

NDIS Support Rules (Transitional Rules)

16 June - 27 July 2025: Public consultation on NDIS Supports

Submission of Animal Therapies Limited (ATL)

Date of submission 21 July 2025

Purpose of Submission

Animal Therapies Ltd (ATL) is advocating for greater clarity about definitions, terms and usage related to *animal-assisted services* under section 4, Schedule 1 and Schedule 2 of the [*National Disability Insurance Scheme \(Getting the NDIS Back on Track No. 1\) \(NDIS Supports\) Transitional Rules 2024*](#) (the Transitional Rules).

ATL's submission has identified a number of current and ongoing issues related to the Transitional Rules. We are committed to maintaining a 'can do' collaborative attitude and where possible, have provided viable proposals for effective, practical and relevant reform.

About ATL

ATL is the national peak body for the Animal-Assisted Services (AAS) sector. ATL has played a pivotal role in standardising language across the sector and developing standards. Our core activities centre around how registered health professionals and other fully insured professionals work alongside animals as an adjunct to their primary scope of practice to support people with disability.

Our key objectives

- (a) Any reforms to NDIS primary and/or subordinate legislation outlines clear and unambiguous definitions which are:
 - compatible and consistent with industry and sector terminology; and
 - provide clarity for NDIS participants/applicants, plan managers, service providers and NDIA personnel.
- (b) NDIA/NDIS *Guidelines* and public-facing material be drafted and published in manner that is consistent with provisions of NDIS primary and subordinate legislation to ensure clarity and avoid confusion for all stakeholders, including NDIA personnel but particularly, NDIS participants/applicants.

Background to Submission

Since 3 October 2024, ATL has worked collaboratively with the NDIA and Commonwealth Department of Social Services (DSS) to ensure that NDIA recognises animal-assisted therapy as an NDIS accepted support as well as other service providers delivering training, skills development, community inclusion and capacity building alongside animals.

On the 5 June 2025, ATL coincidentally wrote to The Hon. Mark Butler, MP Minister for Health and Aged Care about the precise issue to which this submission now relates.

We thank Ms Sarah Hawke, Branch Manager NDIS Policy, Legislation and Engagement for her response regarding the issues raised which was received by ATL on 1 July 2025 (Ref: MC25-009883).

Scope and Limitations of Submission

ATL operates on a voluntary basis. This submission has been overseen by Ms Samantha Nix, former Principal Advisor of the Guide, Hearing and Assistance Team at the department formerly known as the Queensland Department of Seniors, Disability Services and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships. Due to funding and resource limitations, ATL has been unable to undertake a full and robust legislative review of all Transitional Rules for this submission. This submission is therefore limited to the below.

Legislative basis and definitions for ATL's submission

This submission is made pursuant to the Minister's powers under section 10 of the *National Disability Insurance Scheme Act 2013* and includes 2024 reforms made under same in accordance with the [Explanatory Statements](#) supporting the [National Disability Insurance Scheme Amendment \(Getting the NDIS Back on Track No. 1\) Act 2024](#) Rule 1(9)(i) in Schedule 2 of the current Transitional Rules refers to “*animal therapy, including puppy therapy and goat therapy*”.

1. Under the Transitional Rules this means “*animal therapy*” and is generally not considered an NDIS support.
2. Under the Transitional Rules the term *animal-assisted therapy* has not been included or defined.
3. Schedule 1 of the Transitional Rules does not provide inclusive scope of terms consistent with NDIS's [Assistive technologies Therapy animals – webpage](#) and therefore omits *animal-assisted therapy* as a funded/approved reasonable and necessary support for people with disability.

NDIS published understandings

4. The NDIS's [Assistive technologies Therapy animals – webpage](#) has delineated and differentiated between the term *animal therapy* and *animal-assisted therapy* – with the latter generally being accepted as an NDIS support and the former not.

Sector and community wide definitions – accepted language/terminology

5. Whilst ATL is aware of the legislative and jurisdictional complexities regarding terminology around assistance animals,¹ the purpose of this submission is to advocate for greater clarity about definitions and usage related to *animal-assisted therapy* and *animal therapy* under section 4, Schedule 1 and Schedule 2 of the Transitional Rules.
6. As a peak industry body, ATL is widely familiar with common terminology and usage across the animal-assisted services sector which includes a range of fully insured service providers listed in the PAPL who work alongside animals in the delivery of their scope of practices and for which they are trained and qualified to deliver.

