# Annual Report 2020-2021

Version 1.0 ­– September 2021  
Independent Advisory Council to the NDIS   
ndis-iac.com.au



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## Principal Member’s review

As Principal Member of the Independent Advisory Council (Council) to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), it is my pleasure to present the Council’s 2020-2021 Annual Report. This report talks about the important work Council and its Reference Groups achieved from 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021.

Council, its dedicated Members, Expert Adviser and Reference Groups worked really hard over the past year in their respective roles. They have all shown a tremendous commitment to deliver fiercely independent formal advice to the [Board of the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA)](https://www.ndis.gov.au/about-us/governance/board).

The NDIA Board takes [Council’s advice](https://www.ndis-iac.com.au/advice) very seriously, not only because it is a requirement under Section 144 of the [NDIS Act](https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2013A00020). As a Board Director, I know it is also because the advice from Council truly brings the voice and lived experience of the participant, their family and carers, into the boardroom of the NDIA.

I’m really pleased that throughout my first year as Principal Member the strong collaboration and engagement between the NDIA Board and Council has continued.

This year, Council’s work included important formal advice to the Board about:

* local area coordination (LAC), including the role of local area coordinators, in [‘Supporting LACs to be LACs’ (PDF, 1.2MB)](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5898f042a5790ab2e0e2056c/t/60540a713025687587aff5dc/1616120438947/Advice%2B-%2BSupporting%2BLACs%2Bto%2Bbe%2BLACs%2B-%2BFinal%2B-%2B2021-02-04.pdf)
* families and carers, in [‘Support for families and carers’ (DOCX, 2.4MB)](https://www.ndis-iac.com.au/s/Advice-Support-for-families-and-carers-Final-2021-06-01.docx)
* participant safety, in [‘Choice and control to safely live a life of belonging and citizenship’ (DOCX, 1.6MB)](https://www.ndis-iac.com.au/s/Advice-Choice-and-control-to-safely-live-a-good-life-of-belonging-and-citizenship-Final-2021-06-13.docx).

At the same time, Council delivered a significant body of informal advice to the NDIA. This included critical work around Scheme reforms, NDIS research and evaluation, home and living, and support for decision making. All of this was considered against the backdrop of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and Council’s commitment to ensuring participants continued to receive essential supports during this challenging year.

Council also submitted responses to the:

* Disability Royal Commission, through its Employment Issues Paper [‘Eliminating violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation against people with disability in employment’ (DOCX, 113kB)](https://www.ndis-iac.com.au/s/Submission-Council-advice-on-Employment-Isssues-Paper-to-Disability-Royal-Commission-2020-08-12-j9km.docx) and through its Safeguards and Quality Issues Paper
* NDIA, through its Discussion Paper on Support Coordination
* Department of Social Services (DDS), through its National Disability Strategy (NDS) Position Paper [‘Citizens with disability at the heart of the NDS’ (DOCX, 196kB)](https://www.ndis-iac.com.au/s/Submission-National-Disability-Strategy-Position-Paper-Independent-Advisory-Council-October-2020.docx) and Outcomes Framework Consultation [‘Improving outcomes](https://www.ndis-iac.com.au/s/Submission-Council-response-to-NDS-Outcomes-Frameworks-Paper-2020-12-16-6bjz.docx) [for people with disability under the NDS and the NDIS’ (DOCX, 95kB)](https://www.ndis-iac.com.au/s/Submission-Council-response-to-NDS-Outcomes-Frameworks-Paper-2020-12-16-6bjz.docx).

At the start of the year, Council released its inaugural Work Plan, listing its priority areas of work and aligning them wherever possible with the priorities of both the Board and NDIA.

Council also refreshed its Reference Groups this year, encouraging more participants, diversity and younger people to get involved. Council’s Reference Group Members do an incredible job, bringing new perspectives and input to Council to enrich its advice. They also help identify additional areas of specific concern for participants that Council can take forward.

Critically, Council has been guided by its Operating Model. This has improved the way we work with the NDIA, and allowed the NDIA to tap into Council’s work and the expertise of its Members. The Operating Model ensures Council’s advice and Work Plan is impactful, while also supporting NDIA business areas with advice implementation.

Finally, Council’s Communications Strategy has allowed for greater promotion of Council’s work and projects, within the NDIA and to the public. The commitment to transparency and sharing of accessible information is of great importance to Council.

On a personal note, I am immensely grateful to Ms Leah Van Poppel for taking on the role of Council’s Deputy Chair. Leah’s constant support, insight, lived experience and knowledge has made it possible for me to build on the legacy of previous Principal Members, Mr John Walsh AM and Dr Rhonda Galbally AC. While much has been achieved by Council, there is always more to be done to make the Scheme better for people with disability and their families, and to ensure all participants realise the benefits of this visionary social reform.

I would like to thank fellow colleagues on Council, Reference Groups and the NDIA Board, as well as Agency staff, for their significant contribution to the achievements of the Council over the past year.

Additionally, I would like to acknowledge Senator The Hon Linda Reynolds CSC, Minister for the NDIS and The Hon Stuart Robert MP, former Minister for the NDIS. Both Ministers have shown a commitment to regularly engage with Council, seeking their advice on a number of NDIS issues.

