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PM AND PREMIERS MUST OVERHAUL MENTAL HEALTH AND DISABILITY SYSTEM

Funding for people with disabilities and mental health problems in Australia must be fundamentally overhauled according to a new report released today.

The Report for the Melbourne-based think tank, the Institute of Public Affairs calls for:

- funding for support services to be paid direct to individuals and families through consumer intermediaries or brokers
- the Federal Government and State Governments to pool their funding to overcome federal/state disputes about for services
- the introduction of new accountability measures to ensure clients and the community receive value-for-money.

The Report *The Empowerment Agenda: Civil Society and Markets in Disability and Mental Health* was written by Vern Hughes, the Executive Director of Social Enterprise Partnerships, a community-based welfare organisation working with government, business, and families.

'Mental health and disability issues must be on the national agenda, and they must be coordinated between the federal and state governments.

'Currently people with a disability or mental health problems face a confusing maze of services, agencies and bureaucratic regulation.

'The only way to get a real improvement in the quality of services for some of the most disadvantaged in society is by giving them, and their families real power over the funding they receive. Funding should go to individuals not bureaucracies,' said Mr Hughes.

The lives of nearly four million Australians are affected in some way by a physical impairment or disability, while in any one year nearly 18% of adults will experience mental health problems. Over 200,000 people are carers for those with a disability, with those carers typically being parents and family members.

The Report also argues that the process of deinstitutionalisation of those with mental illness has not be adequately supported by either federal or state governments, with the burden of care falling upon communities that have been unable to handle the responsibility.

For further information and comment:

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The Report *The Empowerment Agenda: Civil Society and Markets in Disability and Mental Health* is available on the IPA website at www.ipa.org.au.