

COAG Disability Reform Council
Quarterly Report
31 March 2019



Contents

Executive Summary	6
Introduction	15
Part One: Participants and their plans	17
1.1 Roll-out	17
1.2 Number of participants	18
1.3 Operational progress	19
1.4 Participant characteristics	20
Part Two: Participants in work, community service and social activities	25
2.1 Community and social participation	26
2.2 Employment	28
2.3 Two-year analysis of participant outcomes	30
2.4 Participant satisfaction	31
2.5 Unscheduled plan reviews	34
2.6 Plan activations	35
2.7 Plan utilisation	36
2.8 Actions to improve participant experience	39
Part Three: Providers and the growing market	43
3.1 Growth and diversity of providers	43
3.2 New NDIS Demand Tool	44
3.3 Innovative approaches to services and supports	44
3.4 NDIS pricing	45
3.5 Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA)	46
Part Four: Information, Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC)	48
4.1 Building inclusive communities	48
Part Five: Financial sustainability	50
5.1 Delivering within budget	50
5.2 Addressing Scheme pressures	51
Part Six: Staff, advisory groups and the NDIS community	53
6.1 Official opening of the new NDIA National Office in Geelong	53
6.2 Collaborating with NDIS stakeholders	54
6.3 NDIS Contact Centre	55
6.4 Building a high performing NDIA	56

Appendix A: Key definitions	58
Appendix B: Scheme roll-out: Timing and locations	60
Appendix C: Operational progress	62
Appendix D: Outcomes framework questionnaires	64
Appendix E: National	65
Appendix F – M: States/Territories	100
Appendix N: Participants by region and support type	313
Appendix O: Specialist Disability Accommodation	317

Key highlights

The scale and complexity of the roll-out is unprecedented

Workforce has grown from **2,300** at July 2016 to over

10,000

this quarter

Delivery sites have increased from **31** at July 2016 to

122

this quarter

Now accessible in **every region** of every State and Territory, except for part of Western Australia

277,155 people with disability have joined the Scheme

32,486

joined the Scheme this quarter

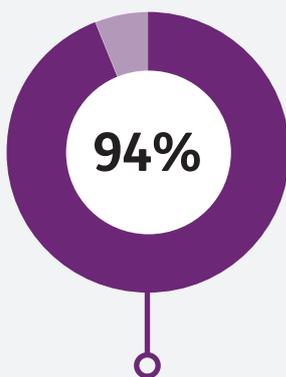
85,489

people are receiving supports for the first time

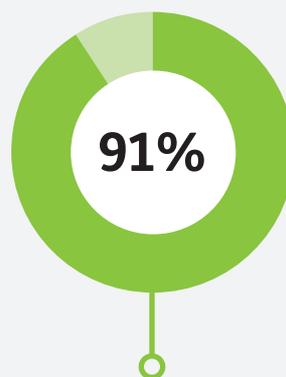
The NDIA **exceeded**

its operational target for the number of participants entering in the quarter

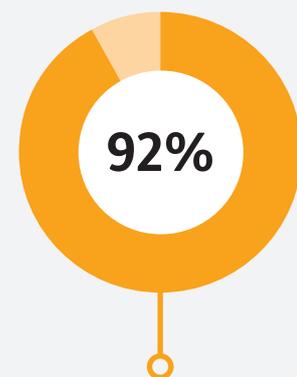
Overall, participant satisfaction is high at **88%**



said their planner listened to them



said they had enough time to tell their story



said their planning meeting had gone well

Key highlights

Participants in the Scheme for two years show significantly improved outcomes

↑11%

increase in social and community participation

↑9%

increase in independence for children aged 0 to 14 years

↑7%

increase in assistance with daily living for participants aged 15 to 25

↑7%

increase in choice and control for participants aged 25 and over



Call centre performance has continued to improve, with the average answer speed consistently at **28 seconds**

Significant work is underway to further improve the participant experience.

Executive Summary

The NDIS is having a significant positive impact on the lives of people with disability, now reaching more Australians with disability than ever before, as the pace of the roll-out rapidly accelerates. However that pace is not without its challenges. This report outlines that progress and those challenges in the context of the overall roll-out of the Scheme.

1. The NDIS is reaching more Australians with disability sooner than ever before

The NDIS has reached a record number of participants this quarter and has exceeded its operational targets.

1.1 As the roll-out accelerates, a record number of participants have been reached this quarter

The accelerating pace of the roll-out is delivering NDIS funding to a rapidly increasing number of participants.

At 31 March 2019, 277,155 people with disabilities, including 11,504 children in the Early Childhood Early Intervention (ECEI) program, had joined the NDIS. This represents a 13% increase over the prior quarter.

An additional 32,486 participants (excluding ECEI) received approved plans this quarter. This is the largest number of additional participants in any one quarter. Indeed, it exceeds the number of plans approved in the entire three year Trial period. Additionally, more participants in remote and very remote areas of Australia joined the Scheme this quarter compared with any previous quarter.

1.2 A record number of participants are receiving supports for the first time

As well as supporting people transitioning from existing State/Territory and Commonwealth systems, the NDIS is reaching people who have not previously received disability funding.

Of the 277,155 participants currently supported by the Scheme, 85,489 are receiving supports for the first time. 180,162 previously received support from State/Territory or Commonwealth programs. The increase in the March quarter in the number of participants without previous support was 11,804 (compared with 11,270 in the prior quarter).

1.3 Supports are being received sooner

Seventy percent (70%) of plans were activated within 30 days during the quarter, and 86% of plans were activated within 90 days. This represents the time from when a participant's initial plan is approved to when they first receive support from a provider.

1.4 Operational targets for the roll-out are being exceeded

The NDIA exceeded its operational target for the nine months to 31 March 2019, with approved plans exceeding actionable records during the period. Actionable records are provided by the Commonwealth and State/Territory governments to the NDIA, to transfer eligible participants to the NDIS. It represents people who can be contacted and who meet the NDIS access requirements.

The bilateral estimates across the states and territories during Transition (excluding Trial) is approximately 377,000 to 30 June 2019. The number of actionable records received by the NDIA is 287,000, leaving a difference of approximately 90,000 records. These 90,000 records include duplicates, some people who have died, or information that does not allow the NDIA to identify or contact an individual. As a result, performance against the bilateral estimates to date is 75%.

1.5 The combination of initial plans and reviews has increased significantly

Plan reviews for existing participants are an important undertaking.

Executive Summary *continued*

The number of plan reviews (both scheduled and unscheduled) was 51,924. When combined with the 32,486 new plans, approximately 1,320 plans were developed or reviewed each business day during the quarter. This represents a significant increase in the daily volume of plans.

1.6 The Scheme is now available in almost all of Australia

Almost three years into Transition of the NDIS, all States/Territories have entered the Scheme on time and as scheduled.

Subject to phasing agreed with State/Territory governments, the Scheme is now able to be accessed in every region in Australia, except parts of Western Australia. It will be available in all regions in Western Australia from July 2019 as agreed with the Western Australian government.

More specifically, from 1 January 2019, the NDIS began operating in the Victorian areas of Goulburn, Mallee and Outer Gippsland; in the Queensland areas of Caboolture/Strathpine and Maroochydore; and in Tasmania for 50 to 64 year olds.

The roll-out continued its focus on transitioning Queensland and Victoria participants, with new plans in those States respectively representing 31.4% and 30.8% of the total. In Victoria 99% of people with actionable records received a plan, in Queensland this figure exceeded 100% as new records were provided during the quarter.

The scale and complexity of the roll-out is unprecedented. There are 122 service delivery sites across the country, including 18 new sites opened within the previous six months. The NDIA and Partners in the Community participated in over 10,000 engagement activities during the 2018 calendar year; and the NDIA and its partners have grown their workforce from approximately 2,300 at the

start of Transition in July 2016 to over 10,000 at the end of the March quarter.

2. Participant satisfaction with the rollout remains strong

This quarter, 88% of participants rated their overall experience with the NDIS planning process as either 'Very good' or 'Good'. This is an improvement on the last quarter's satisfaction rate of 84%. Of participants surveyed this quarter, 94% felt their planner listened to them, 91% considered that they had enough time to tell their story, and 92% reported that their planning meeting went well.

3. Participant outcomes are highly encouraging

The Scheme's overarching purpose is to help participants improve their life outcomes. As participants spend more time in the Scheme, evidence indicates that the NDIS is assisting in most areas.

3.1 Outcomes over time are improving

Results from longitudinal analysis show that outcomes are improving as participants spend more time in the Scheme

- Parents and carers of children starting school to aged 14 years thought their child was more independent as a result of the NDIS (65% in the second year, compared to 56% in their first year)
- Participants aged 15 to 24 years indicated that the NDIS had helped them with daily living activities (66% in their second year compared to 59% in their first year)
- Participants aged 25 years and over considered the NDIS helped them have more choice and more control over their lives (75% in the second year, compared with 68% in their first year).

Executive Summary *continued*

Some areas require more focus, in particular to help address some of the challenges facing people with disability seeking and maintaining employment. The NDIS Participant Employment Taskforce is committed to making progress towards improving opportunities in this area.

3.2 Participants are more involved in social, civic and community activities

The benefits for people with disability who participate in social, civic and community activities include improved wellbeing, lower longer term costs of care and support and increased employment opportunities.

A large increase in social and community participation has occurred, from 35% of participants at entry to the Scheme to 46% of participants after 2 years. The largest increases have been for participants aged 25 to 34 (14% increase) and 19 to 24 (12% increase), along with increases for participants with Down syndrome (18%), Cerebral Palsy (16%) and Intellectual Disability (13%).

Analysis indicates that volunteering and having a paid job are two key drivers of social and community engagement.

4. Work is underway to further enhance the participant experience

Despite high satisfaction rates, the NDIA recognises that it is not yet getting it right first time for each and every participant. Significant ongoing work has been directed to further improving the participant experience, in consultation with participants, families, carers, providers and sector representatives.

4.1 More individualised approaches occurring

Changes have focused on embedding a more individualised approach for participants, and an emphasis on clearer communication to better support people with disability to achieve their goals. These changes include:

- Tailoring approaches around the needs of the NDIS participant, including a complex support needs pathway and Early Childhood Early Intervention pathway;
- Two service streams for psychosocial disability and hearing, to deliver targeted support to provide participants with an experience more suited to their specific disability needs; and
- Four service enhancements to meet the communication and engagement needs of people from different backgrounds or areas, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, culturally and linguistically diverse people, remote and very remote communities, and people who identify as LGBTIQ+.

In response to participant feedback, a key improvement being rolled out is changes to the participant plan format, which now provides participants with a single point of contact. This contact is listed in each participant's plan document and in the myplace participant portal.

4.2 Roll-out of Complex Support Needs Participant Pathway

The Complex Support Needs Pathway is providing specialised support for people with disability that experience extraordinary complex support needs, and who have a greater need for coordination of multiple services. This may include voluntary or involuntary involvement in other government service systems (such as justice systems, child protection, and/or mental health programs) and transitional supports for returning to the community, for example, exiting incarceration or an acute rehabilitation environment.

Executive Summary *continued*

The Complex Support Needs Pathway is progressively rolling out across Australia. It commenced in parts of Victoria and New South Wales in November 2018. It is now also underway in all other States/Territories, except Western Australia. It will commence in Western Australia (Canning) from 1 July 2019.

As of March 2019, ninety planners with human service qualifications and/or extensive expertise in complex case coordination have been identified to transfer to the Complex Support Needs (CSN) Branch. These planners are supporting these complex participants to easily access the Scheme and are closely monitoring their plans, including how the plan links to other mainstream services. Skilled support co-ordinators are also being connected to these participants to further assist with implementing the plan and helping participants achieve their goals.

4.3 Streamlined access for participants with hearing disability occurring

During the March 2019 quarter, 305 children benefited from streamlined access to early intervention supports, through a stream developed in 2018 for children aged 0 to 6 with newly diagnosed hearing loss. The NDIA is now working on developing further hearing streams for participants aged 7 to 64, and has commenced consultation with key external stakeholders in the deaf community to provide input across key life transition points.

