



Australian Government

Australian Government response to the
National Disability Insurance Scheme Workforce Interim Report
of the Joint Standing Committee on the National Disability
Insurance Scheme

October 2021

Introduction

The Australian Government welcomes the Joint Standing Committee on the National Disability Insurance Scheme's (NDIS; the committee's) interim report to the inquiry into the NDIS Workforce.

The interim report makes 14 recommendations that cover funding arrangements; training and accreditation; employment opportunities for people with lived experience of disability; the distribution of allied health professionals; investing in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce; and securing reliable workforce data to support workforce planning and policy development. The Australian Government supports or supports in principle 11 of the recommendations made in the committee's interim report, and notes three recommendations.

The Australian Government is committed to growing a strong and innovative disability sector that has the capability and capacity to deliver supports that enable every individual NDIS participants to maximise their economic and social participation.

The NDIS National Workforce Plan 2021-2025, released in June 2021, outlines the Australian Government's approach to working with states and territories, people living with disability, the care and support sector and other key stakeholders. A shared goal is to grow a responsive and capable care and support workforce, and to strengthen the sector to meet the needs and aspirations of NDIS participants. The plan takes account of issues raised by participants, providers, support workers, allied health professionals, representative bodies and other key stakeholders through government-led consultations and through this inquiry.

Inquiry into the National Disability Insurance Scheme: NDIS Workforce Interim Report

Recommendations made by the committee

1. The committee recommends that the Australian Government facilitate an independent review of the funding model for the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), with a particular focus on:
 - exploring whether it is appropriate for the National Disability Insurance Agency to have responsibility for price settings for NDIS supports;
 - ensuring that prices reflect the 'true' cost of service delivery, including training, supervision, case management and other non-client-facing work;
 - addressing impacts of the funding model on the nature of work within the NDIS, including the implications for support workers, allied health professionals and others;
 - addressing the impacts of the funding model on the quality and safety of supports and services for NDIS participants; and
 - exploring alternative funding models where negative impacts are identified.

Noted

Under the NDIS Act, the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) Board has a statutory responsibility to have regard to financial sustainability. The prices of supports have a direct impact on scheme costs. It is important that the price of services charged to participants are reasonable and represent value for money.

In June 2017, the Board of the NDIA commissioned McKinsey & Company to undertake an Independent Pricing Review. This review was commissioned in response to feedback from participant and provider groups, as well as the Productivity Commission's 2017 Report on NDIS Costs.

In March 2018, the Board of the NDIA released the *Independent Pricing Review Report*. The NDIA gave in principle support to all of the Report's 25 recommendations. The NDIA has addressed and implemented the recommendations in the Report.

Consistent with the Australian Government's full scheme bilateral agreement with Victoria, a project is underway to consider approaches to improve the effective operation of the market for NDIS services. This will include exploring options for alternative approaches to price regulation, building market confidence, capacity and depth, as well as providing greater flexibility for the market to innovate and deliver greater consumer choice. The outcomes of this work will inform policy development around future market interventions, including in relation to price regulation.

2. The committee recommends that the National Disability Insurance Agency consider the concerns relating to the cost model for disability support workers raised in this report in the next annual pricing review.

Supported in principle

The NDIA undertakes a comprehensive review of the Disability Support Worker Cost Model when reviewing prices in the price guide, in full consultation with the sector and on the basis of a financial benchmarking survey in which all providers are invited to participate.

3. The committee recommends that the National Disability Insurance Agency ensure all pricing reviews are conducted in full consultation with people with disability, support workers and representative organisations.

Supported

In administering the NDIS, the Government is committed to strong engagement with people with disability and the disability sector, and notes the NDIA already engages extensively with a broad range of stakeholders as part of all price reviews. The NDIA's 2020-24 Corporate Plan commits the NDIA to improving confidence and trust by building and maintaining genuine and collaborative partnerships with a wide range of stakeholders. In conducting the Annual Price Review 2020-21 the NDIA engaged in extensive consultations with industry, community and government stakeholders and undertook a program of research.

The results of all price reviews are also considered by the NDIA Pricing Reference Group, which now includes five independent members. Information regarding the NDIA's consultation on Annual Price Reviews is available here: www.ndis.gov.au/providers/price-guides-and-pricing/annual-price-review/annual-price-review-consultation.

4. The committee recommends that the Australian Government review options to develop a national registration and accreditation scheme for disability support workers, as the product of a co-design process with relevant appropriate people. This should include developing national benchmarks for skills, qualifications and competencies which reflect the diversity of people with disability, and which are co-designed by appropriate industry bodies, people with disability and representative organisations, support workers and unions, and other key stakeholders.

