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2013 has been a watershed year for disability reform in Australia.

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is now law.

This follows a five year campaign kick-started at the 2020 Summit and championed vigorously by then Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities, Bill Shorten.

The NDIS provides no fault, needs based, individualised funding packages and supports for people with disability, and is paid for by an increase of 0.5% in personal income tax rates.

In 2008 the prevailing political orthodoxy was that disability was a fringe issue with limited voter appeal. The need for reform had been understood and ignored by successive governments of all political stripes since the mid-1970s. A good idea perhaps, but far too expensive.

Five short years on, the NDIS enabling legislation was supported unanimously by an otherwise fractious Australian parliament. Voter support for the new scheme registered a stratospheric 79%.

None of this is to say that the NDIS victory is complete, and its implementation will be a key challenge for the new Abbott Government, and Minister Fifield in particular, who has steadfastly built party room support for the reform, and remained in the disability portfolio longer than any other, first in Opposition, and now in Government.

As recent controversies attest, the need constant vigilance persists, both to ensure the arguments for change remain at the fore, and that the scheme itself delivers on its theoretical objectives during a complex implementation phase.

But for millions of Australians affected by disability, there is a palpable sense of optimism as we welcome a more accessible and inclusive 2014.

Tony Abrahams
CEO

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