In addition, work is underway to transition to the NDIS eligible clients within the Commonwealth's Hearing Services Program (HSP). This commenced in partnership with Australian Hearing at the beginning of March 2019, with all eligible clients scheduled to transition by the end of June 2020.

4.4 Major changes to Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) underway

SDA is a fast growing and significant provider registration group that experienced a 19% growth in the quarter (118 to 140) for

active SDA providers. This coincided with the number of participants with SDA in their plan increasing by 13%. During the quarter an additional 746 spaces in SDA properties became available to NDIS participants.

A package of reforms to SDA is being implemented, following a review in 2018 by the Disability Reform Council of the SDA Pricing and Payments Framework. The changes recognise the centrality of choice and control in SDA for eligible participants, and provide greater visibility and certainty for investors in relation to pricing.

The NDIA has recently published an updated 2018-19 SDA Price Guide, and established an SDA Reference Group comprised of a range of SDA stakeholders. The first meeting was held in March 2019.

Additionally, the NDIA has launched an internal SDA Panel to improve the process for determining SDA eligibility. The SDA Panel is already leading to more consistent and timely SDA decisions as it assists with the implementation of the recently revised SDA Rules. The important revisions to the Rules has been central in the roll-out of these changes.

4.5 An increase in Young People in Residential Aged Care (YPIRAC) receiving NDIS support

The number of Younger People in Residential Aged Care receiving support from the NDIS increased by 439 in the quarter, and by 1,801 over the past year.

Of the 4,093 active participants as at 31 March 2019, 30 were under the age of 35, including 3 under the age of 25. A further 127 were aged 35 to 44, 686 aged 45 to 54, 2,477 aged 55 to 64, and 773 were aged 65 or over.

On 22 March 2019 the Minister for Families and Social Services announced a plan to reduce the number of younger people with disability living in aged care facilities. In support of this, the NDIA is expediting access

Executive Summary *continued*

to the Scheme for those who are eligible. Planners in the Complex Support Needs pathway will then, as a priority, work with eligible NDIS participants and their families to look at housing options, which may include funding for home modifications or SDA where required.

4.6 Early Childhood Early Intervention program refinement underway

The NDIA acknowledges that delays are occurring for children aged from 0 to 6 in accessing supports through the Early Childhood Early Intervention program. The reasons include the rapidity of the roll-out in some jurisdictions, where large numbers of files may be transferred on a single day, also creating additional delays for new participants.

The NDIA is prioritising work to reduce the wait times for children and to ensure that early intervention supports are provided as quickly as possible.

This includes working with groups such as the Autism Advisory Group.

4.7 Access to the Scheme for people with psychosocial disability improves

The NDIA continues to improve streamlined access for participants from Commonwealth psychosocial programs, and to build the capacity of the workforce to better understand psychosocial disability. During the quarter, foundational mental health training was extended to include Victoria, Queensland, Western Australia, the Australian Capital Territory and Northern Territory.

4.8 Access and service delivery in remote areas improves

The number of participants in remote and very remote areas is increasing as the NDIA improves access and stimulates the service delivery market.

The number of participants in these areas increased from 802 at 31 March 2017, to 1,582 at 31 March 2018, to 3,148 as at 31 March 2019.

During the quarter, two new programs were announced in remote Western Australian. The Remote Community Connectors program will see people from remote communities employed by local Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to promote understanding and awareness of the NDIS, linking people with disability to access, planning and implementation pathways.

The Evidence, Access and Coordination of Planning program will enable Aboriginal Medical Services to recruit Evidence and Access Coordinators in remote clinics to facilitate the eligibility testing and access procedures of the NDIS, and to assist with organising NDIS planning meetings in remote areas.

4.9 Assistive Technology (AT) processes improve

Delays have occurred in participants gaining funding for AT. Work is ongoing to improve this situation.

Since February 2019, participants who require replacement of their existing AT (valued between \$1,500 and \$15,000) that is not repairable or has reached the end of its service life, may have funding included in their plan without the need for reassessment. Repairs and maintenance to AT, including the addition of an annualised amount, can be included in a participant's NDIS plan.

Further, as expenditure under \$1,500 no longer requires a quote, wait times should reduce.

4.10 Contact Centre performance improves

The NDIS Contact Centre has made consistent improvements during the March quarter. It is contracted to reach a weekly

Executive Summary *continued*

service level of 80% of calls answered within 60 seconds, which it exceeded by a little over three percentage points at the end of the quarter. Average abandonment rates are 1.25%, an improvement from 1.5% at the end of December 2018.

This improvement in performance follows the appointment of the current provider in June 2018, notwithstanding significant volumes of calls (over 890,000 between June 2018 and the end of March 2019) as the roll-out of the Scheme accelerates.

4.11 The Independent Assessment Pilot reaches its intended number of voluntary participants

The Independent Assessment Pilot is being undertaken to ensure fairness and equity in access and planning decisions. It is on track to reach its intended number of participants before closing at the end of April 2019.

A high level of satisfaction with the process has been recorded with 93% of participants being “satisfied” or “very satisfied”. In addition, the opt-in rate of 73% has been high, indicating that participants have seen the benefit of being part of the pilot.

5. The provider market continues to grow

Access to a growing, vibrant and competitive provider market is critical for participants to achieve their goals.

5.1 Number of providers continues to increase

The total number of registered providers reached 20,208 at 31 March 2019, representing a 6% increase for the quarter.

High growth rates were experienced in Queensland and Victoria in particular, with the number of registered providers increasing by 17% and 12% respectively.

5.2 Improved access to NDIS demand information delivered

During the March 2019 quarter a new NDIS demand forecast tool was released by the Department of Social Services and the NDIA. The NDIS Demand Map is designed to provide information to providers on the nature and location of demand, with the objective being to stimulate market supply.

It includes forecasts of NDIS demand by postcode, the number of NDIS participants in an area, how much participants are expected to spend and on what types of supports, and how many workers may be required.

5.3 Pricing increases are being delivered

Against the backdrop of the rapid roll-out of the Scheme, the NDIA is acutely aware of its role as market steward and the need to set prices that encourage market development, particularly in thin markets.

Supplementing the work of the Independent Pricing Review, which is currently being implemented, and the Western Australia Market Review, the NDIA has undertaken extensive consultation on therapy prices and pricing for attendant care. That work, initiated and promoted by the NDIA, has been rigorous and fact-based, using extensive data not previously available to the Independent Pricing Review.

As a consequence of that detailed consideration, it was announced towards the end of the quarter, that from 1 July 2019 significant price increases will be made for both therapy and attendant care.

More specifically in the case of therapy supports, in New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory, differential prices were set for psychology supports versus other types of therapy, with increases of 17% and 6%

Executive Summary *continued*

respectively. In addition, for South Australia, Western Australia, Tasmania and the Northern Territory, differential prices were set for psychology, physiotherapy and other therapies, with increases of 28%, 23% and 6% respectively.

In relation to attendant care, increases of between 5.6% and 15.4% to the base price for attendant care, depending on location, times and days of shifts, and skill level will be available from 1 July 2019¹. In addition, a Temporary Transformation Payment of 7.5% will also be made to providers, reducing by 1.5% each year over 5 years. This conditional loading will assist providers continue to transform their businesses as the market evolves.

Overall, the increases will help ensure the availability of supply in the attendant care and therapy markets, thereby assisting participants to achieve their goals.

The Western Australia Pricing Review is currently underway, with extensive consultation occurring.

5.4 Developing innovation in provider markets

The NDIA is developing a strategy to encourage the growth of new and better services across Australia, which will increase opportunities for participant choice. The strategy will identify contemporary and innovative approaches to supports and services that build participant capacity, seek to increase independence, and encourage social inclusion.

The strategy will outline the NDIA's vision for an innovative marketplace with informed participants and families, and how the NDIA plans to achieve this vision. The NDIA will consult with a range of stakeholders including participants, providers and industry

leaders, ahead of releasing the strategy later in the year.

6. Community engagement has significantly increased

The NDIA is committed to a programme of extensive engagement with the disability sector. It permeates all facets of projects underway to improve the participant experience. Some examples of engagement undertaken during the Quarter, include:

- Engagement with the Specialist Disability Accommodation Reference Group;
- Extensive consultation with the sector in relation to prices for attendant care and therapy;
- Work undertaken with the Employment Task Force;
- Seeking input from members of peak organisations on the Independent Assessment Pilot;
- Ongoing discussions with the Autism Advisory Group, particularly in relation to improving wait times for children; and
- Collaboration on improved access to supports with the Aboriginal Health Council of WA and Aboriginal Medical Service in the Kimberley, Pilbara and Goldfields regions.

Regular consultation continues under the auspices of the Independent Advisory Council and the CEO Forum, along with ongoing frequent communication by senior management with sector leaders. In addition, the Board is undertaking a series of roving visits as part of a program of meeting with participants, providers, front line staff and peak bodies. In the quarter this included a visit to Broadmeadows in Melbourne.

¹ These prices will also be increased for wage inflation on 1 July, 2019.

Executive Summary *continued*

6.1 Information, Linkages and Capacity (ILC) program expands

ILC provides grants to organisations to carry out activities in the community, to create connections between people with disability and the communities in which they live, encouraging inclusion and participation and promoting a diverse Australian society. To date, the NDIA has allocated 222 grants totalling \$85.9 million (excluding GST) to organisations across Australia to deliver a wide range of ILC initiatives.

The NDIA introduced the “ILC Strategy Towards 2022” in December 2018, which will guide investment of almost \$400 million in ILC grants from 2019-20 to 2021-22. The overarching purpose of the strategy is to ensure that people with disability, their families and carers have the knowledge, skills and confidence to participate and contribute to their communities, have the information they need to make informed decisions, and benefit from the same mainstream services as everyone else. The strategy has been warmly welcomed.

7. The Scheme remains financially sustainable

The Scheme remains within budget, and has done so every year of its operation. It is projected to remain within budget for the rest of the financial year.

Notwithstanding specific pressures on the Scheme, the NDIA is committed to ensuring that funding for eligible participants is responsive to their needs within the reasonable and necessary provisions of the NDIS Act.

8. A high performing NDIA is being built

In line with the accelerated roll-out of the Scheme, the NDIA has significantly increased the number of staff directly supporting the

development of plans for participants. In the second half of 2018, the number of Planners increased by 422 to 1,764. The total workforce (including partners in the community) increased by 2,210 in the same period (from 7,563 to 9,773). In addition, planners with deep experience were re-allocated to support the roll-out of the Complex Pathway.

Over 6,500 hours of training has been delivered to service delivery staff to support the pathways reform implementation, including in areas such as psychosocial disability, customer focus, disability awareness, and human rights. The training on disability awareness and human rights was developed with the Disability Advocacy Network of Australia (DANA).

Notwithstanding the pace of the roll-out, the NDIA’s focus is on growing its workforce capability at the same time as reducing reliance on consultants, evidenced by a decrease of over 50 per cent in consultant spend for the 12 months ending 31 December 2018.

In addition, the NDIA is committed to working with and employing people with disability or lived experience of disability. Currently 11.7% of the NDIA’s workforce have a disability.

The new NDIA National Office (which was officially opened on 8 March 2019), has many state-of-the-art accessibility features. Hence, with almost 12 per cent of NDIA employees identifying as having a disability, this new office will ensure accessible technologies and a suitable work environment for all employees. Overall, the new office houses approximately 600 staff and centralises the NDIA’s national operations in Geelong.

In conclusion

Rapid progress is being made on the Scheme's roll-out. The continuing work, being undertaken in active collaboration with participants and the sector, will ensure that the NDIS meets the needs of participants, develops a vibrant and innovative provider market, and remains financially sustainable for generations to come.

