

## **Independent Advisory Council of the NDIS**

# **Examining Support Coordination in the context of the Intermediaries Review**

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**March 2018**

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## Introduction

Significant resources are allocated to Support Coordination<sup>1</sup> as a capacity building item with the aim of providing “*assistance to strengthen participant’s abilities to coordinate and implement supports and participate more full in the community. It can include:*

- *initial assistance with inking participants with the right providers to meet their needs*
- *assistance to source providers*
- *coordinating a range of supports both funded and mainstream and build on informal supports*
- *resolving points of crisis*
- *parenting training; and*
- *developing participants resilience in their own network and community*
- *developing participant capacity for social and economic participation*
- *managing expectations of reasonable and necessary funded supports.*

Outcomes from Support Coordination have not matched expectations leading to widespread dissatisfaction.

The IAC and the IDRG have written four papers on the topic of Support Coordination providing advice as to how to enhance its performance. The NDIA commissioned Boston Consulting Group to undertake the intermediary project to develop a model for intermediary funding, service types, pricing and registration supported by the identification of appropriate policy settings and implementation steps. The policy objectives of an intermediary market were:

- assist participants with self-direction so that they can exercise choice and control and minimise the Agency’s role in their lives
- increase market transparency and efficiency to promote competition between providers on price and outcomes
- encourage innovation in disability service models by supporting participants to actively identify opportunities to achieve their outcomes.

This paper aims to inform the new IAC of the policy discussion on Support Coordination and to make recommendations aimed at improving the effectiveness of this critical capacity building support.

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<sup>1</sup> *Practice Guidance, Plan Implementation and Monitoring, Guidance for planners, LACs and delegates v1.01*

## Previous IAC advice

The thrust of content from previous papers is presented below.

### Strengths

Support Coordination is a critical capacity building support that links vulnerable participants with a skilled practitioner to assist them to implement their plan and build their capacity.

### Challenges

#### Role and time frame

The IAC has taken a consistent view that the capacity building elements of Support Coordination need to be strengthened and that the level and duration of its allocation needs to match the outcomes sought<sup>2</sup>. The IDRG was especially concerned that the primary aim of support coordination was limited to greater independence in directing services rather than the NDIS aspirations for a life of greater independence, social and economic participation and inclusion.

In addition, the IDRG argued that the NDIA may have underestimated what is required to “strengthen participants’ abilities to coordinate and implement informal, mainstream and funded support”. For many people with intellectual disability, building informal support and connecting to mainstream services requires planning, intentional strategies, the development of trusting relationships and ongoing support.

Research by Roger Stancliffe<sup>3</sup> with the provider AFFORD demonstrates the nature of work required to support people with intellectual disability who have led segregated lives to transition to mainstream options in retirement. The key message from the research is that inclusion and the establishment of informal networks in ordinary places is possible but that it requires sustained and strategic effort over time.

Practice guidance stipulates two limiting elements that potentially impact on the potency of Support Coordination. Firstly, Support Coordination is only allocated to participants in the intensive and super intensive streams, almost all of whom, by definition, lack effective informal support. Secondly, that Support Coordination is a time limited<sup>4</sup> intervention.

People who lack effective informal support need guidance over a significant period of time to positively disrupt patterns that do not contribute to positive outcomes of increased independence and participation. The time limited nature of Support Coordination means that in practice, only the case management elements are implemented and there is little or no attention to the capacity building tasks that are central to reducing the long-term need for support. These tasks include work to:

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<sup>2</sup>IAC “Support Coordination as a tool for capacity building in the NDIS” May 2016 and August 2016

<sup>3</sup><http://sydney.edu.au/news/fhs/607.html?newsstoryid=8350>

<sup>4</sup> Practice Guidance, p12 “There is an expectation that, where possible, Support Coordination will be replaced in subsequent (review) plans by Support Connection or Local Area Coordination.” The document emphasises this point in bold.

- build informal support
- embed (not just connect) the participant to the community in meaningful ways that build belonging
- guide and mentor services to work toward participant goals of increased independence and relationships
- identify areas for next steps, and
- support the participant and his/her newly connected informal support to speak up.

The time limited provision of Support Coordination makes assumptions about the availability of providers of core supports that are skilled at working developmentally. In an ideal world, competent services are readily available to undertake this work but anecdotal evidence suggests that the reality is very different, to the detriment of the participant and the Scheme. Elsewhere, the IDR<sup>5</sup> has called for a market scan to test the readiness of providers of core supports to assist participants in ways that facilitate increased independence including identifying the core competencies required for support workers to increase participant independence.

#### Generalist nature

Support Coordination is not differentiated by type of need or participant so it is often provided by Support Coordinators without specialist experience in working with the targeted cohort.

Specialist expertise is critical for more effective and efficient provision. The redesigned Participant Pathway recognises the value of specialisation to increase responsiveness and potency. Specialisation must be extended to Support Coordination ensuring staff have knowledge, skills and experience in working with specific groups or on specific issues including participants:

- in touch with the criminal justice system
- who are eligible for SDA
- with complex behaviour
- with complex health
- who have informal support but face complex situations such as significant barriers to living in their own home, having a job or valued social role, belonging in community.

Targeted Support Coordination as identified above would enable effective provision if coupled with identified knowledge, skill and experience requirements reflected in a separate registration process.

