should go for a levy. You should stick your neck through this political noose that we have dangling before you and go for a levy.” Obviously the Prime Minister did not go for that. The reason is that none of those Premiers can deliver the federal Liberal Party on this issue. Why? They know that Tony Abbott is standing in the wings ready to stomp on any idea that there should be a levy around this issue. In fact they know that Tony Abbott, their federal leader, is standing in the wings and saying that the federal Liberal Party will not support an NDIS. Tony Abbott is sitting in the wings saying, “No, we are not going to fix up the GST the way you guys want.” The federal shadow Treasurer was in Perth just last week saying, “No, we’re not going to do that. The Liberal Premier of Western Australia can do and say what he likes. We are not going to fix up the GST.”

It was also interesting to see what the federal shadow Treasurer had to say about toll roads. They are sitting there waiting for us. If by chance we have a Liberal–National government next year when the federal election is held, there will be toll roads in Western Australia. Does the Deputy Premier support toll roads in Western Australia? No, he does not. The federal shadow Treasurer was travelling down one of the best pieces of public infrastructure in Western Australia, the Forrest Highway, when the idea struck him: “Goodness me, they have no toll roads in Western Australia!” He paused in his speech at this point and said, “Do you get it? Do you get it? There won’t be any extra public infrastructure funding under a federal Liberal–National government, because in WA you do not have toll roads.”

Dr A.D. Buti: The member for Bateman will be over there championing the cause of WA, won’t he?

Mr R.H. COOK: It is a pity the member for Bateman is not here to explain to us, now that he is a Liberal Party–endorsed candidate, what his position on the GST share is, and indeed what his position is on toll roads. I am sure he will get a briefing note from the shadow Treasurer soon. The federal shadow Treasurer will give him the details, and what we will be going for are toll roads. There will be no Barnett fix for the GST, and we will not have an NDIS, because the opposition’s mob in Canberra will not go for it, and we know they will not support the levy. Members opposite should not come to us and say that that we proposed a new tax and, goodness me, the Prime Minister would not support it. Members opposite cannot deliver one colleague from Canberra who would support such a levy. We know that on their side of politics there is none of the consensus that exists throughout the rest of the community, that we should have an NDIS. Members opposite should pull their weight, stand up and support a National Disability Insurance Scheme and make sure that those poor people who suffer from disabilities get the support they need—the entitlement to get some support in the community. We know that members opposite cannot deliver the federal Liberals, because they will come through and wreck any national disability insurance scheme that is proposed, either by state government or by the current federal government.

It is very disappointing to see the Premier’s attitude today. It is great to see that he supports in principle what we are doing. It is sad that the proposal the government is putting up goes nowhere near what is needed in relation to a national disability scheme. We see a lot of crocodile tears from the other side. We do not see a lot of negotiation. We do not see the WA Premier sitting down with the Prime Minister. Now that the cameras and the media have gone, we do not see any stories from the Premier saying, “I am sitting down and working this out.” He had his opportunity to do that today. There was not a word from the Premier about what he is now doing to resolve the impasse. There was not a word from the Premier about how he is working with the disability sector to overcome these difficulties. And there was not a word from the Premier about what his bottom line is to make sure that we have this scheme in place. Every other state manages this, because they get it. There were negotiations over the dollar value, and they came to an agreement. We could not come to an agreement here because we know it is not about the dollars; it is about control. This government will refuse to participate in the national disability support services, and it is the people of Western Australia who are suffering from a disability who will pay the price.

Question put and a division taken with the following result —

Extract from *Hansard*
[ASSEMBLY — Wednesday, 8 August 2012]
p4635b-4656a

Mr Roger Cook; Dr Tony Buti; Mr Chris Tallentire; Mr Colin Barnett; Dr Kim Hames; Dr Graham Jacobs

Ayes (20)

Ms L.L. Baker	Mr J.C. Kobelke	Mr J.R. Quigley	Mr P.C. Tinley
Dr A.D. Buti	Mr F.M. Logan	Ms M.M. Quirk	Mr A.J. Waddell
Mr R.H. Cook	Mrs C.A. Martin	Mr E.S. Ripper	Mr P.B. Watson
Ms J.M. Freeman	Mr M. McGowan	Mrs M.H. Roberts	Mr M.P. Whitely
Mr W.J. Johnston	Mr M.P. Murray	Mr C.J. Tallentire	Mr D.A. Templeman (<i>Teller</i>)

Noes (24)

Mr F.A. Alban	Mr G.M. Castrilli	Mr A.P. Jacob	Ms A.R. Mitchell
Mr C.J. Barnett	Dr E. Constable	Dr G.G. Jacobs	Dr M.D. Nahan
Mr I.C. Blayney	Mr J.M. Francis	Mr R.F. Johnson	Mr D.T. Redman
Mr J.J.M. Bowler	Mr B.J. Grylls	Mr A. Krsticevic	Mr M.W. Sutherland
Mr I.M. Britza	Dr K.D. Hames	Mr J.E. McGrath	Mr T.K. Waldron
Mr T.R. Buswell	Mrs L.M. Harvey	Mr P.T. Miles	Mr A.J. Simpson (<i>Teller</i>)

Pairs

Mr J.N. Hyde	Mr W.R. Marmion
Ms R. Saffioti	Mr C.C. Porter
Mr B.S. Wyatt	Mr J.H.D. Day
Mr T.G. Stephens	Mr M.J. Cowper

Question thus negatived.