I have also appreciated the significant support from Dr Helen Nugent AO, Chair of the NDIA Board, and Mr Martin Hoffman, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the NDIA to the Council. I am truly grateful to both Helen and Martin for the energy and passion they’ve shown in working with us to deliver Council’s advice.

It has been an honour serving as Principal Member of Council, knowing that our collective collaboration and engagement has made important changes to the NDIS for participants and their families. We all hope that in some way, Council has made a difference in their lives.

**Ms Robyn Kruk AO   
Principal Member  
Independent Advisory Council to the NDIS.**

## Deputy Chair’s introduction

I was appointed Deputy Chair of Council in November 2020, after serving as a Council Member since July 2017.

It is a real honour to support the Principal Member and the wider Council team to develop and deliver our advice. As a woman with disability, I am proud to represent people with disabilities in this important role.

[Council’s advice](https://www.ndis-iac.com.au/advice) is critical to the NDIA for a number reasons. Our advice helps guide the way the Scheme operates. It has recommendations on ways the NDIA can make the Scheme better for participants, now and in the future. Importantly our advice is developed by people with a disability, like me.

This year, Council and its [Reference Groups](https://www.ndis-iac.com.au/reference-groups) have put in extensive work that has already enabled innovation and deeper thought on the most important issues at play. Our consultation with the NDIA on Scheme reforms, [‘Strengthening Scheme [reforms to access and planning’ (DOCX, 159kB)](https://www.ndis-iac.com.au/s/Advice-Strengthening-Scheme-reforms-FINAL-2021-07-03.docx)](https://www.ndis-iac.com.au/s/Advice-Strengthening-Scheme-reforms-FINAL-2021-07-03.docx), is indicative of this.

Council has shown that it is eager to engage with the NDIA and the disability community on real and meaningful co-design of policy and reforms. Together we can make sure that participant experience and participant voice is at the centre of what the Agency does. We can also influence important change needed to ensure the Scheme delivers on its real intent, that people with disability live ordinary lives.

As an advisory body, we aim to support people with disability and their families to achieve their goals.This is so that people with disability can live the life they want, and get the supports they need to develop, grow, be independent, safe and included in their communities.

We are all committed to continuing to advise and engage with the NDIA Board, staff, providers, and the disability community to improve the NDIS for participants.

This year Council introduced two important new Reference Groups to work alongside those which were already established. The new groups are the Children, Young People and Families Reference Group and the Equity and Inclusion Reference Group.

We have also managed to deliver on our [Work Plan priorities](https://www.ndis-iac.com.au/about) under some very tight timelines, and while living through a global pandemic. I want to thank my colleagues for their tireless efforts and resilience during continuous change to support the achievements of Council over the past year.

**Ms Leah Van Poppel   
Deputy Chair**  
**Independent Advisory Council to the NDIS.**

## Our important role

Council’s important role is part of the [NDIS Act 2013](https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2019C00332), which means Council can give independent advice to the NDIA Board on ways to improve the Scheme. In many ways it really is the legislated heart of the NDIS, and Council plays an important advisory role for the Agency.

The advice Council gives the Board is highly regarded and valued. It connects the NDIA Board to the participant experience and puts the participant voice at the centre of the NDIS. Its advice also highlights the current issues affecting people with disability, which is important for the Board to know and consider as part of its role.

Council’s advice is having a bigger impact on the Scheme, and the Agency too. Staff in the NDIA are engaging more with Council and its Reference Groups to design important policies and reforms together. This relationship improves the NDIS and gives better outcomes for people with disability.

Council really is a reflection of [its membership](https://www.ndis-iac.com.au/membership). Current Members have broad-ranging lived experience of disability, with skills and knowledge across different disability areas.

Council includes experts, advocates, family members and researchers from across all Australian States and Territories. This includes members from Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities.

The Minister for the NDIS selected the Members for Council’s third-term. While this term runs from 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2023, not all Members will serve across the three years. Council Members for 2020-2021 are:

* Ms Robyn Kruk AO, Principal Member
* Ms Leah van Poppel, Deputy Chair
* Ms Kerry Allan-Zinner
* Dr Sharon Boyce
* Ms Jennifer Cullen
* Mrs Judy Huett
* Dr Leighton Jay
* Ms Sylvana Mahmic
* Ms Tricia Malowney OAM
* Mr James Manders
* Ms Sam Paior
* Ms Liz Reid AM
* Mr Mark Tonga.

Dr Ben Gauntlett supports the Council as an Expert Adviser. Dr Gauntlett is the Disability Discrimination Commissioner at the Australian Human Rights Commission. Ms Belinda Epstein- Frisch AM is Council’s Independent Consultant and works with Members and external experts to develop Council’s advice.

Council’s advice would not be possible without its [Reference Groups](https://www.ndis-iac.com.au/reference-groups). Council’s Reference Groups include Members who give additional information and expertise to the Council to improve its advice. Together they work hard to bring Council’s advice to life for the NDIA Board.

### Council Members

#### Ms Robyn Kruk AO, Council Principal Member

Robyn took on the Principal Member role in July 2020. Since then, she has worked hard to ensure Council’s advice shapes the future direction and implementation of the NDIS. Robyn is part of the NDIA Board, looking after the People and Remuneration Committee. She is also a member of the NDIA Board Risk Committee and Audit Committee. Robyn has many years of experience as a chief executive of national and state policy, regulatory and service delivery agencies with a strong background in health and mental health.