Introduction

This report is a summary of the performance and operations of the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) for the 3 months from 1 January 2019 to 31 March 2019, as required by Section 174 of the NDIS Act 2013.²

Analysis and key insights are presented in the report, with detailed supplementary tables included in the appendices. The national results are contained in Appendix E, followed by individual appendices for each State and Territory. A list of key definitions of the terms used in this report is included in Appendix A.



Sean has benefited from the School Leaver Employment Support Program and is now enjoying full-time work at Yarra Ranges Nursery (Sean's photo is also on the front cover)

² The Board members must prepare a report on the operations of the Agency for each period of three months starting on 1 July, 1 October, 1 January or 1 April; and give the report to the Ministerial Council within one month after the end of the period to which the report relates.



Cathy receives funding for support workers who pick her up and take her to weekly bible studies class, and into the shops to buy the weekly Big League rugby league magazine.

“It gives her the opportunity to go with other people, talk with them, socialise, and that’s a pretty important part of life,” Cathy’s father Kevin said.

“We’ve noticed Cath’s confidence has increased, and she’s got new things to talk about when she comes home.”

Part One: Participants and their plans

More participants from diverse geographies experience improved outcomes with support from the NDIS.

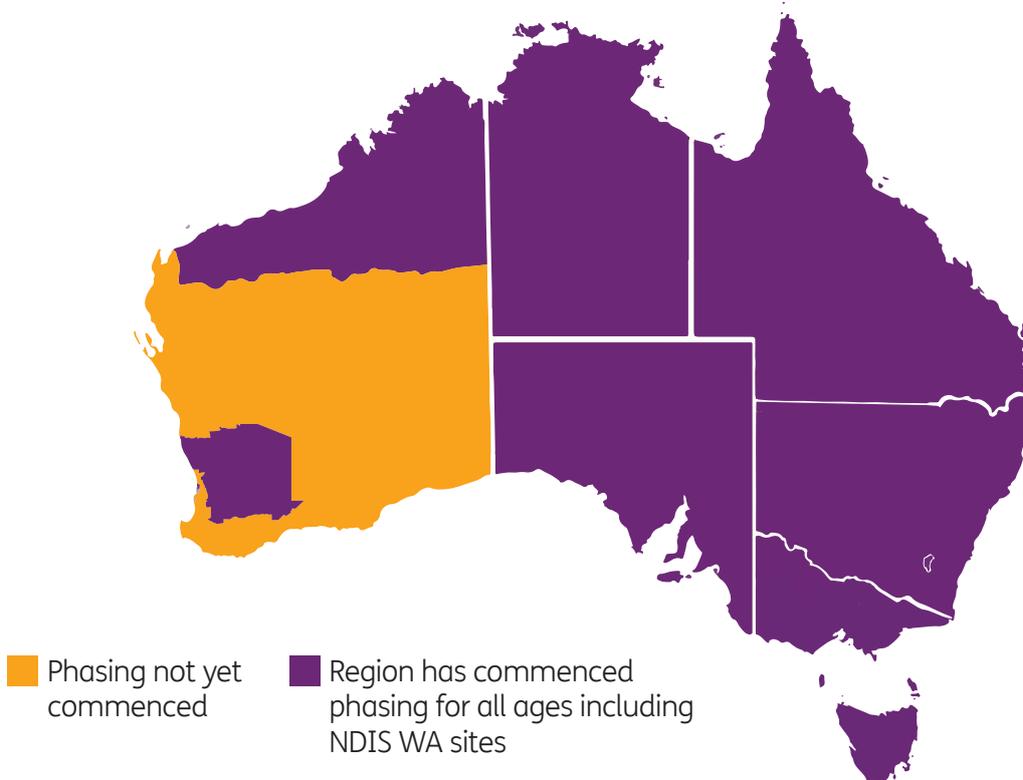
1.1 Roll-out

More participants are receiving support as the NDIS transitions into the remaining areas of Australia in all States/Territories except Western Australia.

In January 2019 the NDIS began operating in the Victorian areas of Goulburn, Mallee and Outer Gippsland, in the Queensland areas of Caboolture/Strathpine and Maroochydore, and in Tasmania for 50 to 64 year olds. At 31 March 2019, the NDIS was operating fully in all regions of each State/Territory except Western Australia, with more people in these States/Territories expected to phase into the Scheme beyond 31 March 2019.

Western Australia continues its transition from the state-operated NDIS to the national Scheme. The Commonwealth and Western Australian Governments have agreed to provide additional time for people to transfer from the WA NDIS, to allow state-based participants to be appropriately supported and transitioned. The original timeframe has been extended to make sure the transfer process is smooth and effective for participants.

Figure 1: Phasing regions



1.2 Number of participants

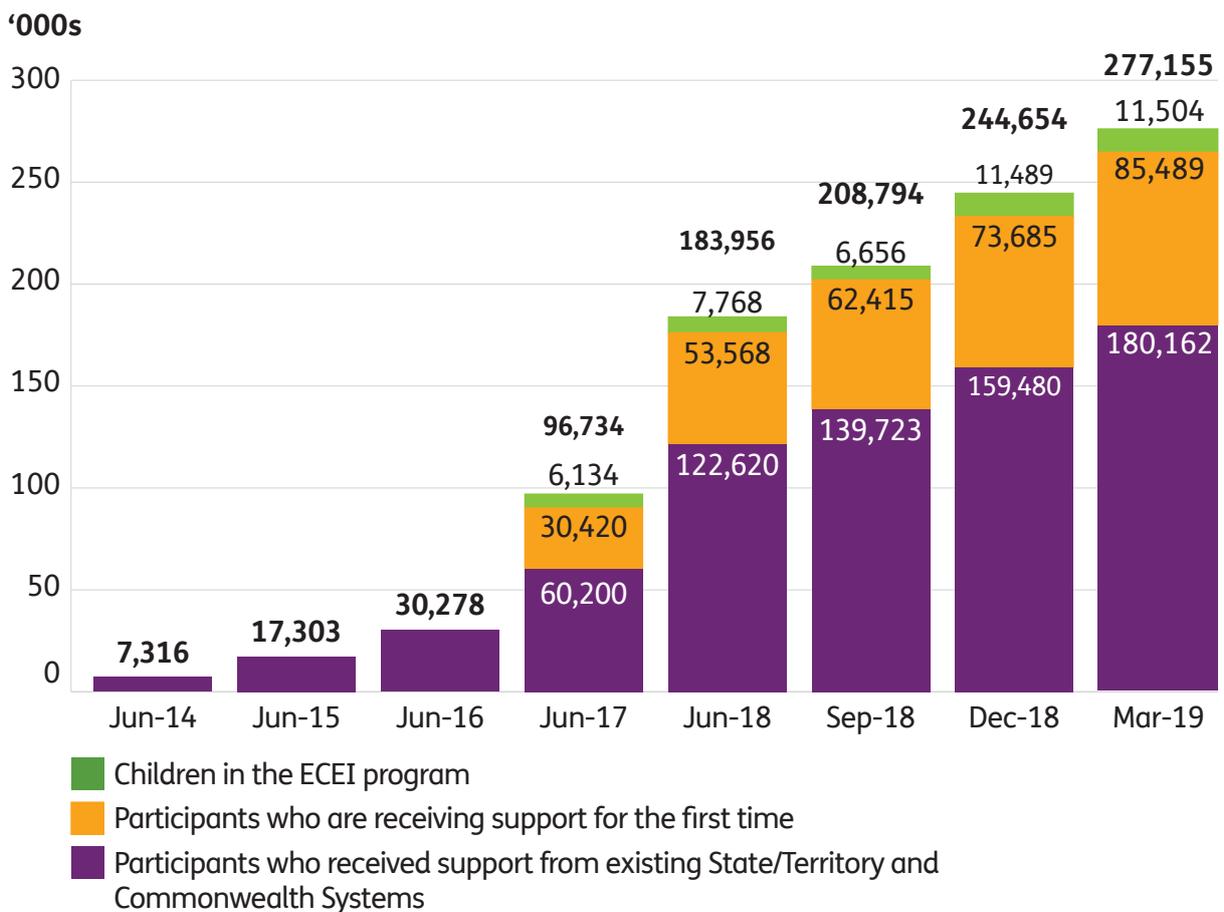
Over 275,000 Australians with disabilities are now being supported by the NDIS, with close to one third of participants receiving support for the first time.

At 31 March 2019, 277,155 people with disabilities, including children in the ECEI program, were being supported by the NDIS. This represents a 13% increase in the number of participants over last quarter. An additional 32,486 participants, excluding children in the ECEI program, received approved plans this quarter.³

Importantly, the Scheme is supporting both people from existing State/Territory and Commonwealth systems and people who have not previously received support. Of the 277,155 participants currently supported by the Scheme, 180,162 previously received support from existing State/Territory or Commonwealth programs and 85,489 are now receiving support for the first time. In the March quarter, 36.3% of participants gained support for the first time, compared with 31.6% in previous quarters combined, excluding children supported in the ECEI program.

The number of children in the ECEI program has remained stable over the quarter, growing slightly from 11,489 to 11,504. The difference in the number of children in ECEI between quarters does not represent the number of additional children being supported in the ECEI program. Children in the ECEI program can exit from the program, remain in the program or go on to receive an NDIS plan under either Section 24 or Section 25 of the NDIS Act.

Figure 2: Growth in participants



³The difference in the number of children in ECEI between quarters does not represent additional children being supported in the ECEI program. Children in the ECEI program can exit from the program, remain in the program or go on to receive an NDIS plan. This means that simple addition will not produce total amounts of Scheme participants.

1.3 Operational progress

The NDIA performed strongly this quarter, achieving its operational target.

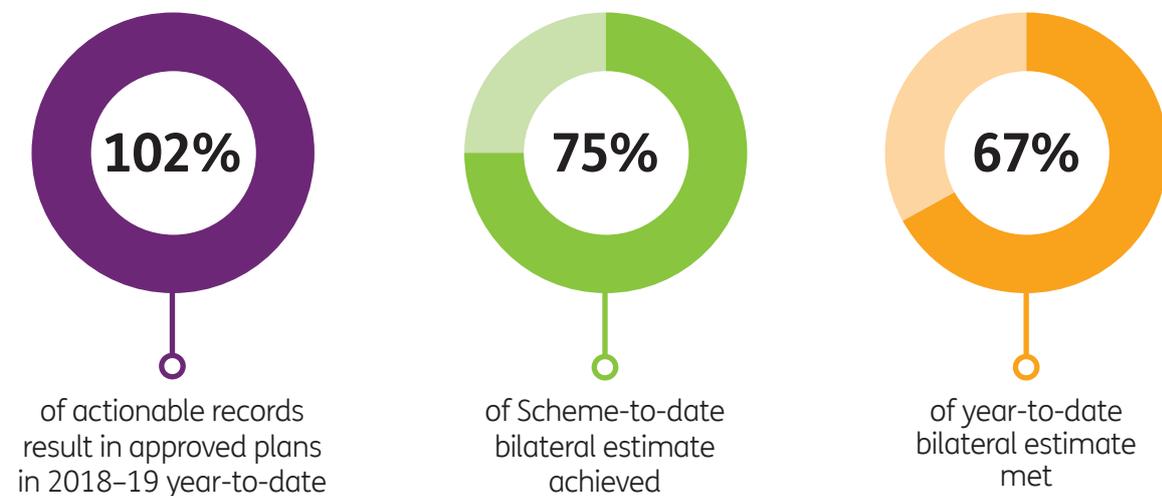
The NDIS is transitioning in sites across Australia in line with phasing schedules bilaterally agreed by State/Territory and Commonwealth governments. The bilateral agreements outline an estimate of the number of people who were predicted to participate in the NDIS from each State/Territory at particular points in time. The estimates are split into people who previously received support from State/Territory programs and those who have not previously received support.

The Agency has achieved its operational target for the 2018–19 year to date, meaning all actionable records were processed. Actionable records relate to those people who could be contacted, who met the access requirements and whose records were provided to the Agency.

