



GPO Box 700
Canberra
ACT 2601
1800 80 110
[ndis.gov.au](https://www.ndis.gov.au)

Office of the CEO

Senator Jordon Steele-John
Chair
Senate Select Committee into the
Provision and Access to Dental Services in Australia

Via email: dental.services.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Senator Steele-John

Thank you for your letter of 21 August 2023, and invitation to appear at a public hearing of the Senate Select Committee into the Provision and Access to Dental Services (the Committee) Inquiry.

The National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) acknowledges and shares the Committee's concerns that people with physical and intellectual disability can experience poorer dental health outcomes and greater barriers in accessing dental care.

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) connects people with information and services in their local communities. It also works alongside mainstream government and community services to maximise independence. NDIS supports may be used alongside health services to assist NDIS participants who may need support to attend and engage with mainstream supports, including dental services, provided by the health system. This may include assistance with transport, mobility or support with communication during these appointments.

The NDIS may also fund supports for a participant to meet their broader disability related support needs. For example, a support worker may help a NDIS participant to maintain their oral health by assisting them to brush their teeth. A NDIS support worker may also assist an NDIS participant to book, travel to and attend a dental appointment. Similarly, therapy supports may be funded with the aim of increasing personal capacity which would also assist a NDIS participant's ability to maintain their oral health.

The NDIS may also assist participants with the provision of suitable equipment or assistive technology to support them to complete daily living tasks such as personal dental care. For example, adaptive handles for toothbrushes or vehicle modifications which may help a NDIS participant to access medical care including dental appointments.



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All supports funded by the NDIS must meet the NDIS funding criteria. If it is more appropriate for another service system, such as the health system to fund a support, the NDIS cannot include it in a participant's plan. For example, the NDIS would not fund provision of direct health interventions such as those delivered by a dentist or dental surgeon, however, an NDIS funded support worker may assist an NDIS participant to attend a dental appointment. Dental services are generally provided as part of Australia's health system, and to a limited extent as part of Australia's publicly funded health services.

The Applied Principles and Tables of Support (APTOS) set out the responsibilities of the NDIS and other government service systems. The APTOS was agreed by First Ministers in 2015 and represents the current agreement between governments on where the boundaries of the NDIS and other systems lie. The APTOS has been supplemented with a limited list of disability-related health supports which would be funded through the NDIS, agreed by Disability Ministers on 28 June 2019. This list does not include dental supports. The Commonwealth and state and territory governments work together through the Disability Reform Ministerial Council meetings to resolve any issues where services interact.

The NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission (NDIS Commission) is an independent agency established to improve the quality and safety of NDIS supports and services. One of the NDIS Commission's functions is to focus on education, capacity building and development for people with disability, NDIS providers and workers. In January 2023, the NDIS Commission, in consultation with oral health professionals published a practice alert (enclosed) providing resources for support workers and outlining the responsibilities of NDIS providers.

The NDIA does not collect granular data on dental and oral health care supports, nor does the data on Administrative Appeal Tribunal and internal review of decision cases include this level of detail. There are no specific support item codes where the NDIA could identify dental/oral payments from the structured data. However, the NDIA measures the outcomes of NDIS participants and their families and carers and asks how their lives are changing. As at 30 June 2022, 50% of NDIS participants said they have visited a dentist in the past 12 months, which is just above the population average of 48%. NDIS participants who say the NDIS has helped them with their health and wellbeing has increased each year over the past 5 years.

As the change of designation of dental supports is a matter for government consideration and noting the Department of Social Services have confirmed they will be appearing on behalf of the Commonwealth, I respectfully request the NDIA be excused from appearing at the Committee's upcoming hearing.

I look forward to seeing the Committee's recommendations from this inquiry.

Yours sincerely

Rebecca Falkingham
Chief Executive Officer
National Disability Insurance Agency

18 September 2023

Encl. NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission Oral health Practice Alert