

Independent Advisory Council Meeting Bulletin 19 March 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 19 March 2021 meeting, led by Ms Robyn Kruk AO, Principal Member. The Minister for the NDIS, Hon Stuart Robert MP, also attended the meeting with:

- Council Members
- Council's Expert Adviser
- Mr Martin Hoffman, NDIA Chief Executive Officer (CEO)
- NDIA Representatives and Council Secretariat.

From the Council's Principal Member

The Principal Member said that the new Reference Group Members had their induction meetings in mid-February 2021. She said the Council's future advice will benefit from the Reference Groups Members' lived experience, skills and knowledge.

The Principal Member said Council has joined the [Building Better Homes campaign \(external\)](#), which aims to set accessibility standards in the National Construction Code. This reflects Council's submission to the National Disability Strategy. Read more about the [partnership on Council's website \(external\)](#).

NDIA CEO Mr Hoffman spoke of discussions with the sector about Scheme Reforms and answered questions from Council Members on Specialist Disability Accommodation and participant plans.

The Principal Member noted that many Council Members had requested further information regarding financial sustainability and the importance of Council also providing advice in this area. The Council will include sustainability as a key perspective in all its future formal advice.

From the Minister for the NDIS

The Minister thanked Council Members for their important work to support NDIS participants and raise issues that affect them.

The Minister said he is focussed on Scheme Reforms, safeguarding future sustainability. He wants to make sure the NDIS is run along insurance principles and that legislative amendments pass through Parliament.

Council Members made three presentations to the Minister, including:

Council's formal advice on Local Area Coordination

- This advice aims to improve the Local Area Coordination function in the NDIS. It says that Local Area Coordinators (LACs) are important to help people with disability build community involvement in work, play and citizenship. This will improve connection to community and Scheme sustainability.
- This advice was sent to the NDIA Board in February 2021. The NDIA response has been approved by the NDIA Board. Both the advice and NDIA response have been sent to the Minister for the NDIS.
- The Minister supported Council's advice, saying that he wants LACs to prioritise informal community supports for people with disability.

Council's formal advice on Participant Safety

- This advice aims to help participants, their families and carers feel safe and be safe. It says that when a person with disability has the right personal safeguards, including decision-making supports, they will live a safe and full life. It also says that the NDIS can reduce safety risks for people with disability by supporting them to be active citizens and belong to their communities.
- This advice will be sent to the NDIA Board in May 2021, before it is presented to the Minister for the NDIS along with the NDIA's response.
- The Minister said this advice is important for the NDIS, for participants and the Disability Royal Commission. He said the Australian Government is still working on participant safety, including definitions of vulnerability and how to better connect with vulnerable participants. He added that more work needs to be done to make it clear who is responsible for connecting with vulnerable participants. Currently, Plan Managers, LACs and Support Coordinators share this role.

Council's view on Scheme Reforms

- Council shared the concerns they have heard from the disability sector and community about the Scheme Reforms, including Independent Assessments (IAs). They have heard concerns that:
 - IAs do not properly capture what is happening in participant's lives.
 - IAs intend to reduce participant budgets and exit them from the Scheme.
 - A three-hour IA meeting is not enough time to make a plan budget and decide the rest of their lives.
 - The way that IA funding is released, and the frequency of funding release, is difficult.
- Council urged increased community input to solve the issues on Scheme Reform. They expressed:
 - Concern about the number of issues being discussed in a very short time.
 - The importance of getting all Australians to have a better understanding of the intent of Scheme Reforms, including IAs, and contribute ideas to make them work better.
 - That the NDIA needs to be better at providing clear and accessible information to the community and disability sector.
- Council also shared a number of practical ideas for solutions that could improve the perception and implementation of Scheme Reforms.

The Minister recognised the issues raised on Scheme Reforms and the NDIS in general, thanking the Council for its advice and support. He said that:

- Scheme Reforms were suggested by the Productivity Commission and Tune Review to make the Scheme simpler, faster, fairer and more equitable for all Australians, no matter their socio-economic status.
- The NDIS has interface challenges with the criminal justice and child protection systems. He urged Council to keep in touch with him to work through issues in these areas.
- The NDIS can be financially sustainable if the States and Territories also help all people with a disability get the supports they need.
- Workforce continues to be an issue for the NDIS.

Scheme Reform consultation

Dr Sam Bennett, NDIA General Manager, Policy, Advice and Research, said that the Agency's work on Scheme Reforms remains a major focus.

The NDIA has reviewed more than 750 submissions to the public consultations on IAs, which closed late February 2021. Dr Bennett said that the Agency is pleased that participants, families and carers made the most submissions.

The NDIA will publically release the submissions' findings, including what the Agency has heard from participants and key consultation themes, likely by the end of March 2021.

Dr Bennett said that the NDIA will continue to work with the Council IA Sub-Group on key topics, including any topics that Council thinks are important. This includes further work relating to the development of the Personalised Budget Tool.

NDIS Quarterly Report Overview

Sarah Johnson, NDIA Scheme Actuary, shared information from the NDIS Quarterly Report from October to December 2020. This Report shows:

- A large amount of people are still joining the Scheme, with 21,283 new participants for the quarter. There are high numbers of children aged 0-6, participants with development delay, psychosocial disability and chronic health conditions entering the Scheme.
- 22 per cent less younger people are in residential aged care compared to two years ago.
- 92 per cent of complaints are closed within 21 days, compared to 58 per cent a year ago
- A higher number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Scheme entrants this quarter.
- Participants continue to report positive outcomes, with decreases in the number of open Participant Requested Reviews and Reviews of Reviewable Decisions.
- Payments for NDIS supports have grown 8 per cent in the last quarter.
- 2.3 per cent of the Australian general population aged 0 to 64 are expected to be NDIS participants by 30 June 2023. This is higher than the original estimate of the Productivity Commission and will impact the Scheme's financial sustainability.

More information on the Council

The Council next meets on 21 April 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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