

Concerns Raised Over NDIS Barriers for Homeless People With Disability



Kate Paterson, an homelessness and disability expert at the Council to Homeless Persons (CHP), spoke to Pro Bono News before her appearance at an NDIS-focused session at the National Homelessness Conference 2018.

Paterson said there were barriers for homeless people with disability because the NDIS relied on people reaching out for help.

“For people who are homeless, and for those that in particular have a psychosocial disability, they can’t even get to the point of asking,” she said.

In a CHP report written by Paterson, concerns were raised over the lack of “discourse” about the “interaction of the NDIS with people who are homeless”, something which she said she would like to see an improvement on.

“If you do a google search on the NDIS website, you will barely find the word homelessness in the information provided... they aren’t identified as

a special needs group or a group of people with complex needs,” Paterson said.

Paterson was joined at the conference by other experts in the sector, including Dr Clare Townsend, manager of Synapse, who spoke about the issues of access to the NDIS for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are homeless.

Townsend told Pro Bono News she believed there were a different set of issues when considering homeless Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with a disability, as there was a need to “recognise their cultural experience”.

“We need to look at what disability means to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, what it means that their first language isn’t English, the involvement of family structures as opposed to individual control,” Townsend said.

She said factors such as “intergenerational trauma” also played a part in a lack of engagement in the system.

“They’ve experienced generations of stigma and discrimination from services, and to get into the NDIS you’re expected to initiate a relationship with a scheme which you don’t understand,” she said.

Paterson said she wanted better “awareness and acknowledgement” to come out of the conference, as it was an issue that was often overlooked.

“I see that the NDIS is a phenomenal change to the service system... but unfortunately the people on the margins are always going to be the last ones to be brought into the system.”

Maggie Coggan is a journalist at Pro Bono News covering the social sector.