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Reference Group meeting bulletin – 16-17 August 2023

Intellectual Disability Reference Group

The [Intellectual Disability Reference Group](#) (Reference Group) met recently. This bulletin summarises the meeting that took place in Adelaide on 16-17 August 2023.

The Reference Group know a lot about intellectual disability. They advise the Independent Advisory Council (IAC) on issues affecting people with intellectual disability. This informs the IAC's advice on how to improve the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) for people with intellectual disability.

[Ms Leah van Poppel, IAC Principal Member and Reference Group Co-chair](#), led the meeting.

From the Reference Group Co-chair

Ms van Poppel acknowledged the Reference Group's recent membership refresh. She opened the meeting by welcoming new and returning Reference Group Members. Members will work with the Reference Group from 1 July 2023 to 31 December 2024. This refresh aims to ensure greater inclusion of people with intellectual disability and younger people in the IAC.

The IAC appoints members to its [4 Reference Groups](#) through its own determined procedures, in line with section 157 of the [NDIS Act 2013](#). The IAC will appoint Co-chairs for each Reference Group, once the Minister for the NDIS announces the IAC's membership. The full complement of IAC membership is currently in the final stages of determination by the Minister following the completion of some IAC Members' terms on 30 June 2023.

Ms van Poppel highlighted work the IAC and Reference Group has done since their last meeting on [1 June 2023 \(DOCX 88KB\)](#). This included acknowledging the Reference Group's contribution to the IAC's advice about behaviour supports. The IAC will endorse this advice once its membership has been announced. This advice will then go to the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) Board.

Ms van Poppel also welcomed Ms Rebecca Falkingham, NDIA Chief Executive Officer (CEO), and Ms Corri McKenzie, NDIA Deputy CEO. She highlighted the importance of their presence at the Reference Group meeting. Ms Van Poppel also acknowledged their commitment to working with the Reference Group to improve NDIA processes and NDIS supports for people with intellectual disability.



What Members have heard in their community

Reference Group Members reported on matters for the NDIA's attention, relating to:

NDIS access and planning

- Calls for the NDIA to offer NDIS plans in Easy Read to ensure that people with intellectual disability understand their plans.
- Concern that some adults with Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) are unable to get a diagnosis to access the NDIS and get subsequent supports.
- Reports that some behaviour support practitioners create behaviour support plans without spending any time with the person the plans are made for.
- Calls for people with intellectual disability to be involved in the implementation of the NDIA Supported Decision-Making Policy.

NDIS service and supports

- Calls for the NDIS to better support people with speech and language disorders, including long-term access to speech pathology.
- Reports that some NDIS participants are told they cannot spend their flexible funding on other therapies. For example, physiotherapy funding supports cannot be used on psychology.
- People with intellectual disability are often vulnerable to scams and need more support to understand technology linked to services and supports.
- People with disability who move into palliative care should keep their NDIS supports because these are familiar and help make the end of their life more comfortable.
- Calls for the NDIA to consider those participants who lose Justice Liaison Officer (JLO) supports when they leave the justice system.

NDIS home and living supports

- Reports that some home and living providers, who also offer other services/supports, pressure participants to get all their NDIS supports from them.
- Calls for the NDIA to look at apartments as part of home and living supports, due to a shortage of houses.
- Calls to better explain 'shared supports' to give people with intellectual disability, especially those with autism and/or psychosocial disability, choice and control over their living arrangements.
- Reports that some planners ask people with intellectual disability leading questions about their home and living supports, especially related to supported independent living (SIL).



Other services that work alongside the NDIS

- Calls for more accessible and Easy Read options for reporting fraud on the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission’s website.
- Calls to make public transport (including airports) more accessible for people with intellectual disability by using Easy Read information, including timetables.
- Concern that some services that work alongside the NDIS lack training and understanding about supports available in the community, and often refer people with disability to the NDIS.
- Reports that people with disability leaving the justice system are vulnerable to exploitation and the overuse of restrictive practices.

Ways to improve employment for people with intellectual disability

Ms Falkingham, NDIA CEO, told the Reference Group what the NDIA is doing to employ more people with disability. The Reference Group discussed what helps people with intellectual disability get jobs and stay in them. Members gave the following feedback about best-practice:

- People with intellectual disability have the right to fair wages, open employment, and supported decision making to help them find a job that leads to a career and a fulfilled life.
- People with intellectual disability want long-term and stable work where they can progress their career. They want to understand how their career might affect their disability support pension.
- Job interviews should be led by people with intellectual disability who ask questions which are easier to understand. Information about the job and/or interview should be in Easy Read.
- Calls to create jobs for people with intellectual disability that are centred on their skills and inclusion. This means accessible and inclusive work practices and processes, for example, easy-to-use timesheets and inclusion in team lunches.
- Employers who hire people with intellectual disability need the right supports in place to understand a person’s individual needs, skills, and get to know them via weekly check-ins.
- Employers should pro-actively plan staff’s daily work plan and look at ways to make workplaces better in the long-term by evaluating staff feedback about the workplace.
- People with disability who are mentors at work help guide people with intellectual disability and make them feel safe. These mentors help people grow and find job opportunities with better pay.

Developing our new Work Plan

The Reference Group considered the advice and work focus for its Work Plan. Members highlighted the Work Plan should look at ways its advice can improve NDIS employment supports for people with intellectual disability, planning processes, the way the NDIS works with other systems, and participants who are parents. When thinking about the Work Plan, which maps work the Reference Group is accountable for from 1 July 2023 to 31 December 2024, Members also noted:



- The Work Plan should address work the Reference Group can do before the NDIS Review and Disability Royal Commission release their recommendations about the NDIS.
- The need to have an updated Reference Group Engagement Guide, which provides practical guidance and information to help Members contribute to meetings and the Reference Group.
- Elevating the use of intersectionality in all areas of the Work Plan. For example, considering the experience of people who live in rural or remote areas, First Nations participants.
- That advice from the previous Work Plan is finalised or considered in the new Work Plan.

Ways SACID employs people with intellectual disability

Representatives from the South Australian Council on Intellectual for Intellectual Disability (SACID) discussed ways they employ people with intellectual disability. They noted that workplaces like the NDIA should use accessible and trauma-informed employment processes. They highlighted the need to consider creative job design and a person's individual needs at work. Members noted:

- A fair wage is important and gives people with intellectual disability choice and control in their life.
- The need for more awareness about employment pathways at the NDIA so that people with intellectual disability can apply for jobs and understand ways to grow their careers/get promoted.
- People with intellectual disability thrive when they feel safe, believed in, and included in the community. Once this is established they can also thrive at work.
- People with intellectual disability may look for and find jobs in different places. For example, through Facebook or their peer networks.

More information on the Reference Group

The Reference Group will next meet on 21-22 November 2023. Find out more about Reference Group meetings and bulletins at [the IAC website](#). You can also access [IAC advice here](#).

The IAC publishes an Easy Read version Bulletin. This is part of its commitment to accessibility.