



Samaritans

Compassion Integrity Justice



Joint Standing Committee on the National Disability Insurance Scheme Inquiry into Supported Independent Living

Prepared by Samaritans Foundation

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Introduction

Samaritans is an NDIS registered charity which has been operating disability services for 35 years. In the 2018 financial year, Samaritans provided a range of services to nearly 1000 people with disabilities in Newcastle, the Hunter, Central Coast and Mid-North Coast of NSW. As such, the organisation has extensive experience working with people at all stages of their plans and with the delivery of services under those plans.

Samaritans response to this inquiry represents the experiences of our staff in relation to NDIS Supported Independent Living (SIL) processes and their reflections on the challenges experienced with approval processes, SIL funding and management of vacancies.

Approval Process

Participants are not often aware of the processes for having SIL funding approved. Discussion during the development of a Participant's plan should include:

- exploration of current and future housing needs,
- likely timeframe that needs will change (for example if they have aging parents), and
- education around the SIL approval and placement processes and availability of properties.

Samaritans observes that Participants often come to us requiring SIL urgently, but they do not have SIL in their plans and are unaware of the process to access SIL. Samaritans can proceed through the vacancy management process but is unable to move the person in until their SIL is approved. The approval process often spans several months, creating issues for the Participant around security, consistency and comfort.

Recommendations

1. Provide education to Participants around the approval process for SIL funding, including discussion during planning around current and future housing needs.
2. Include exploration of SIL during planning as standard for all Participants so those with possible need in the future can access the funding when they need it.

Vacancy Management

Vacancy Management processes are for the most part managed under individual agencies own policies and procedures. There is varying success between agencies in their management of vacancies and subsequent impacts in terms of costs. Samaritans has a thorough matching process, which often means the organisation carries vacancies for a longer period where it is unable to match an individual to an appropriate home and housemates.

There are also occasions where homes have multiple existing residents who have lived together for some time and are in stable and comfortable environments. Where there are vacancies in these properties, often coupled with complex needs of the existing residents, it would usually be unsuitable to introduce a new resident to the home. The challenges and delays getting the SIL plans varied for those Participants mean we are carrying vacancies indefinitely.

The requirement to have SIL approved and reviewed individually for each Participant of a home creates unnecessary duplication and administrative burden and further increases delays having plans approved.

The Housing Hub website is a helpful platform for advertising vacancies only however it is not well known among participants and their families or guardians.

Recommendations

3. Implement suitable mechanisms and automation that allow for streamlined approval and review, including collective review and approval of changes for multiple Participants of the same residence where appropriate.

Funding

Samaritans believes the funding is generally adequate and simple for Participants with standard to moderate support needs. Where there are more complex support needs, funding often doesn't consider the implications of higher needs for the service provider. For example, ensuring the safety of employees under Work, Health and Safety legislation means two staff are required to lift a Participant out of bed; but filling two roles is not possible under the funding.

Additional barriers are faced for people with disabilities around availability of suitable and affordable housing in their area. Changes to their needs as they age, and lack of suitable and affordable housing mean they are forced into unsuitable housing or to move further away, separating them from existing social and support networks and activities.

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