

Independent Advisory Council Meeting Bulletin 11 December 2020

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 provides independent advice to the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) Board, as part of the NDIS Act 2013.

This Bulletin summarises the Council's 11 December 2020 meeting, chaired by Ms Robyn Kruk AO, Principal Member, and attended by Mr Martin Hoffman, NDIA Chief Executive Officer, Council Members and Expert Adviser.

From the Council's Principal Member

The Principal Member said that the Council will provide its submission to the public consultation of the [National Disability Strategy \(NDS\) Outcomes Frameworks](#) by 18 December 2020.

The Council's Reference Group review is nearing completion. Four new [Reference Groups](#) are being established with enhanced and diverse representation. Appointments will be announced at the next Council meeting.

The Council will share its views on safeguards and quality, with a formal response to an issues paper for the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability. This will align with the Council's Work Plan priority to deliver formal advice on participant safety.

Mr Hoffman was invited to provide the Council with an update from the Agency. He said that 2020 has been a challenging year for the NDIA due to COVID-19, however significant improvements to the delivery of the NDIS had been made. High service standards, Independent Assessments (IA), and its reform work will continue be a priority for the NDIA in the new year. The Council's expertise will continue to be used to inform the IAs and all Scheme reform projects.

The Principal Member and Mr Hoffman welcomed the sector issue reports from Members and Expert Advisor, saying that the reports are both extremely useful and serve as a 'reality check' for the Council and NDIA. The reports highlighted significant issues among the communities, geographical areas and population groups that the Council works with. The Council are able to use these reports to inform its work and Work Plan.

Local Area Coordination

Council discussed the development of its formal advice on Local Area Coordination (LAC) which will be submitted to the NDIA Board in February 2021.

The advice will outline the Council's vision for the reconfigured LAC function, as well as challenges and recommendations for the NDIA, to align with the Agency's 'Scheme Work of the Future' project.

Council Members noted the following suggestions for inclusion in the draft advice:

- The skill set of LAC and quality assurance required, noting the challenges with the early LAC model.
- Minimum requirements for people with disability to be employed by LAC organisations, for improved disability representation and lived experience in LAC roles.
- Clarity into the LAC's role to implement NDIS plans, and distinguishing the role of the LAC from that of the support coordinator.
- Minimum requirements for organisations bidding for LAC tenders.

The Principal Member stressed the importance of the LAC role, capabilities, cultural awareness and communication skills, and that the voice of participants should be a part of the LAC process. The Council agreed that it would review and revise the advice and endorse out of session before it is submitted to the NDIA Board.

Progress on Independent Assessments (IA)

Dr Sam Bennett, NDIA General Manager, Policy, Advice and Research, said that [Independent Assessments](#) (IAs) remain a major focus for the Agency. He provided an update on IA consultations and thanked Members who are a part of IA subgroup.

As part of its public consultation work, the Agency has been focusing on:

- The choice of assessor and skill set of the assessor workforce
- Goal setting to meet individual needs, including participants with complex support needs
- The budget design process and methodology for setting personalised budgets
- Quality assurance framework for IAs.

Council Members urged the Agency to provide clear and accessible communication to the community on the IAs, to allay their concerns. Dr Bennett committed to providing a session on the budget methodology at Council's February 2021 meeting.

Research and Evaluation in the NDIA

Dr Janice Biggs, NDIA Branch Manager, Research and Evaluation (R&E), updated the Council on the Agency's research and evaluation structure and future priorities.

Dr Biggs is committed to working with the Council and asked for Members' feedback. The Council said that:

- R&E projects should include people with disability and their families throughout all research process stages, stressing the importance of their role in evaluation.
- Disability or diagnostic specific research presents challenges when people face multiple disabilities, which is the case for many NDIS participants. Council noted this could impact on research findings and advised it be reconsidered.
- Any research into support for decision making and its implementation by the NDIA should take into account people with very complex communication needs. For example, a different approach may be needed for people with intellectual disability who don't use words to communicate.
- Research, evaluations and findings should be provided in Easy Read so that people with intellectual disability can understand and provide feedback on R&E projects.

NDIA's Home and Living Policy Consultation

Dr Sam Bennett, discussed the NDIA's proposed Home and Living policy public consultation paper, which will be released in early February 2021 for a six week public consultation period. Dr Bennett thanked Members involved in the NDIA's Home and Living Advisory Panel for their contributions to the Policy.

The Policy aims to provide an overarching NDIA strategic position to support participants in an environment where their goals, preferences and needs drive their preferred home and living solution, rather than pre-defined service options.

Members noted that:

- Providers of disability accommodation do not assist participants to envision a 'life outside a group home', and are worried they will lose funding.
- The NDIA should support participants to make decision about who they want to live with, noting this process can be very lengthy for some.
- The NDIA should have an ongoing focus for H&L supports for people with complex support needs.
- The need to consider the limitations and impact of current state-based and emerging national building codes legislation on the ability of the NDIA to implement its vision for Home and Living.

The Principal Member acknowledged that building codes are important and are largely state regulated, and asked that the NDIA looks at other ways at engaging with diverse stakeholder groups and highlighting this and other key policy levers. The Council Consultant confirmed that this is not a new issue, and that the Council has highlighted home and living, and building code, issues in a range of its past papers.

More information on the Council

The Council will next meet on 4 February 2021. You can find out more about Council meetings at the [Council's website meeting page \(external\)](#). You can access previous papers and advice from the [Council's website advice page \(external\)](#).

In line with the Council's commitment to accessibility, an Easy Read version of this Bulletin will be released seven days after this Bulletin is published.