

Independent Advisory Council Meeting Bulletin 26 May, 9 and 25 June 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.

Since the introduction of COVID-19 restrictions, the Council has met every fortnight for two hours via videoconferencing. This Bulletin provides an overview of the key topics discussed at the meetings of 26 May, 9 and 25 June 2020. The Council's Principal Member, Mr John Walsh AM, attended the meetings, together with Council Members and Expert Advisers.

The meeting of 25 June marked the final meeting of this Council's term. The NDIA and the Council's Secretariat would like to acknowledge the significant contributions this Council has made to the implementation and delivery of the NDIS.

Data on Rural and Remote Participants

Ms Sarah Johnson, Scheme Actuary, provided an overview of the analysis completed on participants from the Far North region in South Australia.

The findings were consistent with other analysis of rural and remote communities highlighting that meeting basic needs (food or shelter) is a priority as a fundamental need, together with any disability-related need. Members noted the data showed many participants in the region still have a poor understanding of the Scheme and their plans, and recommended ways to addressing this gap.

Early Childhood Early Intervention (ECEI)

Mr Luke Napolitano, General Manager, Partner and Contact Centre, provided an overview of the management response to Council's advice "Promoting best practice in early childhood intervention in the NDIS", which was submitted to the NDIA Board in May 2020.

Mr Napolitano noted the NDIA is now in a position to look in more detail at some of the issues and their causes in relation to the ECEI approach, and outlined current work underway such as the Strategy Review and Strategy Reset project.

Council was pleased to see the commitment from the Agency to improve the ECEI pathway for participants, and noted the challenges around translating ECEI policy into practice. The Council will continue to engage and work with the NDIA in the refinement of the ECEI approach.

Home and Living Supports

Dr Sam Bennett, General Manager, Advice, Research and Evaluation, updated Council on the latest developments around Supported Independent Living (SIL) and Individual Living Options (ILOs) and noted the aim of the current program of work is to ensure participants have greater choice and control.

Members noted specific population groups which require special consideration including people living in group homes who need access to peer support to plan a life out of congregate settings; people in the juvenile justice system and young people aged 15-17 who may be more likely to be funnelled into group homes; and young families with children with disability who may need support to adapt to the changing support requirements as children grow.

Council also noted the broader cultural reform needed to ensure people with disability have real choice and control in home and living, noting the role of social housing and state sponsorship of accessible living which is outside the NDIA's remit.

Practice Guidance Update

Mr Oliver Bladek, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Design Digital and Strategy provided an update on the review and rewrite of NDIA practice guidance and operational guidelines. The project aims to simplify and improve the way the NDIA communicates policy and makes decisions, and is an interim step towards the development of an overarching policy to enable greater choice, control and outcomes for participants.

Council stressed the importance of transparency and consistency of process and decision making. Members also suggested further language translation for some participant groups (CALD, intellectual disability, and Indigenous communities) would be beneficial to ensuring accessibility for all participants.

Psychosocial Disability

Dr Gerry Naughtin, Strategic Adviser Psychosocial Disability and Mental Health, provided an overview of the progress on psychosocial disability within the NDIS, including the development of the 'Recovery Coach', a specific support item for participants with psychosocial disability.

Dr Naughtin acknowledged that most of the work and achievements to date were consistent with Council's recommendations in the 2014 paper 'Implementing the NDIS for people with disabilities related to mental health issues'.

Council congratulated Dr Naughtin on the achievements and noted the learnings that would stem from this work and could be applied across all participants groups in the NDIS. Members noted some of the challenges still to be addressed in relation to peer workers and suggested it may be an area for the next Council to develop advice on.

Council's Year in Review

The Principal Member discussed the extensive work and advice provided by the Council over the past 12 months. Members were pleased to see a compilation of their work, as well as some of the highlights during the past year, including the endorsement and implementation of Council's new operating model, the submission of four papers as formal advice to the NDIS Board, the engagement with The Hon. Stuart Robert, Minister for the NDIS, and the active involvement in the NDIA's COVID-19 response.

Upon the Secretariat's request, Council members and expert advisers provided their views and feedback in relation to areas and processes which could be strengthened and could constitute the focus for 2020-21. Council also discussed outstanding priorities, for the next Council's consideration.

The Principal Member thanked all members and expert advisers for their contributions to the Council and the NDIS, stressing the critical importance of the Council's independent advice in guiding the work of the NDIA.

Next meetings

The first meeting of the new Council is scheduled for August 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/>