



# Submission

# **NDIS Supports rules**

July 2025

## Executive summary

Hireup welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the NDIS Supports Rules (section 10). We recognise the value in providing clearer guidance on what the NDIS can and cannot fund, and we support efforts to make the Scheme more transparent and consistent. However, there is an opportunity to strengthen how this information is communicated to participants and to ensure that funding decisions remain aligned with the core purpose of the NDIS, *"to provide flexible, individualised support that enables people with disability to pursue their goals and improve their quality of life."*

While support lists can serve as a helpful reference point, they should be used as a **starting point for informed discussions rather than as definitive rules**, and applied with flexibility to reflect the unique goals and context of each participant.

In preparing this submission, Hireup gathered feedback directly from people with disability through a survey conducted in July 2025. The survey was shared with members of our Community Advisory Group (CAG), a paid committee comprising Hireup clients, support workers, and account managers who provide feedback that is used to improve our services and help shape future leadership within the disability community, as well as distributed more broadly through our community newsletter.

The responses highlight a clear concern that the current implementation of the support lists is confusing, unnecessarily restrictive, and out of step with the lived experience of those the Scheme is intended to support. Our community is calling for greater consideration of individual circumstances, supported by clearer communication and co-designed processes that uphold autonomy, dignity, and practical relevance.

There is an opportunity to improve the Supports Rules by making them clearer and more consistent, while still allowing flexibility based on individual circumstances. This submission shares what we heard from our community and offers practical suggestions to help the Rules better reflect the intent of the NDIS.

## About Hireup

Hireup was founded in 2015 by siblings Jordan and Laura O'Reilly, inspired by their lived experience growing up alongside their brother with disability. Their family often relied on support workers, and while some were a great fit, many were not. Through this experience, they saw the importance of finding the right support and the challenges that came with it.

While studying at university, Jordan worked as a support worker and saw more clearly how the system was failing both people with disability and the workers who supported them. This insight led to the creation of Hireup in 2015, an online platform designed to give people with disability more control over who supports them, while raising standards across the sector.

Hireup is one of the very few platform providers in Australia that is both NDIS-registered and directly employs its workers. This model ensures all support is delivered within the NDIS safeguards, with clear oversight and accountability. It also provides workers with fair conditions, stability and protections often missing in other parts of the sector.

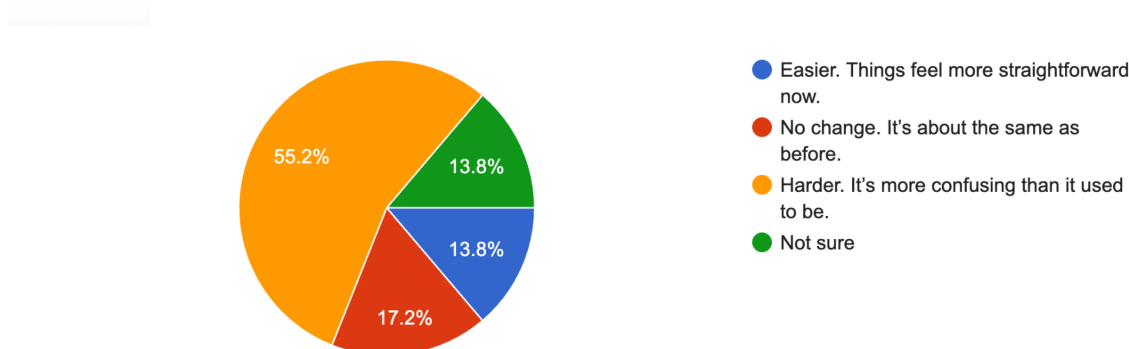
Today, Hireup is Australia's largest NDIS-registered platform provider. Each year we support more than 11,000 people with disability and, more recently, older Australians. Our team includes over 14,400 directly employed support workers who deliver more than three million hours of support each year.

## Understanding the support rules remains a challenge

One of the clearest messages from our consultation found that many people with disability are still unclear about how the current NDIS Supports Rules and associated lists apply to their funding. While the intention behind the October 2024 changes may have been to improve clarity and consistency, this is not yet being experienced on the ground.

Over half of the respondents (55.2%) said the changes have made it harder, not easier, to understand how they can use their funding. These findings suggest that the current approach may not be achieving its communication goals and may be contributing to confusion and uncertainty for participants.

Have the rules and lists made it easier or harder to understand how you can use your NDIS funding?



