

Independent Advisory Council Meeting Bulletin 22 September 2021

The Independent Advisory Council (Council) to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) brings the participant's voice to the heart of the NDIS. The Council gives independent advice to the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) Board, as part of the *NDIS Act 2013*.

This Bulletin summarises Council's 22 September 2021 meeting, chaired by Ms Robyn Kruk AO, Principal Member, and co-chaired by Ms Leah Van Poppel, Deputy Chair.

Mr Martin Hoffman, NDIA Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and Dr Helen Nugent AO, NDIA Board Chair, also attended the meeting with:

- Council Members
- Council Expert Adviser
- NDIA Representatives; and
- Council Secretariat.

From Council's Principal Member and Deputy Chair

The Principal Member noted that Council released its 2021-22 Work Plan and 2020-21 Annual Report to the NDIA and public to increase engagement and awareness around its future priority work and achievements for the past year.

The Principal Member and Deputy Chair both noted that Council's recent co-design workshops with the NDIA, Disability Representative Organisations (DROs), carer and other sector organisations had been productive.

The Deputy Chair acknowledged the work of the co-design steering committee, including Dr Sharon Boyce, Adjunct Associate Professor Jennifer Cullen and Dr Leighton Jay, to help plan the workshops.

The Deputy Chair noted that over the coming months, representatives will focus working with the NDIA to identify projects and priorities to progress through co-design.

From the NDIA CEO and Board Chair

The NDIA CEO reiterated the Agency's commitment to co-design and enhancing the way it works together with the disability community, honouring outcomes from the July 2021 [Disability Reform Ministers' Meeting](#).

He said that the initial co-design workshop showed a willingness by all to move forward, strengthen relationships, rebuild trust, and ensure positive outcomes for the NDIS and participants. Together with the NDIA Board Chair, he thanked Council, the steering committee and all representatives for their input to recent co-design discussions.

The NDIA CEO said the Agency remains focussed on delivering support measures and resources to respond to the escalating coronavirus (COVID-19) challenges across Australia, helping participants and providers safely receive and deliver supports. The NDIA Board Chair noted the extraordinary work by NDIA staff and the disability sector to support participants during the pandemic.

The NDIA CEO acknowledged the Parliamentary Budget Office had released their own analysis of NDIS expenditure. He indicated the NDIA will soon release further information about NDIS expenditure, including the next Annual Financial Sustainability Report, as part of the Agency's commitment to greater transparency into the sustainability pressures facing the Scheme.

Council Members' community reports

Council Members and the Expert Adviser reported on matters for the Agency's attention, on behalf of people with disability in their communities, including:

- The ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns on the health, safety and wellbeing of people with disability
- Acknowledging the exceptional work by NDIA staff to support participants during the pandemic.
- Concern about equity in the access and uptake of the COVID-19 vaccine program, especially for groups likely to experience a disproportionate burden of disease, those with comorbidities or complex support needs.
 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, especially those in rural and remote communities, find it hard to access COVID-19 vaccines.
 - The COVID-19 vaccine implementation for diverse communities should consider targeted communications campaigns to provide safe, in-language, information to counter vaccine hesitancy and inform consent.
 - The COVID-19 vaccine implementation should consider supports for people with disability who cannot get in-home vaccinations.
 - Early recognition and intervention is needed to support people with disability who contract COVID-19, especially people with complex support needs and communications challenges.
- Increased reports about service and support disruptions due to disability support worker shortages, especially with reductions in workers from migrant and refugee backgrounds or international students.
- Issues with 'thin markets' or inadequate service availability, across urban, rural and remote areas, resulting in NDIS participants' needs not being met.
- Increased reports of delays for NDIS plan reviews and Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT) plan reviews. There is also concern from some participants about the automatic rollover of plans at review.
- The need for comprehensive data about average plan budgets across disability types, population groups and geography, to better understand future funding.
- Issues with providers, plans and funding for home and living supports, including Supported Independent Living (SIL) and Individualised Living Options (ILO).

- Increased reports around inconsistent practice with SIL providers. Reports of some large providers capturing the market for profit, while others are exiting the market due to losses.
- The need for the NDIA to consider the [Australian Infant Communication and Engagement Study](#) as part of its Early Childhood Early Intervention Reset Project.
- Increased reports from Disabled People's Organisations that Council and its membership are not representative of the full diversity of people with disability.

Information, Linkages & Capacity Building (ILC) Program

Sarah Guise, ILC Program Branch Manager at the Department of Social Services (DSS) and other DSS representatives updated Council on the [Information Linkages and Capacity Building Program](#).

She noted that as at 20 June 2021, there are 510 active ILC grants delivering services across Australia. The ILC Program, which sees funding channelled to initiatives which provide information and connect people with disability to mainstream supports, is commonly referred to as 'tier 2', and is a priority area for Council's advisory work.

DSS is considering the broader system of supports for all people with disability to improve outcomes and build capacity for people with disability, their families and carers. They are also gathering evidence about outcomes from the current program, and will consult broadly on future directions of the ILC.

Council Members acknowledged DSS' work on ILC and raised the following points:

- The need to support people who are ineligible for NDIS, especially those from diverse backgrounds, through inclusive mainstream services from the ILC Program.
- The potential for the ILC Program be transferred back to the NDIA, in line with recommendations in Council's formal advice '[Strengthening Scheme Reforms to Access and Planning](#)'.
- The importance of ILC to work with valued DROs, Disabled Persons Organisations and Family Organisations, Disabled Persons' Organisations to deliver supports and services through their membership network.
- The need for DSS to look at a new funding model for 'tier 2' and ILC, or a dedicated and independent budget allocated to ensure greater funding certainty. This should include a plan for its investment, co-designed with Council and disability community representatives.
- The need to take the Local Area Coordination function back to its original intent to improve the implementation of ILC grants.

Update on Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031

Stephen Moger, Disability Policy Branch Manager at the DSS and other DSS representatives, updated Council on [Australia's Disability Strategy \(ADS\) 2021-2031](#), previously referred to as the National Disability Strategy. In August 2021, Disability Ministers agreed that the Strategy can progress to its next stages of formal agreement, from all levels of government.

He noted the extensive work done to develop, enhance and review the Strategy over three years, thanking Council and other stakeholders for their input to the consultation. He also noted the development of Targeted Action Plans with states and territories, as one of the ways governments will drive actions under ADS, as well as the establishment of a dedicated Advisory Council for the ADS.

Council's Principal Member and Members acknowledged DSS' strong consultative work, especially with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, on the ADS and raised the following points:

- The need for good governance for the planned ADS Advisory Council, and for its membership and leadership to represent the diversity of all people with disability.
- The importance on data, measurement and evaluation of the past and present Strategy, to ensure accountability against ADS commitments. Also, to understand the ways DSS can address gaps and better measure how well disability strategies actually work for people with disability.
- The need for further work on the targeted action plan for safety, to stress the importance of community inclusion.
- The need to successfully engage all Ministers with portfolios related to the ADS, not just Disability Ministers.
- The need for strong governance and oversight at state and territory level.

More information on the Council

The Council next meets on 18 October 2021. You can find out more about Council meetings at the [Council's website meeting page \(external\)](#). You can access advice from the [Council's website advice page \(external\)](#).

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