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"A Different Light"

A Different Light – 31st May 2025 – “Budget boost for disability sector but gaps remain”

The budget giveth and the budget taketh away! Its impact on some sectors was resounding but in the disability sector it was somewhat subtle. Residential Services had a much-needed injection of \$60m a year over the next 4 years. This will end the freeze on pricing that was imposed by the Government last year. Will it elevate the freeze on the number of people in a residential facility? One would hope so. There are hundreds of disabled people with high needs that are living with their parents who are in their 70's or 80's and when the inevitable comes for them to leave home they will need a quality residential solution that will respect their dignity and uphold their mana.

That old cliché rears its head as it does in all new budgets or policies “The devil will be in the detail”. The Honourable Louise Upston has given us a tad of hope in the budget.

In her budget press release she stated that , “It will allow for more flexibility and means that from 1 July, we are beginning to lift the funding constraints we had to implement last year”. I am hoping this will mean that the restraints that were put onto people being able to use their Individualised funding for their disability supports allocation will be lifted. Of course, she could just be alluding to the pricing freeze on residential facilities.

What will have a negative impact on the disability sector is the changes to the Pay Equity Bill that will make it far more difficult to bring about pay equity redress. The disability supports services sector is heavily represented by women who work in that labour market. This will have a detrimental effect on the sector and probably add to the exodus of workers heading to Aussie, not for the greener pastures, but for the fatter pay checks.

In education, learning support had a huge \$646M boost for learning support, 560+ new specialists and 900,000 more teacher aide hours by 2028. Specialist schools will receive extra classrooms that will hopefully address

waiting lists for Special Schools all over the country. There have been 25 such buildings projects promised but whether these building projects are already underway we don't know yet. On balance, this budget isn't nearly as brutal for the disability sector as were the announcements that were made last year in March and August.

It still doesn't address the wide traverse in the volume and range of supports available between ACC funded disability support services and DSS supports. Until the funding model of disability supports is radically changed in New Zealand to either levy base model like ACC or a National Disability Insurance model as they have in Australia, disability funding will always struggle to meet demand.

Jonny Wilkinson is the CEO of Tiaho Trust - Disability A Matter of Perception, a Whangarei based disability advocacy organisation.