

NDIS Planning Submission

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I am a 29-year-old man living with Cerebral Palsy and am wheelchair bound. I am also partially non-verbal and use a tablet to communicate.

I work as an administration assistant and run my own business 'Calling the Brain's Bluff', where I engage in a range of public speaking, advocating and other events for those with a disability.

Please see a list below of some of my recent talks/presentations & projects:

- SDA Conference
- Summer Foundation Workshops (NDIS)
- Chisholm Tafe (Intro to NDIS Course)
- AGOSCI conference
- Monash University (Physiotherapy/OT Students)
- Monash University (Electronic Assertive Technology Workshop)
- Monash University (Working as a person with a disability)
- Vic-Tas OT Conference – harnessing possibilities within NDIS
- Life after School Expo
- Your Choice, Your Voice (upcoming event)

a) the experience, expertise and qualifications of planners;

Some planners don't know how to speak to people with a disability.

I have had planners direct their questions straight to my support workers instead of me. The workers didn't say anything, and the planner finally started to ask me, however this was because I directed my workers to keep quiet before we entered the meeting.

I was recently a part of a Summer Foundation research workshop (Dealing with the NDIS), other participants stressed that they had been in the same situation at their plan meetings where planners were not focussing on them and instead addressing their support workers first.

There was a lot of interesting discussions at the workshop, with a focus on how people with disability can be informed to achieve the very best outcomes from the NDIS.

What are the exact qualifications of an NDIS planner? Have they worked in the disability industry? Are there any formal qualifications?

Looking online at a position description for a NDIS Planner Team Leader, it seems there isn't any formal qualifications required. A background in disability, human services or allied health is desirable but not mandatory. Only entry levels checks are compulsory.

This is surprising as I think it would be very difficult for someone with no experience in disability to not only understand complex needs for participants, but also to know how to communicate the right way.

b) the ability of planners to understand and address complex needs;

A lot of planners try to fit people with a disability into a box. I think this is because they must fit you into a tick box, also because they do not have a greater understanding of different disabilities and needs. Trying to fit everyone into boxes is impossible, there needs to be more flexibility (or more boxes for planners to choose from in their computer systems) as we are all individuals.

Needs can differ hugely between participants. For instance, for my SIL report for my plan, I was asked for exact hours of when support was required. This is very hard to say. I live a dynamic and spontaneous life and no two weeks are the same for me, these hours change constantly. For some, this is not the case as a lot of participants have set routines that they stick to. NDIS plans need to reflect these variances.

c) the ongoing training and professional development of planners;

I have a friend who is a planner that has mentioned that processes are constantly changing and that it is hard to keep up. Also, that training is insufficient.

At the very least, planners need to get proper training on how to communicate directly with people that have a disability. The training should be run by people with a disability!

d) the overall number of planners relative to the demand for plans;

There are not enough planners. When I asked to have my review at home, they wanted me to go to them because they are understaffed. Even though I was happy to go to the office, I feel it was wrong to expect a person with a disability who is unable to drive and is wheelchair bound to attend. I had to pay my support worker extra for travel time to and from the meeting.

The wait time for many is too long, even when a participant has submitted all required information and documents.

There is no consistency with wait times for plans to be approved, they vary greatly from participant to participant.

I was only given 6 days' notice to prepare for my annual review meeting.

Also, my friend who is a planner mentioned that they used to chase participants for any outstanding important documents required for plans, but they now no longer have time.

e) participant involvement in planning processes and the efficacy of introducing draft plans;

As I am non-verbal, one of the difficulties is the speed of my communication. There is some great technology out there for a person like me, but typing can be slow, and of course on top of that, people wrongfully assume I am dumb consequently. I am used to being very organized, and I took that approach with my NDIS review. I produced two documents. One listed my achievements with my NDIS package over the last 12 months. The other, covering my upcoming goals for the next 12 months ahead. It was pre-emptive, as there is no manual on to how to get across the line with your NDIS package.

From experience, a lot depends on the wording you use in the meeting, which officer you have on the day and how they interpret it. I am still waiting for the outcome from my first plan review last week, and it will be interesting because I have heard that they often cut your funding for the second plan, up to as much as a half of the original plan. In the last few months my workload has increased through my business and I need the extra hours to help with that. I am currently getting 30 hours per week for support outside the home, and I have just asked for 40 hours per week. I felt if I went into the NDIS review meeting unprepared, they may misunderstand what I require, and why. I wouldn't want my planner twisting my words, whether it be accidentally or intentionally. So, I produced these documents to help myself to secure the best supports that I can through my NDIS plan.

People don't know how their NDIS package works (e.g. SIL reports).

We don't have an option to reject or accept our plans.
It can take up to 9 months or more to obtain a review if a change needs to be made.

f) the incidence, severity and impact of plan gaps;

Participants left without necessary aides, equipment and support due to plan gaps.

The time it takes to get a review meeting is inconsistent. This is unfair as it should be the same wait time for all NDIS participants. It also causes rifts between participants and online, people feel cheated when one person is approved before they are etc.

The time it takes to get approval for equipment can be too long, causing individuals health and personal situations to worsen because of the wait time.

Another gap that exists is how some required technologies or aides are approved through NDIS plans and others are not. An example of this, is that my tablet, which I use for every day communication was not funded (cost was only \$500) – which is necessary and reasonable. However, a \$6000 specialised communication device (which is not necessary), is easier to get funding for.

g) the reassessment process, including the incidence and impact of funding changes;

Funding changes make it very confusing for employees for the NDIS and participants to keep up with the process and how it works. I understand needing to make changes to improve how the NDIS runs, as it is new, however we all need to be kept in the loop with updates of these changes.

My SDA high support needs have been taken out of my plan because my current SDA provider isn't registered. My understanding was that SDA stayed in your plan regardless of whether you are using it or not. I have been advised that because my provider is not accessing these funds, NDIS will now be removing them from my plan.

I want to move sometime soon, and I am now being forced to reapply all over again. It should automatically come across. This is not only unfair, but it is time consuming and costly. An OT is required to provide a detailed report (my last was 34 pages long) and charge for this. It is outrageous that I should have to arrange this again.

h) the review process and means to streamline it;

No comment.

i) the incidence of appeals to the AAT and possible measures to reduce the number;

No comment.

j) the circumstances in which plans could be automatically rolled-over;

If the NDIS start automatically rolling some participant's plans over, they will then want more and more to do the same. This would be a huge mistake as participant's needs change constantly and I believe this would leave many without the supports they require.

Some participants might agree to a roll over because they see it as an easy option or don't have the knowledge to be confident in requesting their requirements. Again, this would be leaving participants with less than what they need.

I don't trust the NDIS to do the right thing by me if they automatically roll over my plan.

k) the circumstances in which longer plans could be introduced;

I strongly recommend that people work with 6, or 12-month plans. Circumstances, goals, lifestyles, needs and desires, can and will change. Being locked into a long-term plan might not be a good idea as again it will leave participants without the correct supports required. Also, early reviews can take a long time to get. I have heard of people waiting 9 months or more.

l) the adequacy of the planning process for rural and regional participants; and

No comment.

m) any other related matters

No comment.