At 31 March 2019, 75% of the Scheme-to-date bilateral estimate was reached and 67% of the 2018–19 year-to-date bilateral estimate was met.⁴ The availability of data and difficulties contacting transitioning participants from State/Territory and Commonwealth programs are the primary challenges in obtaining actionable records which is having a consequent impact on progress against bilateral estimates. Other reasons include some individuals making a decision not to apply to the Scheme, and others no longer requiring support.⁵

The Agency is undertaking a number of initiatives to ensure the Scheme is progressing towards bilateral estimates of all actionable records. As well as significant improvements to the participant and provider pathway, which will advance the consistency and efficiency of plan approvals, the NDIA continues to monitor the key performance metrics of each regional service delivery team.

Figure 3: Progress against bilateral estimates⁶



⁴Detail on the bilateral estimates is included in Appendix C.

⁵There are a significant number of transitioning State/Territory and Commonwealth clients who have not been able to be contacted. The NDIA will attempt to contact an individual four times using the provided details, after which the person is deemed 'unable to contact'. The NDIA communicates these details to the relevant State/Territory for follow-up, and is working proactively with each State/Territory government to connect with as many potential participants as possible.

⁶Over 100% was achieved as additional actionable records were made available in the quarter and more new participants approached the Scheme in the quarter than anticipated.

1.4 Participant characteristics

More participants in remote and very remote areas of Australia joined the Scheme this quarter, along with higher numbers of children aged 0-6 years.

Over the transition period, there has been a steady increase in the diversity of participants, including:

- **Remote and Very Remote:** From **802** participants at 31 March 2017, to **1,582** at 31 March 2018, to **3,148** at 31 March 2019.
- **0-6 year olds:** **20%** of new participants in the March 2019 quarter were aged 0-6, compared with a total of **13%** for the Scheme as a whole. This reflects the maturing of the Scheme, with more new entrants being children.

The proportion of participants living in remote and very remote regions has been increasing slowly over the past year, from 1,582 participants at 31 March 2018 to 3,148 participants at 31 March 2019. There were 508 new participants from remote and very remote regions in the March 2019 quarter, the largest number of any quarter to date.

A high proportion of active participants are in the 7 to 14 years age group, with 21% of participants entering the Scheme in the March 2019 quarter in this age group. 0 to 6 year olds represent a higher proportion of entrants compared with prior quarters, with 20% entering the Scheme within this age group during the quarter.

There has been a steady growth in the proportion of adults aged 45 years and over receiving support from the NDIS, increasing from 22.5% of participants at 31 March 2017, to 26.5% of participants at 31 March 2019. The proportion of participants in each age group reflects the phasing schedules outlined in some bilateral agreements which prioritise age group and/or people in existing State/Territory disability systems.

The proportion of participants with a CALD background was 9.3% in the March 2019 quarter, with the increase due in part to the significant number of participants phasing in metropolitan areas of Victoria. Considering the areas in which the NDIS has rolled out across Australia, the proportion of participants who are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (5.5% total and 5.8% this quarter) is in line with expectations.

The number of Younger People in Residential Aged Care (YPIRAC) receiving support from the NDIS increased by 439 in the quarter, and by 1,801 over the past year. Of the 4,093 active participants as at 31 March 2019, 30 were under the age of 35, including 3 under the age of 25. A further 127 were aged 35 to 44, 686 aged 45 to 54, 2,477 aged 55 to 64, and 773 were aged 65 or over.

On 22 March 2019 the Minister for Families and Social Services announced a plan to reduce the number of younger people with disability living in aged care facilities. In support of this, the NDIA is expediting access to the Scheme for those who are eligible. Planners in the Complex Support Needs pathway will then, as a priority, work with eligible NDIS participants and their families to look at housing options, which may include funding for home modifications or SDA where required.

Figures 4 - 9 outline key participant characteristic trends from 31 March 2017 through to 31 March 2019.

Figure 4: Number of participants by disability⁷

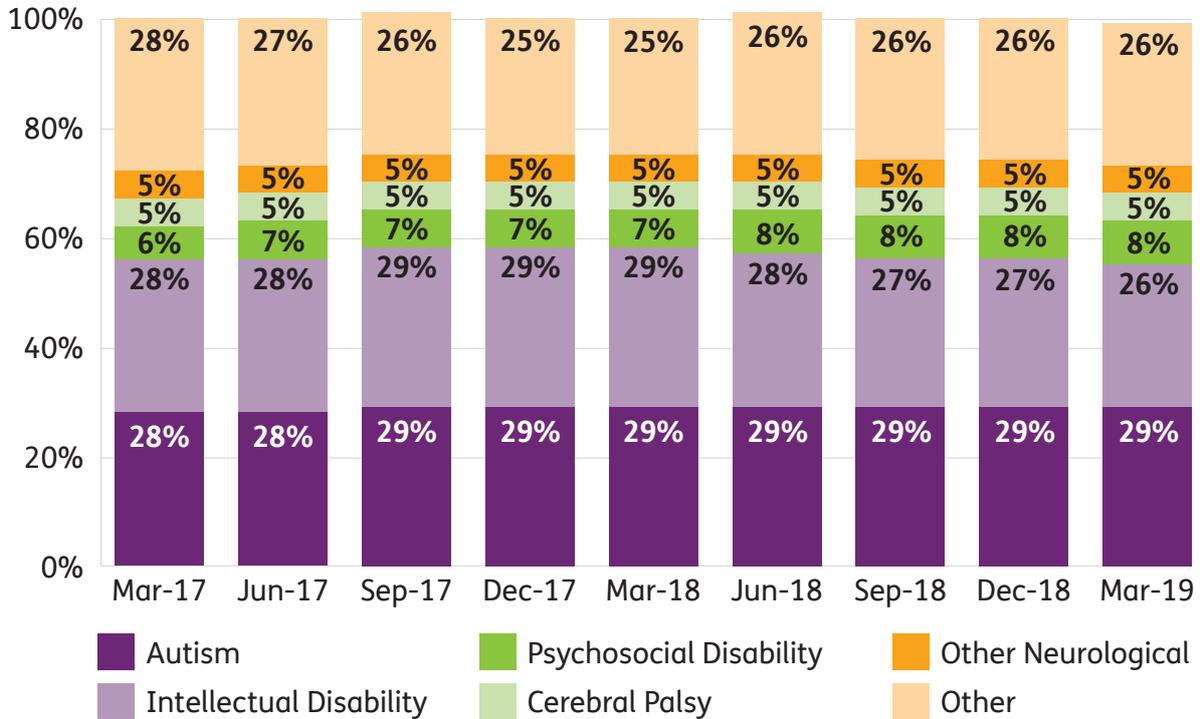
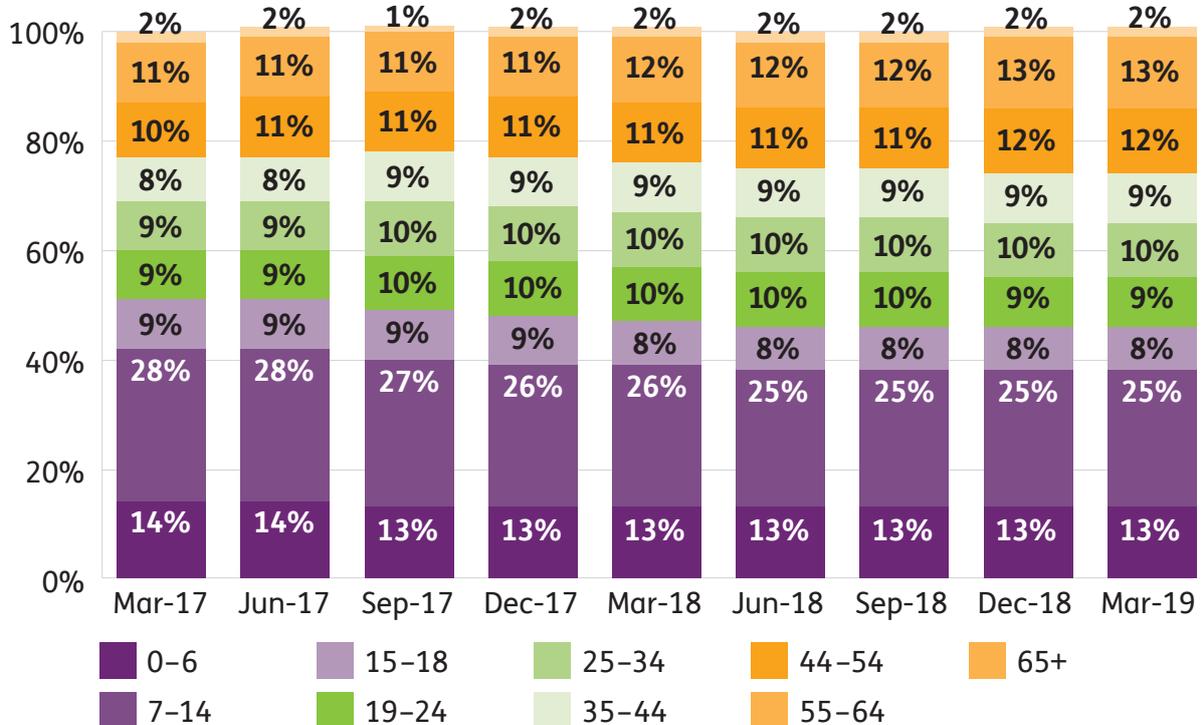


Figure 5: Number of participants by age group⁸



⁷ Percentages have been rounded in Figures 4 to 10, and totals may not add up to one hundred percent.

Figure 6: Number of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander participants