Read more about [Robyn’s experience at our website](https://www.ndis-iac.com.au/ms-robyn-kruk-ao).

#### Ms Leah Van Poppel, Council Deputy Chair & Intellectual Disability Reference Group Co-Chair

Leah took on the Deputy Chair role in November 2020 to support the Principal Member with her duties. She has been a respected member of Council since July 2017. Leah mentors Council members to use their lived experience of disability, and understanding of complex community issues, to put people with disability at the heart of Council’s advice. Leah has lots of experience in state and federal government policy and advocacy for people with disability. She is a woman with disability and the CEO of Women with Disabilities Victoria.

Read more about [Leah’s experience at our website](https://www.ndis-iac.com.au/ms-leah-van-poppel).

#### Ms Kerry Allan-Zinner, Council Member

Kerry is a valued Council Member and an experienced leader in the West Australian disability sector. She is a passionate disability human rights advocate who speaks up to promote disability awareness. Kerry serves on the Customer Advisory Council for Ability WA, providing advice to improve the organisation’s customer service experience. She was born with cerebral palsy, and her lived experience informs her work on Council. Kerry has been a Council Member since July 2017.

Read more about [Kerry’s experience at our website](https://www.ndis-iac.com.au/ms-kerry-allan-zinner).

#### Dr Sharon Boyce, Council Member & Home and Living Reference Group Member

Sharon joined Council in July 2020. She is an author, educator, disability advocate and person with disability from Queensland. She is also Chair of the Queensland Disability Advisory Council. Sharon works hard to help Council understand the complexity of disability in Australia. She does this by using her lived experience of disability and research in inclusion. Sharon is passionate about raising public awareness on physical and hidden disabilities.

Read more about [Sharon’s experience at our website](https://www.ndis-iac.com.au/dr-sharon-boyce).

#### Adjunct Associate Professor Jennifer Cullen, Council Member & Equity and Inclusion Reference Group Co-Chair

Jennifer is passionate about working with communities to ensure people with disability and their families get essential services. She is committed to issues that affect Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people and those living in rural and remote areas. Jennifer has Aboriginal heritage and important networks with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities. She is also the CEO of Synapse, an organisation that helps people with brain injury. Jennifer has been a Council Member since July 2014.

Read more about [Jennifer’s experience at our website](https://www.ndis-iac.com.au/adjunct-associate-professor-jennifer-cullen).

#### Mrs Judy Huett, Council Member & Intellectual Disability Reference Group Member

Judy is a respected advocate for people with intellectual disability from Tasmania. She is a founding member of Council’s Intellectual Disability Reference Group and a person with intellectual disability. Judy works in capacity building and self-advocacy support for Speak Out Association, making sure that people with disability have the same opportunities as everyone else. She has been a Council Member since July 2017.

Read more about [Judy’s experience at our website](https://www.ndis-iac.com.au/mrs-judy-huett).

#### Dr Leighton Jay, Council Member & Home and Living Reference Group Co-Chair

Leighton officially joined Council in October 2020, after working as a Council Reference Group Member. He has experience in the disability and academic sectors in Western Australia, giving advice on policies and services that impact people with disability. Leighton is passionate about communities valuing the voice of people with disability. He is a parent of a NDIS participant with complex disability support needs, and also works as Principal at Sotica.

Read more about [Leighton’s experience at our website](https://www.ndis-iac.com.au/dr-leighton-jay).

#### Ms Sylvana Mahmic, Council Member & Children, Young People and Families Reference Group Co-Chair

Sylvana is a respected Council Member with lots of experience in early childhood intervention and self-management across New South Wales. She has worked with Council since July 2014. Sylvana is also a parent of a NDIS participant with cerebral palsy and intellectual disability. She works hard to support families and children with disability gain independence for a full life in the community, and is the CEO of Plumtree.

Read more about [Sylvana’s experience at our website](https://www.ndis-iac.com.au/ms-sylvana-mahmic).

#### Ms Tricia Malowney OAM, Council Member & Equity and Inclusion Reference Group Member

Tricia joined Council in July 2020. She is a person with disability and human rights advocate based in Victoria. Tricia is the President of Women with Disabilities Australia, and is passionate about women with disabilities having equal access to health and justice. She has expertise in health, justice and family violence sectors. Tricia is also a consultant to government and non-government agencies, and delivers entrepreneur training to people with disabilities.

Read more about [Tricia’s experience at our website](https://www.ndis-iac.com.au/ms-tricia-malowney-oam).

#### Mr James Manders, Council Member

James has been a Council Member since July 2017. Based in the Australian Capital Territory, he advocates for the needs of people with disability in the workplace, including diversity and inclusion at work. He is also interested in how technology helps people with disability. James has got experience in financial services, previously working as an investment banker. He has lived experience of disability.

Read more about [James’ experience at our website](https://www.ndis-iac.com.au/mr-james-manders).

#### Ms Sam Paior, Council Member & Children, Young People and Families Reference Group Member

Sam joined Council in July 2020, after working as a Council Reference Group Member. She is an advocate and service provider from South Australia, who’s passionate about human rights, inclusion and clear communication for people with disability. Sam has a hearing impairment, and is also a parent of two NDIS participants. As the CEO of The Growing Space she gives support coordination and training to NDIS participants and their families.

