

# Supporting LACs to be LACs

**February 2021**

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## Executive summary

Local Area Coordination<sup>1</sup> is a strengths-based and place-based approach, much lauded for its ability to leverage community resources and to broaden transformation through local collaborations. Initiated in rural Western Australia in the late 1980s to support people with disability to remain in the families and communities, Local Area Coordination was extended to metropolitan areas of WA, to other states and territories (with variations), to New Zealand, England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales and some provinces in Canada.

All Local Area Coordination schemes were based on the WA model and evaluations have shown that where fully implemented, there has been strong evidence of a range of consistent and positive outcomes for individuals and families.<sup>2</sup> However, without principled leadership at every level including integrity to scheme design, these outcomes have been less predictable.<sup>3</sup>

It is the view of Council that as the NDIS pivots in its post transition phase, the NDIA must look to the Local Area Coordination function for more than assisting participants to implement their plans. Framed correctly, the Local Area Coordination function can be pivotal to meeting legislative objectives related to supporting social and economic participation and facilitating greater community inclusion, neither of which cannot be achieved without building community capability. It can also assist in mitigating the risk of the NDIS becoming a funding source for a failed community response.

Year by year, plan budgets have increased but many participants remain isolated, vulnerable and cut off from the community. NDIA talk of building informal support is not backed up by a function that allows the time and requires the skill to build informal support and community inclusion, so pivotal for quality of life and Scheme sustainability. Access to mainstream and community services remains a challenge for participants with complex needs and the territorial battles of governments seeking to minimise potential financial exposure by strictly adhering to the interface principles inhibits the crafting of solutions at the local level. This results in a personal cost for the participant, a loss of trust between organisations and a risk that the NDIA will bear the financial cost of the absence of integrated options in community. The NDIS becomes the end in itself rather than a means to the end of a good life.

In a reconfigured system, people with disability should be able to expect that their challenges will be addressed via trusted networks between organisations in their community; networks that share information and resources, are experienced in collaborating to solve problems from the perspective of the individual and have a desire for shared outcomes.

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<sup>1</sup> The paper will use the full name of Local Area Coordination when discussing features of the program and the acronym LAC to refer to staff i.e. Local Area Coordinators

<sup>2</sup> Broad, R., (2012) Local Area Coordination, from service users to citizens, Centre for Welfare Reform, Accessed at <https://www.centreforwelfarereform.org/uploads/attachment/340/local-area-coordination.pdf> 23 November 2020 p49

<sup>3</sup> Broad, R., (2012) op cit. p52

The approach to Local Area Coordination developed in this paper provides an opportunity for the NDIA to take a leadership role in the solution, by building trust at the local level, contributing to networks committed to shared outcomes for people with disability and mitigating the risk of pressure on the NDIS to fill the gap of community failure. It is also the opportunity to strengthen the informal support of participants and assist them to develop sustainable non-service solutions.<sup>4</sup>

It is therefore the view of Council that the Local Area Coordination function should now be clearly articulated in Agency policy and safeguarded with an identified vision, charter and principles that are consistent with the NDIS Act, and that embed the function as relational, in local communities and resourced primarily to support and connect people.

Overseas experience indicates that a reconfigured functions based on the four key features below will lead to new support approaches characterised by meaningful relationships that complement or substitute for paid supports. The features are:

- a facilitator of change at an individual and community level
- aiming to empower people with disability to determine their own goals, make their own decisions, plan for their safety and work towards achieving what is important for them
- staffed by people who work alongside a person with disability, family member or carer to help them plan for the future and link them to whatever community organisations, services or businesses in their local community will assist them achieve their goals and
- prioritising a community engagement component involving networking, partnerships and community development activities, to support organisations and communities to become more welcoming and inclusive of people with disability and to create new opportunities and link individuals to community initiatives.

The reconfigured Local Area Coordination function should combine a number of usually separate roles into one outwardly looking role, represented through a key person. It should also redefine the relationship between individuals and those offering support, with individuals, families and communities seen in the light of their capacities, talents, competencies, possibilities, visions, values, and hopes. LACs must be given the time and the skills to help individuals find practical, non-service solutions.

LACs must also be given the mandate, time and skills to build the capacity of communities to welcome and actively include people with disability. Raising awareness, partnering and building the capacity of organisations and engaging in community development projects designed to have broader social impact should be core responsibilities of the LAC function.

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<sup>4</sup> Non-service solutions are practical ways to meet a need without the use of disability services. For example, arranging for the participant to get a lift to an activity with a community member rather than travel with a support worker or a disability taxi. Reasonable and necessary support may be used to facilitate a non-service solution. For example, for a participant who is isolated, a non-service solution might involve the development of a roster of individuals/'friends' to come for dinner a couple of evenings per week. A support worker may assist the participant to prepare the meal that provides the focus of the dinner invitation and an evening of companionship with an unpaid person.

The target group of Local Area Coordination should be any person who views themselves as having a disability - providing light touch information, advice or connection to local resources while engaging in a longer-term relationship with 50-65 NDIS participants (including those in the intensive and super intensive streams). The paper identifies different ways of working with individuals and with communities and cautions that a focus on case load related to working with individuals captures just one part of the role and may obscure the transformative nature of the approach that lies in its ability to develop and harness the community to support people with disability.

The paper outlines the place of Local Area Coordination in the NDIS ecosystem, clearly differentiating the role from that of Support Coordination with the latter conceptualised as an inward-looking role for participants who need significant <sup>5</sup> assistance to use their plan to achieve their goals as well as participants with multi system challenges and those with complex informal supports. If they choose, these participants can also use their Support Coordinator to assist them to build informal support, enhance their decision-making skills and supports, and develop sustainable non-service solutions. It is anticipated however that the vast majority of Support Coordinators will refer participants to their local LAC for assistance in these areas.

In determining the approach to commissioning Local Area Coordination services, the paper proposes that the Agency give weight to key factors seen as best able to deliver the Local Area Coordination Charter on the ground. These factors include the extent to which the approach creates a national Local Area Coordination sector dedicated to community inclusion outcomes for people with disability and distinct from the disability services industry, strengthens community capacity to actively include people with disability, embeds people with disability in their community, enables participants to choose their Local Area Coordination provider and LAC, ensures organisations delivering Local Area Coordination services have a range of requirements, avoids conflict of interest and is feasible for the NDIA.

Council sees value in the use of hub and spoke and partnership models as approaches that enable participants to select their Local Area Coordination provider and LAC while at the same time ensure consistency, quality and viability for providers. The paper outlines ways in which the use of a lead agency could assume responsibility for quality and consistency, ensure coverage, develop the local market, work with the NDIA to lead systemic interface work within their region and be responsible for contractual accountability to the NDIA.

