

Independent Advisory Council Meeting Bulletin 18 May 2021

The Independent Advisory Council (Council) to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) brings the participant's voice to the heart of the NDIS. The Council gives independent advice to the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) Board, as part of the *NDIS Act 2013*.

This Bulletin summarises Council's 18 May 2021 meeting, led by Ms Robyn Kruk AO, Principal Member. The NDIA Board Chair, Dr Helen Nugent AO, also attended the meeting with:

- Council Members
- Council's Expert Adviser
- NDIA Representatives and Council Secretariat.

From the Council Principal Member

The Principal Member confirmed that Council Members will take part in an initial two-day Scheme Reform Forum in June. The Forum is part of broader consultation activity with the disability community and other stakeholders, driven by Senator the Hon Linda Reynolds CSC, Minister for the NDIS, the NDIA and the NDIA Board, to listen to concerns raised about Scheme reforms, including Independent Assessments (IAs). Council has invited additional stakeholders from its Reference Groups and the disability sector to the Scheme Reform Forum to ensure broad-ranging representation and expertise.

The Principal Member also confirmed that Council will present its formal advice:

- "Choice and control to safely live a good life of belonging and citizenship" to the NDIA Board in June.
- "Supporting participants to be included in the community" to the NDIA Board in July.

Members agreed to progress the advice out of session.

From the NDIA Board Chair

The Board Chair acknowledged Council's concerns about Scheme reforms, including IAs. And the need to ensure this progresses in a way that works for people with disability and the Scheme. The Board Chair stressed the importance of Council's advice to the NDIA Board and welcomed further advice on these issues over the coming months.

She said the NDIA Board has a responsibility to ensure the:

- NDIS reforms are done well, and in line with the fundamental principles of the Scheme.
- NDIS is financially sustainable for the generations to come.

Council Member snapshot of issues and concerns raised about the Scheme

Council Members and the Expert Adviser reported on concerns they had heard from people with disability in their communities to bring these to the Agency's attention, including:

- The need for transparent and proactive communications from the NDIA. Members said that loss of trust in the NDIS and misinformation spread by traditional and social media continue to cause a divide between the disability community and the NDIA.
- The importance of accessible NDIS communications and engagement, including Plain English, Easy Read, and alternative formats like video or animation.
- Inadequate supports for NDIS participants with ageing parents, participants who are ageing themselves, or those moving out of aged care or group settings.
- The low COVID-19 vaccination numbers amongst people with disability, especially those living in residential disability homes.
- The ongoing equity issues for diverse communities in the NDIS, with concerns about the end of the [National Community Connectors Program](#). There has been little growth in the number of participants in the Scheme for:
 - Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people
 - Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities.
- Concerns about self-management, and the need for the NDIA to actively address and dispel the misinformation being raised in social media. The NDIA confirmed that it is not moving away from self-management.
- Concerns that some NDIS participants are getting less funding in their plans at review, especially when plans are rolled over and plan time is extended. There is a need for the NDIA to educate participants about money in packages and money they spend.
- Inadequate decision-making supports for people with complex communication needs, psychosocial disability and acquired brain injury. Particularly those who live in Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) or Supported Individualised Living (SIL) and have an adult guardian.
- Systemic workforce issues, including delayed disability worker screening checks, and worker shortages, particularly in rural and remote areas.

Scheme reform consultation

Dr Sam Bennett, NDIA General Manager, Policy, Advice and Research, updated Council on progress in planning for the Scheme Reform Forum. He said he has been working with a subgroup of Council Members to design the upcoming Forum with Council.

An independent facilitator will lead the Forum to allow for an inclusive and collaborative process. Dr Bennett said that the NDIA is planning follow-up engagement after the Forum, which may include integrating state and territory engagement into this work.

Dr Bennett highlighted progress of other NDIA work, including:

- Reviewing the 300+ submissions from the public consultation "[Interventions for children on the autism spectrum](#)".

- Finalising the Home and Living Policy and Support for Decision Making Policy, before public release.

Members provided feedback on the NDIA's draft paper on Personalised Budgets, including:

- The need for Plain English, with less technical words/language. It also needs to be available in other accessible formats like Easy Read.
- Information on how the IAs will be rolled out, and the Agency strategy to ensure the personalised budgeting approach works as intended.
- Need for checks and balances, to ensure personal safeguards for participants.

Dr Bennett encouraged Council to further engage on this work out of session.

NDIA Corporate Plan 2021-2025

Mr Oliver Bladdek, NDIA Deputy CEO, Design Digital and Strategy, gave an overview of the NDIA Corporate Plan for 2021-2025, which is still under development. He said the Corporate Plan will guide the NDIS through its immediate Scheme reform priorities, as well as its high level aspirations and strategic direction for the next four years.

Council reaffirmed that it will continue to work with the Agency to finalise the Corporate Plan. It will also regard the Corporate Plan priorities before finalising its own Work Plan. Members identified specific issues that needed greater priority, including:

- Support for decision making.
- A deeper analysis about the socioeconomic status and location of participants, and the connection to plan size and utilisation.

Council 2021-22 Work Plan

Reference Group Co-Chairs and Belinda Epstein-Frisch, Council's Independent Consultant, provided an overview of the Reference Group priorities identified at their recent meetings. This will inform Council's Work Plan for 2021-22.

The Principal Member led the discussion on the initial identification of priorities for Council's formal and informal advice. She noted that the Work Plan will link to the NDIA Corporate Plan 2021-2025, and the priorities identified by the NDIA Board.

Further work will occur out of session to refine Council's Work Plan priorities before finalising at the June Council meeting.

More information on the Council

The Council next meets on 22 June 2021. You can find out more about Council meetings at the [Council's website meeting page \(external\)](#). You can access advice from the [Council's website advice page \(external\)](#).

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