

Submission to National Disability Strategy Position Paper

Preamble

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (Scheme or NDIS) is a fundamental shift in the way our country provides and funds disability support for Australians who have a significant and permanent disability. Established in July 2013 to replace the previous state-based system of disability care, the Scheme provides a single, national approach to fund support for people with a permanent and significant disability, their families and carers.

The introduction of the Scheme has made meaningful and significant improvements to the lives and life trajectories of people with disability, their families and carers through supporting them to be more independent and engage more socially and economically. Scheme data continues to highlight improvements in participant outcomes, particularly the longer a participant is in the Scheme. Data as at 30 June 2020 shows that where participants have been in the Scheme for at least three years, there has been a marked improvement in outcomes across a wide range of domains, including:

For children less than school age:

- 95% of parents and carers thought the NDIS improved their child's development in their third year of participation, compared to 94% in their second year and 91% in their first year.
- 94% felt the NDIS improved their child's access to specialist services in their third year of participation, compared to 91% in their second year and 89% in their first year.

For children starting school to 14 years:

- 69% of parents and carers felt their child had become more independent as a result of the NDIS in their third year of participation, compared to 64% in their second year and 56% in their first year.
- 54% of parents and carers felt the NDIS had improved their child's relationship with family and friends in their third year of participation, compared with 50% in their second year and 45% in their first year.

For young adults aged 15 to 24 years:

- 67% of participants felt the NDIS had helped them have more choice and control over their life in their third year of participation, compared to 63% in their second year and 59% in their first year.
- 70% of participants said the NDIS had helped them with daily living activities in their third year of participation, compared to 64% in their second year and 58% in their first year.

For adults aged 25 and over:

- 77% of participants believed the NDIS helped them have more choice and more control over their lives in the third year of participation in the NDIS, compared to 73% in their second year and 67% in their first year.
- 83% of participants said the NDIS had helped them with daily living activities in their third year of participation, compared to 79% in their second year and 71% in their first year.

The rate of participation in work for Scheme participants has been stable with sought after gains not yet achieved for all participants:

- twelve percentage points increase from 13% to 25% for participants aged 15-24 years.
- two percentage points decrease from 26% to 24% for participants aged 25+ years.
- one percentage point increase from 23% to 24% for participants aged 15+ years.

These outcomes highlight the success of the Scheme in facilitating better outcomes for people with severe and profound disability, while signposting the challenges that the next National Disability Strategy must acknowledge and confront.

These outcomes need to be considered in relation to the sustainability of the Scheme, noting a range of cost pressures have continued to emerge over the past year ending 30 June 2020. These include: participant cost pressures, scheme coverage scope creep, and operational challenges. These pressures require continued management responses so that the Scheme does not become a “funder of first or last resort”, especially where other arrangements may be intended or better suited to provide the required supports.

The National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of a new National Disability Strategy through this public consultation process.

Question 1: During the first stage of consultations we heard that the vision and the six outcome areas under the current Strategy are still the right ones. Do you have any comments on the vision and outcome areas being proposed for the new Strategy?

A number of key shifts have occurred in Australia over the past decade that significantly impact on the lives and life trajectories of Australians with a disability, their families and carers that should be acknowledged in the next Strategy.

Firstly, the new Strategy will need to reflect the **introduction of the NDIS** and its progress in improving a previously underfunded, unfair, fragmented and inefficient disability support system. The Scheme is designed to give individuals choice and control over how they want to live their life and over who delivers the supports to help them achieve this. Founded on insurance principles, the Scheme makes evidence-based decisions to determine an individual’s access to the Scheme, and to work with participants to build a plan that helps them achieve their goals. NDIS participant plans bring together consideration of help from family and friends, participation in community and mainstream services and NDIS funded supports.

Despite the progress in advancing the goals of the Scheme, the harmonisation of previously complex and differing systems for people with disability who also require and should expect support from a range of mainstream services. The new Strategy provides a vehicle for promoting the role of mainstream services in supporting people with disability to fulfil their potential as equal members of the community.

Secondly, the new Strategy should account for the great potential of **technology and the role it can play** in improving the lives of people with disability. Over the past decade, Australians have rapidly adopted emerging technologies. For example, Australians have one of the fastest smartphone adoption rates in the world. While the current strategy did not contend with the role technology has in the lives of Australians, a decade on the impact that technology has in the lives of every Australian

is apparent. Without the advances delivered by technology the majority of Australian students would not have been able to engage in remote learning during the current pandemic.

It is now widely accepted that technology plays a large role in the life of individuals and society. Further, technology has a role in creating novel and affordable solutions in supporting people with disability. The next Strategy should strive to improve access to technology for vulnerable cohorts of people with disability; and to encourage further development and the harnessing of new technologies for the benefit of people with disability. The role of technology as an enabler to achieving the six outcome areas should be harnessed by government, non-government and private sectors alike.