The paper outlines key features of a workforce strategy, challenges to manage in the implementation of the Local Area Coordination function and proposes that the Agency pilot and use an action research evaluation approach to assess the impact of different approaches and thereby gain a more granular understanding of reasonable work load and broader performance expectations.

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<sup>5</sup> Framed according to transparent criteria

## Recommendations

Council recommends that in reconfiguring the Local Area Coordination function, the NDIA:

1. Differentiates and safeguards the Local Area Coordination function from other parts of the NDIS with its own:
  - a. vision: *All people with disability live in welcoming communities that respect their inherent dignity and individual autonomy, facilitate their full and effective participation and inclusion and provide friendship and mutual support for everyone, including people with disability, their families and carers.*
  - b. charter: *To develop partnership with individuals and families as they build and pursue their goals and dreams for a good life and with local communities to strengthen their capacity to include people with disability as valued citizens.*
  - c. principles as outlined in this paper.
  
2. Characterises the design of Local Area Coordination as:
  - a. a facilitator of change at an individual and community level
  - b. aiming to empower people with disability to determine their own goals, make their own decisions and work towards achieving what is important for them
  - c. staffed by people who work alongside a person with disability, family member or carer to help them plan for the future and link them to whatever community organisations, services or businesses in their local community will assist them achieve their goals.
  - d. prioritising a community engagement component involving networking, partnerships and community development activities, to support organisations and communities to become more inclusive of people with disability to create new opportunities and link individuals to community initiatives
  - e. supporting the development of support approaches characterised by meaningful community relationships, that can complement or substitute for paid supports.
  
3. That the role of Local Area Coordination includes:
  - a. using a strengths-based approach to walk alongside individuals to strengthen their informal supports, belonging and resilience through natural, sustainable, non-service solutions and assist participants to connect to paid support and prepare for plan review.
  - b. using a planned and strategic approach to build the capacity of communities to actively include people with disability including
    - i. raising awareness and understanding of disability in community organisations, mainstream services and businesses
    - ii. partnering with individual organisations to assist them to become more inclusive
    - iii. building the capacity of individual organisations to become more inclusive on an ongoing basis and

- iv. engaging in larger community development projects designed to have a broader social impact.
- 4. That the target group for Local Area Coordination is people who identify as having a disability including non-participants and all participants.
- 5. That in determining the commissioning approach for Local Area Coordination services, the Agency give consideration to the extent to which the approach:
  - a. creates a national Local Area Coordination sector, dedicated to community inclusion outcomes for people with disability and distinct from the disability services industry
  - b. strengthens community capacity to actively include people with disability
  - c. embeds people with disability in community
  - d. enables participants to choose their Local Area Coordination provider and LAC
  - e. ensures organisations delivering Local Area Coordination services:
    - i. have an existing presence in the area
    - ii. have access to a diverse range of knowledge, skills and experience in relation to disability type, life stage and cultural understandings
    - iii. employ an identified proportion of people with disability and lived experience of disability at all levels of the organisation
    - iv. demonstrate success in developing collaborative community-based initiatives
    - v. contribute additional opportunities such as networks, staff with existing skills, communities of practice etc.
  - f. incentivises development and maintenance of community networks and links
  - g. avoids conflict of interest
  - h. is feasible for the NDIA.
- 6. That the workforce strategy focuses on:
  - a. ensuring the employment of people with disability
  - b. community development and community building
  - c. skills to develop informal support, support decision-making and assist participants to plan for their safety
  - d. specialisation within teams by disability type, life stage and cultural sensitivity and by individual and community focus.
- 7. That the NDIA trial the approaches proposed in this advice in at least one metropolitan, one regional and one rural and remote area exploring different approaches to commissioning and staffing ratios, using independent action research to assess the impact of different approaches.

## Introduction

Local Area Coordination<sup>6</sup> emerged in Western Australia in the late 1980s to prevent individuals with disability being moved to institutional care in Perth for want of service support. Tales tell of LACs with brokerage dollars in their pockets, travelling to people with disability in rural and remote areas with a 'do what it takes approach' to enable them to remain in their families and communities. Flexibility and inclusion were the hall mark of their success with a focus on empowerment and the building of community and social capital.

Much evaluated and lauded for its strengths-based and place-based approach, its ability to leverage community resources and to broaden transformation through local collaborations, Local Area Coordination was extended to metropolitan areas of WA, to other States and Territories, to New Zealand, England, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales and some provinces in Canada. Local Area Coordination schemes were broadly based on the WA model and evaluations have shown that where fully implemented, there has been strong evidence of a range of consistent and positive outcomes for individuals and families.<sup>7</sup> However, without principled leadership at every level including integrity to scheme design, these outcomes have been less predictable.<sup>8</sup> A number of different LAC models were adopted during the rollout of the NDIS based on existing constraints and conditions in the States and Territories and the need for Local Area Coordination partners to take on a variety of Scheme roles.

It is the view of Council that as the NDIS pivots in its post transition phase, the NDIA must look to the Local Area Coordination function for more than assisting participants to implement their plans. . Framed correctly, the Local Area Coordination function can be pivotal to meeting legislative objectives related to supporting social and economic participation and facilitating greater community inclusion, neither of which cannot be achieved without building community capability. It can also assist in mitigating the risk of the NDIS becoming a funding source for a failed community response.

Since its inception, reasonable and necessary support in plans has grown year by year. Many people with disability however remain vulnerable and isolated.

The NDIA highlights the importance of building informal support and connecting participants to mainstream and community services but has given no existing function the dedicated time, resourcing, accountability and competence requirement to undertake the time consuming and skilled endeavour of helping people to have real friendships and be genuinely included in their communities.

The NDIA currently seeks to ensure that mainstream and community services 'do their bit' (including assuming responsibilities held by disability departments pre-NDIS). However, access to mainstream services can be problematic, especially for participants who are more

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<sup>6</sup> The paper will use the full name of Local Area Coordination when discussing features of the function and the acronym LAC to refer to staff i.e., Local Area Coordinators

<sup>7</sup> Broad, R., (2012) op cit. p49

<sup>8</sup> Broad, R., (2012) op cit. p52



complex, and territorial battles of government increase the rigidity of the response and inhibit the crafting of solutions from the perspective of the participant at the local level. This results in a personal cost for the participant, a loss of trust between organisations and a risk that the NDIA will bear the financial cost of the absence of options in community. The NDIS becomes the end in itself rather than a means to the end of a good life.

In a reconfigured system, people with disability should be able to expect that their challenges will be addressed via trusted networks between organisations in their community; networks that share information and resources, are experienced in collaborating to solve problems from the perspective of the individual and have a desire for shared outcomes.

