

25 August 2024

Australian Government Department of Social Services

Email: [NDISConsultations@dss.gov.au](mailto:NDISConsultations@dss.gov.au)

CC: Members of Outdoors NSW & ACT Limited

To Whom It May Concern:

***Subject: Request for feedback on draft lists of NDIS supports***

I am writing on behalf of Outdoors NSW & ACT and the broader outdoor industry to express our profound disappointment and concern regarding the exclusion of the services offered by our industry that have proven health benefits, physically and mentally and ask the department to reconsider this being excluded from the NDIS Support.

As the state peak body in NSW and the ACT responsible for Outdoor Recreation, Outdoor Education, Adventure Tourism and Outdoor Therapy, Outdoors NSW & ACT (ONSWACT) represents a workforce of 57,003 (Jan 2024) in NSW & ACT. Outdoor Therapy is the fastest growing of our 4 sectors due to the need for our activities to combat the rise of mental health. Our outdoor therapists are provided to all ages and results are equally evidenced.

It is important to consider the role nature-based therapies that are evidence-informed. This is due to the profound difference that nature interventions have resulted in the healthy and the not so healthy populations of our society of equal proportions.

We request that 'Wilderness therapy' be removed from the excluded list and that the full range of evidence-informed effective outdoor health, wellbeing and therapy services continue to be provided to participants who benefit from our services.

We do not endorse unethical non-evidence-based involuntary 'Wilderness boot camps' that are designed to be coercive, and as a result harm participants and staff. These models are not reflective in our membership as all our operators follow the Australian Adventurous Active Standard as their guide for best practice in the Outdoors.

Outdoors NSW & ACT and our National Peak Body, Outdoor Council of Australia can assist in the vetting process of the therapy practices to help the department design a process to approve the inclusion of such therapies, as we do for schools in NSW with outdoor education providers.

We feel your exclusion of wilderness therapy ignores the strong and growing body of evidence that demonstrates the health benefits and cost effectiveness of outdoor-based therapies in Australia.

The evidence for continuing to include evidence-informed outdoor health, wellbeing and therapy practices include bio-psycho-social, cognitive and ecological elements, including

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improved cardiovascular, respiratory, and immune health; greater mobility and movement, and balance; improved rest and sleep, greater mood and emotional regulation; reduction in stress response, improved attention, concentration, problem solving and decision-making abilities; greater social connection; and skill development for vocational pathways.

Member of Outdoor Council of Australia, Outdoor Health Australia will also provide some solid evidence around our argument as all of their members are engaged in outdoor therapies.

We respectfully urge the Department to reconsider its position in the exclusion of nature-based therapies. We are keen to engage in a more constructive dialogue and work collaboratively towards a resolution that supports the needs of the community. We hope for your support and understanding as we strive to improve the health and well-being of Australia.

Thank you for giving our concerns attention.

We look forward to your prompt response and to a more inclusive and effective consultation process.

Yours sincerely,

Lori Modde  
Chief Executive Officer  
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