

This submission makes recommendations for long term sustainability of the NDIS in two areas.

[1] Resourcing participant networks

My workplace of over 200 people has seen the emergence of an “NDIS Staff support group” for parents of participants and parents whose adult children may soon be participants. Two of the 11 staff work in community centres where there have been conversations among active community members about setting up a similar support group.

The NDIS reform is extensive

- in complexity of processes
- in concept being based on
 - insurance principles rather than welfare approach
 - the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disability’s principles: mainstream participation, independence, choice and control ,

Many people, whether first entering the disability space as parents of young children (especially in the SA Trial) or people with disability used to the former “broke and broken” system struggle to understand how to develop and implement an NDIS plan.

In such uncertain circumstances there is an excellent instinct to seek a wider network.

But without support these networks, both virtual and face-to-face, risk under-achieving from the viewpoint of the NDIS. Without support these networks can descend into cynicism and negativity which can lead to a “grab as much as you can” attitude. Positive and strategic voices are less easily heard in unmoderated and

unsupported networks where negative NDIS experiences and entrenched attitudes developed in the pre-NDIS era dominate.

But supported networks will contribute to moderation of NDIS cost pressures in a number of ways:

- Networks focussed on problem solving rather than negativity can provide advice to the NDIA from the ground, a vital feedback loop;
- Solution focussed networks can find ways to maximise outcomes for participants and so influence future NDIS plans free of obsession with getting the maximum money first;
- Most importantly these solution focused supported networks will be a powerful influence for greater inclusion in the community and mainstream sectors which is vital for the effectiveness of NDIS plans.

The DSS Sector development Funded Disability Support Organisations and their Local Support Groups offer a model for supporting networks which are currently self-generating and often which have no external support.

Recommendation 1

A medium term funding (3 – 5 years) program be created within ILC to generate and to mentor DSO development.

Recommendation 2

There should be separate funding outside ILC for an independent longitudinal evaluation of this DSO development and operation and its impact on NDIS sustainability and participant experience.

This is critical when Local Area Coordination is burdened by processing the surge of participants during transition.

There are already DSOs in place whose momentum shouldn't be lost and which provide a model for expansion.

[2] NDIS, ILC and the mainstream

Mainstream and community inclusion offer opportunities for NDIS participants and other people with disability to grow skills through participation alongside the wider community but there are threats to this. If mainstream inclusion reform is slow to occur people with disability will become more reliant on services funded by the NDIS.

COAG's responsibility

There are significant threats to mainstream inclusion which are beyond the NDIA's sphere of influence but which must be addressed by all levels of Government:

- De-funding of mainstream reform programs to fund NDIS bi-lateral commitments. The highest profile example is the Victorian Government's alleged plan to reduce the funding for Access Officers in metropolitan Melbourne despite the positive impact this funding has had on access and inclusion in the past decade.
- Uncertainty about "in kind" components of the bi-lateral agreements which fund the NDIS, especially in the continuity of group homes which distort the support and limit the inclusion of informal supports possible when people with disability are more connected to the community. Persistence of these segregated models will result in some people with disability and families and the wider community maintaining a disability institutional mindset which cannot imagine living in the general community with the opportunity for growth of informal supports.

NDIA responsibility

Through ILC the NDIA can influence some mainstream reform. Much of this depends on the capacity of Local Area Coordination once the surge is past. I have two recommendations in this area.

Recommendation 3: Short term ILC priorities

While Local Area Coordination is pre-occupied with the surge CICD Grants should focus on

- community attitude change during “first contact” between increasing numbers of NDIS participants and community members and organisation staff and officials (say in sports clubs) who have had restricted experience of people with disability
- Mainstream systemic reform – “resourcing the resource providers”: for example developing resources which enable professional associations and educational institutions to deploy inclusion values based learning and development for their members. Such organisations include:
 - National librarian association
 - Planning Institute of Australia
 - Local Government Professionals Australia
 - Teacher training courses
 - Medical courses
 - Allied health professional courses.

Recommendation 4: Longer term ILC strategies

- LAC community development should be delivered by community development organisations: Local government and Community centres or their state/territory associations in preference to health, religious or other types of providers. But any contracting of Local Government or Community Centres must be conditional on their
 - maintaining access and inclusion professional development for all personnel which is externally evaluated;
 - Commitment to increased participation by people with disability in community development roles as employees and managers and in governance.

- A specific strategy should be developed to foster disability led organisations with capability to influence community attitudes.

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