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Meeting bulletin – 13 April 2023

This bulletin summarises the Independent Advisory Council's (Council) recent meeting. The Council gives advice to the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) Board. 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 in Hobart, Tasmania on 13 April 2023.

Update from Council's Principal Member

The Principal Member thanked Tasmanian disability representative and carer organisations (DRCOs) and partners in the community who met with Council on 12 April 2023. They gave Council feedback about their experience with the local testing of PACE, the NDIS's new customer relationship management system. Council will use the learnings to give advice to NDIA business areas working on PACE.

Update from the NDIA

Mr Kurt Fearnley AO, NDIA Board Chairperson, highlighted the current inflationary pressures impacting on NDIS plans. This is one of the current sustainability considerations for the NDIS. Mr Fearnley wants to uplift NDIA staff's specialist training to better serve participants.

Ms Rebecca Falkingham, NDIA Chief Executive Officer (CEO), noted the NDIA is working through a pre-decision consultation for its organisational restructure. The CEO wants the NDIA to be an employer of choice for people with disability, as well as First Nations, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD), and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, and asexual (LGBTIQ+) people.

What Members have heard in their community

[Council Members](#) and the [Expert Adviser](#) reported on matters for the NDIA's attention, related to:

NDIA operations

- Calls for the NDIA and government to continue to safeguard participants and/or people with disability who are vulnerable to COVID, in light of [recent reports](#).
- Positive community sentiment around the appointment of Dr Richard Fejo to the NDIA Board.



- Widespread challenges for service providers in the Northern Territory. This includes challenges with workforce and skills, local area coordinators (LACs) and support coordination.
- Calls for longer timeframes for the NDIS [Annual Pricing Review consultation](#) for genuine engagement.
- Calls for the NDIA to look at best practice service providers in remote communities and to consider greater flexibility around a worker's cultural obligations, change of circumstances, and employing family members to give supports.
- The CALD Summit, held on February 2023, was an important forum that gathered different generations of community leaders who contributed their perspectives.

Providers

- Some providers are losing confidence in the NDIS Review's ability to address geographic-specific challenges, for example issues that impact on the Northern Territory.
- Some providers have concerns about how to afford potential recommendations that'll come from the Disability Royal Commission. Registered providers are already struggling under an unequal compliance environment.
- Some providers say the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission's regulatory framework makes their work harder and there is little interaction between the Commission and states/territories.

NDIS supports

- Concerns around the lack of awareness and information about Justice Liaison Officers (JLOs).
- Reports the NDIS denies access to prosthetics for those with upper limb deficiencies. Also, sometimes delegates request that occupational therapists must verify a prosthetic prescription.
- General issues around local area coordination (LAC) and/or support coordinator services that impact plan quality and supports.
- While there is positive feedback in the community about NDIS participants leaving hospital sooner, there are reports some NDIS participants with complex support needs cannot use NDIS funded supports within the hospital setting.
- Reports that some LACs, support coordinators and planners advise families to put people under guardianship orders, which does not promote a person's human and decision-making rights.
- Some plan managers do not process assistive technology request because they allege the NDIA denies claims from some retailers.
- There is valuable information about self-management in a [podcast featuring Council Members Dr George Taleporos and Sam Paior](#).

NDIS planning

- Wide ranging concerns about the quality of planning, practice, and advice LACs give participants.



- Calls for the NDIS and Administrative Appeals Tribunal to streamline the plan dispute pathway for people with complex behavioural supports.
- Reports of plans being heavily itemised with specific amounts for different types of therapy. Some participants worry about restrictions to plan flexibility.

Home and living

- Concerns around supported independent living (SIL) supports for First Nations people in the Northern Territory. Some people must relocate to Darwin to access supports and service.
- SIL and/or specialist disability accommodation (SDA) funding for participants, particularly those with intellectual disability, are mostly funded for 1-to-3 supports. This is an acute issue for participants who have robust housing support needs and significant behavioural support needs.
- Reports of reductions and/or removal of SIL supports in plans, which causes stress and anxiety for participants and families alike.
- The NDIS should reconfirm its position for supported accommodation and ensure consistency with SIL, SDA and independent liveability options (ILO) eligibility criteria.

Interface

- Calls for an inquiry into the [use of school suspensions in Queensland state schools](#), because of the disproportionate affects on children with disability and First Nations students.
- People with a disability support pension are scared to gain employment and advance their careers because it might impact their pension and associated benefits. Calls for a work bonus for people with disability, [modelled on the bonus offered for people of pension age](#).
- While it is positive that Activ's future is resolved, there is concern in the community about the role and viability of Australian disability enterprises.

Update from the NDIS Review

Key members of the NDIS Review team, including Professor Bruce Bonyhady AM and Ms Lisa Paul AO PSM, joined Council to give an update on the work of the NDIS Review. While Council will continue to engage with the NDIS Review through meetings and submissions, Members noted:

- It is important that the NDIS Review factors in co-design in its work and that the NDIS commits to future co-design.
- The NDIS Review's focus on early childhood is necessary to ensure improvements for children and young participants.

Update on PACE testing

The NDIA gave Council an update on PACE, including information on preliminary findings of testing, evaluation, and next steps. Members noted:



- Planning is needed for the PACE rollout to remote and very remote areas to support people without connectivity and access to the internet and/or technology.
- PACE should bridge any potential cultural divides to ensure it is fully accessible.
- The importance of referring to research on [First Nations data sovereignty and governance](#).
- There are current barriers in the access process with showing identification, which is not an option for a lot of First Nations people. Any development in PACE will need to consider this.
- The NDIA needs to consider PACE's cyber security implications and interfaces for partners and other parties involved in the data landscape.

Update on my NDIS app

The NDIA demonstrated the my NDIS app to Council. Members noted:

- The need to ensure full accessibility of the app, especially related to different screen reading technologies.
- The importance of the participant's ability to customise information for the best user experience. For example, having different views for tabular/chart graphics, plan budget breakdown over 12-months rather than 3 years.
- The need to investigate optical character recognition to assist self-managers who upload invoices.
- The importance of the inbox feature. Members wondered if this would allow the NDIS to communicate directly with participants.
- Importance of future integration of my NDIS app with other government systems like myGov.

More information on Council

Council's next meeting will be on 18 May 2023. 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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