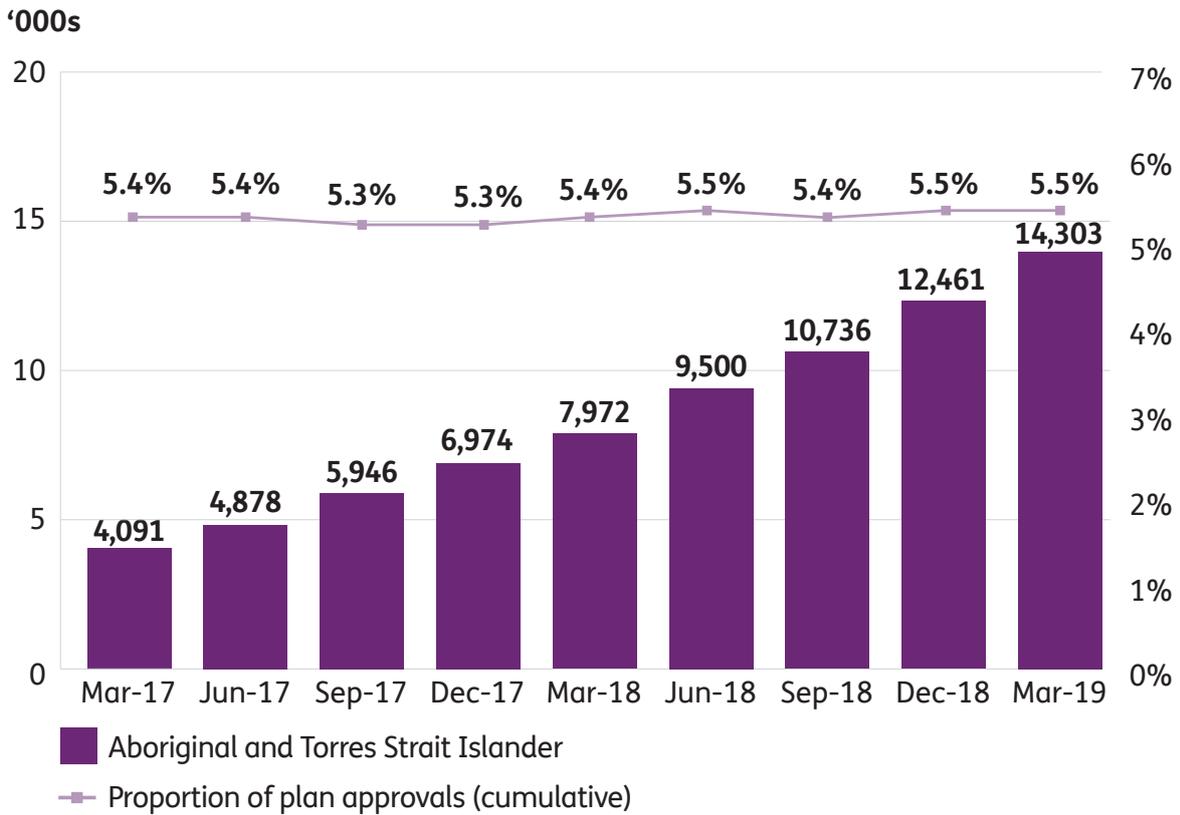


Figure 7: Number of participants that identify as CALD

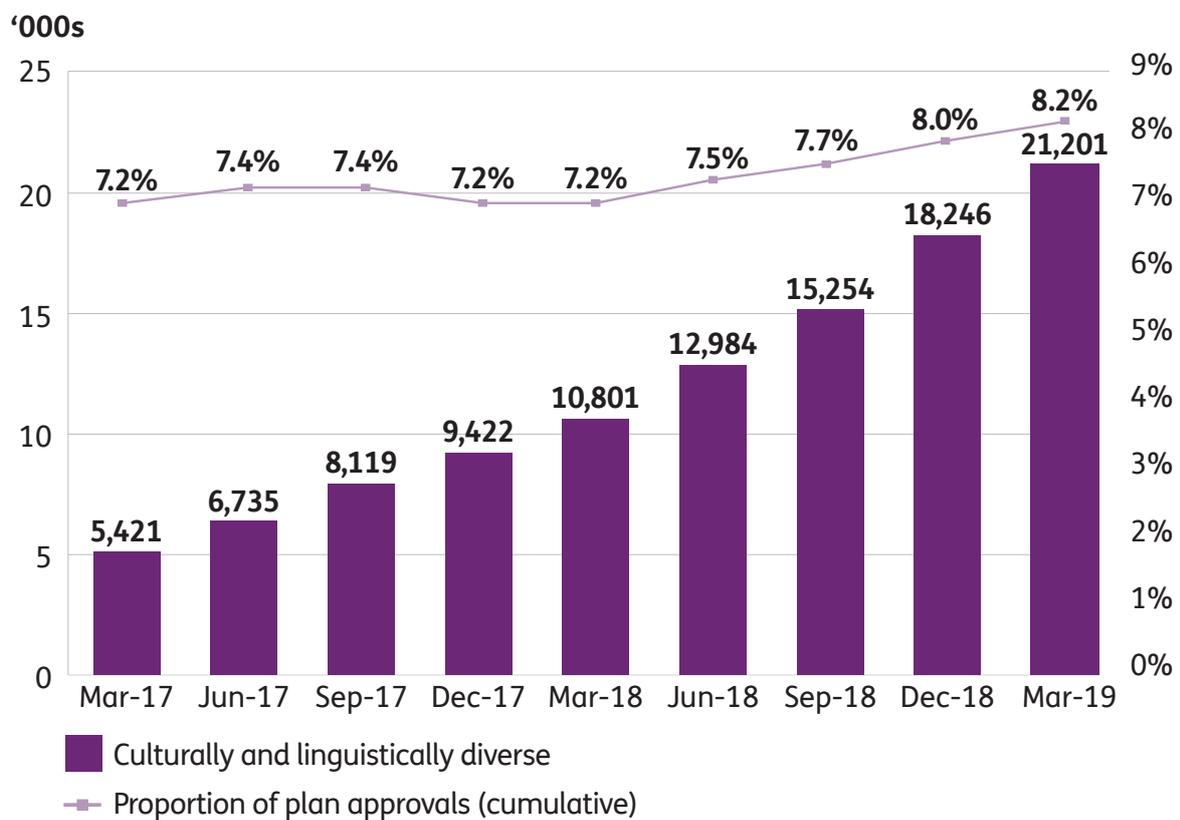


Figure 8: Number of participants by remoteness⁸

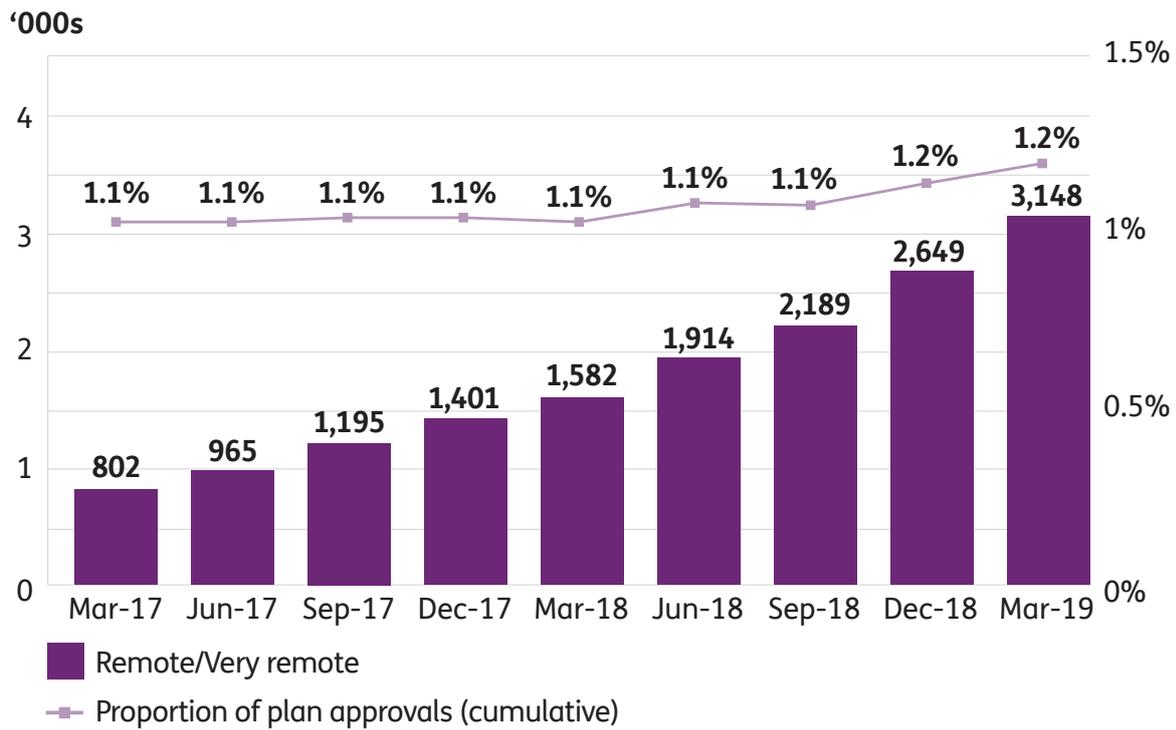
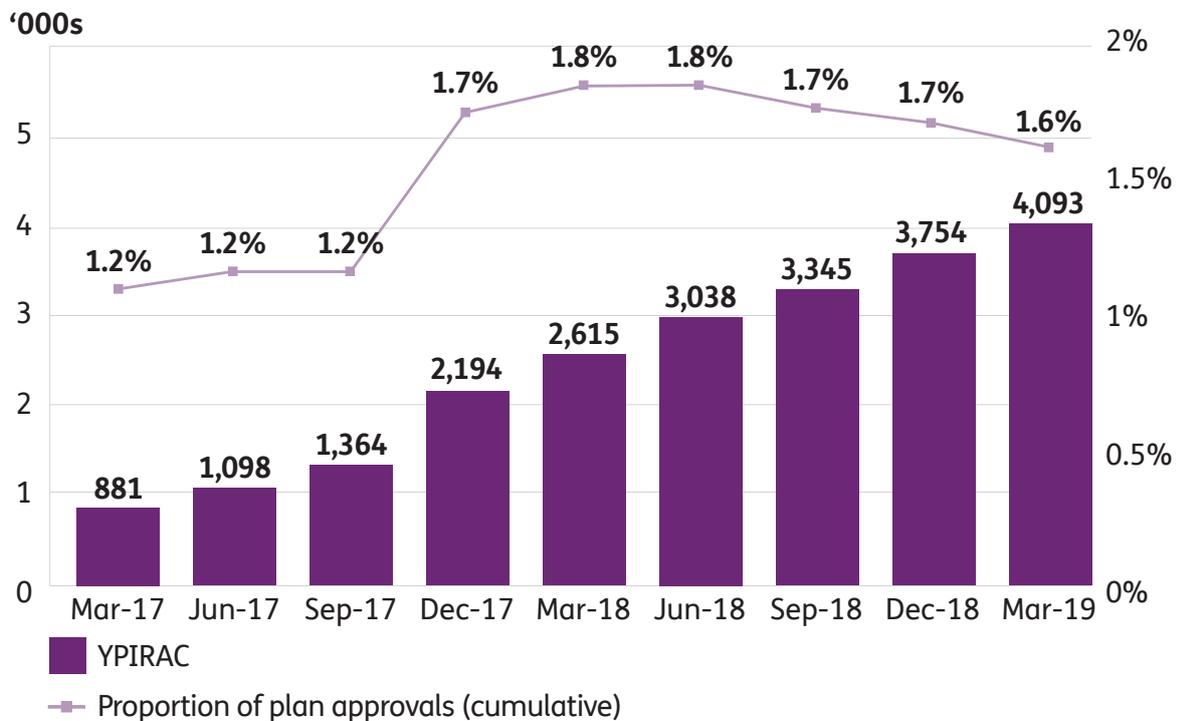


Figure 9: Number of YPIRAC participants



⁸ Classified according to the Modified Monash Model, which categorises metropolitan, regional, rural and remote areas according to geographical remoteness and town size.



Lacey is 32 and joined the National Disability Insurance Scheme in February 2018. She receives funding for support workers who visit the house for four hours a day, five days a week.

Her support workers Gillian and Rose spend time playing games with Lacey – a keen scrabble player – and they take her out to socialise in the community.

“When you’re on your own and you don’t have many resources, it’s very hard to get motivated to do all of these things,” Lacey’s mother Sharon said.

“The support workers have just opened Lacey up, she goes out with people in town, she goes to bingo and to the library, and plays virtual reality games on the television.”

Part Two: Participant experience and outcomes

New data this quarter shows participant outcomes continue to improve over time.

2.1 Community and social participation

People of all abilities, ages, backgrounds and cultures, are participating in social, community, and civic activities.

Community and social participation improves the wellbeing of people with disability, lowers the long-term costs of care and support, and increases employment opportunities. The inclusion of people with disability in the community also benefits the wider community and promotes a more inclusive and diverse society.

The 2018-2022 Corporate Plan uses metrics and performance targets to measure the NDIA's achievements against its aspirations. The 'quality experience and outcomes for participants' aspiration is measured by the percentage of participants currently employed (see page 28) and the number of participants involved in community and social activities, with initial results collected as a participant enters the Scheme.

For people who entered the Scheme between 1 July 2016 and 31 March 2017, participation in community and social activities has increased with time spent in the Scheme.

Figure 10: Participants involved in community and social activities compared with the 2018-19 Target (participants who entered the Scheme between 1 July 2016 and 31 March 2017)

Participants in community and social activities	At Scheme entry (Baseline ⁹)	After two years in the Scheme	2018-19 Target
Aged 15 to 24 years	31%	44%	41%
Aged 25+	37%	47%	
Aged 15+ (average)	35%	46%	

The level of community and social participation differs by age and disability when they enter the Scheme. Participants aged 25 and over have higher rates of participation compared with participants aged 15 to 24. Participants with Down Syndrome (48%) and sensory impairments (Hearing (48%), Visual Impairment (39%), and Other Sensory & Speech (40%)) have higher rates of participation compared with participants with Autism (28%) and Psychosocial Disability (30%).

⁹ Changes in baseline percentages between 2018-19 Q1, Q2 and Q3 are a result of new participants entering the Scheme in these quarters.

