

Independent Advisory Council Meeting Bulletin 17 March 2020

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.

On 17 March, the Council held its first meeting of 2020, attended by the Council Principal Member, Mr John Walsh AM, together with Council Members and Expert Advisers. This bulletin provides an overview of the key topics discussed.

COVID-19 Update

Mr Martin Hoffman, NDIA Chief Executive Officer, and Commissioner Graeme Head AO, NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission, provided an update on the NDIA and Commission response to the COVID-19 outbreak. Mr Hoffman said the NDIA and the Commission are working closely together, along with the Minister for the NDIS, on how to best support people with disability and the sector during this critical situation.

Mr Hoffman said that processes are in place to identify participants with most complex needs, who are at high risk, as well as supporting providers to maintain all critical participant supports.

Commissioner Head said the Commission had a dedicated team to progress and implement the response. They will work closely with the Department of Social Services to manage ongoing communications with providers. He commended the support of advocacy organisations in raising awareness amongst the sector.

Members expressed concern at the number of challenges people with disability and providers face during this situation, noting the need for a targeted response similar to that for the aged care sector.

Expert adviser Dr Ben Gauntlet, Disability Discrimination Commissioner, urged the need for respect for the human rights of people with disabilities in being given equal access to all support services necessary. Council Member, Prof. Anne Kavanagh, noted the [Centre of Research Excellence in Disability and Health \(CRE-DH\) call for action](#) to develop a whole-of-government targeted response to people with disability, their families and the sector, outlining a number of concerns about the outbreak.

The Council also noted some participant groups are more vulnerable than others. These include people in congregate living, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with disability, participants who self-manage and people with complex support needs. Council also highlighted the workforce continuity challenges of providing support and the need for regular easy English communications to participants.

Corporate Plan

Mr Hoffman briefed the Council on the development of the NDIS Corporate Plan 2020-2024.

Mr Hoffman also presented the Council with the new NDIA Participant Vision, which outlines the NDIA's direction and participant-facing work through to the end of 2021. It focuses on the participant, their experiences and outcomes. The goal of the Participant Vision is to improve the participant experience, deliver on the Australian Government priorities and implement recommendations made under the NDIS Act. It will directly inform the Corporate Plan.

Council members were pleased to be given the opportunity to contribute to the NDIA's priorities early in the process and thanked Mr Hoffman for putting the participant back at the heart of the NDIS.

Members highlighted the need for the Corporate Plan to clearly communicate the purpose of the NDIS and participant aspirations. This would include success metrics that reflect participants' outcomes. In particular, members noted the need for the NDIA to be a champion of employment of people with disability, including in leadership positions.

Members also highlighted the need to link the Corporate Plan to the National Disability Strategy, as the success of the NDIS relies on the effective implementation of the Strategy.

Council's Advice to the Minister for the NDIS

The Council discussed their advice prepared for The Hon. Stuart Robert MP, Minister for the NDIS, on the issues raised at the November Council meeting. These included supported independent living (SIL), local area coordination (LAC) and early childhood early intervention approach (ECEI). Minister Robert was due to attend the meeting, however due to other commitments in response to COVID-19, he was a late apology.

The Council urged that the NDIA approach to these topics should maximise choice and control for participants in achieving positive outcomes, in staying true to the values of the NDIS. Some of the Council's recommendations included:

- LAC: the Council noted the consequences of the NDIA's need to fulfil bilateral agreements. This included the LAC focus on planning, leaving a limited role in connecting participants and non-NDIS participants with mainstream and community services. Other concerns included workforce capability, adequate evaluation and monitoring of LACs, and the need to reach out to people with disability on the margins.
- ECEI: the Council recommended a refocusing of the ECEI approach, consistent with the current NDIA review, highlighting the importance of taking a strengths-based approach to early childhood supports. A detailed review was tabled.
- SIL: Members argued that actions are needed which consider all the challenges related to SIL. Council has argued for the separation of housing and support as critical for participant choice and control. Council also stressed the need for participants to be given a stronger and independent voice in the development of their home and living options and support coordination, including through alternatives to the SIL model.

Council will provide its formal response to the Minister's Office.

Tune Review

Ms Celia Murphy, Branch Manager Government Relations provided an overview of the NDIA's work in the development of the Government response to the Tune Recommendations and the Participant Service Guarantee.

Ms Murphy noted that out of the 29 Tune recommendations, 19 require a change in the NDIA Act Rules, noting many of these changes will allow for the start of many projects already approved by the NDIA. In relation to the Participant Service Guarantee, Ms Murphy mentioned that this program of work is well underway, as a 2019 election commitment.

The Principal Member requested the Council gather again when the Government response to the Tune Review is publicly available, to discuss the response and ensure people with disability remain at the centre of the NDIS.

Ms Sarah Johnson, Scheme Actuary, discussed with the Council recommendation 54 of the Tune Review. It recommends that the Council develop an independent participant satisfaction survey. Ms Johnson noted that the NDIA had implemented a more independent and comprehensive participant satisfaction survey, which provided more accurate insights on participant satisfaction.

Members noted the improved features of the new survey, and made suggestions to enhance the survey content in reporting satisfaction with supports that contribute to an ordinary life.

The Council agreed to work out of session with the Scheme Actuary in the development of a participant satisfaction survey.

Early Childhood Early Intervention Approach

The Council discussed their latest advice "Promoting best practice in Early Childhood Intervention in the NDIS" paper, which coincides with the NDIS review of the ECEI approach and strategy refresh.

The aim of the paper is to inform this review, highlighting the needs of children and families. This will enable best practice early childhood intervention and maximise the independence and inclusion of young children with disability.

The Council made a number of recommendations including refocusing the ECEI approach, strengthening ECI practice and developing a workforce strategy.

The Council endorsed the advice, which will be formally presented to the NDIA Board at its May meeting.

General

In addition to the topics described above, the Council also discussed the following topics:

- Quarterly Report Update
- Reports from the Council's Reference Group

**Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, and to prioritise the health and wellbeing of Council members and expert advisers as well as NDIA staff, only Sydney-based attendees met in

person, with the rest of the Council and presenters attending via teleconference. As a result, the original Agenda was shortened from two to a one-day meeting.

Next meeting

The Council is next scheduled to meet on 26 & 27 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/>