Supported in principle

The NDIS Practice Standards specify the quality standards to be met by registered NDIS providers to provide supports and services to NDIS participants. While the NDIS Practice Standards do not specify the types of qualifications required for NDIS workers, the Human Resources Management module requires registered providers demonstrate that 'each participant's support needs are met by workers who are competent in relation to their role, hold relevant qualifications, and who have relevant expertise and experience to provide person-centred support.'

The NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission (NDIS Commission) is leading the implementation of a national NDIS Workforce Capability Framework to support consistency in practice and delivery of quality disability services across Australia. The NDIS Commission completed the development of the Workforce Capability Framework in late 2020, based on extensive consultation with participants, workers, supervisors, providers and experts across Australia.

The Workforce Capability Framework translates the NDIS Principles, Practice Standards and Code of Conduct into clear and observable behaviours that service providers and workers should demonstrate when delivering services to people with disability. An implementation project is now underway, with the focus on supporting the sector to embed the Workforce Capability Framework into all aspects of NDIS workforce management practice.

The Workforce Capability Framework includes:

- Core capabilities that all service providers and workers will be expected to have.
- Additional capabilities that apply to workers who require deeper and more specific knowledge and capability to support participants who identify as Aboriginal or Torres

Strait Islander, culturally and linguistically diverse and / or LGBTIQ+, and / or deliver higher-intensity services that require specialised knowledge or expertise.

- Organisational capabilities that set out expectations of providers, leaders and supervisors in building and supporting a capable workforce.

The NDIS Commission Workforce Orientation Module, *Quality, Safety, and You*, is a free resource developed with NDIS sector agencies and people with disability to assist NDIS workers to understand their responsibilities in relation to the NDIS Code of Conduct and support people with disability to achieve the vision of the NDIS. Modules released in late 2020 provide new workers with specific information they need to start working in the disability sector. The modules supported fast workforce mobilisation during the COVID pandemic. The annual report for the NDIS Commission showed 243,852 completions of the module, with 2,213 completions of the Auslan version.

5. The committee recommends that the Australian Government, through the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency and the National Skills Commission, conduct a thorough analysis of the skills and qualifications required in the disability workforce, informed by extensive consultation with people with disability, support workers, representative organisations and tertiary education providers.

Supported

The Australian Government supports the recommendation to conduct an analysis of the skills and qualifications required in the disability workforce and notes this work is already underway.

The National Skills Commission has undertaken an in-depth study on the factors affecting the supply and demand of care and support workers both in the near-term and to 2050. The study examined the needs of the care and support workforce, in relation to aged, disability, veteran and mental health care. The study's final report was provided to the Hon Stuart Robert MP, Minister for Employment, Workforce, Skills, Small and Family Business on 30 September 2021.

In the 2021-22 Budget, the Australian Government announced funding of \$149.2 million over four years to support new industry engagement arrangements for the Vocational Educational and Training system, enhancing the role of industry and improving governance. Industry clusters will be established to ensure a strong, strategic industry voice, drive collaboration across sectors, address workforce challenges, and improve the speed to market of qualifications to meet evolving industry needs.

As outlined in response to Recommendation 4, the NDIS Commission is leading the implementation of an NDIS Workforce Capability Framework. As part of the development of the Workforce Capability Framework, a review of existing skills and qualifications in the disability workforce was undertaken following consultation with key stakeholders, including people with disability and their families, service providers, workforce, technical experts, state and territory governments, and peak agencies.

A Disability Support Industry Reference Committee (IRC) was established on 29 November 2018 to enable the vocational education and training sector to better respond to the increasing demand for disability support workers, driven in particular by the rollout of the NDIS. The IRC's work includes:

- addressing the current and future competencies and skill requirements for new workers entering the sector and existing staff needing to upskill

- reviewing and updating national training package qualifications, skill sets and units of competency needed by the disability support sector
- working with other IRCs to ensure industry needs are considered and met.

SkillsIQ, under the direction of the IRC, is undertaking a project to update the National Training Package Products for the disability support sector. The Workforce Capability Framework will be an important resource to inform this further refinement of curricula and the Commission is actively promoting its use with education providers.

As part of the Australian Government’s Delivering Skills for Today and Tomorrow package, a Human Services Skills Organisation pilot has also been established to trial new ways to shape the national training system to be more responsive to the skill needs within the sector.

Many professional bodies have established their own standards for the content of professional courses to ensure graduates have the skills and knowledge needed to operate effectively once employed. Such bodies generally offer professional accreditation of courses against those standards. The NDIS Commission will engage with relevant professional bodies to recommend that the NDIS Workforce Capability Framework informs future standards for professional courses.