After two years in the Scheme community and social participation has increased from 35% to 46%. The largest increases have been for ages 25 to 34 (14%) and 19 to 24 (12%), and for participants with Down syndrome (18%), Cerebral Palsy (16%) and Intellectual Disability (13%).

Figure 11: Participants involved in community and social activities after two years in the Scheme, by age group

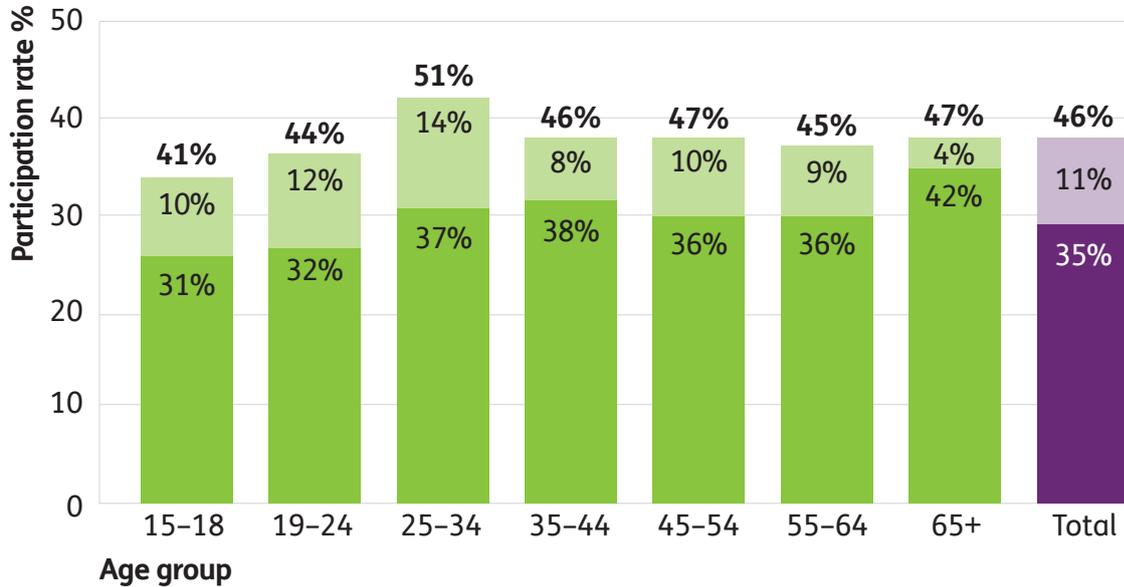


Figure 12: Participants involved in community and social activities after two years in the Scheme, by disability group

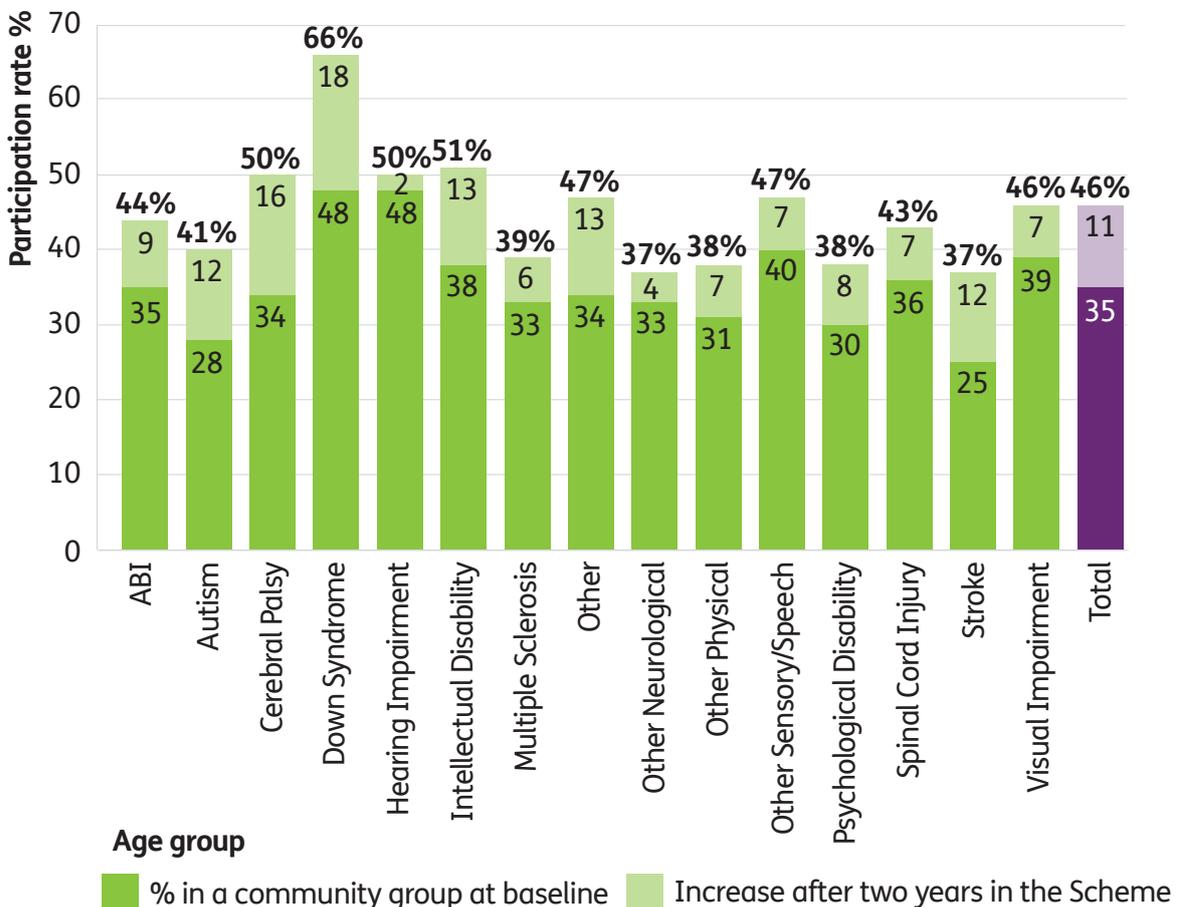
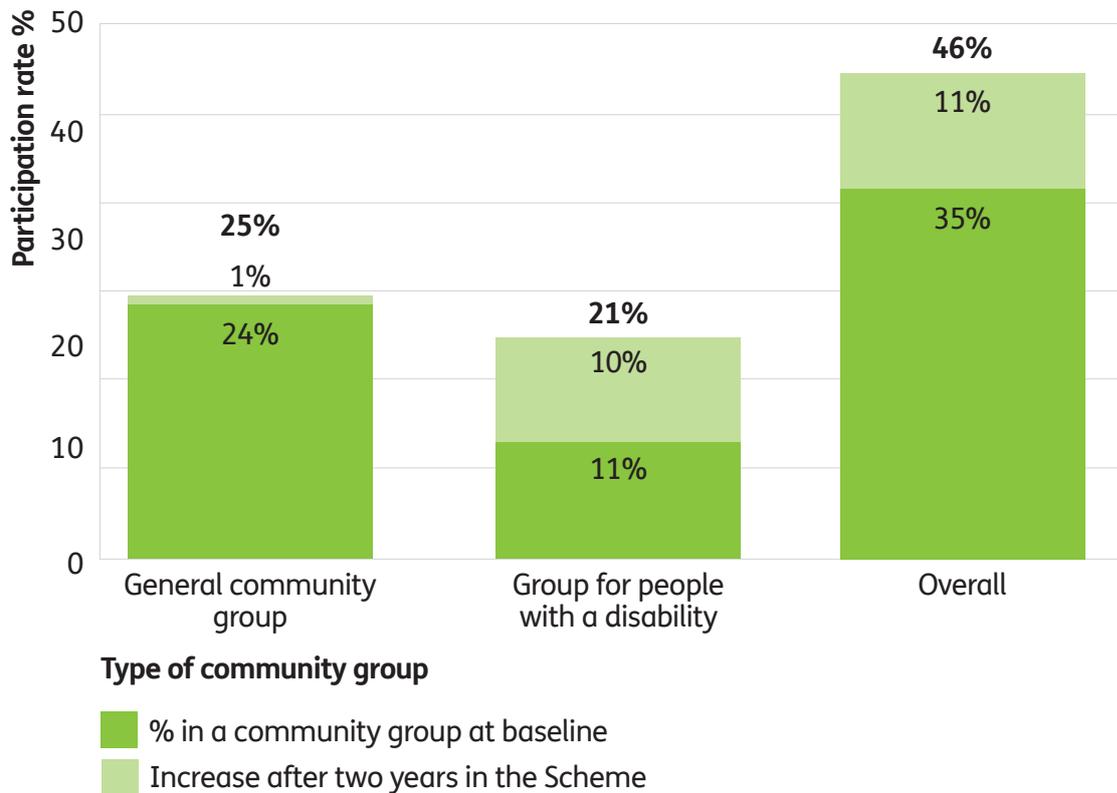


Figure 13: Participants involved in community and social activities, by type of community group



Some participants who were not participating in a community and social group at entry to the Scheme later joined such a group, however unfortunately others who were in a group when they entered the Scheme were not in a group two years later. Specifically:

- Of the participants in a group when they entered the Scheme, 85% remained in a group
- Of the participants not in a group when they entered the Scheme, 25% were in a group two years later.

Statistical analysis indicates that the key drivers of engaging in social participation are:

- Volunteering
- Having friends other than family or paid staff
- Being from a CALD background
- Having a paid job

2.2 Employment

The proportion of participants in employment remains static.

Figure 17 shows progress against the NDIA's corporate plan metrics for 'participants in work', for people who entered the Scheme between 1 July 2016 and 31 March 2017.

There was an eight percentage point increase in the number of participants aged 15 to 24 years old in work, from 13% baseline to 21% this quarter. For participants aged 25 years or over, the percentage fell by two percentage points from 25% to 23%. The average across both cohorts was also 23%, two percentage points higher than the baseline result. The target for the number of employed participants in both cohorts is 26% for 2018-19.

Figure 14: Participants in work compared with the 2018-19 Target (participants who entered the Scheme between 1 July 2016 and 31 March 2017)

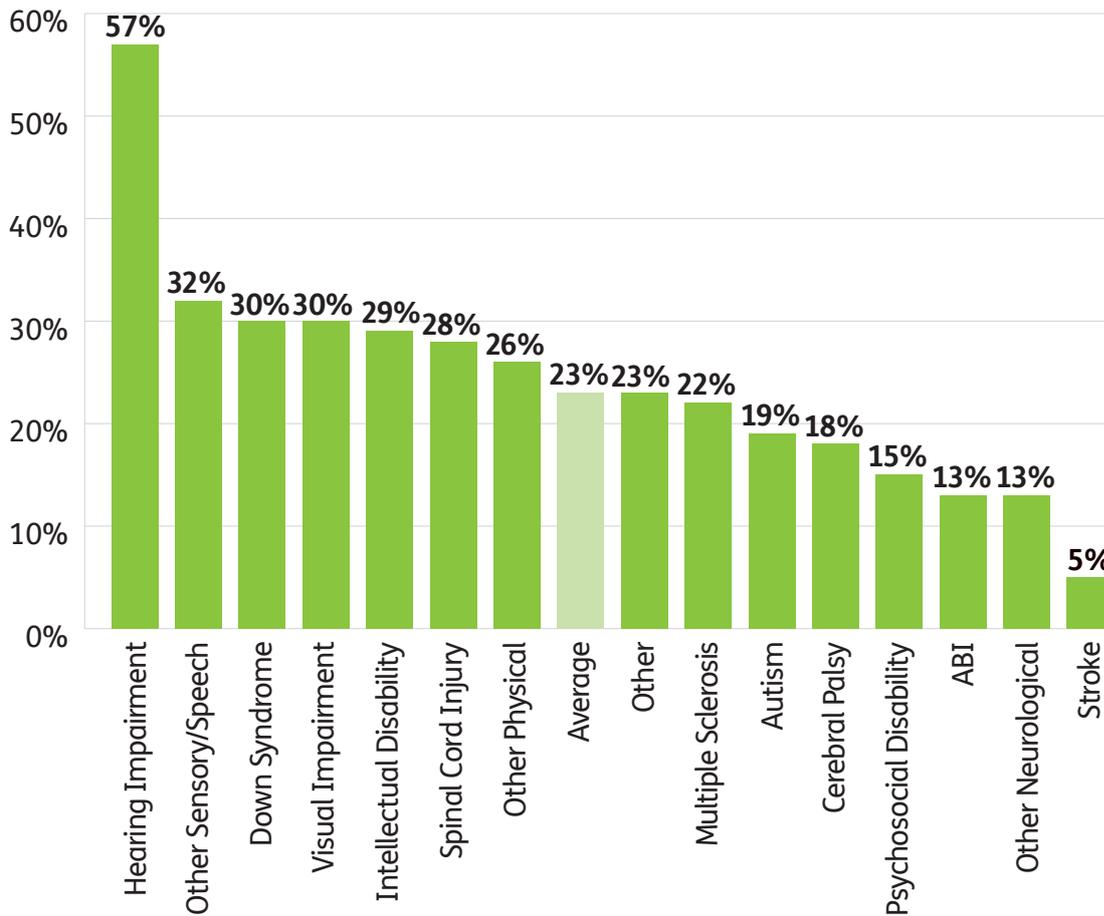
Participants in work	At Scheme entry Baseline ¹⁰	After two years in the Scheme	2018-19 Target
Aged 15 to 24 years	13%	21%	26%
Aged 25+	25%	23%	
Aged 15+ (average)	21%	23%	

