

Whaikaha's Purchasing Rules Changes are Disabling the Autistic Community

The changes to purchasing rules and EMS services, announced by Whaikaha early this week, are destroying the plans, goals and mental health of many members of the Autistic and wider Autism communities.

Autism NZ has reached out to both the Whaikaha staff and the Minister for Disability Issues to request urgent meetings, as the Autism community is arguably the most affected by the sweeping changes announced without warning or consultation.

We are deeply concerned for the welfare of the community, and particularly unpaid family carers to Autistic children and adults. The carer support system has already been under significant scrutiny, as the allocation of \$80 for a day of care was insufficient for families to truly access respite. The flexibility around spending at least gave families hope, knowing they could use this allocation towards equipment such as noise-cancelling headphones or an iPad, to give them an essential break within their home.

The nature of the changes clearly demonstrates a complete lack of understanding of the needs of the Autistic community, and the specific accommodations and supports Autistic people need to live a good life.

Many community members have come forward to share that they have been overwhelmed and feel unable to cope in light of the announcements. The insinuation that a carer having a therapeutic massage is wasting public funds has instilled guilt and shame in an already vulnerable population. Studies have found that the unpaid labour of family caregivers is worth in excess of ten billion dollars per annum - more than 672 million hours of care every year.

When these carers burn out, who do we turn to? What kind of public investment must then be made to support children and adults with nowhere else to turn?

The National Party says they have a plan to rebuild the economy, and give people reasons to stay in New Zealand. But people cannot live where they cannot cope. People cannot thrive without access to fundamental supports.

We have many families and Autistic adults willing to speak to the media about how these changes will affect them. Dane Dougan, Autism NZ's CE, is also more than willing to engage with media, and to continue to exert pressure to see a resolution for the community.

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