The absence of trusted collaboration leaves participants bearing the brunt of challenges in finding the 'right' balance between informal, mainstream, community and NDIS support. This is a difficult and 'wicked'<sup>9</sup> problem that bleeds into jurisdictional, organisational, functional and professional boundaries. The problem developed and persists because the NDIA and mainstream service systems analyse issues from their own perspective and no-one crafts responses from the perspective of the individual with disability. Solving this problem will not be easy because it is beyond the capacity of any one agency or jurisdiction and relies on systemic change, not short-term fixes.

The approach to Local Area Coordination developed in this paper provides an opportunity for the NDIA to take a leadership role in the solution, by building trust at the local level, contributing to networks committed to shared outcomes for people with disability and mitigating the risk of pressure on the NDIS to fill the gap of community failure.

Given the significant drift in function during roll out as a result of imperatives outside the control of the NDIA, Council is of the view that the Local Area Coordination function should now be clearly articulated in Agency policy, safeguarded with an identified vision, charter and principles<sup>10</sup> that differentiate it as embedded in local communities, relational and resourced to support and connect people.

Council proposes Local Area Coordination as an outward looking participant function supporting participants and simultaneously building relationships and subsequently trust, with mainstream and community services to facilitate shifts in priorities at the local level. The desired outcome would be that mainstream and community providers feel proud of including NDIS participants and support that might not have been prioritised in the past, is delivered from a place of mutual respect between workers and organisations. That mutual trust is based on understanding and empathising with the perspective of others, from a commitment to resolve conflict and from a willingness to develop interdependencies. Genuine collaboration would result in the NDIS being part of the local ecosystem with a high degree of trust at the interface and the emergence of new and truly innovative non-service solutions<sup>11</sup> that align the interests of the NDIA with the interests of participants.

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<sup>9</sup> Williams, P., (2002) The Competent Boundary Spanner, *Public Administration*, v80, No 1, p103-124

<sup>10</sup> Similar to those in the draft, undated NDIS Local Area Coordination Practice Guide

<sup>11</sup> Non-service solutions are practical ways to meet a need without the use of disability services. For example, arranging for the participant to get a lift to an activity with a community member rather than travel with a support worker or a disability taxi. Reasonable and necessary support may be used to

The paper proposes a vision and charter for a Local Area Coordination function that is available for non-participants and all participants, and outlines its design, role and place in the NDIA ecosystem. The paper outlines key directions for a workforce strategy and principles to be used to test approaches to commissioning most likely to deliver on the Local Area Coordination Charter on the ground.

## Vision and charter

The reconfigured Local Area Coordination in the NDIS should be give voice to guiding principles of the UNCRPD and the NDIS Act and build on the WA model. Council proposes that the Local Area Coordination function have a vision that:

*All people with disability live in welcoming communities that respect their inherent dignity and individual autonomy, facilitate their full and effective participation and inclusion and provide friendship and mutual support for everyone, including people with disability, their families and carers.*

Local Area Coordination should also have its own charter, to differentiate it as a feature of the civil society sector in Australia and separate from the disability service industry. The dual focus on the WA Local Area Coordination charter should be embraced, namely:

*To develop partnership with individuals and families as they build and pursue their goals and dreams for a good life and with local communities to strengthen their capacity to include people with disability as valued citizens.*

Using WA principles as its foundation, the principles underpinning reconfigured Local Area Coordination function should be:

- Citizenship: People with disability have equality of opportunity as well as rights and responsibilities to contribute to the economic and social life of the community.
- Self-determination: People with disability and their families are in the best position to determine their own needs, goals and to plan for the future.
- Choice and control: The lives of people with disability and their families are enhanced when they can determine their preferred support and services and control required resources to the extent that they desire.
- Inclusion: Communities are enriched by the inclusion and participation of people with disability and are the most important way of providing friendship, support and a meaningful life for people with disability, their families and carers.
- Contribution: People with disability have a life-long capacity for learning, development and contribution.
- Natural authority: People with disability and their families have natural authority and are best placed to be the most powerful and enduring leaders, decision-makers and

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facilitate a non-service solution. For example, for a participant who is isolated, a non-service solution might involve the development of a roster of individuals/'friends' to come for dinner a couple of evenings per week. A support worker may assist the participant to prepare the meal that provides the focus of the dinner invitation and an evening of companionship with an unpaid person.

advocates.

- Relationships: Families, friends and personal networks are the foundations of a rich and valued life in the community.
- Information: Access to timely and accurate information enables people to make appropriate decisions and to have greater personal choice and control in their lives.
- Complementary nature of services: Government and community agencies complement and support the primary role of families, carers and communities in achieving a good life for people with disability.
- Working together: Partnerships between individuals, families and carers, communities, governments, service providers and the business sector are vital in meeting the needs of people with disability.

## Target group

### Background

Local Area Coordination programs in WA, NSW, New Zealand, England and Wales have had no formal eligibility criteria (other than the person identifies as having a disability), no formal assessments at program entry, and no limits on the number of times a person may seek support from their LAC.

The programs often differentiates the level of engagement with people as:

- Level 1 involves for 'light touch' information, advice or connections to local resources
- Level 2 involves a longer-term relationship with engagement with 50–65 people per Local Area Coordinator <sup>12</sup>
- Community Level support is offered to existing and nascent community organisations.<sup>13</sup>

### Council position

Currently in the NDIS, considerations in relation to target group differentiate between non-participants, participants in the general and supported streams and participants in the intensive and super intensive stream. In a reconfigured state, there is value in seeing the LAC role as available to all people with disability on the basis that:

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<sup>12</sup> Bartnik, E., and Chalmers, R, 'It's more than the money: Local Area Coordination supporting people with disabilities', in Hunter, S and Ritchie, P., (2007) Changing relationships in the provision of social care Accessed at

[https://books.google.com.au/books?hl=en&lr=&id=Dfh8PIarEEgC&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&dq=Co-production+and+personalisation+in+social+care:+Changing+relationships+in+the+provision+of+social+care&ots=fwji-e0cT3&sig=iGVaF\\_J\\_rqzihwOlrtMmXTOegsM#v=onepage&q=Co-production%20and%20personalisation%20in%20social%20care%3A%20Changing%20relationships%20in%20the%20provision%20of%20social%20care&f=false](https://books.google.com.au/books?hl=en&lr=&id=Dfh8PIarEEgC&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&dq=Co-production+and+personalisation+in+social+care:+Changing+relationships+in+the+provision+of+social+care&ots=fwji-e0cT3&sig=iGVaF_J_rqzihwOlrtMmXTOegsM#v=onepage&q=Co-production%20and%20personalisation%20in%20social%20care%3A%20Changing%20relationships%20in%20the%20provision%20of%20social%20care&f=false) 14 January 2021

Bartnik, E (2013), The Local Area Coordination Programme: successful transitions in practice. NDA Annual Conference Dublin, Nov 2013.