This level of uncertainty is concerning, particularly given that the individuals who responded in our survey are already actively trying to engage with the system. If participants with a strong understanding of their supports are struggling to interpret the rules, the barriers for others who are less knowledgeable about the NDIS, or who have less ability to self-advocate, are likely even greater.

Participants described the rules as *"rigid," "unfair,"* and *"non-responsive to actual needs."* Many shared practical examples of how the rules are being interpreted in

ways that don't reflect their lived experience. One respondent noted, *"Most things are confusing,"* while another said, *"Nothing is clear anymore."* Several participants raised concerns about vague terms like *"standard household items,"* particularly when these items are used in ways that directly support disability-related needs. As one person explained, *"Many standard household items can assist people with disability and be a cheaper substitute to disability-specific brands. If I have a letter from my podiatrist, why can't I purchase the shoes he recommends for my son to wear with his orthotics?"*

Others questioned how everyday items are classified, another shared *"I'm unclear about consumables. For example, wet wipes that I typically buy from Amazon as it is more cost-effective, however, is this classified as a household item?"* There was also confusion about groceries, transport, and supports like orientation and mobility training.

Some shared concerns about the replacement supports process, which was described as *"inadequate and inefficient."* Others expressed frustration over inconsistencies in planning decisions. One participant shared their experience of a plan review where the internal review officer misunderstood the difference between physiotherapy and exercise physiology, resulting in the withdrawal of funding for a critical service: *"It's the only service that treats my severe degenerative condition and keeps me upright and mobile. I don't have any confidence in the NDIS when they make basic errors like this."*

These responses reflect not just a need for better communication, but a need for decision-making that is more consistent, better informed, and grounded in the realities of people's lives.

## **What's missing from the current list**

The feedback provided by participants reveals a clear tension between the current NDIS support lists and the realities of day-to-day life with disability. Many shared examples of reasonable and necessary supports that do not appear on the current lists and are routinely declined, often without warning or explanation. These include low-cost but high-impact items that are used in creative, functional, and disability-specific ways. While not traditionally labelled as disability supports, these items are used to enable participants to regulate their behaviours and/or emotions, participate in activities of their choosing, and improve mobility and safety.

Several responders noted that items used in everyday life, such as standard household products, personal care services, or mainstream goods with therapeutic value are often rejected under current rules, despite their relevance to disability-related needs. For example, one participant shared that they were *"unable to purchase a specific type of shoe recommended by their podiatrist because it was classified as a mainstream product."* Another highlighted the use of *"sofa covers to manage frequent regurgitation caused by sensory issues, noting that while these are technically*

*household items, their use is clearly disability-specific and essential to maintaining a safe and hygienic environment."*

The current lists also appear to restrict supports that enhance dignity and participation. Participants expressed frustration at being unable to fund basic items like *"swimming lessons, hair washing, or event tickets for support workers, all of which play a role in improving wellbeing, social inclusion and independence"*. Several people pointed to inconsistencies, for example, the NDIS may fund a support worker to accompany a participant to a pool, but not fund the swimming lesson itself. Others mentioned the financial burden of covering a support worker's travel, accommodation or access costs when attending community activities, especially when these are necessary for the participant's inclusion.

Participants expressed significant frustration with the exclusion of essential supports on the grounds that they are theoretically the responsibility of other sectors, such as health, education or housing. In practice, however, these systems are often under-resourced, difficult to access, or simply not equipped to meet the complex and intersecting needs of people with disability.

While some of the supports raised may ultimately fall within the scope of future foundational supports, there is currently no implementation timeline for these supports, let alone a clear national agreement. In the absence of such clarity, deferring responsibility to other service systems is not only premature but creates a policy vacuum with significant negative consequences for people with disability.

These include restrictions that prevent participants from accessing vital supports, for example:

- Mental health supports such as psychology and psychiatry, particularly where access through public health is limited or where disability and health needs intersect.
- Essential therapies such as physiotherapy and exercise physiology, especially in cases where a formal diagnosis is not yet in place but functional benefits are evident.
- Hearing aid upgrades and assistive technologies like screen readers or mobility scooters, which are critical for independence but often excluded.
- Support during hospital stays where clinical staff cannot meet the behavioural or communication needs of participants with complex disability.
- Prepared meal delivery services, particularly when the participant can pay for the food component but needs support for preparation and delivery of the meal to be funded.

