



Joint Standing Committee on the NDIS
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Email ndis.sen@aph.gov.au

The provision of hearing services under the NDIS

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to this inquiry. ADACAS is an independent individual advocacy service providing advocacy to people of the ACT and region. Our experience with the NDIS spans several years and numerous clients on a range of issues related to entry, planning, implementation and reviews/appeals. When taking part in inquiries of this sort, ADACAS only participates when we have relevant experience of advocating for clients on the issue under inquiry. In this case, ADACAS has had limited requests for advocacy from people experiencing hearing loss. Our comments therefore are limited to the issues that are raised by those cases. This experience does however raise some issues of general concern which may be of interest to the Committee.

The clients with hearing loss who have sought support from ADACAS also live with other disabilities. The hearing loss has not necessarily been the disability that has been used to meet the eligibility requirements of the NDIS so is not always the primary focus of planning. In one case for instance the person lives with multiple disabilities including hearing loss which benefits from the use of hearing aids. While hearing was not the primary disability the NDIS planner included cost of replacement batteries for the hearing aids in the persons plan for which the person was very grateful.

Another client living with deafness and other disability is currently in the process of applying to the NDIS. This process has been extended because of the need to ensure that the client fully understands the process and the information required for the access request. It has involved doctors visits, in the company of both the advocate and AUSLAN interpreters. Fortunately the interpreters for medical visits can be supported through the NABS scheme, however follow-up conversations with the client to ensure that the person is satisfied with the information the Doctor has provided have also needed AUSLAN interpreting and there has not been funding available for this support. The NDIS does not fund any supports to assist individuals to access the scheme or prepare for planning. This introduces a barrier for some people in accessing the NDIS, including for people who need AUSLAN interpreting but cannot afford it and cannot get it funded in other ways. ADACAS covered the cost of interpreting for this client to complete the access request however we do not receive any funding to do this and would not be able to sustain this on a re-occurring basis. The NDIS should make AUSLAN available for people through all parts of the NDIS application and planning process, including preparing to apply.

This experience also raises a concern about whether sufficient AUSLAN interpreting will be funded in the persons plan when the time comes. We are aware that in the wider community some people have spoken of the improvement in quality of life that has come from having

sufficient funding to enable AUSLAN interpreting for social occasions as well as interactions of a more transactional nature.

However others have spoken of their frustration in not being able to access the interpreter of their choice for the NDIS planning meeting, because the NDIA will only use interpreters through their pre-arranged contracts. This presents a significant concern for one ADACAS client who lives with psychosocial disability as well as hearing loss. This person has a history of some very poor experiences when interpreting is provided by someone that he is not familiar with, to the extent that if a suitable interpreter is not attending the person will not participate in the planned appointment. The NDIA must recognise the very personal nature of AUSLAN interpreting and ensure that the person is able to have control over which interpreter is present at NDIA appointments.

Our experience suggests that for people living with a hearing disability along with other disabilities the NDIS is sometimes meeting needs but not always. Communication is a fundamental right and a cornerstone of living successfully in community. The provision of supports for deafness, alongside supports for other disabilities, is crucial for people to achieve successful outcomes with the NDIS. The NDIS has a responsibility to ensure that people who need hearing supports can access those during all stages of the NDIS process, including preparation for entry.

Thank you again for the opportunity to bring these matters to the attention of the Committee.

Yours sincerely

Fiona May
CEO

13 January 2017