

Mr Bruce Phillip Bonyhady AM
Citation for the Award of Degree of Doctor of Laws *Honoris Causa*

When a child is born its parents begin the long process of marking and celebrating growth against a widely accepted set of developmental milestones. These milestones, however, elude some children: their development stalls, or it veers off in a bewildering spiral of disability, and parents are left searching for answers, grasping for solutions to a perplexing set of incomplete questions. In confronting developmental delay each family will typically grieve and rage at the lottery that has thrown them this challenge. How they succeed in managing their future will be heavily influenced by their reserves of personal resilience, family support and access to financial resources.

With extensive personal experience of negotiating disability services on behalf of two of his sons, and as Chairman of Yooralla, Bruce Bonyhady's sense of moral justice was offended by the 'deeply unfair' labyrinth of systems in which successful outcomes for children with developmental disabilities depended largely on their postcode or family's financial standing. His personal crusade to remedy inequity caused by the disarray of social security systems, private medical, health, public liability and third party car insurance and worker's compensation schemes across Australia, has resulted in the creation of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

Bruce Bonyhady took early retirement from a senior executive career to apply his expertise in funds management, insurance, property management and economics, together with his extensive experience of non-executive leadership in disability advocacy and philanthropy, to solve this problem.

A series of well-placed signposts have marked the progress of Bruce Bonyhady's carefully moderated rebellion: the 'light-bulb moment' when, in conversation with then Deputy Prime Minister, Brian Howe, they decided to approach the issue not as a welfare problem but as an insurance risk; acceptance at the 2020 Summit of the first proposal for national disability insurance as one of the Summit's Big Ideas; and the passage, in early 2013, of the National Disability Insurance Scheme Bill 2012, accompanied by heartfelt speeches, some politician's tears, and a brief respite from the highly combative atmosphere of the 43rd Parliament of Australia.

This groundbreaking legislation was the culmination of many years of tireless work, strategic lobbying and background planning by Bruce Bonyhady. The NDIS, however, is only half the story.

Many years of poor funding and lack of focus have stifled developmental medicine research. Making a real difference to the lives of people with disabilities will need the kinds of advancements in knowledge that are created through a focused research program that is aligned with current practice. In recognising this Bruce Bonyhady has worked simultaneously to create a fertile environment for research into developmental medicine. His work as Inaugural Chairman of the Advisory Panel to the Centre for Development Disability Research at the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne has been instrumental in the establishment of two named University of

Melbourne Chairs in the area of Developmental Medicine (the Apex Foundation for Research into Intellectual Disability Chair in Developmental Medicine and the Lorenzo and Pamela Galli Chair in Developmental Medicine), the development of numerous partnerships with funders and government and the foundation of a Centre for Research Excellence in Cerebral Palsy.

As the development of individuals is measured in milestones, so is the culture of our society. The introduction of the NDIS is being widely hailed as a milestone in Australia's cultural history on a par with the introduction of universal health insurance in the 1970s, compulsory superannuation in the 1990s and the goods and services tax that came into operation early this century. The real promise of this scheme is more than financial: it has the potential to generate cultural change, to alter disability in the public psyche through a subtle shift in power as families and individuals are supported to make their own choices in accessing assistance. The power to act from a position of strength, to make decisions that don't depend on another's charity, is transformative. Professor Emeritus Sir Gustav Nossal, who has sat with Bruce Bonyhady at numerous board tables, describes him as selfless and strategic: 'a modest man with original thoughts and ambitious plans'. Bruce Bonyhady's comprehensive vision, and quiet, methodological approach has secured bi-partisan support for the NDIS and financial investment in research that will transform the future for individuals and families living with disability.

October 2013