

The Canberra Times

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A feather in their hats

Mother-daughter duo Debra Parish and Viviana Croker can dress to impress. Mum Debra was named runner-up in the suited category, while judges tipped their hats to daughter Viviana, who was the millinery winner in the Black Opal Fashions on the Field. Meanwhile, thousands lapped up the warm weather trackside in the middle of the Canberra Day long weekend. Check out what's happening in the capital on the public holiday in our Canberra Day guide.

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Debra Parish and Viviana Croker. Picture by Elesa Kurtz

'SELFIE' SUPER FUNDS THE RISKS EXPLAINED
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HEALTH Worried providers urge 'complete rethink' with future uncertain

Funding crisis for NDIS

Lucy Bladen

ORGANISATIONS which support hundreds of Canberrans with disabilities are under threat and need immediate assistance to help them through a lengthy reform process, their leaders have warned.

Canberra NDIS providers say they have really had to "tighten their belts" and have been forced to take drastic

changes to keep up with cost pressures, including cutting staff wages, stopping weekend services and ceasing supports altogether.

The NDIS has been running for 10 years in the nation's capital and four organisations who provide support to people with disability say costs are making it increasingly difficult to deliver services.

Data is showing an in-

creasing number of providers operating at a deficit.

The federal government has promised a wholesale change of the scheme's operation, following a review last year, but this could take up to five years, which providers say they do not have.

Providers are calling for financial support and an immediate uplift in pricing to help them over the com-

ing years as organisations are using their reserves to fund the costs of providing services under the NDIS.

Koomarri chief executive Nadine Stephen said the cost model was "fundamentally flawed" and there was a growing divide between what could be claimed and the actual cost of delivering services.

She said Koomarri, which supports about 300 people,

had already restructured and reclassified wages and had been subsidising gaps.

"Koomarri will never compromise on quality or deliver substandard care to the people we support but working in this incredibly tight fiscal arrangement where the sector is operating in a deficit. That is quite concerning," she said.

Ms Stephen said funding was needed to help them

through the implementation of the recommendations from the NDIS review.

"In order for the sector to be in a strong, financially sustainable position at the end of that transition period I would be strongly encouraging and requesting some type of transitional funding for organisations to make it through the series of reforms," she said.

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Heatwave conditions to persist in south-east

RECORDS have been smashed as people in south-eastern Australia swelter through an autumn heatwave over the long weekend.

Melbourne and Hobart sizzled overnight, with the Bureau of Meteorology recording unprecedented temperatures for both cities.

"There is going to be a lot of tired and cranky people across south-eastern Australia," meteorologist Sarah Scully said.

Canberra was spared the worst of it, with temperatures peaking at 30 degrees late in the afternoon.

Melbourne sweated as the mercury hovered near 30 for most of Saturday night before dropping to 27.3 early on Sunday, topping the previous March record high minimum temperature of 26.5 in 2013.

Hobart was also uncomfortably hot overnight, with a minimum temperature of 24, well above the previous March record of 21.1, Ms Scully said.

Authorities issued a total fire ban for parts of South Australia on Sunday, as the mercury soared into the high 30s and 40s across most of the state. The bureau has warned the heatwave conditions will persist into next week in parts of NSW, Tasmania and SA, and most of Victoria, where a total fire ban has been issued for the state's southwest on Monday. Melbourne peaked at 36.9 late on Sunday, with Avalon recording 40 and Geelong 39.6.

One of the stages at Adelaide's WOMAD was closed on Sunday due to the heat, while a handful of other events were postponed or cancelled.



Woden Community Services chief executive Jenny Kitchin, Koomarri chief executive Nadine Stephen, Hartley Lifecare chief executive Eric Thauvette and Marymead CatholicCare ACT chief executive Anne Kirwan are facing a dire future as NDIS providers. Picture by Elesia Kurtz

NDIS providers call for changes

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Marymead CatholicCare Canberra chief executive Anne Kirwan said the organisation had to make the decision to cease providing supports on weekends and after hours.

"It was incredibly difficult for our staff who've worked with people for over 30 years but also very disruptive for the clients who have their entertainment and their lives in a routine and we've had to disrupt that," she said.

The NDIS provides funding to participants who are then able to choose and how they want to be supported.

The NDIS is designed to provide disability-related supports to participants, who then have choice and control on how they are supported

and by who. The National Disability Insurance Agency works with providers to ensure participants can receive value for money support.

But the organisations say they are contending with fraud and non-compliant providers.

"We have all the quality and compliance obligations that we meet and quality costs money and the challenge we have in this space is that there are a larger number of unregistered providers who don't have the same compliance obligations," Ms Kirwan said.

A review into the NDIS, released late last year, recommended a series of significant changes, with the report's authors saying the proposed reforms recom-

ended a "complete rethink" of the scheme.

The changes recommended included changes to pricing frameworks to improve incentives for providers, incentives for continuous quality improvement and to "attract, retain and train" the workforce.

The 26 recommendations would be delivered over a five-year period.

"It took 10 years to get to where we are today, and we should not expect changes of the scale we are proposing to happen overnight," the report said.

A report from National Disability Services found disability service providers reported the most recent financial year was the worst one yet.

It found 34 per cent of organisations reported a loss over the period.

The federal government allocated \$10.2 million towards repairing the market and better ways to access support in January. This includes funding for the Department of Social Services to design and consult on a new NDIS pricing and payments framework.

National Disability Services chief executive Laurie Leigh said while the changes were needed and supported organisations needed financial support to help through the changes.

"This financial strain is already materialising in major providers ceasing NDIS services, leaving individuals and families without essen-

tial supports," she said.

Canberra provider Hartley Lifecare has already been forced to make drastic changes to remain in business, including reducing wages of staff by up to 5.7 per cent. Chief executive Eric Thauvette said the organisation would not have lasted beyond 2024 if the changes were not made but even with the changes there is not much room for growth.

"The measures we have taken over the last six months is ensuring Hartley's viability into the future but barely. It doesn't leave us any money to do anything innovative," he said.

Woden Community Services has been forced to cut direct NDIS support services due to costs.

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