Accessed [http://nda.ie/ndasitefiles/EddieBartnik\\_presentation.Pdf](http://nda.ie/ndasitefiles/EddieBartnik_presentation.Pdf). 14 January 2021

<sup>13</sup> Lundt, N. (2020) p4

- non-participants are often very vulnerable individuals at risk of falling through the gaps because they do not meet eligibility criteria of any service system. The diminished role of State and Territory Governments has led to a loss of capacity of some mainstream agencies that previously partnered with state disability services to respond to this group. Failure to meet their needs through the Local Area Coordination risks increased escalation of need and a demand for Scheme entry.
- participants in the intensive and super intensive streams be included on the basis they tend to be trapped in multiple service systems that create their own dependencies and remove the person from family and community. These individuals desperately need the relationships of ordinary community life to rebuild their capacity and citizenship.
- participants in the general and supported streams who are competent in multiple domains of life but whose lives are depleted of relationships, belonging, opportunities to learn new things and contribute.

Council supports the indicative caseload of 50-65 as documented in the literature but cautions that a focus on case load related to working with individuals captures just one part of the role and may obscure the transformative nature of the approach that lies in its ability to develop and harness the community to support people with disability. The approach proposed by Council will ultimately increase community inclusion and reduce their dependence on the disability service system and the NDIS.

Council's preferred approach to commissioning would require organisations to demonstrate an enduring presence in an area so that the NDIA purchases access to the organisation's networks, not just their knowledge and skill. Factors that impact on workload include:

- its capacity building nature and the commitment to build independence, not dependence, means that the intensity of involvement with any one participant will diminish over time.
- LAC work to facilitate relationships and membership of community for one participant will have flow on effects for other participants for whom the pathway to community inclusion will take less intentional effort.
- LACs will work with many participants in community building projects to overcome barriers and enhance the welcoming nature of community. These initiatives will achieve two outcomes – they will build the welcoming nature of community AND simultaneously build the capacity of participants whose self-esteem, confidence and relationships will grow through valued community engagement.

All these factors need to be taken into account in determining workload and prioritisation of responsibilities and Council is keen to engage further with the Agency to progress these matters.

It is the view of Council that the proposed LAC approach offers the NDIA far more than Scheme administration and hence consideration should be given its increased costs being seen as participant support rather than just Scheme administration. As with all major

projects, the LAC approach will require its own performance reporting framework that captures its impact on individuals and on communities.

## Design

### Background

The NDIS was designed to transform the disability service system from a welfare model to an insurance model, providing individuals with choice and control and assisting them to build their capacities for social and economic participation and inclusion.

The hallmark of the Local Area Coordination program is also one of transformation, combining a range of traditionally separate roles into one outwardly looking role, represented through a key person who is embedded in their local community. The Local Area Coordination approach achieves its aims by a distinct:

- culture that:
  - focuses on strengths, natural solutions, building capacity and resilience
  - values the pivotal nature of relationships
  - starts conversations and joint work focused on a good life, imagining better
  - works collaboratively alongside individuals, families and communities
  - strives for inclusive solutions
  - takes the time required but avoiding dependency.
- small geographical area of 8-12,000 population in which the LAC has existing networks across service systems, business and community groups
- focus on place-based solutions that:
  - build on the assets and contributions of people and the community and leverages contributions from other service systems
  - facilitate introductions for voluntary relationships, not referrals and
  - focus on natural, sustainable non-service solutions that build resilience rather than a temporary 'fix'
  - enable innovation, entrepreneurship and peer led initiatives.

### Council position

To date, the transformative role of the NDIS has mainly been implemented via choice and control over funded disability supports. Funded disability support alone however will not enable the Scheme to meet its reform objectives. While services provide critical support,

they cannot deliver the genuine community connections or sense of belonging that people are seeking and they cannot deliver the link between the Scheme and other government and community responsibilities. Without the structural means to connect communities and create inclusion, people are forced to rely on funded services for their life chances.

The Local Area Coordination function is the opportunity to provide the structural means to connect communities and create inclusion. It is the means to strengthen the informal support of participants and assist them to develop sustainable non-service solutions, thereby reducing their long term need for care and support. The promise of transformation is more likely to be realised if, building on the positively evaluated Local Area Coordination approach of Ability Links NSW,<sup>14</sup> the design of the NDIS Local Area Coordination is characterised as:

- a facilitator of change at an individual and community level.
- aiming to empower people with disability to determine their own goals, make their own decisions, plan for their safety and work towards achieving what is important for them.
- staffed by people who work alongside a person with disability, family member or carer to help them plan for the future and link them to whatever community organisations, services or businesses in their local community will assist them achieve their goals.
- prioritising a community engagement component involving networking, partnerships and community development activities – to support organisations and communities to become more welcoming and inclusive of people with disability and to create new opportunities and link individuals to community initiatives.

These four design features will lead to new support approaches that are characterised by meaningful community relationships, that can complement or substitute for paid supports.

## Local Area Coordination in the NDIS ecosystem

### Background

Local Area Coordination is characterised as a strengths-based and place-based approach. As a strengths-based approach, Local Area Coordination re-defines the relationship between individuals and those offering support, with individuals, families and communities 'seen in the light of their capacities, talents, competencies, possibilities, visions, values, and hopes'.<sup>15</sup> Building quality relationships is central to the well documented<sup>16</sup> success in delivering outcomes based on an individuals' strengths and assets.

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<sup>14</sup> Urbis, (2016) Ability Links NSW Final evaluation report, prepared for the NSW Department of Family and Community Services, Accessed at <https://urbis.com.au/app/uploads/2017/01/2016-Evaluation-Report.pdf> 23 November 2020, p9

<sup>15</sup> Lunt, N., (2020) op cit. p5

<sup>16</sup> Lunt, N., (2020) op cit, p10

As a place-based approach, Local Area Coordination addresses challenges of individuals and families at a local level, involving a focus on community building to arrive at stronger and better-resourced communities,<sup>17</sup> with supportive relationships as key to improved health and wellbeing, contribution and confidence. At the system level, Local Area Coordination targets prevention, the building of social capital, enhanced support and services, consolidated partnerships and joint working between and across statutory and non-statutory organisations.<sup>18</sup>

The role in working with communities is often less clear than the role in working with individuals and families. The evaluation of Ability Links NSW documents the processes and outcomes associated with working with the community to support greater inclusion of people with disability describing a continuum of activities from:

- raising awareness and understanding of disability in community organisations, mainstream services and businesses
- partnering with individual organisations to assist them to become more inclusive
- building the capacity of individual organisations to become more inclusive on an ongoing basis and
- engaging in larger community development projects designed to have a broader social impact.