Read more about [Sam’s experience at our website](https://www.ndis-iac.com.au/ms-sam-paior).

#### Ms Liz Reid AM, Council Member & Children, Young People and Families Reference Group Member

Liz has been a valued Council Member since July 2017, representing the Northern Territory. She is passionate about equal opportunities for economic and social inclusion, ensuring people with disability are a part of their communities.

Liz has experience in the community, disability and social justice sectors. She is the Executive Officer of YouthWorX NT, supporting young Territorians for lifelong social, economic and career success.

Read more about [Liz’s experience at our website](https://www.ndis-iac.com.au/ms-liz-reid-am).

#### Mr Mark Tonga, Council Member & Home and Living Reference Group Member

Mark joined Council in July 2020, after a number of years as the ministerially appointed Chair of the Disability Council of NSW. An accountant by profession, he acquired tetraplegia as a 35 year old, following a rugby incident. In life, sport and disability advocacy he pushes for fairness, team work, and an informed and engaged community.

Read more about [Mark’s experience at our website](https://www.ndis-iac.com.au/mr-mark-tonga).

#### Dr Ben Gauntlett, Council Expert Adviser

Ben has been Council Expert Adviser since May 2019. He brings his perspective as the Disability Discrimination Commissioner at the Australian Human Rights Commission to Council’s work. As Commissioner, Ben promotes the importance of human rights in society and works to ensure people with disability are treated with dignity and respect. Ben has lived experience of disability, and is a quadriplegic.

Read more about [Ben’s experience at our website](https://www.ndis-iac.com.au/dr-ben-gauntlett).

#### Ms Belinda Epstein-Frisch AM, Council Independent Consultant

Belinda has been the Independent Consultant to Council since 2014. She works closely with Council and Reference Groups Members to bring its advice to life for the NDIA Board. Belinda has experience in advocacy, community development and social policy for people with disability. She has also been a member of ministerial advisory councils on disability reform and education at state and national level.

Read more about [Belinda’s experience at our website](https://www.ndis-iac.com.au/ms-belinda-epstein-frisch-am).

## Reference Groups

This year Council made some important changes to its Reference Groups, to further support and strengthen Council’s advice.

We refreshed the terms of reference and membership of the Home and Living Reference Group (previously known as the Contemporary and Innovative Approaches Reference Group), and Intellectual Disability Reference Group.

We also decided to establish two new Reference Groups, including the Children, Young People and Families Reference Group and Equity and Inclusion Reference Group. We know these groups will focus on some of the most important issues facing the Scheme.

Each Reference Group includes a majority of people with disability, representatives from Aboriginal and/ or Torres Strait Islander and CALD communities, as well as families and carers, researchers and disability experts from across Australia. The Reference Groups identify emerging issues, provide expert input into Council advice and act as an important source of expertise to the NDIA.

### Children, Young People and Families Reference Group

This Reference Group gives advice to support best practice for children, young people, their families and carers to maximise independence and inclusion in the community.

Its membership includes:

**Co-Chairs**

* Robyn Kruk AO
* Sylvana Mahmic

**Council Member Representatives**

* Sam Paior
* Liz Reid AM

**Reference Group Members**

* Katharine Annear
* Tash Binder
* Kane Blackman
* Jake Briggs
* Ara Cresswell
* Abrahim Darouiche
* Catherine Dunn
* Karina Enks
* Melo Kalemkeridis
* Mary Sayers
* Professor Les White
* Professor Andrew Whitehouse.

### Equity and Inclusion Reference Group

This Reference Group gives advice to promote diversity and the principles of inclusion, equal opportunity, fairness and transparency in the delivery of the NDIS.

Its membership includes:

**Co-Chairs**

* Robyn Kruk AO
* Adjunct Associate Professor Jennifer Cullen

**Council Member Representative**

* Tricia Malowney OAM

**Reference Group Members**

* Margherita Coppolino
* Jadnah Davies
* Faye Dickson
* Judith Drake
* Julie Duong
* Jane Flanagan
* Benjamin Garcia-Lee
* Catherine McAlpine
* Nigel Pernu
* Suzy Trindall
* Felix Walsh
* Barbel Winter.

### Home and Living Reference Group

This Reference Group gives advice to support best practice home and living supports and innovation models that help to build participant capacity, independence and inclusion.

Its membership includes:

**Co-Chairs**

* Robyn Kruk AO
* Dr Leighton Jay

**Council Member Representatives**

* Dr Sharon Boyce
* Adjunct Associate Professor Jennifer Cullen
* Mark Tonga

**Reference Group Members**

* Alan Blackwood
* Liz Dutton
* Rebecca Evans
* Peter Gregory
* Scott Harry
* Grace Mills
* Associate Professor Mary-Ann O’Donovan
* Leanne Pearman
* Pat Sutton
* Dr George Taleporos
* Peter Tully
* Robbi Williams.

### Intellectual Disability Reference Group

This Reference Group gives advice to support best practice in empowering people with intellectual disability to lead ordinary lives and be included in their community.

