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Meeting bulletin – 21 November 2022

This bulletin summarises the Independent Advisory Council's (Council) recent meeting. Council gives advice to the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA). Council's advice aims to improve the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). Ms Leah van Poppel, who is [Council's Principal Member](#), chaired the meeting held on 21 November 2022.

Update from Council's Principal Member

Ms Leah van Poppel, on behalf of Council, thanked and acknowledged the contributions of Ms Sarah Johnson, current DCEO Strategy & Service Improvement and former Scheme Actuary, who is leaving the NDIA.

Ms van Poppel said the NDIA has nearly completed its response to Council advice 'Improving Equity in the NDIS', noting Council's advice and the NDIA response will be submitted to Board in early 2023.

Ms van Poppel welcomed the NDIS Review Co-Chairs, Prof Bruce Bonyhady AM and Ms Lisa Paul AO PSM, who held a closed session with Members.

Update from the NDIA

Ms van Poppel welcomed Kurt Fearnley AO, NDIA Board Chairperson, and Ms Rebecca Falkingham, NDIA Chief Executive Officer (CEO). Both stepped into the role on 18 October 2022.

Mr Fearnley commended the expertise of Council and noted that it is a fundamental part of the NDIS. He provided a brief overview of his activities in the first five weeks as Board Chairperson, noting his current priority was to engage with NDIA staff and listen to people with disability to understand the challenges and concerns, aiming to rebuild trust in the Scheme.

Ms Falkingham noted the thorough wisdom Council Members bring to the NDIA and committed to continuing to work closely with Council. Since becoming the NDIA CEO, her priorities have included:

- The rollout of PACE, the new NDIA business system, in Tasmania
- Hospital discharge



- Fraud
- Thin markets
- NDIA recruitment processes to improve representation of people with disability across NDIA staff.

Council Members' community reports

[Council Members](#) and the [Expert Adviser](#) reported on matters for the NDIA's attention. Members provides these reports on behalf of people with disability in their communities. The reports give the NDIA CEO and staff understanding about issues from the ground. They also give the NDIA the opportunity to respond to themes, concerns, and opportunities raised by Members. Key matters Members noted this month included:

NDIS planning

- Concerns that the '[Would We Fund It – Generators Operational Guideline](#)' does not take into consideration the reality experienced by people with disability living in regional and remote areas of Australia, where electricity supply is commonly unreliable.

Providers

- Continued reports of issues with provider registration processes, particularly for First Nations providers and in remote locations.
- The need to raise awareness amongst participants and their families of the NDIS Quality and safeguards Commission as the main body to report abuse, neglect or unsafe provider practices. Members expressed concern that participants and their families still do not know who to report to.
- Reports of the poor condition of some Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) housing, with some participants noting the state of some residences is unliveable and dangerous, putting participants safety at risk.

Pricing Review

- Concern about the NDIS Annual Price Review not including Individualised Living Options (ILO). This risks ILO sustainability, as it does not take into consideration the increases in SCHADS Awards which significantly impact on ILO pricing.
- Concerns about Support Coordination rates not being increased in the last 3 years. This reduces the ability of smaller, person-centred, organisations to supply high quality support coordination services.
- The importance of the current SDA Pricing Review in shaping the SDA housing market. Members were concerned that if the Review does not promote good practices in the market, it may result in an increase of institutions and participants becoming homeless.



Disability community

- Concerns about the negative way the media portrays participant spending, despite it being in line with NDIS guidelines. Members commended The Hon Bill Shorten, Minister for the NDIS, for his public support for participants.
- The need to match the Disability Support Pension to the Aged Pension.

NDIA Operations

- The need for the NDIA to be a leader in employing people with intellectual disability.
- Reports of ongoing delays with the NDIS call centre and not having enquiries appropriately dealt with.
- The need to include information about how people with disability can appeal an access decision in NDIA's written communications to participants.
- Ongoing reports of participants and providers having difficulty finding and keeping skilled disability workers.

Interface

- The need to have more discussions with state and territory governments about the importance of data sharing arrangements related to NDIS participants in the criminal justice system.
- Reports of children with disability living in residential institutions being significantly underrepresented in the NDIS. The NDIA needs to work with state and territory governments to ensure this vulnerable population receive the adequate support to access the NDIS.

Update on NDIA co-design work

Ms van Poppel asked for feedback on the [progress of co-design projects](#) that Council Members are working on. In relation to the Information Gathering for Access and Planning Co-design Steering Committee, Members noted:

- The importance of prompt and transparent communications about the work of the Steering Committee. In particular, about the nature of its work, pace and engagement to date.
- The need to have balanced views between health and medical professionals and people with disability and their families.
- The importance of co-design in all aspects of the project, including planning, implementation and evaluation.

Information, Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) update

Ms Sarah Guise, Branch Manager Disability Support, Department of Social Services, briefed Council on the current work related to ILC including:



- Building Employer's Confidence Grant Round
- Extending the funding of over 350 existing ILC grants until June 2024. This ensures continuity of services for some grant recipients who had expressed interest in continuing their programs or services.
- Delays in the development of the ILC Strategy. This is due to a need to wait for any recommendations the NDIS review may make in relation to ILC.
- Developing a performance framework to better analyse ILC data and evaluate grants outcomes.
- Work related to increasing ILC funding in rural and remote areas
- Work related to improving the ILC grant application process, to make it more accessible and easier for organisations to apply.

Members feedback included:

- The need to provide some advisory service to assist smaller disability and family organisations with the grant application processes, as some may have good programs but not the capacity to apply.
- Questions about the membership and terms of reference of the Sector Advisory Panel.
- The need to provide a platform for current grant recipients to connect with each other, to maximise networking and shared learnings.

More information on Council

Council will next meet on 15 December 2022. Find out more about Council meetings and bulletins at the [Council's website](#). You can also access advice from the [Council's website](#).

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