The evaluation noted that small practical steps in working with the community can lead to significant change, but that larger, community development projects are also important. Most reported community outcomes related to increased awareness of disability and the adoption of more inclusive organisational practices and policies.<sup>19</sup> However the evaluation noted the need for a more planned and strategic approach to community engagement to overcome persistent attitudinal and systemic barriers to inclusion, rather than the somewhat ad hoc or individualised approach that existed at the time of the evaluation.

Interestingly, a report into progress on Local Area Coordination in England and Wales<sup>20</sup> identifies limits of the role of the LAC, many of which were not respected in the Local Area Coordination model in the NDIS. The limits include:

- The LAC does not complete statutory health or adult social care assessments. Instead, they offer advice and support to individuals to help them understand their strengths, aspirations, needs and possible solutions. This can help people be in greater control should they need an assessment.

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<sup>17</sup> Lunt, N., (2020) op cit, p6

<sup>18</sup> Glasby, J., Miller, R., & Lynch, J. (2013). 'Turning the welfare state upside down?' Developing a new adult social care offer. Policy Paper 15, Health Services Management Centre, University of Birmingham. Reported in Lunt p6.

<sup>19</sup> Urbis (2016), piii

<sup>20</sup> Broad, R., (2015) op cit.

- There is no referral system. It is available without the need to satisfy any eligibility criteria based on need or problems. People can connect in a variety of ways, for example: direct contact in the community, introductions by friends, families, carers, neighbours, GP, social workers, services, or by phone or email.
- The LAC does not work in a way that creates caseloads, waiting lists or allow dependency to develop.
- It is not a time limited ‘fly in, fix and fly out’ service. LACs get to know people on a person-by-person basis. They do not have a pre-determined time scale or set of responses and interventions. Instead, they focus on helping the person to stay strong, independent and in control, develop and build supportive relationships and practical local solutions to problems.
- Local Area Coordination is not about directly providing services. Rather than merely signposting people to services, they work alongside individuals, families, carers and communities to identify, nurture and utilise non-service, low-cost or no-cost solutions to build resilience.
- Rather than just fitting people into existing services, LACs help people to build connections, relationships and opportunities based on their interests, experiences and strengths.
- Local Area Coordination is not just ‘re-badging’ some existing service by adding a few extra roles to an existing service or professional role.

The NDIS experience reflects international experience that the integrity and effectiveness of the role diminishes when these boundaries are ignored or diluted, and Local Area Coordinators are asked to play roles that conflict with or overshadow their role.

### Council position

In a reconfigured system, Council proposes that the roles of Local Area Coordination and Support Coordination are distinct and complementary. In summary:

Local Area Coordinators	Support Coordinators (SC)
Target all participants	Target participants: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• who need significant assistance to use their plan</li> <li>• with multi system challenges</li> <li>• with complex informal supports.</li> </ul>
Look outward to connect participants to community	Look inward to assist participants to choose, negotiate adjustments and coordinate services and negotiate mainstream interfaces. Participants with support coordination can



Local Area Coordinators	Support Coordinators (SC)
	choose to use their SC or LAC to develop natural supports.
Are local, embedded in community	Most are not place based and hence are not necessarily connected to local community.
Focus on developing natural, sustainable non-service solutions	Focus on service coordination and negotiating multi system challenges.
Focus on building community capacity	Most not necessarily connected to local community (not place based).
Outcomes relate to informal support developed, non-service solutions developed, improved access to mainstream and community services, improved business practice of community agencies related to inclusion etc.	Outcomes relate to multi system challenges resolved, service agreements individualised, etc.

### Local Area Coordination

LACs provide light touch information, advice, connection to resources for participants and non-participants and where appropriate navigate access to the NDIS.

For participants, the major elements of LAC role include assisting participants

- Facilitate change at the individual level by assisting the participant to
  - prepare for planning
  - build informal support
  - make decisions and strengthen their ability and support to make decisions
  - plan personal safeguards
  - negotiate adjustments in mainstream services
  - design support
  - develop natural, sustainable non-service solutions
- Facilitate change at the community level by engaging with participants to build the capacity of community to actively include people with disability. This role is especially important in thin markets where LAC connections can develop natural, sustainable non-service solutions, stimulate the development of DPOs or ILC grant applications.

As a lesser part of their role, LACs also assist participants to:

- connect to disability services (similar to that currently described as Support Connection) and
- prepare for plan review (at participant request).

Each LAC team would be embedded in a local community. Collectively, a national sector of Local Area Coordination partners has the capacity to:

- develop local community capacity to welcome and actively include people with disability
- develop innovative and collaborative solutions with mainstream services and community organisations
- deliver non-market community engagement outcomes for people with disability
- facilitate consumer participation in community development activity.

If the Local Area Coordination function is to operate effectively it is important that:

- there are no conflicts of interest
- it provides an authentically localised response
- the case load enables the time intensive work required to develop natural, sustainable non-service solutions
- the NDIA minimises requirements related to NDIA administration

Implementation of the proposed Local Area Coordination approach would lead to a community ecosystem (that embraces the NDIS ecosystem) and include:

- trusted networks and established organisational relationships
- longstanding practice of collaboration
- sharing information and resources from other service systems and community organisations
- entrepreneurship
- complex interrelationships between and across sectors that needs active involvement from skilled organisations
- desire for shared outcomes.

## **Support Coordination**

Major elements of the time limited role for participants who need significant assistance to:

- use their plan to achieve their goals including
  - plan personal safeguards
  - design support
  - select services and negotiate service agreements that reflect their preferences
  - at participant request, prepare for plan review
- negotiate appropriate adjustments from mainstream services

A participant can alternately choose for their Support Coordinator to assist them to build informal support, enhance their decision-making skills and supports, and develop sustainable non-service solutions if they wish. It is anticipated that the vast majority of Support Coordinators will refer participants to their local LAC for assistance in these areas.

It is often anticipated that Support Coordinators can monitor provider performance. As Support Coordinators are not a party to service agreements, this is currently an unrealistic expectation.

If the Support Coordination function is to operate effectively it is important that:

- there are no conflicts of interest
- there is a skilled market of providers with specialisation the norm.

