

Response of the Office of Public Guardian to the Joint Standing Committee on the National Disability Insurance Scheme Questions on Notice

- **What aspects should the NT NDIS sector aim to address in order to differentiate itself from adjacent sectors?**

The NT NDIS requires strategic, coordinated initiatives to attract a workforce of individuals committed to the disability sector and the individualised outcomes for NDIS participants. To differentiate itself from adjacent sectors the NT NDIS sector should consider addressing the following:

- Remuneration levels for the NDIS workforce. Any discrepancies in remuneration between the NDIS workforce and similarly skilled workforce in the Northern Territory Government and local governments should be negated.
- Qualification requirements and training needs of the NDIS workforce. Initiatives should be offered to encourage individuals to undertake qualifications specific to the disability sector including vocational qualifications such as Certificate III in Individual Support or a Certificate IV in Disability or higher education qualifications in allied health where skills are transferrable to the disability sector. These initiatives may include fees and HECS exemptions, paid study leave and direct funding to the NT NDIS sector to undertake relevant training for the NDIS workforce.
- Perception of the NT NDIS workforce for individuals. Communication strategies and marketing campaigns should be implemented to promote the NT NDIS sector as a workforce of choice. These strategies and campaigns should highlight the advantages and benefits of supporting NDIS participants including, the flexibility of working hours, the impact that NDIS supports can have on a participant's achievement of personal goals and increase in wellbeing and the variation and scope of work and responsibilities.
- Perception of the NT NDIS sector as an industry. Communication strategies and marketing campaigns should be implemented to promote the NT NDIS sector's importance in the lives of participants and their families and the significant economic contribution that the sector provides. It may also include the flexibility and responsiveness of the NDIS sector to respond to the needs and choices of NDIS participants.
- Casualisation of the NT NDIS sector. Many individuals engaged with the NT NDIS workforce are employed on a casual basis and employed across multiple service providers. Creative strategies should be developed so that individuals within the NT NDIS workforce have access to entitlements such as paid sick leave, paid holiday leave and

guaranteed hours of work notwithstanding having to work across multiple service providers to meet the needs of participants. This could include innovative concepts such as a regional shared pool of employees coordinated by a central organisation.

- **What aspects of NDIS scheme mechanisms and design are not working? How could these be improved or tailored to the NT setting?**

NDIS participants living in Darwin, the largest city in the Northern Territory, experience significant service gaps and thin markets limiting the availability and accessibility to reasonable supports. The market situation deteriorates further for regional centres and then becomes even more problematic, even non-existent, in remote and very remote areas.

The NDIS market-based model for service delivery is not working in remote communities in the NT. This is evidenced by utilisation data and the inability of NDIS participants living in remote communities to purchase support services needed for the achievement of their goals. Significant bodies of work have been undertaken to consult with remote communities regarding their needs, unmet needs and to develop proposed recommendations in relation to the existing NDIS scheme mechanisms and design¹. Despite this significant work implementation strategies are yet to be developed and/or effected to address issues identified with the existing market-based model for service delivery in remote communities.

The Office of the Public Guardian notes the Australian Government's response to the 2019 Independent Review of the NDIS Act (Tune Review) and in particular its support of recommendation 17 that the NDIS Rules are amended to give the NDIA more defined powers to undertake market intervention on behalf of participants². This support must transpire to collaborative, strategic action and funding to address market challenges in remote communities. In the NT it should include consideration of the significant work already undertaken and proposed recommendations in relation to alternative approaches to the existing NDIS market-based model for service delivery including consideration of:

- block funding of some discrete services or coordination of participant agreed pooling of funds to overcome service delivery gaps
- NDIS funded services being delivered in conjunction with other core services, for example health and aged care and utilising existing infrastructure for NDIS funded services³
- community controlled governance of disability services and associated funding⁴ to reflect the unique needs of individual communities

¹ *NDIS Thin Markets Project* commissioned by the Department of Social Services and the NDIA, 2019; *Walykumunu Nyinaratjaku Project* initiated by the Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women's Council, 2018; Anglicare NT's response to the Productivity Commission's Report, "National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) Costs", July 2017; Productivity Commission 2011, *Disability Care and Support*, Report no. 54, Canberra.

² Australian Government response to the 2019 Review of the *National Disability Insurance Scheme Act 2013* report, August 2020.

³ AMSANT submission in response to NDIS Thin Markets Project Discussion Paper 31 July 2019.

⁴ AMSANT submission in response to NDIS Thin Markets Project Discussion Paper 31 July 2019.

- identification of an existing, or creation of a new collaborative body, who with secretariat support from the NDIA can oversee and drive development of market strategies and market intervention in the NT.

For the NDIS workforce, the NDIS scheme mechanisms and design are not working to grow the capacity of the workforce through training and engagement of existing community members into the NDIS workforce. The existing funding model is not accommodating of individual or organisational training needs or the real cost of delivering this training within existing resources and to remote communities. The NDIS sector should be supported to explore collaborative training models and fund specific training to remote communities. It should also be supported to approach workforce capacity and growth in remote communities creatively and in strong collaboration with the individual community.

Successful service delivery in remote communities will be contingent upon engaging with existing community members and building their capacity to work within the NDIS sector. Training for community members in remote communities must therefore reflect the specific cultural and learning needs of the community and the available resources. For example the limited and poor internet access in remote communities will impact the possibility of delivering online training to these communities.

The market assumptions upon which the NDIS is premised are failing in the Northern Territory, requiring a unique community development approach being driven collaboratively by key players to implement innovative solutions to overcome the challenges. Examples of successful community engagement and community controlled service delivery in remote communities can be found in the adjacent sectors of early childhood development⁵ and health⁶.

⁵ See Anglicare NT East Arnhem Communities for Children and Remote Playgroups Initiatives; <https://www.anglicare-nt.org.au/service/east-arnhem-communities-children/>

⁶ See National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation; <https://www.naccho.org.au/>