

## **Independent Advisory Council Meeting Bulletin 31 March and 14 April 2020**

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The Independent Advisory Council (Council) to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) was established to bring the participant's voice to the heart of the NDIS. The Council provides independent advice to the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) Board, as outlined in the NDIS Act 2013.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the Council is now meeting every fortnight for two hours via videoconferencing. This Bulletin provides an overview of the key topics discussed at the meetings of 31 March and 14 April 2020. The meetings were attended by the Council's Principal Member, Mr John Walsh AM, together with Council Members and Expert Advisers.

### **COVID-19 Update**

Martin Hoffman, NDIA Chief Executive Officer, provided an update on the latest developments in relation to the NDIA response to COVID-19.

Mr Hoffman said that the NDIA is communicating regularly via different channels about the changes affecting participants. This includes the recent changes to plan review processes and priority home delivery services. In relation to providers, Mr Hoffman noted that the NDIA has increased the price for key daily living and care support items, as well as paying one month's billing in advance.

The Council commended the NDIA for their response to COVID-19, and welcomed the measures put in place to support participants.

The Council questioned the level of understanding within the health system about the rights and needs of people with disability, as well as the equitable treatment of people with disability when accessing health care.

In relation to the impacts on the disability workforce, the Council stressed the importance of participants having a contingency plan in the case they are left without support. This includes the NDIA's role in communicating and educating participants on how to set this up. Mr Hoffman noted that participants and providers can now connect with matching platforms through the [NDIS website](#) as another possible avenue to find the support workers they need.

### **Participant Reference Group**

Maryanne Diamond, General Manager Disability Advocacy, briefed members on the new model for the NDIA to engage with participants as part of the Participant Reference Group (PRG). The PRG was established in 2018 to provide feedback and input for continuous improvement of the NDIS Pathways work. The group includes a range of participants and carers from around Australia who have lived experience with disability.

The Council welcomed the new engagement model as a step towards using the voice of participants proactively and effectively by the NDIA.

Members also recommended the NDIA communicate and reinforce the importance of participant engagement to all business areas, recommending engagement with the Council early and upfront in any project.

The Council also offered assistance with the recruitment of participants to the PRG as part of the members' and expert advisers' roles in the community.

### **Council's Communications Strategy**

Richard Honey, Branch Manager Strategic Communications Media and Marketing, consulted with members on the Council's Communications Strategy. The Strategy aims to raise awareness and increase the visibility of the Council's work both internally as well as externally.

Mr Honey sought Council's feedback in relation to the Council narrative, their role and purpose. The Council noted its unique role as a main stakeholder for the NDIA, being 'independent' and its ability to initiate advice to the NDIA Board to promote the best interest of participants.

Members also recommended that the narrative should include the proactive as well as responsive nature of the Council's work and that the Council actively seeks solutions to challenges experienced by participants.

The NDIA will continue to work with the Council in the implementation of the Strategy.

### **National Disability Strategy**

Mr Stephen Moger, Branch Manager National Disability Policy Branch, Department of Social Services, provided an update on the progress of the new National Disability Strategy.

Mr Moger discussed the plans for the second stage of consultations and the updated engagement plan. This included a particular focus on reaching people with complex disabilities who have challenges participating in other, more traditional, consultation processes. Mr Moger noted that in light of the current pandemic, consultations had to be deferred and the finalisation of the Strategy may consequently be delayed.

The Council was pleased to hear about the nuanced approach to targeting groups of people with complex disability, to ensure their views are represented in the Strategy. Members also noted some opportunities arising from the delayed consultation including a more focused communications campaign about the purpose of the National Disability Strategy and the potential to reach a higher number of people with disability via online consultation.

Members highlighted the importance of having a robust outcomes framework alongside the Strategy, with more specific outcomes measures that provide a strong reporting mechanism and accountability. Members stressed the importance of the National Disability Data Asset in the development of the outcomes framework.

### **Next meetings**

The Council is next scheduled to meet on 28 April and 12 May 2020.

**Previous papers and advice from the Independent Advisory Council to the NDIS can be accessed on the Council's website at: <https://www.ndis-iac.com.au/>**