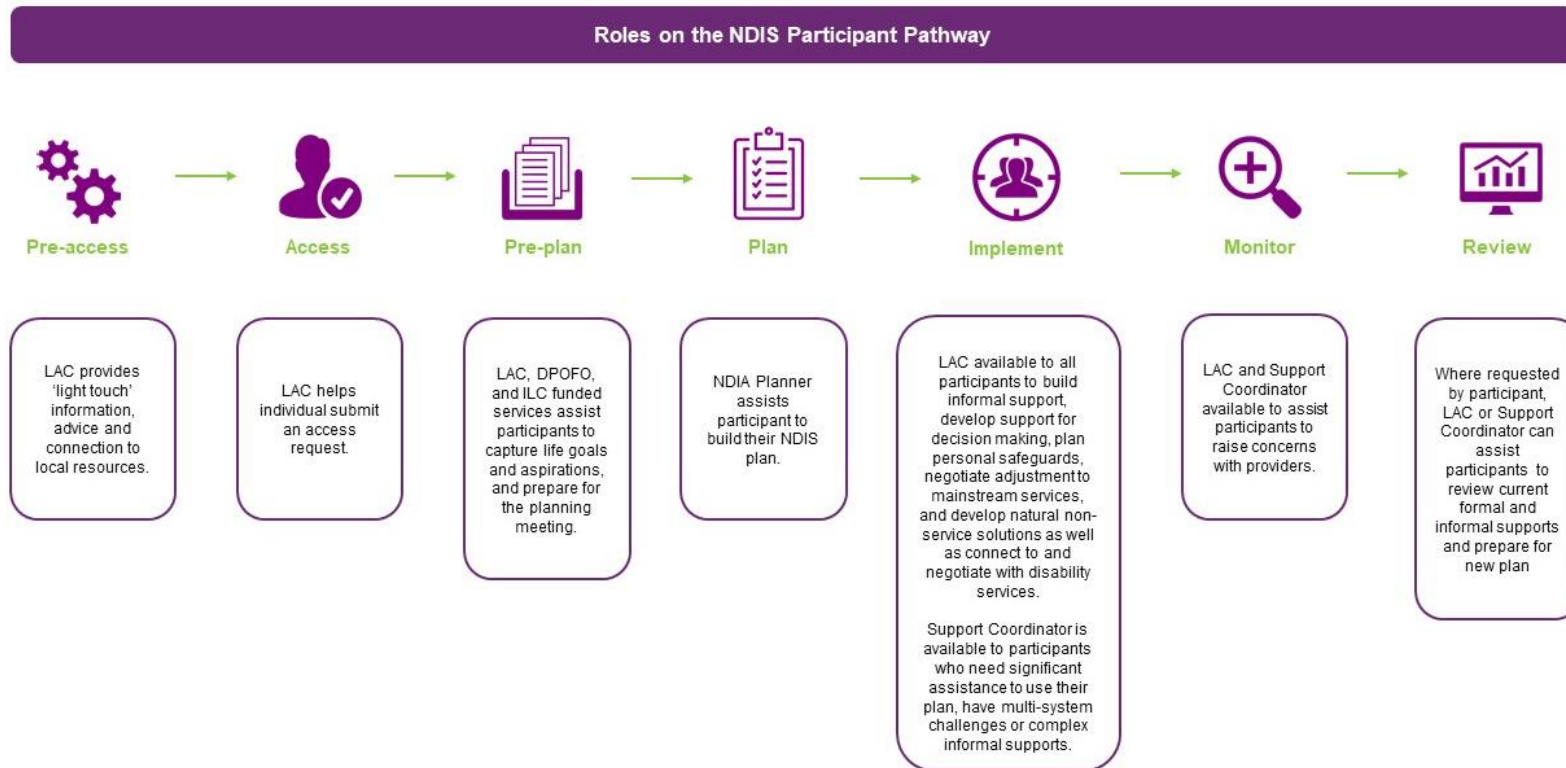
The role of Support Coordinator outlined above is different to that outlined by Council in earlier NDIA consultations on Support Coordination wherein a more significant role in building participant capacity and informal supports was outlined. In the light of the significant planned reconfiguration of functions in a post launch future state, the role of Support Coordination outlined in this paper reflects Council's current position.

### **NDIA planner**

The planner is an NDIA delegate whose main role is to develop their NDIS plan. During the process, the planner identifies the need for assistance to

- develop informal support
- support decision making
- plan personal safeguards
- negotiate adjustments with mainstream services
- design support
- develop sustainable on-service solutions

## Roles on the participant pathway



The diagram above indicates that both LACs and Support Coordinators undertake tasks identified as plan implementation, monitoring and review on the Participant Pathway. The determination as to who assists the participant is based on the complexity of the participant's situation, the extent to which the participant prioritises connection to community and the strength of existing relationships. Guidance as to which role will undertake identified tasks is provided below.

Task	Role and rationale
Select services and negotiate service agreements to reflect preferences	LAC where participants want to focus on informal, non- service options  Support Coordinator when participants need support to negotiate mainstream challenges and need significant assistance to identify services
Build informal support, identify and strengthen support for decision-making, assistance to plan personal safeguards	LAC for most participants  Support Coordinator where the individual provider is local, has the skill and is chosen by participant for these tasks
Assist participant to raise concerns with provider	Participant choice based on who best understands their situation best
Assist participants review current formal and informal supports and prepare for new plan	Participant choice based on who best understands their situation

### Risks related to proposed Local Area Coordination function

Risk	Mitigation	Who
People with disability do not have informal supports and do not use mainstream and community services	Develop and implement national structure to resource and deliver community connections	LAC organisations
Scheme is not sustainable as a result of lack of action by other service systems  Reputation of NDIS is poor because it is blamed for failures that are the responsibility of other systems	National structure of LACs work with mainstream and community organisations at local level to build their motivation and skill at including people with disability  Clearly articulated role of the LAC differentiated from other parts of the ecosystem	NDIA / LAC organisations
NDIA and participants only have options within the specialist disability sector with no leverage to develop communities	Shared effort with DSS and states to promote inclusion and National Disability Strategy	NDIA, DSS, jurisdictions

Risk	Mitigation	Who
	<p>NDIS to develop its own outward looking policy function that works at community level not just with individual plan.</p>	
<p>LACs revert to simple solutions of linking participants to services rather than building natural sustainable non-service solutions</p>	<p>Provide key focus of role on building natural sustainable non-service solutions.</p> <p>Use Support Coordination for participants who need significant assistance to use their plan to achieve their goals</p>	<p>NDIA LAC organisations</p>
<p>Role confusion of new NDIA roles, and NDIA has no outward looking roles to engage with community providers</p>	<p>Limit expectation of Support Coordinators to inward looking role of disability service market access, service coordination, plan implementation and mainstream access and develop new outward looking roles (LAC) to focus on community development.</p>	<p>NDIA/DSS</p>
<p>LACs do not have the right balance between working with individuals and building community capacity</p>	<p>Require community engagement of LACs and encourage some specialisation related to working with individuals and community development within LAC teams</p> <p>Proactively exploring outcomes from community development</p> <p>Monitor outcomes</p> <p>KPIs in LAC contracts</p>	<p>NDIA</p>
<p>Participants become dependent on LACs</p>	<p>Reflective supervision</p> <p>KPIs in LAC contracts</p> <p>Training and development including best practice case studies</p>	<p>LAC organisations</p>
<p>NDIA sees LACs as main decision supporters of participants</p>	<p>Clear role definition in this area</p> <p>Develop ILC services related to decision support</p>	<p>NDIA DSS</p>

## Commissioning

### Background

The current NDIA approach to contracting organisations to deliver Local Area Coordination services has led to concerns that participants have no choice of Local Area Coordination provider and very limited choice of LAC. Some providers commissioned by the NDIA also had no links to the region prior to winning the tender, thereby offering no community leverage for people with disability.