Its membership includes:

**Co-Chairs**

* Robyn Kruk AO
* Leah Van Poppel

**Council Member Representatives**

* Judy Huett
* Dr Leighton Jay

**Reference Group Members**

* Paige Armstrong
* Gavin Burner
* Marissa Carlyon
* Nathan Despott
* Angus Graham OAM
* Brodie McElroy
* Leonie McLean
* Professor Sally Robinson
* Jim Simpson
* Sarah Sutton
* Justen Thomas
* Catherine Viney
* Angela Yee.

## Our priorities

Council uses an Operating Model to guide the way it works and plan its annual priorities for formal and informal advice.

### Our Operating Model

The Council Operating Model outlines the way we work and better aligns Council’s work with that of the NDIA. It involves four steps:

#### Step 1 – Identify and prioritise:

* The NDIA Board makes a formal request for advice each financial year
* Council considers the request alongside its own self-identified priorities
* A forward program is developed and endorsed.

#### Step 2 – Mobilise:

* The NDIA business area that is responsible for the implementation of the advice is identified
* Expert advice is sought
* Literature reviews, research and consultation is commissioned
* Council and Reference Groups consider the draft advice
* Council endorses the final advice.

#### Step 3 – Advise:

* An Agency Response is sought, outlining how the NDIA will implement the Council’s advice
* The advice and Agency Response is submitted to the NDIA Board, then referred to the Ministerial Council.

#### Step 4 – Implement:

* The advice is implemented, with progress reports to Council and NDIA Board every six months. Additional advice is sought, as needed
* Council actively delivers its work products.

### Our 2020–21 Work Plan

Council’s Work Plan outlines the work we will do over a year. When developing our Work Plan, Council considers:

* The priorities identified by Council, its Expert Adviser, and Reference Group Members
* Priorities outlined in the NDIA Corporate Plan
* Requests that the NDIA Board has made for Council’s advice
* Other priorities from the wider government and disability sectors. This includes current issues of concern and the Disability Reform Ministers’ priorities.

We focus on areas that will have meaningful, systemic and long-lasting impact. Our Work Plan is always flexible, and may change if new priorities are identified throughout the year.

Our Work Plan includes projects of work across formal advice, informal advice and advice from Council’s Reference Groups. The Work Plan links to the NDIA Corporate Plan Aspirations and the Council Communications Strategy:

#### Formal advice

* [‘Supporting LACs to be LACs’ (PDF, 1.2MB)](https://www.ndis-iac.com.au/s/Advice-Supporting-LACs-to-be-LACs-Final-2021-02-04.pdf)
* [‘Support for families and carers’ (DOCX, 2.4MB)](https://www.ndis-iac.com.au/s/Advice-Support-for-families-and-carers-Final-2021-06-01.docx)
* [‘Choice and control to safely live a life of belonging and citizenship’ (DOCX, 1.6MB)](https://www.ndis-iac.com.au/s/Advice-Choice-and-control-to-safely-live-a-good-life-of-belonging-and-citizenship-Final-2021-06-13.docx)
* ‘Supporting participants to be included in the community’.

#### Informal advice

* Independent assessments
* Post-COVID practice and support
* Support coordination
* Scheme Work of the Future
* Early Childhood Early Intervention reset
* National Disability Strategy
* Supported Independent Living
* Monitoring the Participant Service Guarantee
* Other identified priorities.

#### Reference Groups

* Children, Young People and Families Reference Group
* Equity and Inclusion Reference Group
* Home and Living Reference Group
* Intellectual Disability Reference Group.

#### NDIA Corporate Plan Aspirations 2020–24:

* A robust COVID-19 response and recovery
* A quality experience and outcomes for participants
* A competitive market with innovative supports
* A genuinely connected and engaged stakeholder sector
* A high-performing NDIA
* A financially sustainable Scheme.

#### Communications Strategy

* Raises awareness of the Council, its role within the NDIS and its work.

## Promoting our work

In July 2020, Council endorsed its first Communications Strategy. The Strategy aims to raise awareness and understanding of Council and its work within the NDIA and in the community.

We have implemented the Strategy through writing regular News and Meeting Bulletins, in plain English and in Easy Read, and publishing these to NDIS communications channels and the [Council website](https://www.ndis-iac.com.au/).

We also released news on our inaugural Work Plan. This work showed the NDIA and public, Council’s priorities for the year, and encouraged more people to get involved with Council.

Additionally, we released Council’s first Annual Report. It recapped the highlights and work that Council covered over the year. Council’s Principal Member used the report as a way to promote Council’s achievements to the Minister for the NDIS and NDIA Board.

The Council’s website was established by the inaugural Council and is regarded as a valuable, independent communications asset. This year a lot of work was done to refresh its content, including writing in plain English and publishing all advice and ‘papers on a page’.

We understand that the website must meet the highest accessibility standards and this will be a focus of our work in 2021-22.

We also worked hard to raise awareness of Council, its purpose, work and impact within the NDIA. This included updates to the Council’s NDIS intranet page, news notices and videos.

We also released whole of Agency talking points and Council-branded templates and documents to confirm our independence and professionalism.

In May we launched the interactive Council Roadshow to help NDIA staff understand more about Council’s role and advice, as well as how to engage with Council and its networks to test ideas and co-design important work.