¹ Some legislative examples include: the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (the DDA) refers to *assistance animals*; Rule 1(2) in Schedule 1 of the Transitional Rules refers to *eligible assistance animals*; Queensland's *Guide, Hearing and Assistance Dog Act 2009* (the GHAD Act) refers to *guide, hearing or assistance dogs*.

7. Across such sectors, the term “*animal therapy*” is generally accepted to mean *animal-assisted therapy* or AAT and refers to a program delivered by a registered health professional that includes animal interaction *as part of* the therapeutic intervention for the broader purpose of necessary support for a person with disability.

Current and ongoing issues with the NDIS

8. Inconsistency between the Transitional Rules and NDIS’s [Assistive technologies Therapy animals – webpage](#), insofar:
While the NDIS’s [Assistive technologies Therapy animals – webpage](#) has delineated and differentiated between the term *animal therapy* and *animal-assisted therapy*, Rule 1(9)(i) of Schedule 2 of the Transitional Rules, (nor any other primary or subordinate provisions of the Transitional Rules), has not.
9. The inclusion of the term *animal therapy* in Rule 1(9)(i) of Schedule 2 of the Transitional Rules, has resulted in NDIS participants being refused approval/funding for supports which are in fact *animal-assisted therapies* and form a genuine part of their reasonable and necessary support needs.
10. The NDIS’s [Assistive technologies Therapy animals – webpage](#) continues to delineate and differentiate between the term *animal therapy* and *animal-assisted therapy* when in fact they are terms used interchangeably and synonymously across the disability support and animal-assisted service sector which operates to assist people with disability.
11. Schedule 1 of the Transitional Rules is limited to “eligible assistance animals” however, it does not include animal-assisted services such as animal-assisted therapies, delivered by service providers listed in the PAPL, for the broader purpose of reasonable and necessary support for a person with disability.

Stakeholder Impacts – practical implications

12. ATL has received numerous inquiries and anecdotal correspondence about the absence of any reference to *animal-assisted therapies*, and respectively, the existence of an exclusionary reference to *animal therapy*, in Schedule 1 and 2 of the Transitional Rules.
13. Overwhelmingly, the matters brought to ATL’s attention have centred on existing NDIS participants, (and NDIS applicants) being refused approval/funding for supports which are in fact *animal-assisted therapies* and form a genuine part of their reasonable and necessary support needs.

Proposed legislative reforms to resolve current issues

ATL proposes amendments to the Transitional Rules as follows.

- Section 4 definitions
- Schedule 1
- Schedule 2

Section 4 Definitions of the Transitional Rules – Proposed reforms

14. ATL's most significant proposal is that section 4 Definitions of the Transitional Rules be expanded to include a **relevant** definition that captures therapies and services which include: *animal(s) as part of skill building / therapeutic interventions and/or supportive processes for the broader purpose of reasonable and necessary supports for a person with a disability*. Potential Section 4 reforms are listed in the below table.

Option 1 (Preferred)	Option 2 (Not preferred but still fit for purpose)	Option 3 (Least preferred and not fit for purpose)
Create and include a term that defines animal-assisted services .	Create and include a term that defines animal-assisted therapy .	Create and include a term that defines animal therapy (ensuring it captures a similar definition to <i>animal-assisted therapies</i>).

15. ATL submits that Option 1 - **animal-assisted services** is the most sector-relevant and appropriate term for what the NDIS and NDIA are trying to achieve. We propose the following definition be considered.

Animal-assisted services are defined as:

- *the mediated, guided or facilitator-led practices, programs and human services that incorporate specially qualified animals into therapeutic, skill building interventions and/or supportive processes for the broader purpose of reasonable and necessary supports for a person with a disability; and*
- *require the facilitative presence of a service provider (under the [NDIS Pricing Arrangements and Price Limits](#)) who holds the appropriate and required qualifications to deliver reasonable and necessary supports for a person with disability.²*

16. ATL submits that Option 2 – **animal-assisted therapy** could provide NDIS participants/applicants with greater clarity. Although this is not ATL's preferred definition we propose the below for consideration. (Further information is also outlined in Points 18 to 20 below).