There is a strong commitment from the Agency and the Department of Social Services to implement an employment strategy to improve job opportunities for people with disability (see page 54). The NDIA is acutely aware of the benefits employment brings to participants and the economy and has prioritised employment options in planning discussions.

¹⁰ Changes in baseline percentages between 2018-19 Q1, Q2 and Q3 are a result of new participants entering the Scheme in these quarters

The average employment rate for participants aged 15 or more by disability type is 23%. The highest employment rates occur in participants with a hearing impairment at 57%, and other sensory or speech disabilities at 32%. Participants with an acquired brain injury (ABI) and other neurological disabilities are among those least likely to be employed, with baseline employment levels at 13%. The lowest percentage of employment by disability type is at 5% for people who have had a stroke, explained in part by age

Figure 15: Employment rates of participants aged 15 years and over who entered the Scheme in 2016-17 and 2017-18, by disability type



2.3 Two-year analysis of participant outcomes

Analysis of participant outcomes over two years demonstrates the positive long-term impact of the NDIS.

To assess the longitudinal impact of the NDIS, participants who entered the Scheme in 2016-17 were asked 'Has the NDIS helped?' after one and two years in Scheme, allowing the NDIA to gain a better understanding of the longer-term impact of the Scheme.

Survey results for participants who entered the Scheme in Quarter 3 of 2016-17, and who have now been in the Scheme for two years, have built on the results of the previous two quarters. These results support the trend that outcomes are improving as participants spend more time in the Scheme.

From transition to 31 March 2019, for participants that have been in the Scheme for two years, the following outcomes have been recorded:

For children aged 0 to before starting school:

- **94%** of parents and carers thought the NDIS improved their child's development, compared to **91%** in their first year.
- **85%** of parents and carers thought the NDIS helped increase their child's ability to communicate what they want, compared to **82%** in their first year.

For children starting school to 14 years:

- **65%** of parents and carers felt their child had become more independent as a result of the NDIS in their second year of participation, compared to **56%** in their first year.
- **50%** of parents and carers felt the NDIS had improved their child's relationship with family and friends in their second year of participation, compared to **46%** in their first year.

For young adults aged 15 to 24 years:

- **66%** of participants said the NDIS had helped them with daily living activities in their second year of participation, compared to **59%** in their first year.
- **59%** of participants felt the NDIS had helped them improve their participation in community and social activities, compared to **56%** in their first year.

For adults aged 25 and over:

- **75%** of participants believed the NDIS helped them have more choice and more control over their lives in their second year of participation in the NDIS, compared to **68%** in their first year.
- **80%** of participants believed the NDIS helped them with daily living activities in their second year of participation, compared to **72%** in their first year.

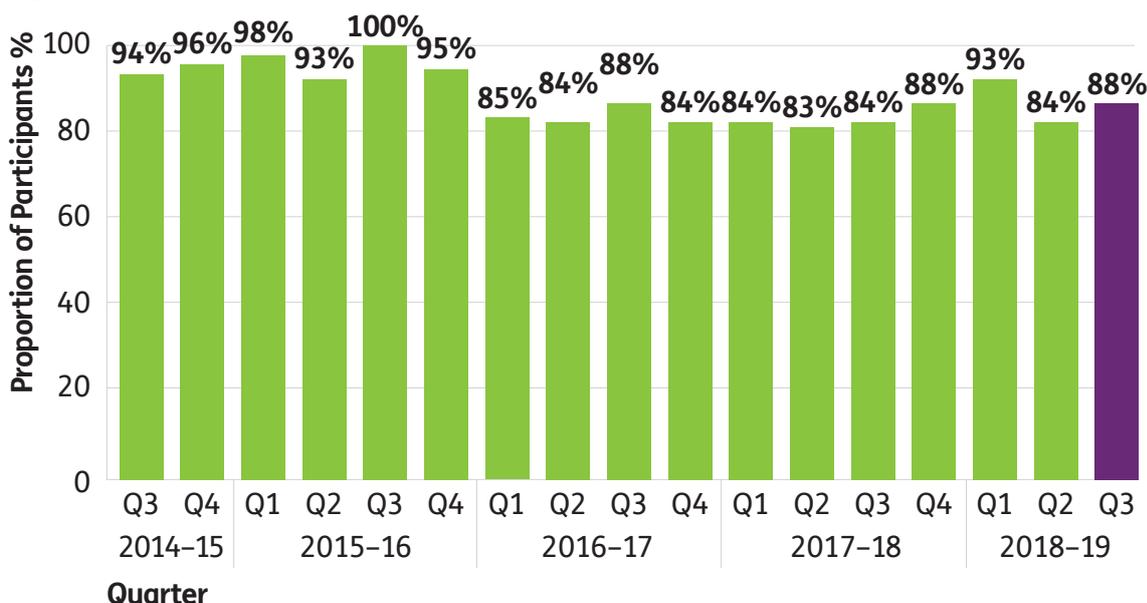
Apart from the above results, the analysis indicates that there are areas for improvement in the outcomes for participants. Only 17% of participants aged 15 to 24 and 19% of participants aged 25 and over felt involvement in the NDIS had helped them to find a job that was right for them, compared to 19% and 20% respectively in their first year. Employment outcomes for participants have been prioritised within the NDIA and a Participant Employment Taskforce (see page 54) has been established to help address some of the challenges facing people with disability who are seeking and maintaining employment.

2.4 Participant satisfaction

Participant satisfaction remains high with improvements this quarter compared with the previous quarter.

Plan development is a key milestone on the participant pathway. To better understand the impact of the NDIS on participants and their families and carers, the Agency conducts satisfaction surveys during the planning process each quarter. This quarter, 88% of participants rated their overall experience with the NDIS planning process as either ‘Very good’ or ‘Good’. This was an improvement on the last quarter’s satisfaction rate of 84%.

Figure 16: Historical satisfaction rates



Of the participants surveyed this quarter, 94% felt their planner listened to them, 91% considered that they had enough time to tell their story, and 92% reported their planning meeting to have gone well.

Figure 17: Participant satisfaction in 2018-19 Q3¹¹

	Agree/ Strongly agree	Neutral	Disagree/ Strongly disagree
The planner listened to me	94%	3%	3%
I had enough time to tell my story and say what support I need	91%	5%	4%
The planner knows what I can do well	80%	14%	6%
The planner had some good ideas for my plan	84%	11%	5%
I know what is in my plan	81%	11%	8%
The planner helped me think about my future	75%	16%	10%
I think my plan will make my life better	84%	10%	6%
The planning meeting went well	92%	5%	3%

¹¹ Survey results were collected from 674 randomly selected participants. This sample size meets the required level of precision for estimating satisfaction at a 95% confidence level.

2.4.1 New participant satisfaction survey

New survey is providing a comprehensive view of participant experience.

Since September 2018 the Agency has been testing and refining a new participant satisfaction survey that allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the participant experience. It gathers responses at the four primary stages of the participant pathway – access, pre-planning, planning and plan review – whereas the original survey gathers responses at the planning stage only.

The new survey caters to analysis of the experience of different participant groups - for example for differences in age and disability. By gaining greater insight into varying experiences at different stages of the NDIS process, the NDIA will be better positioned to make meaningful and specific improvements to the participant pathway.

A new online version of the survey was launched at the end of the quarter, to complement the existing phone surveys. The online version asks the same questions as the phone survey. Participants receive an SMS or email message asking them to log into the myplace participant portal to complete the survey. Responses are private, and any identifying data is removed.

Comparing previous quarter (2018-19 Q2) with the current quarter (2018-19 Q3) indicates improvement in satisfaction, particularly in understanding the next stages in the process¹²:

Stage One: Access

- **94%** of respondents believed their NDIS contact to be respectful this quarter compared with **94%** in the previous quarter.
- **77%** of respondents were happy with the process by which they entered the NDIS this quarter compared with **75%** last quarter.
- **71%** of respondents understood the next stage in their NDIS process this quarter compared with **64%** last quarter.

Stage Two: Pre-planning

- **96%** of respondents understood what information they had to provide to prepare for pre-planning this quarter compared with **94%** last quarter.
- **87%** of respondents believed their NDIS contact understood how disability impacts their life compared with **85%** last quarter.
- **75%** of respondents understood the next stage in their NDIS process this quarter compared with **70%** last quarter.

Stage Three: Planning

- **96%** of respondents understood what information they had to provide for their plan this quarter compared with **95%** last quarter.
- **86%** of respondents believed their NDIS contact understood how disability impacts their life this quarter which was consistent with last quarter.
- **75%** of respondents understood the next stage in their NDIS process this quarter compared with **73%**

Stage Four: Plan Review

- **83%** of respondents felt prepared for their plan review meeting this quarter compared with **79%** last quarter.
- **81%** of respondents believed their NDIS contact understood how disability impacts their life this quarter compared with **78%** last quarter.
- **85%** of respondents believed their NDIS plan was helping them progress with their goals this quarter compared with **84%** last quarter.

¹² Survey results were collected from 6,269 randomly selected participants made up of 1,542 participants at access, 1,529 at pre-planning, 1,678 at planning, and 1,520 at plan review. The number of respondents at each of the four stages of the participant pathway were sufficient to meet the required level of precision for estimating satisfaction at a 95% confidence level.

The results show an overall improvement in satisfaction across the four stages.

Participants have responded with high levels of satisfaction for understanding what they need to prepare for pre-planning (96%) and what information they need to provide for their plan (96%).

Respondents found NDIA contacts and planners to be respectful (94% of Access respondents) and understanding of how their disability impacts their life (87% of pre-planning respondents and 86% of Planning respondents).