6. The committee recommends that—following the needs analysis to which Recommendation 5 refers—the Australian Government facilitate a review of current vocational education and training programs and university courses in disability care and allied health, to ensure that such programs capture the training needs of the National Disability Insurance Scheme workforce and reflect current best practice.

Supported in principle

As detailed in response to recommendation 5, the Disability Support Industry Reference Committee (IRC) has been established to ensure vocational education and training provides workers within the disability and allied health workforce with the skills and knowledge required to deliver high quality and individualised care in an evolving market. The qualifications that cater to the disability and allied health assistant workforce are now undergoing a major review and update following implementation of the NDIS and in response to implementation of consumer-directed care and supports.

The Disability Support IRC is collaborating with the Human Services Skills Organisation, the Direct Client Care and Support IRC and the Aged Services IRC to update the Qualifications and relevant Units of Competency within the Certificate III in Individual Support, the Certificate IV in Disability and the Certificate IV in Ageing Support.

The NDIS National Workforce Plan also outlines further initiatives in relation to training, career pathways and professional development to ensure workers are well equipped to perform their roles.

7. The committee recommends that the National Disability Insurance Agency develop, publish and implement a peer workforce strategy, co-designed by people with disability and peak bodies.

Supported in principle

The *NDIS Participant Employment Strategy 2019-2023* sets out the NDIA’s vision, commitment and action plan for supporting NDIS participants to find and maintain meaningful employment. This Strategy comprises a comprehensive program of work across five key focus areas, including:

- increasing participant aspiration and employment goals in NDIS plans
- increasing participant choice and control over pathways to employment
- increasing market innovations that improve the path to paid work
- improving confidence of employers to employ NDIS participants
- leading by example as an employer.

The goal of the Strategy is to enable 30 per cent of NDIS participants of working age to be in paid work by 30 June 2023.

More broadly, the Australian Government is developing a National Disability Employment Strategy (Employment Strategy), which will seek to improve meaningful employment opportunities for people with disability. Activities under the Employment Strategy could improve employment opportunities of people with disability in the NDIS workforce.

A broad range of stakeholders, including people with disability, employers, industry representatives, and community organisations have already been engaged in the development of the Employment Strategy. The Employment Strategy will be released in the second half of 2021.

A new Australian Government Employment Services Model will also help transform the delivery of employment services in Australia, benefiting job seekers, including the most disadvantaged job seekers, and employers seeking to fill vacancies with appropriately skilled workers.

8. The committee recommends that the National Disability Insurance Agency develop, publish and implement an education strategy for participants, co-designed by people with disability, peak bodies and training providers.

Noted

Australia’s education system is a joint responsibility between Commonwealth and state and territory governments. The Australian Government supports a strategic approach to the education of people with disability, recognising that education supports people with disability to transition into long-term, stable employment. A priority area in the development of *Australia’s Disability Strategy 2021-2031* is learning and skills and a commitment from all governments to improve education and training outcomes for people with disability throughout their lives. This includes making sure people with disability have adequate, reasonable and necessary support through all stages of learning from education to employment.

The NDIS funds supports to enable participants to attend school education, such as specialist transport, and transportable equipment. Currently, supports for personal care and school transport are delivered through an in-kind arrangement with the education department of each state and territory. Such supports are recognised in NDIS participant plans. During post-school study, the NDIS can fund supports for transport and personal care including any additional study aids that are not the responsibility of the tertiary institution. NDIS information regarding work and study is available in the NDIS Operational Guidelines:

www.ourguidelines.ndis.gov.au/supports-you-can-access-menu/social-and-community-participation/work-and-study-supports.

In 2020 the Australian Government reviewed the *Disability Standards for Education 2005* (the Standards). The Standards help to make sure students with disability can access and participate in education and training on the same basis as students without disability. The final report makes 13 recommendations which reflect four reform directions:

- empowering and supporting students with disability and their families
- strengthening the knowledge and capability of educators and providers
- embedding accountability for the Standards throughout the education system
- building awareness and capability in the early childhood education and care sector.

The Australian Government will work closely with state and territory governments and education authorities to implement the recommendations. Changes will be made with help and advice from people with disability and educators. This will also include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability and those from a culturally and diverse background.

9. The committee recommends that the National Disability Insurance Agency consider expanding its existing graduate program to include graduates of Vocational Education and Training (VET) programs.

Noted

The Australian Government is committed to creating an inclusive and prosperous Australia by maximising skills and education opportunities for Australians.

Current entry level programs offered by the NDIA are open to:

- recent tertiary graduates (NDIA Graduate Program, in line with the Australian Public Service Graduate Development Program);
- people with disability who are currently studying at university (Stepping Into Internship Program);
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people wishing to complete an apprenticeship (Indigenous Apprenticeship Program); and
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people wishing to commence a career with Government (Indigenous Australian Government Development Program).