The Roadshow includes four new accessible videos, telling the story of Council’s impact and influence. Council Members feature in these videos, describing in their own words [Council’s](https://youtu.be/aov_e9sk9Nc) [important role](https://youtu.be/aov_e9sk9Nc) and [Council’s advice](https://youtu.be/0Hbont0xo94).

## Year in review

### Review of work completed by Council in 2020-21

| Month | | Work completed by Council | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| July 2020 | * New Principal Member and Council membership appointed. | |
| August 2020 | * Council submits its response to the Disability Royal Commission Employment Issues Paper [‘Eliminating violence, abuse, neglect and [exploitation against people with disability in employment’ (DOCX, 113kB)](https://www.ndis-iac.com.au/s/Submission-Council-advice-on-Employment-Isssues-Paper-to-Disability-Royal-Commission-2020-08-12-j9km.docx)](https://www.ndis-iac.com.au/s/Submission-Council-advice-on-Employment-Isssues-Paper-to-Disability-Royal-Commission-2020-08-12-j9km.docx). | |
| September 2020 | * Council establishes a subgroup to work on Scheme reforms. * Council submits its response to the NDIA Support Coordination Discussion Paper. | |
| October 2020 | * Council submits its response to the NDS Position Paper [‘Citizens with disability at the heart of the NDS’ (DOCX, 196kB)](https://www.ndis-iac.com.au/s/Submission-National-Disability-Strategy-Position-Paper-Independent-Advisory-Council-October-2020.docx). | |
| November 2020 | * The Principal Member appoints a Deputy Chair. | |
| December 2020 | * Council submits its response to the NDS Outcomes Frameworks Consultation, [‘Improving outcomes for people with disability under the [NDS and the NDIS’ (DOCX, 95kB)](https://www.ndis-iac.com.au/s/Submission-Council-response-to-NDS-Outcomes-Frameworks-Paper-2020-12-16-6bjz.docx)](https://www.ndis-iac.com.au/s/Submission-Council-response-to-NDS-Outcomes-Frameworks-Paper-2020-12-16-6bjz.docx). | |
| February 2021 | * Council submits [‘Supporting LACs to be LACs’ (PDF, 1.2MB)](https://www.ndis-iac.com.au/s/Advice-Supporting-LACs-to-be-LACs-Final-2021-02-04.pdf) as formal advice to the NDIA Board. * Council Reference Group Co-Chair and Member appointments confirmed. | |
| March 20021 | * Council submits [‘Support for families and carers’ (DOCX, 2.4MB)](https://www.ndis-iac.com.au/s/Advice-Support-for-families-and-carers-Final-2021-06-01.docx) as formal advice to the NDIA Board. * Council submits its response to the Disability Royal Commission Safeguards and Quality Issues Paper. | |
| April 2021 | * Two weeks after her appointment, Senator the Hon Linda Reynolds CSC, the new Minister for the NDIS, attends her first Council meeting and requests Council’s advice on Scheme reforms. | |
| April/May 2021 | * Council’s four Reference Groups hold their first official meetings, as well as induction training to understand their work and Council’s role. | |
| June 2021 | * Council submits [‘Choice and control to safely live a life of belonging and [citizenship’ (DOCX, 1.6MB)](https://www.ndis-iac.com.au/s/Advice-Choice-and-control-to-safely-live-a-good-life-of-belonging-and-citizenship-Final-2021-06-13.docx)](https://www.ndis-iac.com.au/s/Advice-Choice-and-control-to-safely-live-a-good-life-of-belonging-and-citizenship-Final-2021-06-13.docx) as formal advice to the NDIA Board. * Council convenes the Scheme Reform Forum and state and territory consultations to inform its advice [‘Strengthening Scheme reforms to access and planning (DOCX, 159kB)](https://www.ndis-iac.com.au/s/Advice-Strengthening-Scheme-reforms-FINAL-2021-07-03.docx). | |

## Advice

### About Council’s advice

Council gives both formal and informal advice to the NDIA.

We give formal advice to the NDIA Board on the delivery of the NDIS, under Section 144(1) of the [NDIS Act 2013](https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2019C00332). Formal advice is important because it ensures Council’s advice is considered by the NDIA, and helps the NDIA Board make changes to the NDIS.

Council also provides informal advice directly to NDIA staff. Informal advice helps the NDIA access up-to-date information about current issues within the disability community. It also allows NDIA staff to apply advice as they are developing their work.

Council is supported by its Independent Consultant to collate Members’ views, develop and write Council’s advice papers. We also work with Reference Group Members and external stakeholders, such as people with disability, researchers and sector experts, to support the advice consultation process.

Over the years, Council has developed a broad range of advice which is [available on Council’s [external website](https://www.ndis-iac.com.au/advice)’s](https://www.ndis-iac.com.au/advice).

### Formal advice

Once Council provides formal advice to the NDIA Board, the Board must:

* consider the advice
* develop an Agency Response, outlining what the NDIA has done or will do in response to the advice
* send the advice and Agency Response to the Disability Ministers.

