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Reference Group meeting bulletin – 24 August 2023

Equity and Inclusion Reference Group

The Equity and Inclusion Reference Group (Reference Group) met recently. This bulletin summarises the meeting which took place via videoconference on 24 August 2023.

The Reference Group focus on improving inclusion, equal opportunity, and fairness for diverse people in the NDIS. The Reference Group advises the Independent Advisory Council (IAC) on issues related to equity and inclusion. The IAC uses their knowledge to develop advice for the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) Board.

[Ms Leah van Poppel, IAC Principal Member](#) led the meeting.

From the Reference Group Co-chair

Ms van Poppel acknowledged the Reference Group's recent membership refresh. She opened the meeting by welcoming new and returning Reference Group members. Members will work with the Reference Group from 1 July 2023 to 31 December 2024. This refresh aims to ensure greater inclusion of people with intellectual disability and younger people in the IAC.

The IAC appoints members to its [4 Reference Groups](#) through its own determined procedures, in line with section 157 of the [NDIS Act 2013](#). The IAC will appoint Co-chairs for each Reference Group, once the Minister for the NDIS announces the IAC's membership. The full complement of IAC membership is currently in the final stages of determination by the Minister following the completion of some IAC members' terms on 30 June 2023.

Ms van Poppel highlighted work the IAC and Reference Group has done since their last meeting on [22 June 2023 \(DOCX 87KB\)](#). This included acknowledging the Reference Group's contribution to finalising the IAC advice [Improving Equity in the NDIS \(PDF 1MB\)](#) and input to the NDIA's inclusion strategies.

What members have heard in their community

Reference Group members told us things the NDIA needs to know, including:

NDIS access and planning

- Calls for all planners to consider people with disability holistically, rather than focusing on their primary disability.
- It can be hard for smaller culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities to access the NDIS. This is because NDIS information is often not in their language.
- Members highlighted that less people from CALD and First Nations backgrounds self-manage their NDIS plans. Members asked the NDIA for data on this to help them understand this better.
- Calls for the NDIS to get plans and support quickly to people who have acquired disability through stroke.
- Calls for NDIS plans or information to include ways that participants can keep their personal data safe. This includes teaching participants how to protect themselves from scams and fraud.
- Members highlighted that artificial intelligence (AI) could help make better NDIS plans. Policies for using AI must focus on keeping people with disability and their data safe.
- Reports of long wait times in the health system for people gathering evidence of disability, including functional reports.

NDIS service and supports

- Reports that men with brain injury often get more NDIS support for things like food and meal preparation and cleaning than women with brain injury.
- Reports of aging CALD parents finding it hard to get home and living supports for their children with Down syndrome. This is because of language and cultural differences.
- Concerns that school leaver employment supports (SLES) may direct young people with disability into short-term jobs that leave them feeling isolated from their community and don't consider career pathways.
- Members noted the need for employers to think creatively about tailoring jobs for people with disability or using an approach which promotes cooperative small business ownership. This may build capacity and reduce a participant's reliance on employment supports.

NDIS providers and disability community

- Reports that some SLES providers focus on using the program to benefit their business' financial goals.
- Calls for the NDIA to share data on Australia's disability support needs to help providers offer tailored services most needed in communities.
- Concern that support workers may leave disability support work if it takes a long time to get their disability worker screening check.
- Reports that some support workers breach confidentiality. They share NDIS participant's stories to others because they do not have anyone else to talk too and/or cannot access supervision or psychology supports at work.



- Reports that some people with disability are unhappy with providers who ask for case notes about their disability and functional needs.
- Some participants, mainly in rural areas, do not think their providers can support them well in an emergency. Some providers seem unsure of how to help participants plan for an emergency.
- Some concern that better mental health services in the community may reduce their ability to access psychosocial disability supports in the NDIS.
- Concerns that the NDIA may not be able to implement forecasted recommendations from the NDIS Review and Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (Royal Commission) in a timely manner.

Update on NDIA inclusion strategy work

The Reference Group continues to be involved in developing the NDIA's inclusion strategies.

Regarding the NDIA's lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, and asexual (LGBTIQA+) strategy, Members noted:

- The disability community is calling for a refresh of the LGBTIQA+ strategy. They want better representation of themselves and their co-design work in the strategy.
- The LGBTIQA+ strategy should include ways to support LGBTIQA+ NDIS participants with children. Members highlighted that people in non-traditional families often have added challenges in accessing government services like the NDIS.
- The group also felt that sexuality and reproductive rights is an area the NDIS needs to improve on for all participants.

Regarding the CALD strategy, Members noted:

- The NDIA's high-quality stakeholder engagement for the strategy.
- The strategy could be improved by better including/representing the co-design work done.

Regarding the First Nations strategy, Members noted:

- That people from the government were not a part of all sessions of a recent First Nations Advisory Council meeting. This gave the Advisory Council a safe place to talk through their advice before informing the NDIA.

Developing IAC advice

The Reference Group discussed the way the IAC developed its recent advice, [Improving Equity in the NDIS \(PDF 1MB\)](#). Members noted future improvements to the IAC's advice development process and highlighted:



- That establishing 3 focus groups comprising Reference Group members, which linked to each of the NDIA's inclusion strategies population groups, helped develop [Improving Equity in the NDIS \(PDF 1MB\)](#).
- The need to apply intersectionality to all IAC and Reference Group work. The Reference Group wants the IAC's formal advice to help make the NDIS a safe space for all participants.

Developing the Reference Group Work Plan

Members discussed the areas of work they should focus on over the next 18 months. These priorities will form a Work Plan, which will guide the Reference Group's advice to the IAC. Members noted:

- The need for a practical guide to apply intersectionality across all IAC advice. This will include helping the IAC implement their Operationalising Intersectionality Framework.
- The role of the Reference Group is to support the IAC. The IAC focuses on broad issues that affect many people with disability. For example, a person's sexuality.
- They want regular updates on the NDIA's inclusion strategies but want to focus on other issues too.

More information on the Reference Group

The Reference Group will next meet in November 2023. Find out more about Reference Group meetings and bulletins at [the IAC website](#). You can also access [IAC advice here](#).

The IAC publishes an Easy Read version Bulletin. This is part of its commitment to accessibility.