

## **Independent Advisory Council Equity and Inclusion Reference Group Meeting Bulletin 29 April 2021**

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The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) has an Independent Advisory Council (Council). Council gives independent advice to the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) Board. This is a part of the NDIS Act 2013.

Council brings the participant's voice to the heart of the NDIS. It does this by using its four reference groups, to inform and improve its advice. Reference groups include members with expertise and experience in specific areas of disability.

The Equity and Inclusion Reference Group (Reference Group) gives advice to the Council. This advice promotes diversity, inclusion, equal opportunity and fairness in the NDIS.

This Bulletin summarises the 29 April 2021 Reference Group meeting, led by:

- Ms Robyn Kruk AO, Council Principal Member and Reference Group Co-Chair
- Adjunct Associate Professor Jennifer Cullen, Council Member and Reference Group Co-Chair
- NDIA Representatives and Council Secretariat.

### **From the Reference Group Co-Chairs**

Ms Robyn Kruk said each Reference Group member would help to:

- Bring Council a unique perspective on diversity and what's happening in their communities.
- Ensure that Council achieves its advice, priorities, and the priorities of the NDIA.
- Develop solutions to current Scheme equity issues, creating positive outcomes for NDIS participants.

Ms Jennifer Cullen added that the Reference Group will help Council with equity issues for diverse communities including:

- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people
- Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities; and
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer, Asexual Plus (LGBTIQA+) communities.

Ms Cullen said the Reference Group will give trusted analysis to Council advice. This is because of member's knowledge of current issues. She will update the Terms of Reference objectives for the Reference Group. They will include representative communities.

## Reference Group member reports

Reference Group members provided updates on issues in their communities, including:

- Access inequality, with some communities not knowing how to access the NDIS.
- Workforce issues make it hard for NDIS participants to get supports, including:
  - Long wait lists for services.
  - Service quality variability.
  - Lack of workforce training, causing trauma or safety issues.
  - Disability support workers seeking employment in aged care. This causes disruption to support services for NDIS participants.
  - Participant concern that unspent funds may lead to funding cuts at plan review. These funds were unspent due to service unavailability during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.
- Anxiety on Scheme reforms and Independent Assessments. There is increased anxiety in communities among:
  - People with intellectual disability.
  - People with complex support needs.
  - People who are homeless.
- More young people are being home schooled. And parents are using NDIA funding to provide an education to their children. This is because:
  - They can't get necessary supports from education providers.
  - Disability supports across the states, territories, and the Commonwealth, differ.
- Poor quality NDIS plans that do not consider inclusion. This results in a decline in equity and cultural safety for diverse communities.
- The NDIA lacks ways for people from diverse communities to:
  - Inform NDIA practice.
  - Have a say in rolling out strategies that affect them. These strategies include the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, CALD, and LGBTIQ+ Strategies.
- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, CALD and LGBTIQ+ women face increased disadvantage. They cannot access to the NDIS, experience higher levels of violence and unemployment.

## Update on NDIA inclusion strategies

Ms Kathryn Harris is the NDIA Branch Manager Engagement & Communications. She gave updates on the NDIA's progress on the:

- [Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Strategy](#), released in March 2017
- [CALD Strategy](#), released in May 2018
- [LGBTIQ+ Strategy](#), released in June 2020.

Ms Harris advised that the NDIA:

- Will update the public on the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and CALD Strategies. This update will include clear communications and resources. The NDIA wants to ensure the community understands its progress against the Strategies.
- Wants better outcomes for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, CALD and LGBTIQ+ participants. To do this they will focus on:
  - Making the NDIS culturally safe; and
  - Intersectionality.
- Will boost its community engagement. This will ensure the strategies are upheld, effective and meaningful.

Reference Group members raised matters including:

- Lack of improvement by the NDIA on issues faced by diverse communities:
  - Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people face the same issues with the Scheme as they did in 2013.
  - The NDIA lacks an appropriate definition for CALD. This results in inadequate representation of, and data on, CALD people with disability.
  - The NDIA has not established the external Advisory Group set out under the Priority Actions in the LGBTIQ+ Strategy.
- The NDIA's diversity working group should focus on representation. Especially for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, CALD and LGBTIQ+ people. Also, NDIA's Indigenous and LGBTIQ+ Champions should be representative of their communities.
- The NDIA should meaningfully engage with diverse communities. This engagement should:
  - Allow participation in policy design, implementation and decision making.
  - Include people from diverse communities and their organisations.
  - Consider the barriers to engagement for these communities. This includes communication, social and economic disadvantage, gender, trauma, and domestic violence.
- The NDIA should create communications together with diverse communities. These groups should also review communications. This will to ensure tailored and needs-based communications. Communications, including the NDIS Act, should be in plain English or in-language. This will help these groups access the NDIS.
- The NDIA should consider intersectionality to promote equity within the NDIS. This means the NDIA should look at discrimination based on:
  - Sexual orientation and identity
  - Gender and gender identity
  - Race
  - Economic status; and
  - Housing status.

## Reference Group priorities

Ms Jennifer Cullen led discussions on priorities for the Reference Group. This includes advisory work it will complete in its three-year term, until June 2023. The priorities aim to provide solutions to equity and inclusion issues in the NDIS.

The Reference Group will finalise its priorities out of session. The priorities will align with Council's Work Plan and advice, and the NDIA Corporate Plan.

### **More information on the Reference Group**

The Reference Group will next meet in the second half of 2021. You can find out more about Council meetings at the [Council's website meeting page \(external\)](#). You can access advice from the [Council's website advice page \(external\)](#).

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