

Independent Advisory Council Equity and Inclusion Reference Group Meeting Bulletin 18 May 2022

This Bulletin tells you about the recent meeting of the Equity and Inclusion Reference Group (Reference Group). The Reference Group met on 18 May 2022.

The Reference Group gives advice to the Independent Advisory Council (Council) to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) about diversity, inclusion, equal opportunity, and fairness in the NDIS.

[Ms Leah Van Poppel, Council Principal Member \(external\)](#), and [Adjunct Associate Professor Jennifer Cullen \(external\)](#), Council Member and Reference Group Co-Chair, led this meeting. The meeting included National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) Representatives and the Council Secretariat.

Updates from Council's Principal Member & Reference Group Co-Chair

Ms Van Poppel acknowledged the traditional owners of the various lands people were meeting on, and the extensive knowledge that members bring to the Reference Group. She noted significant NDIS changes have occurred [since the last Reference Group meeting in December 2021 \(DOCX 57KB\)](#).

Ms Van Poppel acknowledged the Reference Group's work outside its regular meeting schedule to develop Council's Formal Advice '*Equity in the NDIS: improving access and outcomes for diverse communities*'. Council will give its Formal Advice to the NDIA Board soon.

Associate Professor Cullen also highlighted the Reference Group's collaborative work on Council's Formal Advice. She noted [the NDIA's work on co-design \(external\)](#) should inform its diversity and inclusion strategies, some of which are being currently refreshed.

Reference Group members' community reports

Reference Group members reported on matters for the NDIA's and Council's attention, on behalf of people with disability in their communities, including:

- Continued challenges with NDIS access, supports, funding, and plan reviews, with associated increase of stress, anxiety, trauma, and isolation for people from diverse communities, with overlaying challenges for people who have psychosocial disability or are in vulnerable settings.
- Increased reports the NDIA is reducing plans without a step-down approach. A step-down approach minimises trauma and uncertainty about reduced support levels and established supports-based relationships.
- Plan reductions for people with disability who have supports for Supported Independent Living (SIL) and/or live in group homes.

- Some people say their daily supports do not match what is being claimed by their service provider, but they are too scared to raise the issue.
- Reports the NDIA is auditing and eroding plan management, withholding supports, or requesting plan managers cancel paid supports when it is determined that a support is not in line with the intent of a participant's plan.
- Some people from diverse communities do not know how to manage their plan and/or their child's plan, or navigate the NDIS, without support from a plan manager.
- People with disability are still at risk of, and stressed about, contracting COVID-19. Some people have issues sourcing and paying for rapid antigen tests. There is a need for unified public health messaging about the importance of vaccination and the continued risk of COVID-19 for people with disability.
- The NDIA must ensure participants who moved into NDIS Supported Disability Accommodation (SDA) from institutional settings under the [Intergovernmental Agreement for the NDIS Launch \(DOCX 82 KB\)](#), especially elderly people with cognitive disability, have continuity of supports.
- Challenges with the education interface for parents of children or young people with disability, with lack of one-on-one supports.
- Misinformation in the community that people must exit the NDIS at 65 years, particularly among elderly women with cognitive disability.
- The NDIA should give personalised and transparent replies about plan decisions, rather than using automated responses.
- The need to understand more about supports and services available for people with disabilities and NDIS participants in palliative care settings.
- Reports that some young lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, and asexual (LGBTIQ+) people with disability who live in group homes face discrimination from other tenants, if they reveal how they identify while getting in-home supports.
- People who are in hospital or awaiting hospital discharge find it hard to get NDIS supports. Most of these people have psychosocial disability.
- While the [Disability Royal Commission \(external\)](#) is at a crucial point of proceedings, the public visibility of its work is declining and there is less available accessible information about its important work.
- While there are challenges across the justice interface, there has been significant funding for justice advocacy support for people with cognitive and intellectual disability in New South Wales.

Update on NDIA's diversity and inclusion strategies

NDIA Representatives updated members about the implementation and/or refresh of NDIA's diversity and inclusion strategies. This includes work underway for the:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Strategy refresh
- Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Strategy refresh
- LGBTIQ+ Strategy implementation
- Remote and Very Remote approach.

NDIA Representatives acknowledged that each piece of work is at a different stage of maturity and development. The Agency will take time to co-design the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and CALD strategies with the disability community. The NDIA is genuine

about rebuilding trust and working alongside diverse communities on shared goals. The Agency sought members' advice on the best approach for each strategy.

Members noted:

- People with disability should deliver the NDIA's mandatory diversity training to staff in person, using purposeful storytelling, rather than online learning.
- Some people from diverse communities are less likely to engage with strategies that affect them because they do not self-identify, often because of previous negative experiences with disclosure.
- Because the NDIS is set up to be person-centred, it should cater to all people who have intersecting identities and needs. The NDIA should explore and acknowledge intersectionality as part of all its diversity and inclusion strategies.
- The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Strategy is of great importance to First Nations people. The NDIA should engage with [Overcoming Indigenous Exclusion \(PDF 1MB\)](#) research, to learn more about the systemic and structural issues that underpin the policy failures of governments in Indigenous Affairs.
- The NDIA should look at short-term gains and practical ways to start rebuilding trust in the community, while also keeping an eye on long-term priorities.
- Engagement methods used as part of the NDIA's strategy development should be safe and not retraumatise people or ask invalidating questions.
- The NDIA's strategy champions should identify as being a part of the communities they represent.
- The LGBTIQ+ Strategy should ensure LGBTIQ+ people, especially those in rural and remote areas who have limited services, are not discriminated by faith-based organisations.
- The NDIA's engagement for the LGBTIQ+ Strategy should be broad, with suggestions to include:
 - Inclusive Rainbow Voices
 - The Royal Commission
 - NDIS engagement officers.
- The NDIA's Rural and Remote approach should consider barriers these communities face, including:
 - unaffordable internet and/or reliable phone and mobile coverage.
 - stigma in applying for and engaging with NDIS services in small communities where everyone knows you.
 - thin markets that do not allow choice and control of providers or supports, and the long distances need to travel for basic services.

Update on co-design & discussion on implementation

Ms Van Poppel noted the [NDIA's release of its Engagement Framework \(DOCX 4.7MB\)](#) for [work on co-design \(external\)](#). She acknowledged the need for consistency, process, and evaluation, so that co-design is accessible and happens on good timelines.

Ms Van Poppel noted productive co-design meetings held, and that the Co-design Steering Committees provide strategic advice, governance and oversight for the co-design and development of four key policies:

- Information Gathering for Access and Planning
- Home and Living

- Support for Decision Making
- Participant Safety.

Members noted:

- Co-design is about sharing power, so it is important to include underrepresented communities that have not had power or a voice.
- Co-design should include diverse communities from the start of the process.

Ms Van Poppel asked for member feedback on how the Co-design Advisory Group includes the voice of underrepresented communities in each co-design project. Members noted, the NDIA should:

- engage with a range of peer support organisations, youth advocacy services, and peak advocacy groups, to hear from diverse voices. They should also make connections with people who are not participants or cannot access the NDIS.
- use engagement process led by people with disability or people who identify as being from diverse communities, because some people are more comfortable to share with people from their communities.
- strengthen ties with diverse community leaders and offer information in different languages. This will also assist with any emergency response.
- consider multimodal communication and different ways to engage people who do not speak English, ensuring they have a voice.

More information on the Reference Group

The Reference Group will next meet later in 2022 and keep progressing its work between meetings. Find out more about Reference Group meetings and bulletins at [Council's website \(external\)](#). You can also [access Council's advice here \(external\)](#).

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