

Independent Advisory Council News Bulletin 7 July 2021

The Independent Advisory Council (Council) to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) brings the participant's voice to the heart of the NDIS. The Council gives independent advice to the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) Board, as part of the *NDIS Act 2013*.

Consultations with States and Territories

From the 21 to 29 June, Council Members from each jurisdiction attended consultations with state and territory disability advisory groups. The goal of these consultations was to hear their views and concerns on Scheme reforms, and further inform Council's advice to the NDIA Board and Minister for the NDIS.

Some of the feedback received included:

- The loss of trust in the NDIA and the consultation process
- The poor quality of communication, engagement and co-design to date, raising concerns that the speed of reforms is too fast
- The impact the reforms will have on:
 - regional, rural and remote communities
 - Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people with disability
 - Culturally and linguistically and diverse (CALD) communities
 - The LGBTIQ+ community.
- The lack of investment in Tier 2 and a strong network of Disabled Peoples and Families Organisations. Tier 2 means connecting people with disability, their families and carers, including people who are not NDIS participants, with disability and mainstream supports in their communities
- The need to tailor Independent Assessments (IAs) to specific population groups
- The importance of understanding the outcomes of an IA and how IAs will impact plan budgets.

Some other significant challenges were raised including the need to address existing issues within the NDIS such as:

- workforce and professional development
- provider conduct and service gaps
- interface issues between the NDIS and other systems like health, justice and education.

Scheme Reform Forum #2

On 1 July, Council Members convened a follow-up meeting of the Scheme Reform Forum. In the morning, this meeting was attended by Council and Reference Group members, and other members from the disability community with NDIA staff.

The purpose of the meeting was to:

- Share and discuss the feedback received during the state and territory consultations
- Discuss Council's recommendations on Scheme reform
- Hear and discuss with the NDIA how we can work better together in the future.

This session was independently led by ThinkPlace.

Ms Leah Van Poppel, Council's Deputy Chair, acknowledged the complexity of the task ahead as well as the tight timeframes imposed on Council. She said that building trust takes time and effort, and was hopeful this was the start of a broader and meaningful engagement with those additional attendees, the broader disability community, and state and territories.

The afternoon session was attended by Council members only, and focused on refining their recommendations and endorsing the advice.

Council's advice on Scheme reforms

The Minister for the NDIS and NDIA Board requested Council's advice on specific changes that could be made to improve the proposed access and planning reforms, including IAs, if they are to go ahead.

Council's advice combines the feedback received from the consultation process. The advice includes recommendations that aim to:

- make the Government's proposed changes to access and planning fairer, simpler, more respectful and safer for participants; and
- rebuild trust with the disability community through greater transparency, collaboration and a forward-looking approach to ensuring the NDIS returns to sustainability; and maintains a focus on improving participant outcomes.

The advice and recommendations are based on the view that the NDIS and its ecosystem have moved away from the original vision outlined in the [2011 Productivity Commission Report](#). It recognises that there are other missing, underfunded or poorly implemented foundations, which lie outside proposed Scheme reforms.

A key message of Council's advice is that a sole focus on the NDIA's proposed changes to access and planning processes, including independent assessments, without further commitment and funding to address these weak foundations, will not meet the Scheme's objectives for participants. Nor will it address the underlying sustainability and equity challenges.

Council also strongly reaffirmed the need for more engagement with the disability community and state and territory groups in how reforms are taken forward.

Next steps

Council's advice on Scheme reforms has been provided to the Board of the NDIA and published on the Council's website. The advice has also been provided to the Disability Ministers for consideration and discussion at their July meeting.

To comply with the formal process outlined in the NDIS Act, the advice will be formally presented to the NDIA Board in late July, together with the Agency's response, outlining what the NDIA will commit to do in relation to each of Council's recommendations.

More information

Council welcomes feedback [through the Council Secretariat](#).