This year’s formal advice included:

* [‘Supporting LACs to be LACs’ (PDF, 1.2MB)](https://www.ndis-iac.com.au/s/Advice-Supporting-LACs-to-be-LACs-Final-2021-02-04.pdf)
* [‘Support for families and carers’ (DOCX, 2.4MB)](https://www.ndis-iac.com.au/s/Advice-Support-for-families-and-carers-Final-2021-06-01.docx)
* [‘Choice and control to safely live a life of belonging and citizenship’ (DOCX, 1.6MB)](https://www.ndis-iac.com.au/s/Advice-Choice-and-control-to-safely-live-a-good-life-of-belonging-and-citizenship-Final-2021-06-13.docx)
* ‘Supporting participants to be included in the community’.\*

#### What is the advice ‘Supporting LACs to be LACs’ about?

[‘Supporting LACs to be LACs’ (PDF, 1.2MB)](https://www.ndis-iac.com.au/s/Advice-Supporting-LACs-to-be-LACs-Final-2021-02-04.pdf) outlines the key features of a Local Area Coordination (LAC) workforce strategy. The advice also highlights the challenges that impact the implementation of the LAC function. The advice says that the NDIA should test and use an “action research evaluation” method. This method assesses the impact of different approaches to understand reasonable workloads and performance expectations for Local Area Coordinators (LACs).

LAC is an approach that helps communities become more inclusive and welcoming. It promotes local collaboration, supporting people with disability to create their own local support networks. When implemented correctly, LAC supports social and economic participation, facilitating greater community inclusion. These are both vital parts of the NDIS Act.

The advice points out that during the Scheme’s rollout, the LAC function moved away from its original purpose. This has had a negative impact on participants and the sustainability of the Scheme.

#### What is the advice ‘Support for families and carers’ about?

[‘Support for families and carers’ (DOCX, 2.4MB)](https://www.ndis-iac.com.au/s/Advice-Support-for-families-and-carers-Final-2021-06-01.docx) highlights the central role that families, carers and informal supporters play in helping people with disability in Australia. It says that support for families and carers of people with disability is critical for positive participant outcomes. It is also critical for the sustainability of the NDIS. The advice also notes that since the introduction of the NDIS, resources to support carers have significantly reduced.

This advice guides the NDIA on the most effective ways it can support families to facilitate the best possible lives for people with disability. It says that investing in families is essential to reduce participants’ need for paid supports in all areas of their lives.

#### What is the advice ‘Choice and control to safely live a life of belonging and citizenship’ about?

The NDIS Quality and Safeguarding Framework is the foundation to ensure high quality supports and safe environments for all NDIS participants across Australia. [‘Choice and control to safely live a life of [belonging and citizenship’ (DOCX, 1.6MB)](https://www.ndis-iac.com.au/s/Advice-Choice-and-control-to-safely-live-a-good-life-of-belonging-and-citizenship-Final-2021-06-13.docx)](https://www.ndis-iac.com.au/s/Advice-Choice-and-control-to-safely-live-a-good-life-of-belonging-and-citizenship-Final-2021-06-13.docx) notes that national collaboration is needed to strengthen supports and protections for people with disability at risk of harm. This collaboration is needed between:

* the DSS;
* the NDIA;
* the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission; and
* state and territory governments.

Council’s advice also says that each key party in the disability community network needs to have clear accountabilities. The advice focuses on what the NDIA can do to assist people with disability, their families and carers to develop strategies for their personal safety to enable them to live a full life.

#### What is the advice ‘Supporting participants to be included in the community’\*about?

Community inclusion is a key part of the NDIS.

‘Supporting participants to be included in the community’\* highlights what is required to ensure full community inclusion for people with disability. It says that this is critical for participant outcomes and Scheme sustainability. At the same time, the advice recognises that all Australian governments have a responsibility to develop welcoming communities.

The advice gives strategies that have been successful in supporting people with disability to be included. It also identifies changes to planned reforms that will help facilitate greater community inclusion.

\*This advice was prepared and endorsed by Council in June 2021, however due to decisions from the [Disability Reform Ministers’ Meeting](https://www.dss.gov.au/disability-and-carers-programs-services-government-international-disability-reform-council/communique-9-july-2021) on Scheme reforms the advice will be amended and progress as informal advice for 2021-22.

### Informal advice

Informal advice is the advice that Council gives directly to NDIA staff or business areas, and is often time-limited. It relates to issues that Council has identified, or that have been requested by the Agency. Whilst the Agency can update Council on their response to informal advice, this is not a formal requirement.

Informal advice can be provided in a number of ways. This includes during Council meetings, through out of session engagement with Council, or by working collaboratively with the NDIA through subgroups.

This year, Council continued to work with teams across the NDIA to help implement informal advice provided during 2019-2020. Some examples of this engagement include our involvement in the Early Childhood Early Intervention reset and the Scheme Work of the Future project. As part of this project, Council provided feedback on the role of LAC, Support Coordinators and planners, as well as participant decision-making supports.

Over the past 12 months, Council has provided informal advice to the Agency on a broad range of issues. Some examples of informal advice includes:

#### Informal advice on Scheme reforms

In September 2020, at the request of Council and the NDIA, a subgroup of Council and Reference Group Members started to meet fortnightly with the NDIA. Their goal was to discuss broader work on Scheme reforms, including independent assessments.

This informal engagement led to a request in April 2021 by the newly appointed Minister for the NDIS, for formal advice from Council on Scheme reforms. This led to Council convening a two-day Scheme Reform Forum in June 2021, which included NDIA staff and additional members from Council’s Reference Groups and the disability community. Council also engaged with state and territory advisory groups, to hear their views on Scheme reforms.

