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Meeting bulletin – 10 August 2023

This bulletin summarises the Independent Advisory Council's (IAC) recent meeting. The IAC gives advice to the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) Board. The IAC's advice aims to improve the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). Ms Leah van Poppel, who is [the IAC Principal Member](#), chaired the meeting, held via videoconference on 10 August 2023.

Update from the IAC's Principal Member

Ms van Poppel acknowledged that the full complement of IAC membership was currently in the final stages of determination by the Minister following the completion of some IAC Members' terms on 30 June 2023. The Minister for the NDIS, the Hon Bill Shorten MP, is responsible for appointing IAC members in line with section 147 of the [NDIS Act 2013](#). It is expected that the Minister will make announcements about the IAC membership shortly.

Ms van Poppel gave an update on the IAC's advice and other priority work done since their [last meeting on 18 May 2023](#). This includes work:

- to develop IAC's advice on behaviour supports for the NDIA Board
- that has been done to refresh the membership of IAC Reference Groups. The refresh aims to ensure greater inclusion of younger people and those with intellectual disability. 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 soon.

Ms van Poppel acknowledged the valued contribution of [Ms Belinda Epstein-Frisch AM](#) who will complete her work with the IAC in October. Ms Epstein-Frisch has supported the work of the IAC over many years in the role of Senior Independent Advisor, compiling IAC's advice. A recruitment process is being finalised to appoint a new Senior Independent Advisor.

Update from the NDIA

[Mr Kurt Fearnley AO](#), NDIA Board Chair, thanked the IAC for their patience regarding membership appointments being finalised. Mr Fearnley noted work by the NDIA Board to establish a subcommittee to oversee the NDIA's strategic direction in relation to participants' outcomes. He also noted the significant achievements of [the Fraud Fusion Taskforce](#) to combat fraud against the NDIS.



Ms Rebecca Falkingham, NDIA Chief Executive Officer, said that she is pleased that the [National Contact Centre \(NCC\)](#) has made service improvements, over the past year, to ensure participants get the right answers the first time they call the NDIA. Ms Falkingham noted the NDIA's decision to start rolling out PACE, [the new NDIA computer system and processes](#), across Australia gradually from 30 October 2023. She highlighted the significant work and communications needed for the roll out for participants and providers. Ms Falkingham renewed the NDIA's focus to continuously collaborate with partners to strengthen systems and processes in place to protect participants' and other stakeholders' information, considering the [HWL Ebsworth cyber incident](#). Ms Falkingham noted [work underway to finalise the NDIA's organisational structure](#), including recruitment of NDIA Senior Executive Service (SES) officers to fill General Manager and Branch Manager roles. Ms Falkingham advised the IAC of work underway by the NDIA to increase the employment of people with disability and improve the workplace experience of existing employees with disability.

What Members have heard in their community

[IAC Members](#) reported on matters for the NDIA's attention, related to:

NDIS access and planning

- Reports that some people are confused about the NDIS early childhood approach. They are unsure if children over 7 years will remain on the Scheme without a formal intellectual disability or autism diagnosis.
- The NDIS' focus on a primary disability causes significant issues/barriers for many participants who live with co-occurring disabilities, particularly around accessing the right supports.
- Questions as to if there is enough first-year funding to support children with complex needs. This is due to reports that some families are spending most of their first-year funding on functional assessments. It is reported that functional assessments are then used to get additional funding for their child in the second year of their plan.
- Concerns that the process for [change of circumstances](#) is taking too long and is not being communicated as well as it should. Members noted that it is important to manage the expectations of participants and/or their families. They should also be told what stage the process is at.
- There are some reports of the NDIA removing self-management from participants without giving them a clear explanation about why that change has been made.

NDIS service and supports

- Positive feedback that children will now transition to local area coordinator (LAC) support later in life, at 9 years rather than 7 years. This change has been well received by families as they believe the early childhood partners understand childhood and families better than LAC's.



- Reports of a severe lack of occupational therapists in the Northern Territory. Members also highlighted that therapy delivered by videoconference is not a substitute for in-person therapy. Autistic children especially need occupational therapy in their own environment.
- Members stressed the importance of play and interacting with other children for a child's development. There was concern that therapy is being promoted as more important than this by some providers.
- Continued concern for NDIS Participants who are in hospital being able to access NDIS supports while they are there.

Home and living

- Reports that some home and living decisions are taking longer than the 28-day timeline set and endorsed by the NDIA. Members advocated for greater transparency on timing and what stage the decision process is at.
- Concerns that the specialist disability accommodation ([SDA pricing review](#)) does not consider a 'one resident' housing option, particularly for participants in rural and remote areas.

Disability community

- Reports that there is limited understanding of how to access [Justice Liaison Officers \(JLOs\)](#). Also, confusion of what supports people with disability can get inside prison and through the judicial process.
- Concern that trust in the IAC and its connection with the disability community may be eroded given the delay in membership appointments.

Providers

- Concerns about the conflicting interests of service providers in early childhood. Some reports of people exploiting trust to overservice or provide unnecessary supports to participants. Some examples include autism childcare services and inappropriate referral pathways.
- Suggestions for the NDIA to offer an anonymous whistleblower line. This would allow provider staff and participants to notify the NDIA of misconduct relating to conflicts of interest.

NDIA update on co-design work

Members were updated on the 6 initiatives the NDIA is co-designing with the IAC, disability representative carer organisations (DRCOs), participants, and the disability community, as part of the [government's 'Reform for Outcomes' work](#). Members agreed that NDIA staff have different levels of familiarity with co-design but that strong engagement, energy and goodwill has been shown by the NDIA to date. Members also gave the following feedback:



- There is a need to ensure all Co-Design Working Group information and materials for meetings are accessible, and available in Easy Read as standard practice.
- The process of true co-design involves identifying the problem to be solved together, rather than co-design projects decided for you.
- The need to ensure older NDIA co-design projects truly reflect participant feedback. When projects are drawn out, the NDIA should regularly release public updates that build community trust and awareness. This relates to the cultural and linguistically diverse (CALD) and Remote and Very Remote strategy work.

NDIA update on its 10-year strategy

The IAC got an update on the NDIA's work to develop a 10-year Agency Strategy (Strategy). The long-term Strategy will outline the vision for the NDIA. IAC Members noted the vision for the Strategy should establish the NDIS as the driver for an ordinary life, and centre on capacity building, quality services, inclusion, independence, and self-determination. Members also gave the following feedback on the Strategy, planned for release at the end of 2023:

- The important opportunity for the vision of the NDIS to be focused on the Australian public, rather than outcomes for the government.
- Increasing public awareness on the desired outcomes and vision of the NDIS.
- Making sure the work connects with the NDIA's '*Reform for Outcomes*' co-design work.
- Ensuring that the NDIA team developing the Strategy is properly staffed to meet the timeline for release.

More information on the IAC

The IAC's next meeting will be held on 20-21 September 2023. Find out more about IAC meetings and bulletins at the [IAC website](#). You can also access advice from the [IAC website](#).

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