

## MND Australia 2016 Budget analysis

There are no major new policies included in the 2016 Federal Budget that would significantly improve the lives of the more than 2,000 Australians living with motor neurone disease (MND) and their carers. However, policies related to the NDIS, aged care, health and research sectors will impact the MND community to varying degrees.

### NDIS:

MND Australia welcomes the \$2.1 billion allocated to a special savings account to fund the future of the NDIS. This new Fund will quarantine savings for the purpose of funding the NDIS and will supplement funds in the DisabilityCare Australia Fund, which is financed by the Medicare Levy.

This is a substantial amount but it falls short of the additional money that will be needed when the Scheme is fully implemented. It is reassuring to note that this announcement affirms the Government's commitment "*to fully funding this vital scheme*" and that any shortfall will "*be funded from general revenue or borrowings*".

During his Budget address Treasurer Scott Morrison said:

*"To meet the future costs of the National Disability Insurance Scheme we are establishing an NDIS Savings Fund. This fund will hold unspent funds from the NDIS as well as the proceeds of savings measures from better targeting our welfare spending. These funds can then be reinvested back into delivering the NDIS and contribute to filling the current funding gap that exists."*

Some of these savings, which include, a crack down on the Disability Support Pension and cutting off carbon tax compensation for all new welfare recipients, have potential to impact people with MND and their carers. Savings through changes to the Carer Allowance will also be allocated to the NDIS Savings Fund through the removal of the capacity to claim a backdated lump sum for the Carer Allowance. It will therefore be important for MND carers to lodge an *Intent to Claim* with Centrelink as early as possible.

Securing future funding for the NDIS through savings in social services, therefore, remains of concern.

### Aged Care:

Aged care has not fared so well and over the next four years savings of \$1.2 billion will be made by revising the Aged Care Funding Instrument (ACFI). This funding instrument determines the level of funding paid to aged care providers. Most aged care providers would rely on the complex health domain to provide vital higher quality care to meet the complex and progressing needs of people living with MND.

It is understood that the ACFI has experienced unanticipated growth in the complex health domain and as a result indexation will be halved to fund this saving. It is imperative that the government commits to closely monitoring the impact of this cut to ensure there is no reduction in the quality of care to people with complex care needs such as those living with MND.

We welcome the funding boost of \$136.6 million to the My Aged Care contact centre as its call rates continue to grow. However, we call on the government to ensure that this funding will enhance the capacity and understanding of My Aged Care staff to ensure that people over the age of 65 with complex and progressing disability needs can access appropriate information and timely referral to aged care funded services and support.

## Health

MND Australia welcomes the government investment of \$21.3 million across four years to administer the trial of Health Care Homes for those with chronic and complex conditions. However, the continued Medicare freeze on payments to doctors poses a disincentive to primary health care practitioners to participate in the roll-out of this reform. Investment in the primary health system is vital to ensure provision of integrated coordinated care for people living with MND and to reduce demand for expensive hospital treatment.

Performance indicators for the Health Care Homes must ensure monitoring of the quality of care provided to people with life-limiting, complex conditions. Despite the limited arrangements proposed for Health Care Homes, alignment between health, aged care and disability services to ensure a coordinated multidisciplinary approach is imperative.

## Research

The Budget has confirmed the Government's continued commitment to the Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF). However, it is now expected to meet the \$20 billion target in 2020-21 which is a year later than first projected in the 2014 Budget. Funded by savings in the health system and the transfer of \$1 billion from the Health and Hospitals Fund, the MRFF currently has a balance of \$3.13 billion. Unfortunately, it seems likely that it will be at least 2021/22 before the MRFF is able to provide the anticipated \$1 billion per annum of funding for medical research and innovation.

Funding for the NHMRC's research programs will remain virtually stable in coming years with increases roughly in line with CPI.

While funding for research in this Budget remains limited we remain hopeful that the MRFF will provide some hope for those living with MND and their carers that government investment in research to understand the causes and to develop effective therapies to ultimately stop MND will increase in the future.

### **MND Australia will continue to call on the government to:**

- Double investment in MND related research
- Ensure 'fast track' access to care and support services to meet the reasonable and necessary support needs of all people living with MND no matter which sector funds the services.
- Make progressive neurological disease a National health Priority

We hope that the Government will continue to plan not just for the next electoral cycle, but with a strategic vision for the future of the health, disability, aged care and research sectors for all Australians.

Carol Birks  
National Executive Director  
MND Australia