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Meeting bulletin – 17 October 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 17 October 2022.

Update from Council's Principal Member

Ms van Poppel acknowledged the work of Dr Lisa Studdert, the NDIA's Acting Chief Executive Officer (CEO). She also thanked Dr Studdert for her support and engagement with Council. Ms van Poppel said that Council is looking forward to working with Ms Rebecca Falkingham. Ms Falkingham is the NDIA's incoming CEO, who steps into the role on 18 October 2022.

Update from the NDIA

Dr Studdert provided an overview of the key topics of this week's Disability Reform Ministers' Meeting. Dr Studdert updated Members on the Independent Expert Review program the NDIA is establishing. This program aims to provide participants with an alternative dispute resolution. The program will review selected individual participant cases before they go to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT). Participation in this program is voluntary and it will not remove a participant from their place in an AAT process. The program will have an independent oversight committee, chaired by Mr Graeme Innes AM.

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. Council welcomed Ms Donna Purcell, NDIA Participant Advocate, to observe this session.

Key matters Members noted this month included:



NDIS planning

- The need to highlight to the Department of Social Services (DSS) that people in the Northern Territory cannot access any advocacy supports to assist them with an AAT process. The lack of advocacy supports dissuades people from contesting their plan at AAT.

Other services and programs that give support

- Concerns over the relaxation of national guidelines for public health related to COVID-19. This may further restrict the areas people with disability consider 'safe' to go. Noting, some people with disability have been isolating in their homes since March 2020.
- Reports of negligence and discrimination within the health system. In particular when there is no carer or support person looking after a person with high level disability. There is a need to educate health professionals about the needs and rights of people with disability.
- Reports that hospital staff refuse to give NDIS participants personal care. Some hospital staff ask NDIS staff to do personal care. There is a need to establish a national process to ensure consistency of practice.
- General issues with accessibility in retirement villages/aged care homes. Members noted that while communal areas are generally accessible, individual units are not.

Providers and disability organisations

- Concerns about the sustainability of small providers, not-for-profit and disabled people's organisations. Many of these organisations provide individualised and quality services to people with disability. But they struggle to secure the funding needed to run their organisations and compete with large corporate providers.
- Concerns about the high costs and administration involved in provider registration. This affects smaller providers or participants who self-manage.

Disability community

- The need for the NDIA to be a leader in employing people with intellectual disability.
- The need to continue to include people with disability in NDIA consultations. Members noted the NDIA has consulted different groups separately—for example, providers and people with a disability— but that there is value in bringing various stakeholders together.

Members continue to report about:

- Plan funding cuts or unexpected funds cancellation.
- Concerns about the lack of information about the prorating of plan value when the NDIA applies a plan variation. This can impact participants who have banked their plan funding for periods of high support needs, such as school holidays. Members warned this could increase the number of complaints from participants.



- Concerns about the ongoing lack of availability of support workers. Members noted the higher incentives for workers to move to the aged care sector; causing a significant workforce shortage in the disability sector and potentially putting participants at risk.
- Reports of inadequate access to services in regional areas. This affects NDIS participants who live regionally.
- Long delays for the approval of home modifications.

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 Participant Safety Co-design Steering Committee, Members noted:

- The NDIA should encourage dialogue with people with disability and providers in the same room.
- The need for representation of young people and women with disability.

Members noted the importance of engaging the Co-Design Advisory Group in relation to the NDIS Review work. They also voiced concern about the progress of the NDIA's co-design of the First Nations and Remote and Very Remote Strategies. Members called for greater engagement with key First Nations disability organisations and communities.

Australia's Disability Strategy

DSS representatives provided an update on the progress of [Australia's Disability Strategy \(Strategy\)](#). Members said the [current consultation to inform the Strategy Guides](#) and the upcoming [National Forum](#) was pleasing.

Members' feedback included:

- The need to include people with intellectual disability in the Strategy's Advisory Council.
- The importance of looking at needs and outcomes for people with disability 'across their lifespan'.
- The need to improve access to adequate housing for people with disability.

Update on NDIA work on 3P

Council received an update about the NDIA's work on the Participants, Platform and Processes (3P) program. This work includes developing, testing, and implementing tools to improve systems, controls, and frameworks. The end goals are to:

- Improve participant experience
- Make NDIA processes simpler for staff
- Help meet the timeframes in the Participant Service Guarantee (PSG) and the requirements of the NDIS Act.



Council also received a demonstration of the new 'my NDIS' participant portal. Members' feedback included:

- The ability to incorporate Easy Read translations and imagery into the participant portal.
- The importance of testing the portal with First Nations people, communities from remote and very remote Australia, and people with intellectual disability.

The NDIA have started testing the new internal system across Tasmania and will present their results at a future Council meeting.

More information on Council

Council will next meet on 21 November 2022. Find out more about Council meetings and bulletins at the [Council's website](#). You can also access advice from the [Council's website](#).

Council publishes an Easy Read version of this bulletin. This is part of its commitment to accessibility.