

States 'cost-shifting' on to NDIS

EXCLUSIVE

RICK MORTON
SOCIAL AFFAIRS WRITER

A West Australian man had his status as guardian of a severely disabled man threatened if he did not agree to state authorities' plans to privatise services as they prepared for a trial of the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

Former senior education bureaucrat Andrew Thompson, the legal guardian of Vaughan McNichol for 17 years, was given an ultimatum by the state's

Disability Services Commission that he submit to its privatisation plan and timeline or "have a decision-maker appointed for that person", according to emails seen by *The Australian*.

Western Australia, which originally refused to sign up to the NDIS when Julia Gillard was prime minister, has subsequently agreed to deliver a parallel scheme under the same entry criteria as the NDIS in return for access to funds under the national scheme.

Mr Thompson said it was being used as a smokescreen to

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erode service quality to disabled people in the state.

"We are witnessing the commodification of people with disabilities in the name of the NDIS," Mr Thompson told *The Australian* yesterday.

"My main concern is we have state governments in a headlong rush in the name of the NDIS to divest themselves of services and responsibilities and this is very likely to lead to a lesser value of life for people, particularly those who are in group homes."

His concerns have been aired in a climate of rising anxiety about the cost and implementation of the disability scheme, especially when it comes to the protection of people with disability against abuse and robbing.

In one case, Allen Dhirendra Prasad, 46, is facing four counts of aggravated sexual assault of a victim with a serious physical disability, after being accused of violently sodomising and assaulting the woman in her 60s. It is understood Mr Prasad arrived in Australia from Fiji in March, and quickly secured work as a private carer through a non-government NDIS service provider.

In the northwest Sydney suburb of Kenthurst, 66-year-old Ingrid Pickering feels she is moving further into an uncertain future for her son, Michael, 33, who has a moderate intellectual disability and severe autism.



CHRIS PAVLICH

Ingrid Pickering and her son Michael

Since the NSW government took the decision to sell all of its disability services, Mr Pickering has been rejected by five non-government organisations because, they said, his behaviour was too extreme and their staff could not cope. "I always thought the NDIS would enhance what we already had — I didn't realise with the enabling act it was going to undo everything we already had," Ms Pickering said.

The core issues, as with many affecting implementation of the \$22 billion disability scheme, go back to concessions made with various state governments during Ms Gillard's deal-making to get the scheme over the line.

The Australian recently reported an inside account of public servants involved in the negotiations who said NSW was so happy with its deal a senior bureaucrat in the state said: "It's

not often you get such a golden goose."

"This is all about cost-shifting," Ms Pickering said. "Julia Gillard wasn't actively privatisation but there was a federal election coming up and she wanted to get a deal done. All of the states' funding is now, essentially, going to the federal government. They don't care what happens next."

Cases of abuse, neglect and robbing in disability services have been unearthed in volume over the past decade but the sector has warned that dramatically increasing the bucket of funding via the NDIS will necessarily lead to inexperienced providers making the switch to disability.

The workforce must double by 2020.

Workers hired by people with disability under the scheme will not necessarily be required to have any formal qualifications, particularly for those who manage their own support funds, as this was one of the key design features of the NDIS.

"This is a trainwreck waiting to happen," Public Services Association NSW general secretary Stewart Little said.

Ms Pickering's husband died three months ago and she wonders what Michael's future looks like when his group home goes to a private provider later this year.

"I used to think we had his future sewn up, but that's not true at all," she said.