### Council position

In determining the approach to commissioning most likely to deliver on the Local Area Coordination Charter on the ground, Council recommends that the NDIA give significant weight to the extent to which the approach:

- creates a national Local Area Coordination sector, dedicated to community inclusion outcomes for people with disability and distinct from the disability services industry
- strengthens community capacity to actively include people with disability
- embeds people with disability in community
- enables participants to choose their Local Area Coordination organisation and LAC
- ensures organisations delivering Local Area Coordination services:
  - have an existing presence in the area
  - have access to a diverse range of knowledge, skills and experience in relation to disability type, life stage and cultural understandings
  - employ a required percentage of people with disability at all levels of the organisation
  - demonstrates success in developing collaborative community-based initiatives
  - contributes additional opportunities such as networks, staff with existing skills, communities of practice etc.
- avoids conflict of interest
- is feasible for the NDIA.

Council is of the view that tender specifications should stipulate a presence in the area, the ability to access diverse range of knowledge, skills and experience and minimise conflict of interest. Commissioning should require applicants to demonstrate the capacity of their approaches to:

- embed people with disability in their community
- strengthen community capacity to actively include people with disability
- contribute additional opportunities
- demonstrates success in developing collaborative community-based initiatives
- facilitate choice of provider including opportunity to choose provider not part of an identified consortium, and
- be feasible for the NDIA.

Some options considered and preferred by the Council include:

- hub and spoke models that facilitate a very local approach for participants as well as levels that facilitate community development and interface with mainstream systems within a jurisdiction
- partnership approaches at a regional and sub-regional level with a lead agency and partners working in separate areas; working jointly within the area; segmenting the area by expertise or some other combination.

It is the view of Council that these approaches to commissioning are best placed to enable choice of LAC provider and LAC in ways that ensure consistency, quality and viability of providers. These approaches lend themselves to a lead agency that could be assigned responsibility for:

- quality and consistency through
  - Training and development
  - Leading practice improvement including establishing communities of practice
  - Quality assurance
- ensuring coverage and developing the local market including by placing and supporting staff in an organisation focused on small communities (e.g., small ethnic communities, the LGBTI community or people with low incidence disabilities) or remote areas to ensure:
  - people with disability have access to LAC support and
  - there is support to build the capacity of the community to welcome and support people with disability
- working with the NDIA to lead systemic interface work with mainstream providers within their region
- contractual accountability to the NDIA.

As with all major projects, the LAC approach will require its own performance reporting framework that captures its impact on individuals (including empowered participants, development of informal supports and non- service options) and on communities (including making communities and specific activities more inclusive, collaborative solutions etc). Council is interested to continue engagement with the Agency on these issues.

## Workforce

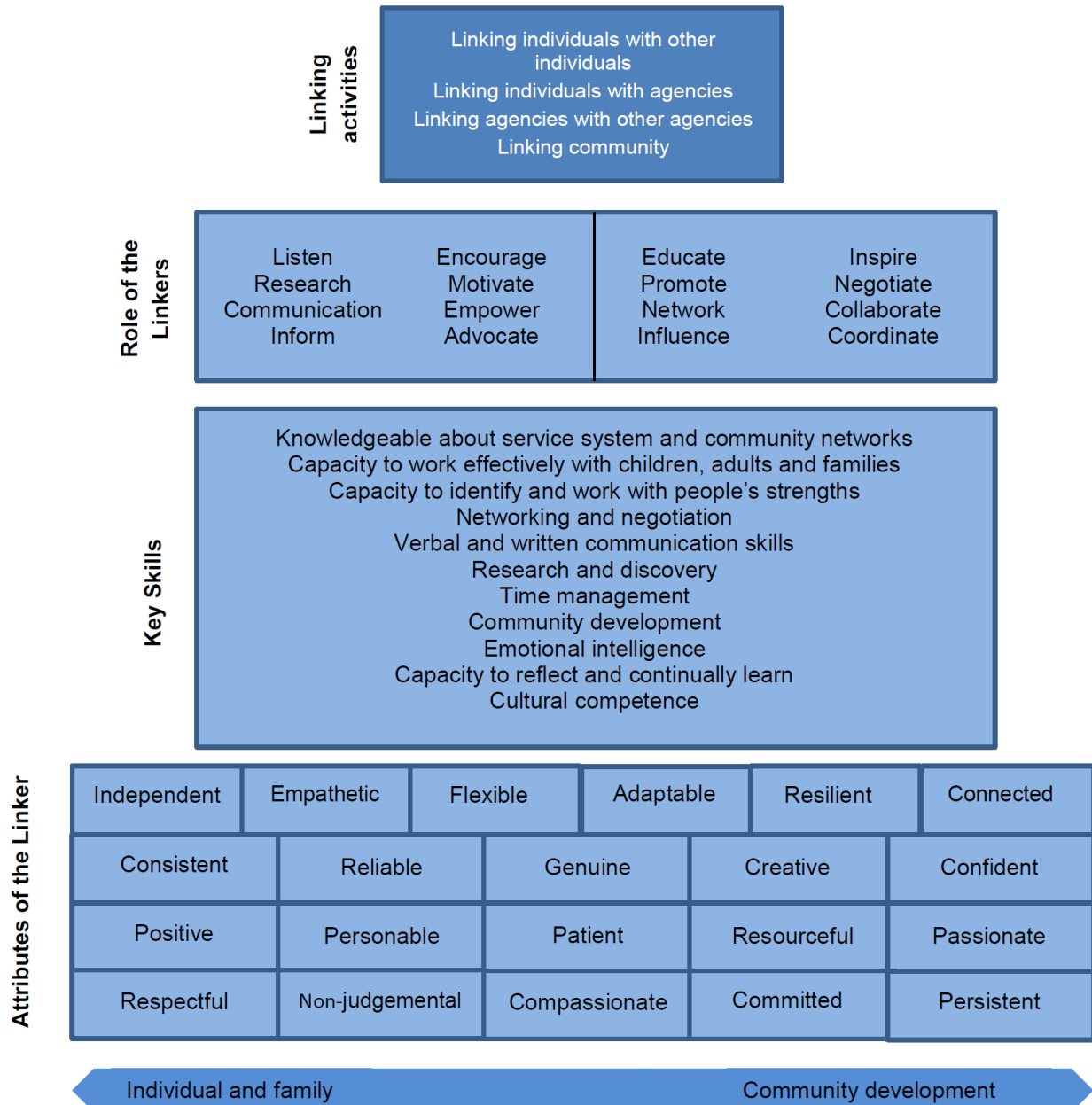
### Background

The evaluation of the Ability Links NSW demonstrated that 'it is as much about personal attributes as it is about skills which partly explains the broad diversity of the Linker workforce. Linkers (particularly Ability Linkers) had very varied backgrounds, including people who had worked in government, community organisations and the private sector. They included former tradies, soldiers, retail workers, community workers, hairdressers and



disability support workers. Early Linkers, in contrast, tended to have qualifications in early childhood development.”<sup>21</sup>

