**Open letter to members of Government and service providers in Western Australia**

Dear Ministers and Government Officials,

The WA State Government signed a bilateral agreement on the 31st of January 2017, entering Western Australia into a WA NDIS – a state-based National Disability Insurance Scheme. Members of the Youth Disability Advocacy Network (YDAN) have many concerns about this decision and would like to see these concerns addressed before the next state election in March this year.

As a representative organisation, that supports young people with disabilities, YDAN believe there has not been enough consultation and information provided. A general consensus by those directly affected by this decision – those living with disabilities in Western Australia and the YDAN Committee – is that we would prefer to be and will be better off under a national scheme. We request that the following concerns be addressed:

1. **What are the tangible benefits for disabled people of being under WA NDIS?** The spiel that officials sell to us when we have asked this question in the past is that the WA NDIS is exactly the same as the national scheme. If this is so, why reinvent the wheel? Why separate us from the rest of the country when the main point of the NDIS is clearly stated in the first letter of its acronym, the fact that it is National?
2. **Who has control under WA NDIS?** Officials often tell us that WA currently has the best disability services in Australia, that by going with a state-based scheme they will make sure that this is not lost. However, this is not the experience of members of YDAN and the general disabled population. Many of us in Western Australia have had very negative experiences with the current controller, the Disability Services Commission (DSC) and feel that the present culture within the DSC is very toxic. YDAN have been told stories of threats being made by the DSC to reduce funding if an individual kicks up too much of a fuss, there have even been allegations of threats to remove guardianship powers if guardians don’t comply with what the DSC want. The existence of these stories itself is a worrying trend, which demonstrates a fear and distrust of the DSC. With such negative experiences and anxiety already how will this change under WA NDIS?
3. **Where is the transparency?** There have been trials conducted in Western Australia for both the national and state schemes. Officials have said that extensive evaluations and comparisons have been carried out and that the results favoured the state scheme. However, disabled people are yet to receive access to these reports. When will we get access so we can decide for ourselves for what is best for us? Why should the government or service providers be deciding for us?
4. **Why are scare tactics being used?** We have been told that the best thing about going with WA NDIS is that we will be able to keep and maintain our local area coordinator (LAC) system. Under the national scheme, they have planners; one of our YDAN members in the national scheme trial has a local planner. How do these LACs differ from the planners that participants deal within a national scheme? If they do not differ why are we are being scared into thinking that by going with a national scheme we will lose the ability to deal with people locally? The people affected by this are already in vulnerable positions and to misrepresent information or instil fear is unacceptable.
5. **Who pays for this?** There have been nonstop reporting of Government debt and funding cuts over the past 18 months. Many people living with disabilities have major concerns about how a Government making cuts and complaining of debt will pay for the WA NDIS scheme. How is this debt and budget cuts going to affect the amount of funding available to participants? Why would the government want to sign up to a state scheme that will cost them so much more money than if they had signed up for the federal scheme? Why would they want to bare the full cost of administration and risk, which will total millions and millions of taxpayer dollars? The Government has been saying one thing and backing it up with their actions and now says another – how can we know what to trust?
6. **What is the flexibility of the scheme?** There has been confusion and uncertainty surrounding the portability of funding packages under a WA NDIS. If someone from Western Australia moves to a state with the national scheme, is there a risk they will lose funding? How easy it is for participants to move from one provider to another? Under a national scheme, participants are able to pick and choose who provides them services and change providers at short notice, because service providers are paid after the service has been provided, and participants do not have to have it recorded in their plan in advance who is providing their services. Will this be any different under WA NDIS?
7. **Where is the autonomy?** As you may know, autonomy is an important part of human existence; we in the disability community have had to fight hard for a long time to achieve this. There are concerns that this fight may get harder with this decision and how participants choose to manage their plan. If a participant chooses to not self-manage, they are only allowed to choose off a dictated, approved provider list. If a participant chooses to self-manage they are given a lower rate to pay for services then if they didn’t self-manage. How is this promoting choice and control? How is this promoting autonomy and freedom?

These concerns have arisen because officials have failed to provide transparency and information. As representatives of a community pushed aside and silenced for too long, YDAN demands to see these concerns addressed as soon as possible and certainly before the state election. We want to see a fair system that puts disabled people as the priority. We want to see “nothing about us, without us” acknowledged, respected and adhered to. This is not just a signed piece of paper to us, or a handshake and a plastered smile; this is our needs, our freedom, and our lives.

Sincerely,

**Youth Disability Advocacy Network Committee**