Hello DSS,

**RE: NDIS consultation re. draft support lists**

I am writing to express my concern about the lack of mention of Level 1 support connection and Level 2 Support Coordination in the attached NDIS lists.

It appears that the Government is trying to remove these Level 1 and Level 2 SC supports even though in a NDIS, NQSC and DSS communication document dated June 2024, ***the Australian Government committed to a co-design consultation and engagement process on various topics including “Navigator” functions.***

Now that the current legislation has passed through Parliament then Level 1 Support Connection and Level 2 Support Coordination roles could cease before you have consulted with people with disabilities and their families about what the role means to them and whether they can see the proposed ‘Navigator’ role working for them.

I have just commenced my 38th year of working in disability services and therefore, I feel somewhat qualified to comment on this issue.

Since the inception of the NDIS the, ***grass roots, consumer driven,*** growth in my business has been people seeking me out to provide independent, experienced Level 2 SC for themselves or their family member.

This is despite the fact I have no website, social media or glossy brochures. Just a solid reputation and vast networks built on 37 years of experience. I work from a human rights and social justice perspective and this is what helps folks achieve great outcomes.

I do have numerous relevant tertiary qualifications but none that the NQSC/NDIS recognise as being ‘suitable’ for me to be a ‘Specialist Support Coordinator (i.e. currently known as Level 3 SC).

This is a nonsensical way to approach who is ‘qualified’ to be a SSC. A new graduate psychologist, OT or Social Worker with no disability experience will not get the outcomes that a highly experienced Support Coordinator can get.

This has proven to be true time and again over the last 11 years since the scheme launched when I have had participants referred directly to me by the NDIA when Level 3 SSC has failed complex participants and wasted thousands in tax payers money with no outcomes for the participants or their families.

I am not concerned about these changes for my sake because after 37 years in the human services sector, I am very used to change.

I also agree that the role of SC’s needs further scrutiny because too many ‘unqualified’ shonksters have just ‘hung up a shingle’ saying they are a SC and they are making a lot of money without achieving outcomes for participants These shonksters include BOTH registered and unregistered providers. IN fact I have seen more rorting of the SC budgets by registered providers who simply claim the .5 or 1 or 2 hours per week out of the participants plan and they have never even met the Participant! This is unacceptable on so many levels.

I am very concerned for participants and their families who may be expected to ‘trust and feel safe’ with a complete stranger i.e. a Navigator who will not have the time or capacity to build a rapport and regularly changes. They will be re-traumatised every time they have to ‘share/re-tell’ their story to another complete stranger. We know from experience and the Royal Commission has also taught us that people with high and complex disabilities and their families need safe, connected, longer term relationships to really achieve their goals.

From my perspective, the criticality of quality Support Coordination has never been understood by the NDIA since it began.

This ‘dumbed down’ version of what used to be known as ‘Case Management’, (pre-NDIS), is often the glue that helps hold very complex individuals and families together and not simply lurching from one crisis to the next. This role often needs to do individual advocacy when mainstream systems e.g. education, housing, health justice etc fail people with a disability repeatedly.

The fact that Support Coordination is in Capacity Building Budgets rather than Core budgets again shows that NDIA do not understand the inherent need for this role to be ongoing in the lives of many people with significant/severe and permanent disabilities that they will live with lifelong. We need a walk beside and walk with model of SC that is build on mutual trust and respect.

We need Level 2 SC’s who, (in addition to potentially having a relevant qualification which needs to be much broader than the current Allied Health ones), have years of direct experience in the disability sector. It is the practical assistance, networks, CAN DO attitude, empathy, compassion, understanding, human rights and social justice focus that matters and ensures that participants are well supported to achieve their goals and outcomes.

The NDIS is fundamentally sound and philosophically right and when it works well it is life changing. It works well when NDIS plans are funded appropriately and the participant has a solid team around them including SC to turn the funds into the right supports, at the right time to achieve goals/outcomes.

I implore the Government to re-think and ***engage in true co-design*** about the future of SC and Navigators.

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If we get this changeover wrong now, many, many lives will be negatively impacted on.

**I am offering to volunteer my time and 37 years of knowledge and expertise to be part of the co-design process because we must get this right.**

**Please advise how I can be directly involved in any ‘Reference Group’ or Taskforce or whatever is being set up to undertake this critical piece of co-design work.**