Animal-assisted therapy is defined as:

- *the mediated, guided or facilitator-led practices, programs and human services that incorporate specially qualified animals into therapeutic, educational, supportive and/or ameliorative processes for the broader purpose of reasonable and necessary supports for a person with a disability.³*

² Adapted from various sources by ATL. Further information can be provided on request.

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17. ATL's view is that Option 3 - **animal therapy** has been so significantly misinterpreted, misused and incorrectly applied by stakeholders, agencies and political representatives that it is no longer fit for purpose. ATL has therefore not provided a proposed definition. (Further information is however, outlined in Points 21 to 22 below).

Schedule 1 of the Transitional Rules – Proposed reforms

18. Insertion of a new Item and categories (Column 1, 2 and 3) which accepts *animal-assisted services* (as proposed-above) as **Supports that are NDIS supports**.
19. Alternatively, amend Schedule 1 so that either *animal-assisted services* or *animal therapies* are captured in a manner that easily explains they are **Supports that are NDIS supports** and which:
- recognise that animal-assisted services including, animal-assisted therapy and animal therapy can be approved and funded under Schedule 1; and
 - recognise and is consistent with sector and industry terminology; and
 - delineates and differentiates between a fully funded and approved *eligible assistance animal*, (under section 4 of the Transitional Rules and specifically Item 2 of Schedule 1); and
 - delineates and differentiates between exclusions that are generally **not NDIS supports** under Schedule 2.
20. Below are potential options that could be used to create a new Item and/or term that clearly ensures *animal-assisted services (or animal-assisted therapy)* is included as **Supports that are NDIS supports**:
- animal assisted interactions *as part of* the therapeutic, capacity or skills building intervention for the broader purpose of reasonable and necessary support for a person with disability; or
 - animal assisted interactions that are embedded and are in conjunction with therapeutic, capacity or skills building intervention provided by a service provider or health professional listed in the PAPL; or
 - animal interactions offered by a service provider or health professional listed in the PAPL that genuinely form part of reasonable and necessary support for a person with disability.

Schedule 2 of the Transitional Rules – Proposed reforms

21. The term “animal therapy” be entirely removed from Schedule 2 of the Transitional Rules; and/or
22. The term “animal therapy” be removed from Schedule 2 of the Transitional Rules and be replaced with a term that both recognises and is consistent with sector and industry terminology. Below are possible alternatives that will operate to ensure NDIS participants who simply engage with, or have encounters with animals are not funded, (unless the animal interaction *is part of* the therapeutic intervention for the broader purpose of reasonable and necessary support).
- a. “general engagement and encounters with an animal or animals, including a hobby, companion animal or pet”
 - b. “general engagement or encounters with an animal or animals, which are non-assistive”
 - c. “general engagement or encounters with an animal or animals which are independent from, or do not form part of, a facilitated service providers main scope of practice or purpose”
 - d. “general animal interests or activities”

Additional – NDIS Published Guidelines and public facing material

There are numerous Guidelines, FAQs and other resources published on the NDIS website. Unfortunately, some of these resources are contradictory in their information or do not align with provisions of the relevant NDIS primary or subordinate legislation.

ATL also often receives copies of correspondence from NDIA delegates forwarded by existing NDIS participants/applicants requesting assistance. Because of this information, ATL also has concerns about the contradictions and inconsistencies provided by different NDIA delegates and its public facing materials.

Moving Forward

We remain committed to working collaboratively with the NDIA and DSS to ensure that people with disability have access to only the most effective therapies, interventions and supports that involve animals – and which we understand must be balanced against cost-effectiveness and value for money.

ATL appreciates the opportunity to engage in this public consultation process. We are eager to meet with Ms Sarah Hawke and other relevant parties to further discuss animal-related NDIS supports for people with disability, particularly in relation to the Transitional Rules' reforms.

ATL is a voice of lived experience and can speak to a multitude of issues that affect people with disability.

We are able to provide further information about any of the points raised in this submission should such be required. Please feel free to contact the CEO directly via the email or phone details below.

Yours sincerely



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Founding CEO

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Advancing the understanding, acceptance and accessibility of animal-assisted services in Australia.