#### Target group

The target group for Support Coordination may be unnecessarily restricted.

It is the role of LAC to assist participants in the general and supported streams to activate informal, mainstream and community supports and assist the participant to

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<sup>5</sup> IDR<sup>5</sup> "NDIS Supports for independence, December 2016

link to services. Whilst the revised Participant Pathway will facilitate increased participant engagement, the IAC is concerned that LACs are unlikely to have the time to provide more than information and referral. In addition, the IAC is concerned that the assumptions about the capacity of participants to reconfigure their supports and negotiate service agreements to help them achieve their goals are unrealistic.

Participants who have informal support but face complex situations need skilled assistance to lead an ordinary life. Many are participants with significant disability who have traditionally been subjected to low expectations with a natural pathway to grouped accommodation and day programs. Some have engaged families who seek guidance as to how to build ordinary lives for their family member with disability.

The now obsolete Support Coordination Framework allocated Support Coordination according to a matrix of capacity of participant AND complexity of plan. This enabled the provision of Support Coordination for people with significant disability who want to avoid congregate services and want paid staff to facilitate relationships and help them be more independent. The challenge is that these participants do not get support to redesign their support and move from congregate to individualised services.

The Support Coordination Framework enabled the allocation of Support Coordination to plan and implement the highly nuanced steps required to succeed. Evidence from state and territory systems suggests that assistance of this nature represents value for money contributing to participants being more independent, more safeguarded, with greater levels of participation and less need for paid support.

#### Conflict of interest

The previous IAC was not able to come to a consensus position in relation to requirements that providers of Support Coordination needed to be independent of providers of core supports.

#### Registration requirements

Elsewhere<sup>6</sup>, the IAC and the IDRG have argued that registration for Support Coordination or any of the areas under the Assist Life Stages Transition Cluster do not require evidence of the knowledge, skills and experience required to provide the capacity building support. In fact, many providers offering Support Coordination advertise the services as case management on their websites.

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<sup>6</sup> IAC, (May 2016) *Support Coordination as a tool of capacity building in the NDIS*  
IAC (August 2016) *Support Coordination as a tool of capacity building in the NDIS: A discussion paper*  
IDRG (June 2016) *Requirements of support coordination to meet the goals of the NDIS for people with intellectual disability*

## NDIA Intermediary Review

The NDIA has been concerned that the intermediaries market, including a market of Support Coordination providers had not developed as anticipated and hence commissioned Boston Consulting to undertake a review of intermediary functions.

The NDIA required the intermediary project to work within the constraints of:

- no new intermediary role on the basis that existing roles of LAC plan implementation, plan manager and support coordinator) are sufficient but standards need to be lifted
- no additional intermediary funding on the basis that existing plan capacity building support is frequently underspent and the intermediary market needs to demonstrate value delivery before additional investment
- no changes to intermediary entitlement by participant stream on the basis that maintaining eligibility by participant stream reduces role duplication.

Two key observations of the intermediary project that are relevant are that:

- No intermediary role has clear accountability to help participants do better with their plans, as such there has been limited innovation in service delivery structures
- The focus of effort of Support Coordination has been on support connection and management due to system complexity, a lack of independence and no clear expectation for support redesign.

Intermediary project recommended

Stream	Overarching recommendations
All participants	<p>Enforce independence requirements at the participant level between their intermediary and funded supports to protect participants from sharp practices</p> <p>Presume participant capacity to self-direct by default during planning</p> <p>Require full participant plan access for funded intermediaries</p> <p>Enable unfunded intermediaries by opening API access and allowing bulk payment capability</p> <p>Clarify that 'plan manager' is a legislative entitlement with fixed stated support</p>
General & supported participants	<p>During transition, re-stream participants to intensive who need more than LAC plan implementation support, limiting their support coordination to 'support redesign'</p> <p>Allow participants to choose to spend capacity-building supports</p>

Stream	Overarching recommendations
	on support-redesign
Intensive and super intensive participants	<p>Create a discrete service type for 'support redesign' with a portion of support coordination funding sequestered for this service to ensure it is delivered and the focus for market entrants</p> <p>Establish regional panels of support coordinators to increase focus on outcomes and signal agency expectations</p> <p>Where possible, ensure support coordinator is present for the plan handover meeting.</p>

## Implementing the IAC recommendations within the constraints required of the Intermediary Review

The IAC recommends that the NDIA:

- reconfigures Support Coordination to
  - strengthen the capacity building elements
  - create a discrete service type of 'support redesign'
  - ensure level and duration of Support Coordination matches the outcomes sought
  - differentiate Support Coordination roles for specific target groups and life stages
- enforces independence requirement between their intermediary and funded supports at the participant level to protect participants from sharp practices.
- during transition, re-streams participants who need more than LAC plan implementation support to the intensive stream, limiting their support coordination to 'support redesign'
- allows participants to choose to spend capacity-building supports on support-redesign

Given the required constraint of not extending the target group, the IAC recommends that the NDIA:

- commissions capacity building elements in the ILC to ensure that wherever they live, participants who have transitioned into the Scheme in the general and supported stream have access to support to
  - redesign their reasonable and necessary support
  - strengthen informal support
  - speak up
- preferences Disabled Persons and Families Organisations to provide this support