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Reference Group meeting bulletin – 8 November 2023

Equity and Inclusion Reference Group

The Equity and Inclusion Reference Group (Reference Group) recently met in Melbourne and online on 8 November 2023. This bulletin is a summary of the meeting.

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

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

From the Principal Member and Reference Group Co-chair

Ms van Poppel thanked members for coming and welcomed Ms Samantha Jenkinson, the IAC's new Senior Independent Advisor. She will be responsible for supporting the development of the IAC's advice for the NDIA Board.

Ms Van Poppel acknowledged that the IAC are waiting for the appointments of 6 IAC member vacancies to be resolved through government decision-making process. Ms van Poppel will appoint a Co-chair to this Reference Group once IAC membership has been confirmed.

Ms van Poppel highlighted work the Reference Group have done since their last meeting on [24 August 2023 \(DOCX 94KB\)](#), particularly their development of a Work Plan for the next 18 months.

What members have heard in their community

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

NDIS access and planning

- Some NDIS planners encourage participants aged 60 years and over to move to [My Aged Care](#) without letting them know they are ineligible to access the NDIS once they transition.
- Reports that asking for evidence from occupational therapists can delay the access and planning process. This is because there are not enough occupational therapists.
- Assessments to access the NDIS can be expensive and are not refundable. This could mean that children are missing out on early intervention.
- Some families in the defence force find it harder to access the NDIS. This is because they move across Australia or overseas for work, making it difficult to get the evidence they need to complete an [access request](#).
- Calls for more NDIA staff to better understand people with intellectual disability and their needs for access and planning.
- Some people with psychosocial disability are concerned that changes to the NDIS will make it harder for them to gain access.

NDIS service and supports

- When making decisions about NDIS supports, NDIS planners sometimes place greater emphasis on the financial benefits that microenterprises bring rather than the social benefits.
- Calls for the NDIA to improve the way it responds to accidental or minor misuse of plan funding by participants who self-manage. This follows reports that the NDIA often takes self-management away from participants who have made a mistake in how they use their funding.
- Some prisoners with disability find it difficult to access supports through their NDIS plan before they leave prison.

The NDIA, disability community and other services

- Calls for the health system to better inform people with disability and those who help support them about getting important health checks.
- Some people in the community are confused about PACE, the new NDIA computer system. The NDIA should share clear information about PACE, including information in Easy Read.
- Calls from people with disability for the NDIA's co-design work to use a trauma-informed approach that encourages and supports participants to take part in co-design.

Developing IAC advice

The Reference Group discussed new advice the IAC has started to develop about participants who are ageing. Reference Group members gave the following guidance to help shape the advice development:

- Calls to review the working title of the advice 'Participants who are ageing'. The advice should define the age range of participants that it refers to.

- Calls for the age range for the advice to start at 45 years, to account for when people with disability may start experiencing age-related issues. This will also include those First Nations people who can access aged care at 50 years old.
- NDIS participants need support to make an informed choice to move into aged care. There were calls for decisions to be made on a participant's needs, not their age.
- People with high support needs could be at risk of not having enough supports if they move into aged care, given that aged care funding is generally less than funding through the NDIS.
- As carers age, the people with disability they support might need to start caring for them.
- People whose disability was not diagnosed until they are over 40 years old should be supported to take part in the NDIS through a trauma informed approach.
- People with disability who transition from the NDIS to My Aged Care may be unable to keep working without NDIS supports to work or run their business.
- Some providers offer both NDIS and aged care supports. This could help ease the transition from the NDIS to aged care if people with disability can use the same support workers. However, this also creates a conflict of interest for the provider. A conflict of interest is when someone has competing interests because of their duties to more than one person or organisation.

Reform for outcomes, NDIA's co-design projects

Ms Corri McKenzie, NDIA Deputy Chief Executive Officer, updated the Reference Group on the 6 co-design projects under the ['Reform for outcomes' initiative](#). These projects aim to improve the NDIA's capability, capacity and systems to better support participants. They are part of a 4-year government investment of \$724.4 million.

Ms McKenzie provided detail on the working groups, comprising of IAC members, Disability Representative and Carer Organisation (DRCO) representatives, and participants, who are collaborating on the co-design projects.

IAC Members who are a part of the working groups focused on provider fraud and improving workforce capability, shared the progress of those projects. Reference Group members highlighted:

- The important impact this IAC Reference Group can make to each NDIA co-design project, especially in ensuring the use of an intersectional approach.
- That the NDIA's co-design projects are helping people with disability build capacity through inclusion and 'learning on the job'.
- The need for the NDIA to provide training about co-design and its engagement processes, especially for those people who are not familiar with the concept of co-design.
- The need to define and educate people with disability about terms like 'provider fraud' and 'funding misuse' to build their capacity.
- The importance of using a supported decision-making framework in the co-design on fraud.
- The NDIA should promote self-management and support participants' awareness on the appropriate and flexible use of their funding.



- That people with disability have the right to use registered and/or unregistered providers, which underscores the importance of plan flexibility.
- The NDIA should hold and share clear data related to each co-design project, especially fraud, and start co-design projects using baseline data to allow future evaluation.
- Any NDIA communications campaign about fraud should provide information on the complaints process, with a view to prevent risk for participants who may unintentionally misuse funding.
- The NDIA should investigate the auditing process used by providers and continue to work closely with the [NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission](#) as part of their co-design work on fraud.
- NDIS planners should consider intersectionality when developing plans.
- The NDIA should engage with educational institutions about the qualifications that are accessible for people with disability, to hire more people with disability lived experience.
- Calls for the NDIA to offer customised employment and include people with disability in job interview processes.
- Calls for the NDIA workplace culture to better include and encourage people with disabilities, including those with hidden disabilities. Also, more should be done to reduce the need for people with disability at the NDIA to drive cultural change.

Update on NDIA inclusion strategy work

The Reference Group continues to be involved with the NDIA's inclusion strategies. Members noted:

- That it is important to invite individuals and participants, as well as people from DRCOs, to engagements on these strategies and other NDIA work.
- Engaging individual advocates is a way of supporting and growing new disability leaders in the disability community.
- That the NDIA could use peer networks as a place to find individuals to engage.

More information on the Reference Group

The Reference Group will next meet in 2024. 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.