All these consultations informed Council’s formal advice on Scheme reforms, [‘Strengthening Scheme [reforms to access and planning’ (DOCX, 159kB)](https://www.ndis-iac.com.au/s/Advice-Strengthening-Scheme-reforms-FINAL-2021-07-03.docx)](https://www.ndis-iac.com.au/s/Advice-Strengthening-Scheme-reforms-FINAL-2021-07-03.docx), which was submitted to the Minister for the NDIS and NDIA Board in July 2021.

#### Informal advice on Research and Evaluation

Council provided advice to the NDIA’s Research and Evaluation team on the development of the Participant Decision Guides (PDGs). These guides provide information to help participants make decisions about the services and supports they use. Council focussed on supporting the design of the PDGs and reviewing guides about Early Interventions for Children with Autism and Home and Living.

#### Informal advice on Support for Decision Making

Council provided advice to the Agency on the NDIA’s drafted:

* Support for Decision Making Framework
* Support for Decision Making Consultation Paper.

This work originated from Council’s formal advice on Support for Decision Making, submitted to the Board in 2019. Importantly, Council’s formal advice on support for decision making included input from the Intellectual Disability Reference Group.

The Intellectual Disability Reference Group was involved in the final stages of the consultation, and the NDIA released the [‘Supporting you to make your own decisions’ (DOCX 2.1MB)](https://www.ndis.gov.au/media/3230/download) in June 2021.

## Council Member case studies

### Support for decision making in the NDIS

‘The NDIA’s [‘Supporting you to make your own decisions’ (DOCX 2.1MB)](https://www.ndis.gov.au/media/3230/download) consultation paper, released in June 2021, has been a long, challenging, but rewarding process for Council and Council’s Intellectual Disability Reference Group.

This important work was first raised by the Intellectual Disability Reference Group in 2016. The Reference Group provided advice to Council about the need to improve supports that help people with intellectual disability make their own decisions, which led to Council taking this work on as formal advice to the NDIA Board.

In July 2019, after broadening the work to include all people with disability, Council submitted its advice [‘Support for Decision Making in the NDIS’ (PDF, 1.1MB)](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5898f042a5790ab2e0e2056c/t/5f59ba01d3cff1429e311bcc/1599715852765/Support%2Bfor%2Bdecision%2Bmaking%2Bin%2Bthe%2BNDIS%2B-%2BJuly%2B2019.pdf) to the NDIA Board. This work was then prioritised by the NDIA, who recognised the safety gaps in decision-making supports for people with a disability in the NDIS, and included it as a Corporate Plan priority.

In April 2021, to help the NDIA with its work, a subgroup of Council Members and Council Representatives provided input to the consultation. Importantly, the Intellectual Disability Reference Group had an opportunity to give their feedback about the consultation paper. They suggested ways to increase participants’ opportunities to be actively involved in making decisions about their lives, and to have real choice and control.

The work of the subgroup wasn’t without challenges. Firstly, it isn’t always easy to give advice to a large group of people you don’t know, in a relatively short timeframe and through an online format. This challenge is compounded if you genuinely want to give people with intellectual disability a voice at the table, fully include them, and give them access to information like anyone else.

But at the end of this process, the NDIA learned a lot about ways it can improve its consultation processes in the future, and how to fully include and tap into the lived experience of people with intellectual disabilities. Council Representatives from the subgroup have been gracious, positive and practical in their feedback to the NDIA, and I can’t thank them enough. I am confident this is an important step to building long-standing and meaningful engagement between the NDIA and the Intellectual Disability Reference Group.’

**Dr Leighton Jay  
Council Member & Home and Living Reference Group Co-Chair**

### My experience on Council and passion for early intervention

‘My passion for early intervention started over two decades ago because of my son Karim, who has been nurtured by early intervention professionals ever since I asked the simple question: “what kind of life will my son have?” They replied “he will be independent”, which was a defining moment in my journey to create the best life for my son.

This vision for a positive future gave our family the direction we needed to make decisions that built on Karim’s strengths throughout his childhood. It also helped me find my own professional path, supporting thousands of families from diverse backgrounds in early years’ supports. Setting a positive trajectory in a child’s early years is very important, because it helps families build their child’s best life.

All of this experience has helped me with my work on Council, of which I’ve been a Member since 2013. I have seen important changes over this time. Firstly, Council’s advice has been considered more carefully by the NDIA. Especially in this past year, more than any other time since Council’s establishment.

Secondly, there has been important changes made to Council Reference Groups. This has further strengthened our contribution in key areas, and continues to shine a light on the expertise of people with disabilities, their families and allies. I am proud to lead Council’s Children, Young People and Families Reference Group and work to improve the Scheme for all Australians.’

**Ms Sylvana Mahmic  
Council Member & Children, Young People and Families Reference Group Co-Chair**

## Acknowledgement

Council acknowledges and pays respects to fellow Australians with disability—and reconfirms its commitment to the mission of the NDIS to contribute to a just and inclusive Australia where all can reach their full potential and contribution.

Council also acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the country throughout Australia, and their continuing connection to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to their Elders, past, present and emerging.