The evaluation outlines the linking activities, roles, skills and attributes required in an LAC in Figure 1.<sup>22</sup>



The evaluation demonstrated that significant learning took place on the job with networking as a powerful way for both Linkers and organisations to leverage each other's skills and cultural knowledge.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Urbis (2016), p58

<sup>22</sup> Urbis (2016), p59

<sup>23</sup> Urbis (2016) p63

The evaluation concluded that the Ability Link model be enhanced through the introduction of specialisation noting that it was not realistic to expect that all Linkers would undertake all aspects of the role. What was considered important was to have the required skills and aptitudes across the team rather than embedded in all individuals.

## **Council position**

The reconfigured Local Area Coordination function requires its own workforce strategy to strengthen its unique contribution in the NDIS ecosystem and differentiate itself from Support Coordination and service coordination. The focus of workforce develop should be:

- the unique LAC community focused approach that embeds people in the community, building informal support, assisting people to develop practical non-service solutions, supporting decision-making and assisting participants to plan for their safety
- community development and community building including developing complementary roles in other sectors to better partner with LACs and even do the community building work themselves. These could be neighbourhood house coordinators, local government community workers, community health centre staff etc.

Recruitment of Local Area Coordinators should include people with disability in the selection process, emphasise skills and qualities and give priority to employment of people with disability and those with lived experience. Recruitment should be based on specialisation within teams rather than the expectation that all LACs hold all skills with specialisation related to community development and working with individuals, disability type, life stage and cultural understandings.

Investment is needed to ensure staff are skilled and supported for the work required with reflective supervision, communities of practice and mentoring as some of the strategies required to support learning on the job and enhance emerging practice.

## **Challenges in implementation**

### **Maintaining the integrity of the Local Area Coordination program**

The integrity of the Local Area Coordination program is critical to deliver consistent quality outcomes for participants. Whilst the pragmatic decision to use LACs in a planning function to meet bilateral agreements related to transition to full Scheme is understood, the impact of the decision has been significant. Anecdotal evidence suggests little impact from existing LAC effort in developing partnerships with individuals and families as they built and pursued their goals or with local communities to strengthen their capacity to include people with disability as valued citizens.

A report from the Local Area Coordination Network (established to support the ongoing learning and development of the model in England and Wales)<sup>24</sup> affirmed the importance of fidelity to core design principles to achieve positive outcomes and that where there is strong design, development and implementation, supported and driven by strong, integrated and contributing leadership, there are consistent, positive and sustainable outcomes at the individual, family, community and systems levels.

To sustain the integrity of the LAC model and safeguard its consistency, quality and best opportunity to achieve its outcomes, the Local Area Coordination Network reported the need for:<sup>25</sup>

National LAC values framework	Realistic ratios enable a personal approach to be maintained
Careful co-produced selection of LACs	Location in, connection with and knowledge of local community – people, places and natural resources
Clear role description and high expectations of performance	A personal, flexible human approach focusing on strengths solutions and resilience rather than deficits services and dependency wherever possible
Greater focus on inclusion contribution and leadership in all aspects	Strong supervision structure and performance development system
Planned opportunities for regular support and interaction between LACs and their line managers	Systematic induction and training strategy
Open culture characterised by participation, feedback, reviews and evaluations	Deliberate investment in leadership, new ideas and partnerships
Planned links to independent monitoring and evaluation	Strong care and protection framework and commitment to training

The introduction of features above will enhance the integrity of the program and also lead to the development of a strong national network dedicated to community inclusion outcomes for people with disability and distinct from the disability services industry.

<sup>24</sup> Local Area Coordination Network (2018) *Building on learning – Turning the system upside down*, Research meeting 15 February 2018 p5 Accessed at <https://lacnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/LACN-Research-Meeting-Summary-Paper-v2-1.pdf> 23 November 2020

<sup>25</sup> Broad, R., *Inclusive Neighbourhoods* NDA Conference Dublin 25 October 2017 Accessed <http://nda.ie/nda-files/Presentations-Transcripts-Annual-Conference-2017/Ralph-Broad.pdf> 20 November 2020

## Prioritising work with communities

As caseloads grow, many Local Area Coordination programs note tension between working with individuals and working with local communities to strengthen their capacity to include people with disability. Stakeholder engagement on the NDIS Scheme Work of the Future indicated general agreement that community capacity building is one of the most important activities of the Local Area Coordination function and yet it is the first function to go under the pressure of increased caseloads.

The Ability Links NSW evaluation noted that despite most Linkers receiving some training in community engagement and community development, there appeared to be a lack of common understanding about the range of community activities, what a successful outcome looks like and what a Linker's responsibility is to achieve outcomes at a community and system level. This was further compounded by the fact that outcomes from community capacity building are slower to emerge and there is less agreement on precise measures of their impact.<sup>26</sup> Indeed driving system level outcomes was seen as beyond the scope of some smaller providers. The evaluation noted that most Ability Links providers appear to be balancing the responsibility for community work across the team by allowing those that have skills and expertise in community development to reduce their participant load.

## The role of specialisation

Participant feedback suggests the importance of having an LAC who understands and has deep experience related to their individual circumstances. This is supported by evaluations from England and Wales that identify target groups perceived to challenge LACs.

Specialisation here is more than being knowledgeable about diagnostic groups, it is the experience to engage with people, utilise their expertise and that of those around them, and create links and community connections. The specialisation is one in collaborative community building, not simply out-posting diagnostic specialist workers into community organisations. In this context, Council has prioritised participant ability to choose an LAC recommending soft specialisation within Local Area Coordination programs. Council would encourage Local Area Coordination providers to tag skill sets and experience in staff to help them offer participants a LAC with skills and experience matched to their needs.

## Testing future state

The proposals submitted by Council include significant changes to current operation. In this context and to ensure a smooth transition to future state, Council recommends the NDIA trial approaches in at least one metropolitan, one regional and one rural and remote sub region to identify and work through challenges. The key in the design of these approaches is the capacity to embed the LACs in communities to maximise existing resources and linkages. Factors to be explored in pilots include approaches to commissioning and the number of people with whom the LAC works.

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<sup>26</sup> Lundt, (2020) p16

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