

Executive Summary

Transition to the full National Disability Insurance Scheme started in July 2016 and is expected to be completed by 2020. At full Scheme, about 475 000 people will be NDIS Participants. The arrangements, timelines and implementation of the transition to the NDIS are set out in the Bilateral Agreements between the Australian and state and territory governments and vary across jurisdictions. To date, the Australian Capital Territory is the only jurisdiction to have completed full transition to the Scheme. Elsewhere, the intake of Participants is falling behind schedule. The transition period presents significant challenges, which are explored throughout this report.

Delays in processes

The committee received evidence of delays in accessing the Scheme as well as delays in plan approvals, plan activations and access to services. As a result of the delays in the intake of Participants against bilateral estimates, there were over 34 500 people in September 2017 who should have already been Participants who were yet to access the Scheme. The committee heard that the plan review process is too lengthy and can jeopardise Participants' ability to access services.

Interface between the NDIS and mainstream services

The committee received evidence that whilst interactions between the NDIS and mainstream services are guided by the Principles agreed by COAG, they are subject to interpretation and lack clarity. This is resulting in boundary issues and funding disputes, which can lead to reduced access or no access to services for both NDIS Participants and people with disability not eligible for the NDIS. Additionally, the committee found that the current transition of Commonwealth, state and territory programs to the NDIS is contributing to emerging service gaps and the lack of clear delineation of funding responsibility between the NDIS and state and territory services. In particular, the committee received significant evidence of boundary issues in the areas of health, aged care, education, transport, housing and justice.

Impediments to deliver services

The committee heard that the administrative burdens experienced by service providers, the inadequacy of NDIS pricing caps and disability workforce shortages are significant barriers to the delivery of NDIS services across all jurisdictions.

Rollout of the Information, Linkages and Capacity Building Program (ILC)

The ILC is still in its infancy and has not yet started in all jurisdictions. However, the committee heard that insufficient funding has been allocated to the ILC program during the transition period. The committee is concerned that the current grant funding approach for ILC activities may result in service gaps for some essential services and has potential to disadvantage some cohorts because of their type of disability or geographical location.

Thin markets and Provider of Last Resort

The transition to a market based system brings new challenges for delivering services in areas of thin markets. The committee found that thin markets will persist for some Participants, including for those living in rural and remote areas, people with complex needs, people involved in the criminal justice system, people from CALD backgrounds and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. Greater clarity is required on how the NDIA intends to intervene in areas of thin markets. The committee is concerned that Provider of Last Resort arrangements remain unclear and incomplete.

Service Gaps

The committee heard that the transition to a market-based system combined with the transition of Commonwealth, state and territory programs have resulted in emerging service gaps in important areas, including advocacy, assertive outreach and support coordination.

People from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds

The committee received evidence that the current NDIS participation rates for people with disability from CALD backgrounds are significantly below what had been anticipated. The committee is concerned that a comprehensive NDIS CALD Strategy is yet to be published and implemented.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are experiencing additional challenges to engage with the NDIS. The committee found that pre-rollout and pre-planning engagement activities are essential and must be prioritised by the NDIA. The committee is concerned about reports of a lack of cultural competencies among NDIA staff. The committee found that growing the disability workforce in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities needs to be prioritised to ensure supply of services.

Conclusion

The committee received a wealth of information and evidence throughout the inquiry and thanks all those who participated. As a result, the committee has made 26 recommendations, which aim to ensure that improved and appropriate arrangements can be put in place to provide necessary and reasonable supports for all NDIS Participants and fully realise the objectives of the Scheme.