



Women
With
Disabilities
Australia
(WWDA)

Winner National Violence Prevention Award 1999
Winner National Human Rights Award 2001
Winner Tasmanian Women's Safety Award 2008
Certificate of Merit Australian Crime & Violence Prevention Awards 2008
Nominee UN Millennium Peace Prize for Women 2000
Nominee French Republic's Human Rights Prize 2003
Nominee National Disability Awards 2017
Nominee UNESCO Prize for Digital Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities 2021

NDIS Consultation Secretariat
Department of Social Services
NDISConsultations@dss.gov.au

21 August 2024

Dear NDIS Consultation Secretariat

I write to you from Women With Disabilities Australia (**WWDA**). WWDA is the National Disabled People's Organisation (**DPO**) and National Women's Alliance (**NWA**) for women, girls, feminine identifying, and non-binary people with disabilities in Australia.

WWDA welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the open consultation on the draft lists of NDIS Supports. We make this submission in addition to our general submission, specifically to address the need for sexuality supports (broadly defined) to remain fully accessible under the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

We recently conducted a survey of Australians with disabilities, asking them about their sexual support and service needs. Results were analysed by Associate Professor Roxanna Pebdani from the University of Sydney, an expert in qualitative research, disability, and sexuality. Sixty-four people responded to the survey. Respondents provided examples of why sexuality supports were important to them, what supports are needed, and how these supports are reasonable and necessary supports related to their disability.

Extensive research has demonstrated the importance of sexuality on mental and physical health (1), but people with disabilities are often seen as non-sexual (2) and experience a lack access to sex education (3). Yet, women with disabilities in particular experience much higher rates of abuse, specifically sexual abuse (4). Opportunities to safely address sexuality needs and access sexuality services are essential to the wellbeing of people with disabilities, and particularly women and gender-diverse people with disabilities.

We provide the following recommendations sourced from the survey described above and available in our attached report:

Recommendation 1: Sexuality supports should remain funded under the NDIS

- Sexuality is a human right, and access through the NDIS supports people to make choices about their own bodies.
- Access to sexuality improves community participation and inclusion.

Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA)

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- It also has numerous other benefits including mental health, physical health, self-esteem and self-confidence. This is consistent with considerable evidence on the benefits of sex (1).

Recommendation 2: Sex work is an integral part of sexuality support for some people with disabilities and should continue to be funded by the NDIS

- For some, sex work is a safe space to explore wants and desires and learn about sex in a safe way.
- For people who have experienced trauma (particularly sexual trauma), sex workers can provide a safe space to explore sexuality again. This is particularly important given the higher rates of sexual abuse that women with disabilities experience (4).
- Sex workers can provide a safe space for people with disabilities to learn about consent, boundaries, how to communicate in sexual situations, and how to safely have their sexual needs met. When this is paired with the considerable evidence that people with disabilities often are excluded from sexual education, it becomes even more important (3).

Recommendation 3: The NDIS should continue to fund sex facilitators (professionals, adaptive devices, and other facilitators).

- There is a need for well-trained disability informed sex workers in addition to medical and allied health professionals who are knowledgeable about sexuality and disability. This is consistent with research that has shown that professionals often do not have sufficient training to address sexuality for people with disability (5).
- Support workers knowledgeable and comfortable with disabled sexuality are necessary to facilitate sexual activity (from preparing for dates to sexual positioning supports and beyond).
- People need access to adaptive sex toys, sensory sex toys, hands free devices, waterproof blankets, among other items that can facilitate sexual activity.

Recommendation 4: NDIA employees, plan managers, and support coordinators need training on disabled sexuality.

- Lack of access to plan managers and support coordinators who are knowledgeable about disabled sexuality is a barrier to accessing NDIS funded sexuality support
- Auditors and NDIA decision makers must be knowledgeable about disabled sexuality in order for them to make decisions that support sexuality for people with disability.



Recommendation 5: The NDIA must develop a comprehensive NDIS policy framework on sexuality framed in sexual positivity.

- The results overwhelmingly state that access to sexuality is important for well-being, inclusivity, access, and safety.
- Access has historically been limited given people’s discomfort discussing sex with plan managers and not knowing that sexuality tools and services can be accessed.
- This is in line with the joint call from many disability organisations for a rights-based framework for sexuality in the NDIS (6).

We urge the National Disability Insurance Agency and the Department of Social Services to engage with the needs of people with disabilities, and particularly women and gender diverse people, in defining NDIS Supports. For safety, for access, and for quality of life – sex toys, sexuality supports and access to sexuality are reasonable and necessary and should remain fundable by the NDIS.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this submission.

Yours sincerely,



Sophie Cusworth
Acting Chief Executive Officer

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 2. Pebdani RN, Tashjian A. An Analysis of the Attitudes of the General Public Towards the Sexuality of Individuals with Disabilities Through a Systematic Literature Review. *Sexuality and Disability*. 2021:1-35.
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 4. Ledingham E, Wright GW, Mitra M. Sexual violence against women with disabilities: experiences with force and lifetime risk. *American journal of preventive medicine*. 2022;62(6):895-902.
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