The NDIA does not currently offer a graduate program that is specific to VET graduates. Additional to the above offerings, the NDIA does consider graduate students from outside the university sector, except where the scope of the role requires a minimum education component for subject knowledge or additional body memberships (e.g. Legal, Finance, Scheme Actuary).

10. The committee recommends that the National Disability Insurance Agency review its recruitment and application processes, with a view to identifying and removing barriers to applications from people with disability.

Supported

The NDIA strongly upholds its belief in the value of a workforce comprised of people from diverse backgrounds and experiences. This commitment is demonstrated by the NDIA currently having the highest percentage of employees with disability in the Australian Public Service. Latest census figures indicate 18.2 per cent of the NDIA's workforce have a disability, exceeding the NDIA's goal of 15 per cent.

Since 2016, the NDIA has maintained Disability Confident Recruiter accreditation from the Australian Network on Disability. The NDIA continues to focus on improving the experience for people with disability throughout its recruitment and retention processes.

11. The committee recommends that the Commonwealth, states and territories, through the appropriate inter-governmental forum, consider the matter of allied health workforce maldistribution and implications for service access for people in regional, rural and remote Australia, and develop strategies for enabling workforce distribution, sustainability and growth.

Supported in principle

On 9 July 2020, the Australian Government announced the creation of the Chief Allied Health Officer role. A key focus of this role includes supporting increased access to allied health services in the regions through the Stronger Regional Health Strategy and other health workforce reforms.

The NDIS National Workforce Plan also includes initiatives that support the allied health workforce, particularly in regional areas of Australia.

12. The committee recommends that the Australian Government develop, publish and implement a national strategy for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce, co-designed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and community leaders, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and other key stakeholders.

Supported

The Australian Government supports this recommendation, noting there are several initiatives underway to build the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander care and support workforce.

The Australian Government is currently finalising a *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan 2021-2031 (Health Workforce Plan)* to strengthen and grow the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce across all health roles and locations, inclusive of the aged care and disability sector.

The Health Workforce Plan has been co-designed with governments and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled health sector. The *National Workforce Plan* will be finalised for government consideration in mid-2021.

The Australian Government is investing \$64.3 million in the NDIS Jobs and Market Fund, which funds targeted projects to grow the NDIS provider market and workforce in size and capacity. Of this, \$5.9 million has been allocated to the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) to strengthen disability support services within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Through this project, NACCHO is working with its affiliates and member Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations to increase registrations to deliver services to NDIS participants. The project will help build capacity for these organisations to transition to and operate as NDIS service providers and, in turn, grow the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander NDIS market and workforce.

As per Recommendations 4 and 5, the NDIS Commission is implementing a national Workforce Capability Framework for the disability sector. This includes core capabilities around engagement, understanding, respect and communication with diverse communities. It also specifically includes a capability relating to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability. The NDIS Commission will continue to engage key Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders around these issues.

The NDIS Commission is also focused on further building its own capability in this area. Priorities include developing resource materials specifically tailored for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, tailored jurisdictional engagement programs and partnerships, and recruitment of more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to key positions across the NDIS Commission.

13. The committee recommends that the Australian Government develop and implement a national data strategy for the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), including a national minimum dataset on the NDIS workforce.

Supported in principle

The Australian Government is continuing to build and strengthen its data analytics capabilities, including in relation to the NDIS workforce. This includes:

- development and publication of estimates of the NDIS workforce on the NDIS Demand Map;
- the National Disability Data Asset pilot phase;
- development of Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031, which leverages the NDIS Outcomes Framework where possible, and notes the data strategy as part of this will enable reporting of outcomes across Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031;
- linkage of NDIS data with existing Commonwealth data sources (and state/territory data where possible) as part of the Data Integration Partnership of Australia; and
- ongoing data improvements by the NDIA in collaboration with Commonwealth and state and territory governments.

The NDIS Commission has developed a national regulatory data strategy and enhanced its data analytics capability. This includes data sharing arrangements with the NDIA.

From 1 February 2021, states and territories commenced implementation of new NDIS worker screening arrangements as part of a national approach to worker screening. The NDIS Commission is responsible for establishing, operating and maintaining the NDIS Worker Screening Database. This will provide a further source of national data.

14. The committee recommends that the Australian Government develop and implement a strategy to market the disability sector as an employer of choice.

Supported

The Australian Government is committed to continuing to raise awareness about the opportunities and benefits of working in the care and support sector. The NDIS National Workforce Plan details initiatives that support awareness raising and work with the NDIS providers to become employers of choice, including through the Jobs and Market Fund communications campaign.