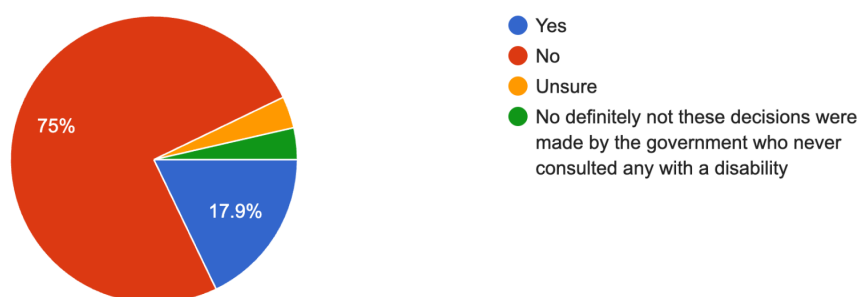
These examples point to a deeper structural challenge. The NDIS cannot operate effectively within rigid administrative boundaries that do not reflect the realities of service access. The assumption that other systems will consistently meet participant needs, whether in health, housing, education or foundational supports, too often falls short. In the meantime, individuals are left managing the consequences which include

delayed access, preventable deterioration in their condition(s) and the loss of independence. Until there is a clearly defined and implemented national framework for foundational supports, the Scheme must remain responsive to these gaps. A participant-centred NDIS must be grounded in the lived experience of people with disability, not in the theoretical reach of other systems. Deferring responsibility without safeguards leads to unmet need and avoidable harm - outcomes the Scheme was designed to prevent.

## A need for genuine consultation

The need for consultation in relation to these rules is significant. In our survey, the overwhelming majority of respondents (75%) said they did not feel meaningfully consulted in shaping the NDIS Supports Rules and lists. Only 18% felt that any genuine consultation had occurred.

Do you feel the disability community was meaningfully consulted in shaping the NDIS Supports Rules and lists?



## Recommendations

Drawing on the feedback from our community and the analysis provided in this submission, we propose the following recommendations to strengthen the NDIS Supports Rules and Lists:

1. **Improve clarity and accessibility of the Rules and Lists:** Revise how information is presented to participants, ensuring that language is clear, examples are relevant, and distinctions (e.g. between lists and guidelines, or between item categories) are plainly explained. This includes reconsidering confusing labels such as "standard household items," which currently lack contextual nuance.
2. **Embed flexibility and individualised decision-making:** Use the Rules and Lists as guidance, not as rigid exclusions. Enable access to supports in the context of each participant's goals and disability-related needs, especially where mainstream or low-cost items are used in innovative or non-traditional ways to meet those needs.

3. **Co-design the rules and lists with the disability community:** As outlined through the results within our survey, participants feel that there was limited consultation in the process that was ultimately going to determine their supports. The current process so far has not met the NDIA's commitment to co-design. Consultation processes like this are a positive step forward, but future iterations must be genuinely co-designed with the disability community to ensure the Rules reflect lived experience and the full diversity of needs.
4. **Clarify responsibilities across service systems before excluding supports:** Supports should not be excluded on the assumption that another system will provide them, unless there is a reliable mechanism for access already in place. Until foundational supports are nationally agreed and operational, the NDIS must continue to fund supports that fall between system cracks.
5. **Introduce a more practical and proportionate replacement support process:** Streamline the process for assessing alternative or replacement supports and most importantly make it known to the community. The current approach is overly burdensome and results in delays, inefficiencies, and unnecessary plan disputes.
6. **Ensure all supports that promote inclusion, dignity and safety are considered reasonable and necessary:** From swimming lessons and salon hair washing to ticket costs for accompanying workers, funding decisions should consider what is required to participate fully in life, not just survive within narrow parameters.
7. **Strengthen training and quality assurance for planners and reviewers:** Ensure that those making funding decisions have the knowledge and tools to interpret the Rules accurately and consistently, particularly when reviewing specialist reports or assessing therapies and assistive technology.

## Conclusion

The responses to our consultation reveal a clear disconnect between the intent of the NDIS Supports Rules and the practical realities experienced by participants. There is widespread confusion, frustration, and concern about the lack of flexibility, transparency, and meaningful consultation underpinning the current approach.

We urge the Department to act on this feedback. While greater clarity and consistency are valuable goals, they must not come at the cost of individualised, human-centred decision-making. The NDIS must remain a Scheme that supports people to live well and with dignity, not a system governed by rigid exclusions and theoretical assumptions about who will step in.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with the Department to discuss these issues further and explore how the next phase of work on the Supports Rules can better reflect the lived experience of the disability community.