

Media Release

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MDA boss wary of Budget's \$20b Medical Fund and hopes Abbott's not using it as scapegoat

Muscular Dystrophy Australia encourages the Government to prioritise medical research but with a Budget filled with so many hits to the average Australian there are concerns that this item which Abbott has professed will be "the largest of its kind in the world" is more a distraction rather than genuine commitment to the health of Australians.

"We need to keep in mind that while there is absolutely a need for future medical research which this fund is said to focus on, we cannot forget about those who currently have these conditions, such as Muscular Dystrophy, who need our help now," said Muscular Dystrophy Australia's (MDA) Executive Director, Boris M Struk.

The announcement of the Budget's \$20 billion Medical Research Future Fund last night was well received by those in the disability sector, in particular the Muscular Dystrophy community, however it is hoped that Abbott will also honour the NDIS, without compromise, which is currently in a review until mid-year.

"We are glad that medical research was high on the agenda of last night's Budget but we are also wary of celebrating too soon as we already know the difficulties encountered with the NDIS which is meant to be launched to full scheme in all states, except WA, in 2016-17," said Mr Struk.

Mr Struk has been actively involved with giving people within the MD community a voice about the scheme, speaking last year in February to a meeting of the Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee regarding the NDIS, in Melbourne.

MDA recently spoke with Senator The Hon Mitch Fifield Assistant Minister for Social Services, responsible for disability care, who noted that the Government will only be advised mid-year whether the NDIS's scheduled rollout will continue as planned.

"The independent Board of the Agency have commissioned KPMG to look at the work of the NDIA Capability Review, which was published earlier this year, to see if there are any implications in that for their capacity to deliver the NDIS in good form according to the existing timeframes. The report is expected mid-year, and the Board will then advise all governments if there are any issues that need to be addressed," said Senator Fifield.

The money for the new Medical Research Future Fund is said to come from health system cuts, abolition of bulk-billing, co-contribution payment for GP consultations and \$5 increase in PBS prescriptions, as well as other areas; and is expected to grow over the next six years and be capped at \$20 billion by about 2020.

"At this stage we can only hope that Abbott is genuine in his commitment to boosting medical research for the future wellbeing of Australians but we also hope he honours his commitment to no significant changes to the NHMRC's Medical Research Endowment Account and to the current welfare of people living with debilitating conditions and diseases," said Mr Struk.

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