

Productivity Commission
Level 2, National Circuit
BARTON ACT 2600

Dear Commissioners,

Re: Productivity Commission 2017 Study into NDIS Costs: Supplementary Information

Thank you for the email advice from your office of 20 July advising additional material would be welcome.

Please find attached letter from Ms Deb Diggins a former NDIS employee which details serious examples malfunctions of the NDIS in delivery of services. It particularly shows how the disappearance of requests for services and equipment into black holes at the NDIS has serious consequences for clients while disillusioning NDIS staff to the point that they consider that the only honest option is to resign.

In addition I support the comments of Hugh Packard, CEO of Valmar Support Services Ltd (especially on ABC TV's "The Drum" 30 July 2017,) and other Disability Service organisations (such as Catholic Social Services Australia in their submission of 12 July 2017) re NDIS Planning processes for clients now being often dysfunctional since the Commonwealth Government took over from the various State jurisdictions in the past year and corporatized the NDIA Board. As many authorities have noted, the main issues include:

1. The speed of the rollout has been far too fast for the staff, IT systems and resources available;
2. the new, minimal consultation, abbreviated planning processes is largely being performed by inadequately trained staff;
3. the partnership with clients culture in the pilots has been replaced by an "us vs them" management culture modelled on insurance companies, with contracted staff doing the NDIS Planning with clients and Department Delegates editing and interpreting the results in ways often characterised by misunderstanding and misrepresentation with many delays;
4. this new management culture includes a communication policy which is based on generic call numbers and email addresses where no-one is responsible or accountable and has led to crisis upon crisis for a majority of clients (who are now frequently seriously disadvantaged) and the NDIS.

One key initial win-win would be acceptance of the submissions from many of the above and other disability organisations for NDIS Plans to be reviewable by clients and to be in person rather than on the phone (as was done in the trials). If implemented, this initiative alone will save the NDIS \$millions spent in unnecessary appeals and further reviews.

Due to the gross deficiencies in the current NDIS Planning, systems and other administrative processes, my sister, who is intellectually disabled, has had to go through an appeal process of some two months and there has been much wastage of \$ and time for the NDIS, service providers and other suppliers involved – as well as our family. We only obtained a review last week from the NDIS after we had written to our local Federal Member of Parliament, Andrew Leigh, and they advised this had prompted them to act. Unlike us, there are thousands of disabled people who do not have sufficient advocacy skills to remedy the gross disadvantages and injustices being currently perpetrated on them by the Commonwealth's new NDIS staffing, processes and systems.

A contributing factor to the Commonwealth's NDIS dysfunction is the associated huge turnover of NDIS staff. Most offices would appear to have lost most of their staff through resignations (mainly due to stress, over-work, general disillusion) or structural dislocation/relocation in the past year. The remnant staff hide in their bunkers, overwhelmed by work, very rarely communicating with clients – often only prompted to do so by stressed carers or disability organisation staff demanding attention at an office reception desk – and when they do surface are fearful, confused and can often offer only promises.

Under the new Commonwealth NDIS regime, communication with clients, carers and support organisations is often close to non-existent. I have consulted widely with many of the above and can advise that the NDIS

1800 call centre is widely regarded as a dead end by virtually all them. They all recommend calling in at an NDIS Office and demanding attention since the 1800 Call Centre only delivers promises of call backs or emails which do not happen. The NDIS on-line Portal is similarly held in contempt by most people encountered in all the categories above.

Conclusion

Since the Commonwealth took over from the State Pilot NDIS programs, NDIA Executives have attempted to roll out the NDIS at great speed without appropriate infrastructure of trained staff or adequate systems and administrative processes. They have apparently been more intent on achieving high numbers of NDIS Plans to impress the Minister rather than achieving quality of delivery. The result is that the NDIS implementation has been a fiasco in the league of the previous Government's Pink Batt Scheme.

In view of the above NDIS cost problems, the Commonwealth Productivity Commission needs to strongly recommend changes consistent with the following points:

1. The Commonwealth Government reviews the Management of the NDIS with a view to remedying the botched, expensive roll-out via obtaining more competent NDIA Senior Executive staffing;
2. The new NDIA Senior Executive be given a first priority of performing a Review of the scope of the NDIS which will enable the development of realistic policies and implementation processes. The latter will include due regard for what worked in the pilots and the advice of service delivery stakeholders within the context of ensuring that the speed of the NDIS roll-out is consistent with the capacity to deliver quality client outcomes;
3. The new NDIA Senior Executive particularly reviews the staffing and other resourcing of the NDIS with a view to ensure staffing levels are commensurate with demand and that they are properly trained and supported by adequate communication policies, structures and systems;
4. NDIS Plans be done in person and be reviewable by the client before finalisation;
5. The Commonwealth Government greatly increases the funding of advocacy services for the large numbers of disabled people who do not have support in this area and who are thus particularly further disadvantaged;
6. The NDIS Portal is made reliable asap and made much more easily used by clients;
7. The 1800 Call Centre be overhauled so that client calls are actually answered, recorded and progressed in an accountable, referenced process;
8. NDIS Planning and Branch Management staff be accountable and directly contactable via email and phone;
9. The NDIS Executive implements a client service culture (rather than just a "serve the Minister culture") which includes communicating with clients on a regular basis through Newsletters on the rollout issues that are being resolved and providing helpful contacts who actually respond; and
10. The NDIA Board be returned to a more disability representative membership model like that before October 2016: ie where disability stakeholders have real power (eg, at least 50% of the Membership and executive roles) rather than the present one where Members from private enterprise with no/minimal disability experience are dominant.

Yours sincerely,

Frank Ross
8 August 2017