Finally, and more recently, the rapidly intensifying **economic effects of COVID-19 on the world of work** including for vulnerable populations requires particular consideration in the next National Disability Strategy. Concerted action will be required for people with disability to continue to participate in and contribute to the labour market. Whole of government initiatives so that participants who can work are able to enter or return to the workforce quickly (including through use of assistive technology) or else are supported to apply for meaningful employment and obtain assistance in being successful on the job.

In building to employment participation, the value of inclusive education is paramount. Many students with disability continue to be educated in segregated settings, reinforcing community perceptions of lower performance and increasing real and imagined barriers for young people with disability. Education, skills acquisition and social relationships are prerequisites for gaining employment. As such, limiting opportunities for inclusive education for students with a disability further entrenches the disadvantage faced by these young people.

Question 2: What do you think about the guiding principles proposed here?

The experience of operationalising the NDIS has shown the Agency that it is critical that policies and programs related to disability must be holistic and connected, recognising the complexity of people's lives and the intersection and interdependence of many differing areas of government and governments' responsibilities. A reflection of this in the guiding principles is critical, signalling the need for coordinated and comprehensive planning across all portfolios and between all levels of government in delivering the strategy.

Question 4: How do you think that clearly outlining what each government is responsible for could make it easier for people with disability to access the supports and services they need?

The next Strategy is the first following the establishment of the NDIS, and should commence through a reconfirmation of the National Disability Strategy's primacy in driving public policy for Australians with a disability while acknowledging the introduction of the Scheme. The Strategy should clarify its role in leading our national obligations to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, as well as stating our national aspiration to create better opportunities for every Australian with disability.

As noted in the Productivity Commission Review of NDIS Costs (2017), a smooth operational interface between the NDIS and other disability and mainstream services is critical for participant outcomes and the financial sustainability of the scheme. The new Strategy is an opportunity to outline and re-confirm the responsibilities of all contributors and to address misconceptions that the NDIS is Australia's only and 'one-stop-shop' for people with disability.

Some risks to achieving the goals of the Strategy that lie outside the Scheme, and disability services more broadly, include withdrawal of some mainstream services, continued investment in segregated approaches, and delays to investment in approaches that support universal access.

The Strategy should reinforce the intention that policies, programs and services commissioned or delivered by any level of government must consider the needs of people with disability, remove barriers to inclusion and ensure people with disability are involved in development and implementation processes.

Question 5: How do you think the Strategy should represent the role that the non-government sector plays in improving outcomes for people with disability?

To achieve faster and greater change for people with disability, significant alignment with the non-government sector is required and the next Strategy should seek to promote and guide action and reform across all Australian governments, private enterprises and the broader community.

Non-government organisations (along with private and government sectors) will play an important role in advancing objectives to create more employment opportunities for persons with disability, noting the two key roles of support provision and employer are typically performed by separate non-government entities.

Increasing employment opportunities for persons with disability aligns to the NDIA's Participant Employment Strategy.

Question 6: What kind of information on the Strategy's progress should governments make available to the public and how often should this information be made available?

In line with the NDIA's commitment to regular performance reporting, the Agency strongly supports robust reporting against outcomes in the Strategy, aligned to the newly developed Outcomes Framework.

The Outcomes Framework for the National Disability Strategy needs to be separate and distinct from the NDIS Outcomes Framework, reflecting the former's wider scope and responsibilities, while ensuring consistency of metrics and data to the greatest extent possible. A program of the scale of the NDIS must have its own clearly identifiable outcomes framework and reporting; while being fully consistent with and forming part of the Outcomes Framework for the National Disability Strategy.

Reporting could comprise a range of metrics recognising the differing needs of various groups of people with a disability. Critically, reporting should differentiate outcomes for people with severe and profound disability (broadly, the NDIS population), as improvements in social inclusion indicators that apply to the whole population of people with disability may disguise contrary trends for the minority of people with severe or profound disability.

Question 7: What do you think of the proposal to have Targeted Action Plans that focus on making improvements in specific areas within a defined period of time (for example within one, two or three years)?

Targeted Action Plans provide an opportunity to bring focus and attention to specific areas with clear linkages to dependencies in related areas that are necessary for sustainable, meaningful change. Through delivery of Information, Linkages & Capacity building activities, the NDIA has observed that to effect meaningful positive change for people with disability, simultaneous investment in multiple factors over multiple years offers the greatest potential.

Question 8: How could the proposed Engagement Plan ensure people with disability, and the disability community, are involved in the delivery and monitoring of the next Strategy?

The NDIA supports placing a strong value on the role of Disabled Persons Organisations in the delivery and monitoring of the next Strategy.

The Independent Advisory Council (the Council) was formed in 2013 to represent the participants' voice in the NDIS and to provide advice to the Board about the way the Agency performs its functions in relation to the Scheme. The Council is formally appointed by the Minister for the NDIS and composed of people with disability, service providers and carers, representing the crucial perspective of these stakeholders to the work of the Agency and the design of the Scheme.

A similar such mechanism should form part of the governance for the National Disability Strategy, preferably with a formal link to the Council.