

Independent Advisory Council Meeting Bulletin 27 July 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 27 July 2021 meeting, led by Ms Robyn Kruk AO, Principal Member. Mr Martin Hoffman, NDIA Chief Executive Officer (CEO), also attended the meeting with:

- Council Members
- Council's Expert Adviser
- NDIA Representatives and Council Secretariat.

From the Principal Member

The Principal Member noted that Senator the Hon Linda Reynolds CSC, Minister for the NDIS, sent letters of thanks to Council members for their [advice on Scheme reforms](#). The Principal Member said this recognised Council members' commitment to work through complex issues.

The Principal Member also noted the following letters:

- Council sent a letter to Mr Graeme Head, former NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commissioner, thanking him for his work and collaboration with Council. Council will invite the new Commissioner, when appointed, to a future meeting.
- Council received a letter from the NDIA CEO, recognising their collective efforts and contributions to Scheme reforms. In the letter, the NDIA CEO committed to closer collaboration with Council and the disability community.

The Principal Member highlighted Council's recent work with the NDIA, including consultations with Council and Reference Group subgroups on the:

- Access and eligibility policy consultation
- Participant decision guides for employment; and
- Complex Support Needs Pathway review.

From the Deputy Chair

The Deputy Chair noted that Council recently hosted an initial small meeting of Council members, members of the disability community and NDIA staff. The meeting considered:

- the development of a partnership agreement between the NDIA and the disability community; and
- how to start engagement with the broader disability community on co-design.

Council has released a [News Bulletin with more information about the partnership agreement meeting](#) and the plan to engage widely to develop the agreement.

From the NDIA CEO

The NDIA CEO acknowledged Council's early commitment to progress work on the partnership agreement. He said that future consultations about the agreement would benefit from including representatives of disability organisations. He noted that good co-design involves balancing time, deep involvement and the right amount of people.

The NDIA CEO confirmed the outcomes of the [Disability Reform Ministers' Meeting](#), specifically that Independent Assessments would not proceed. Both the CEO and Council acknowledged the hard work and dedication of NDIA staff who worked hard to develop Independent Assessments and related Scheme reform proposals, over a long period of time.

The NDIA CEO stressed that the NDIA continuing to focus on improvements to the Scheme as outlined in the Participant Service Charter and Participant Service Improvement Plan. This is on top of the 10,000 participant access and planning decisions it makes per week. He committed to providing more information about:

- the joint Operating Principles that will strengthen how the NDIA and Council work together in the future. This includes ways the NDIA can help Council complete advice that is vital to its annual Work Plan.
- the NDIA Corporate Plan 2021-2025.

Council Members' snapshot of issues

Council Members and the Expert Adviser reported on matters they'd heard from people with disability in their communities. The reports aim to bring matters to the Agency's attention, and include:

- A sense of relief that Independent Assessments are not proceeding. There is excitement across communities about the opportunity to co-design and 'have a say'.
- Concerns that increases to the Social, Community, Home Care and Disability Services Industry Award 2010 (SCHADS Award), are not factored in participant plans. The SCHADS Award is the national award for Disability Support Workers.
- Concerns around plan decisions in relation to Individualised Living Options (ILO) support packages.
- The need for home and living supports for young people who do not qualify for Specialist Disability Accommodation.
- General workforce issues with:
 - disability support worker shortages. This has been further impacted by COVID-19 lockdowns;
 - increased reports of Support Coordinators leaving the disability sector for other employment sectors;
 - small not-for-profit organisation capacity to retain staff and essential services due to competition with larger providers; and

- delayed and rejected NDIS Worker Screening Checks.
- Increased reports that some service providers are overcharging customers who are NDIS participants, at significantly higher rates than non-NDIS customers.
- Concerns about delays with COVID-19 vaccine rollout for people with disability, disability workers and disability service providers.
- Concerns that only Victoria, Queensland, Tasmania and the ACT will implement minimum accessibility standards for new constructions under the National Construction Code (NCC).
- The need to help people in the justice system access the NDIS, and understand funded supports, that will help them move out of these settings. There is misinformation in the community that Justice Liaison Officers in the NDIS do not exist.
- The need to look at service accessibility in rural and remote areas.

Update on NDIA Payment Strategy

Mr Oliver Bladek, NDIA Deputy CEO, Design, Digital and Strategy, updated Council on changes to the proposed claims and payment processes which are part of the NDIA Payment Strategy. He asked for Council's feedback on the draft Strategy and ways to implement the work. Council agreed to work with the Agency out of session on the Strategy. Council Members raised the following points:

- The need for transparent and clear communications about the potential impact of the Strategy on those who self-manage. This will help dispel misinformation in the community that the NDIA is moving away from self-management.
- The need to ensure the Strategy promotes innovation, flexibility and choice and control for participants to determine how they spend their plans.
- While the NDIS participant mobile application (app) may better help participants manage their NDIS plan, some people with intellectual disability still want manual options to manage their plans.
- The language used across NDIA communications and channels should be clearer and simpler than the current language used.

Council 2021-22 Work Plan and priorities

The Principal Member discussed priorities from the Council Reference Groups, and their link to Council's 2021-22 Work Plan. She noted she'd had discussions with the Board on the identification of priorities for Council's formal and informal advice. When finalised, the Work Plan will align with the NDIA Corporate Plan 2021-2025, any priorities identified by the NDIA Board, and advice provided by Council and Reference Groups. The Principal Member acknowledged the work of Council on the Work Plan, which will be finalised out of session.

More information on the Council

The Council next meets on 23 August 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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