Inclusive Rainbow Voices' Statement to the Senate Legislative Committee on the NDIS reforms

Good morning. My name is Dr Jess Cadwallader, and I'm the CEO of Inclusive Rainbow Voices. IRV is a national representative organisation of and for LGBTIQA+ people with disability. We welcome the opportunity to share with you the experiences of LGBTIQA+ people with disability as they relate to the NDIS reforms currently before the committee. We join the chorus of experts, both of lived experience and institutional expertise, calling for this bill to be scrapped, even with the amendments made. It will have serious, potentially fatal impacts on people with disability, and we know from experience and from design, that such impacts are exacerbated when it comes to intersectional minorities like LGBTQIA+ people with disability.

We at IRV regularly hear stories about the impact that the NDIS has had on the lives of LGBTIQA+ people with disability, and more recently, about the impacts that slashing community participation funding will have for our community. This story is derived from those stories, but isn't any one individual's story.

Chris is a gay man with disability who spent most of his life supported by parents and family members. He lived at home, and concealed his identity from his conservative ageing parents. This was the only safe way to exist, as without his family's support, he knew his life could be at risk. Once a month, a service picked him up in a minivan and took him along with a group of other people with disability to go bowling in the middle of the day when no one else was at the bowling alley. This was deemed to be his 'connection with community,' despite his longing to join the local gay community.

When Chris became an NDIS participant, though, everything changed. He had access to enough support to be able to move out of the family home and into a share house, with housemates that he chose partly for their LGBTIQA+ friendliness. He ventured out, with support he chose, again for their LGBTIQA+ friendliness, to connect with the community he'd longed to be part of for so long: the local gay community. With his community's

support, he could name and express his identity for the first time out loud, connect with other gay men, attend drag bingo, and began to live his life as he had dreamed.

But Chris, along with many others like him, is anxious that with these reforms, he will be forced back into the closet – and back into bowling with other people with disability as his only access to community. He may be forced back into the family home due to a lack of adequate supports – but he doesn't know if his homophobic family will even provide that support. The last plan review he had moved a significant proportion of everyday supports for things like going shopping into 'SCCP,' now subject to this across-the-board cut.

We don't have great data on how many people with disability are LGBTIQA+. The NDIS literally doesn't record this kind of data, reflecting the ongoing failures of the NDIA to support LGBTIQA+ people with disability despite many years of advocacy. The Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers data from the ABS appears on the surface to say that only 4.9% of people with disability identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual, but when we delve into the data, this likely reflects the historical and ongoing barriers and risks experienced by older people with disability in being safe disclosing their sexual orientation. For the age cohort 15-34 years, the percentage increases to 18.5%, suggesting that people with disability are far more likely to be LGBQ than the rest of the community. This is before we factor in trans and gender diverse people, asexual people, or people with innate variations of sexual characteristics, all key parts of the community.

As the proposed reforms get their legs, this could mean that as many as 1 in 5 people with disability could have their ability to express their identity heavily circumscribed. With community participation becoming block funded and likely delivered by disability service providers who have a significant way to go in understanding their obligations to support the human rights of *all* people with disability, the impacts could be significant.

Already, evidence suggests that LGBTIQA+ people with disability experience significantly higher rates of isolation, homelessness, mental distress and violence against us than either LGBTIQA+ people or cishet people with disability. The research report *Violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation of LGBTQA+ people with disability* commissioned by the Disability Royal Commission highlights that 39.8% of LGBTIQA+ young people with disability had attempted suicide at some point, compared with 15.7% of LGBTIQA+ young people without disability. And for LGBTIQA+ people with disability, 43.4% had ever attempted suicide, compared with just 3.2% of the general Australian population.

These reforms, whether they impact a given person in terms of eligibility or funding, are likely to force LGBTIQA+ people with disability back into the closet, and into situations that continue to put us at risk. It will shift costs predominantly to state-and-territory provided crisis services such as mental health services, domestic and family violence services, child protection services, or homelessness services. It will certainly mean that our right to enjoy community participation on an equal basis with others will be undermined, and this will have consequences for our community's mental health.

The NDIS is a key element of Australia's attempts to realise the human rights of people with disability, recognised internationally. But the proposed reforms, each in their own way, undermine its capacity to do that. LGBTIQA+ people with disability deserve to live our lives and express who we are without fear. People like Chris don't deserve to live from crisis to crisis, at risk of serious harm or death, and forced to conceal themselves even from their own community. The impact of these reforms will be devastating for some of the most marginalised people in our community, and we reiterate our call that they should be scrapped.