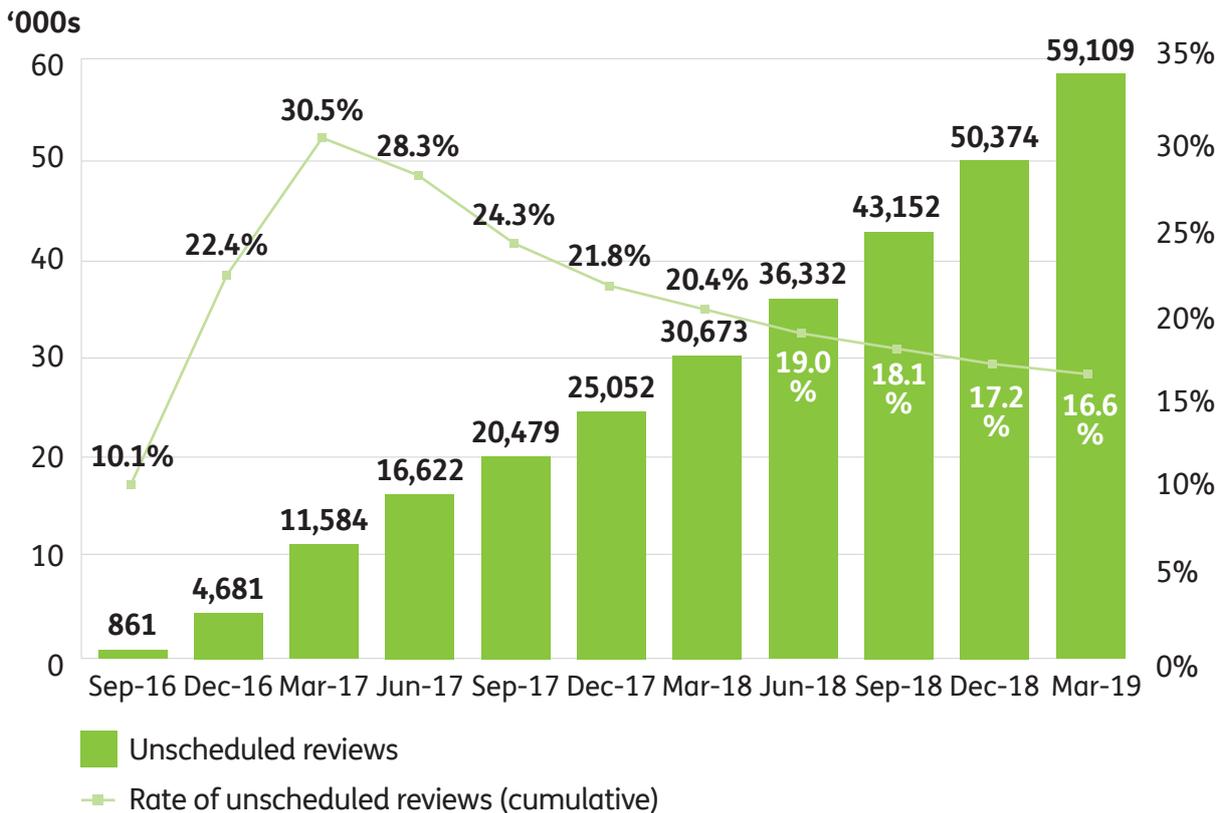
While there is still work to do, there has been a large improvement in the proportion of participants who understand the next stage of the process. Seventy-one percent (71%) of participants understood the next step after access compared with 64% in the previous quarter, and 75% understood what was next after pre-planning compared with 70% in the previous quarter.

2.5 Unscheduled plan reviews

The rate of unscheduled plan reviews continues to decrease.

The rate of unscheduled plan reviews has fallen for the eighth quarter in succession, indicating improvements in satisfaction with final plans.

Figure 18: Cumulative number and proportion of unscheduled plan reviews over time



2.6 Plan activations

Plan activation rates increase.

Plan activation refers to the amount of time between a participant's initial plan being approved, and the date the participant first receives support from a provider.

Seventy percent (70%) of plans were activated within 30 days during the quarter, and 86% of plans were activated within 90 days. The number of days for plan activation improved slightly in the first quarter of 2018-19, with a one percentage point increase in durations of less than 30 days and a one percentage point reduction in durations of less than 90 days compared with previous quarters. There was a fall in the number of participants activating their plans after more than 90 days, but an increase in the number who had not commenced receiving support. There is a lag between when support is provided and when payment is made – hence, these figures under-estimate the number of participants who activated their plans.

Figure 19: Duration to plan activation by quarter of initial plan approval for active participants^{13,14}

Plan activation	Prior Quarters (Transition Only)		2018-19 Q1	
	N	%	N	%
Less than 30 days	97,580	69%	18,045	70%
30 to 59 days	16,273	11%	2,964	11%
60 to 89 days	7,828	6%	1,236	5%
Activated within 90 days	121,681	86%	22,245	86%
90 to 119 days	4,521	3%	665	3%
120 days and over	11,059	8%	949	4%
Activated after 90 days	15,580	11%	1,614	6%
No payments	4,753	3%	1,926	7%
Total plans approved	142,014	100%	25,785	100%

The proportion of active participants with plans activated within 12 months is consistent at 94% to 95% across disability groups. The proportion is also 95% for CALD participants, and participants residing in major cities and regional centres, but slightly lower at 90% for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants and 88% for participants living in remote areas.

¹³ Plans approved after the end of 2018-19 Q1 have been excluded from the table. They are relatively new and it is too early to examine their durations to activation.

¹⁴ Activations include payments for in-kind supports.

2.7 Plan utilisation

Utilisation increases the longer participants have been in the Scheme, and is higher for participants in supported independent living, and for those living in major cities.

The extent to which utilisation differs between groups of participants (e.g. age group), and types of supports in different geographies, provides insight into where markets are thin and also where there are opportunities for providers to expand their support offering.

The most significant drivers of utilisation are length of time in the Scheme (the longer a participant has been in the Scheme the higher the utilisation – Figure 20), and whether or not the participant is in Supported Independent Living – Figure 21.

Figure 20: Utilisation of supports by plan number¹⁵

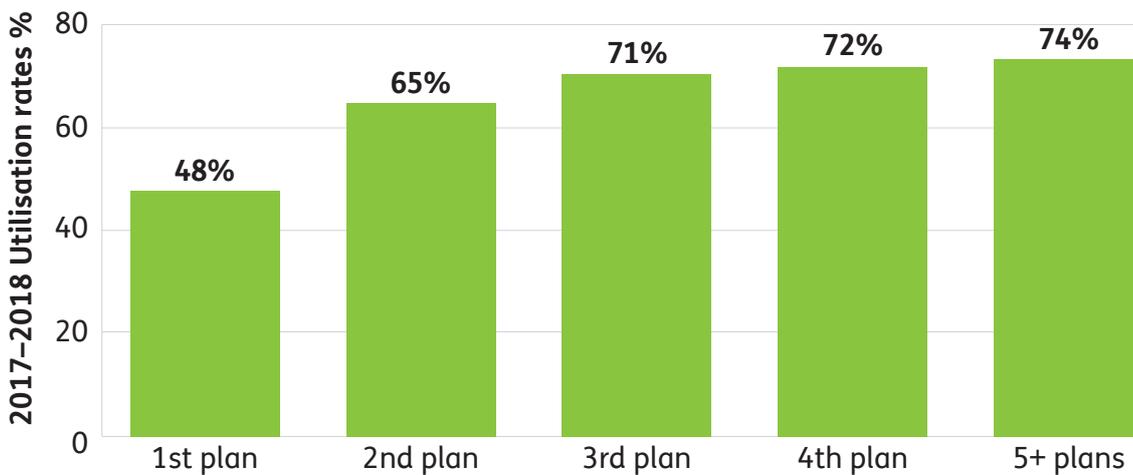
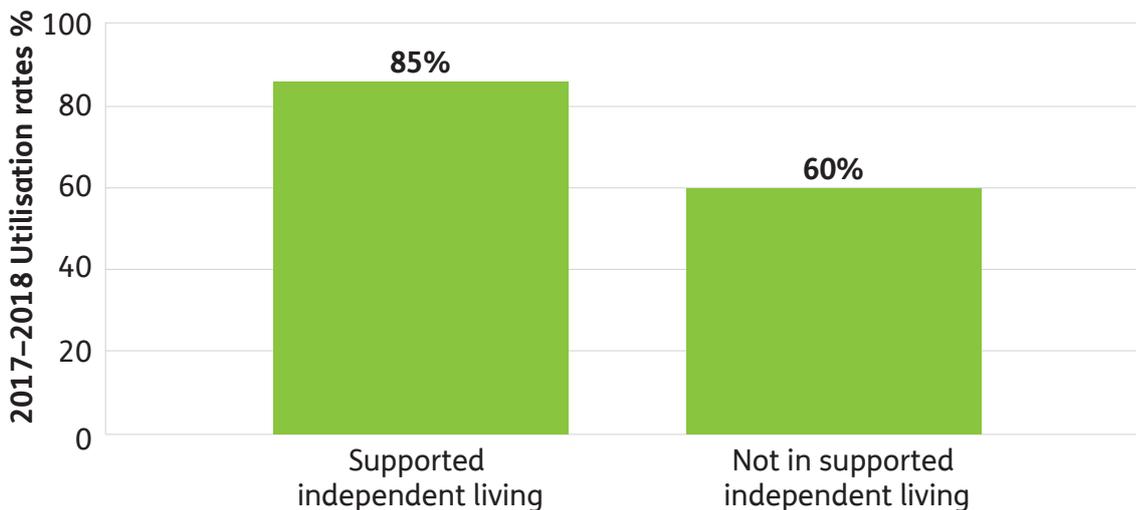


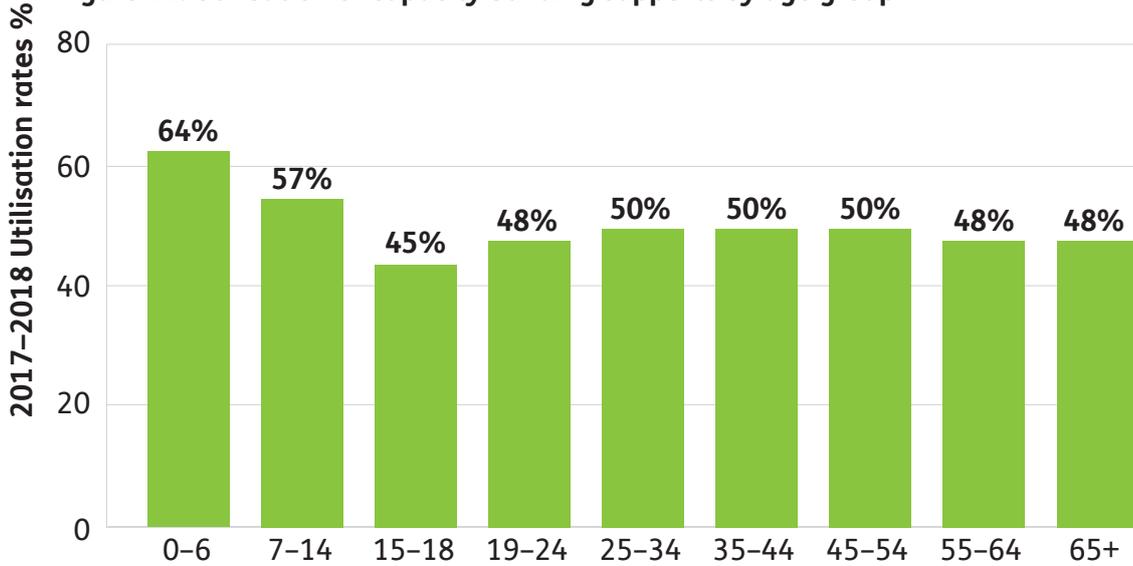
Figure 21: Utilisation of supports for participants with and without SIL



In addition, capacity building supports are less utilised than core support for participants with a second or later plan who do not have SIL. This is more evident for participants aged 15 and over (Figure 22). Capacity building supports for daily living are under-utilised. These supports are intended to build a participant’s independence, which reduces the need for core support.

¹⁵ Plans are generally for one year periods, but may be of shorter or longer duration depending on individual circumstances.

Figure 22: Utilisation of capacity building supports by age group



Age group

Lastly, a key driver of utilisation is location – with participants in less populated locations, including remote and very remote communities, having lower utilisation than participants in major cities and regional locations (Fig 24). This is driven by both core supports (non-SIL) and capacity building supports across all age groups (Fig 25). Capacity building supports for employment are particularly under-utilised in very remote areas.

Figure 23: Map of Australia depicting remote locations with participants in the scheme as at 31 March 2019 – Utilisation of a percentage total committed

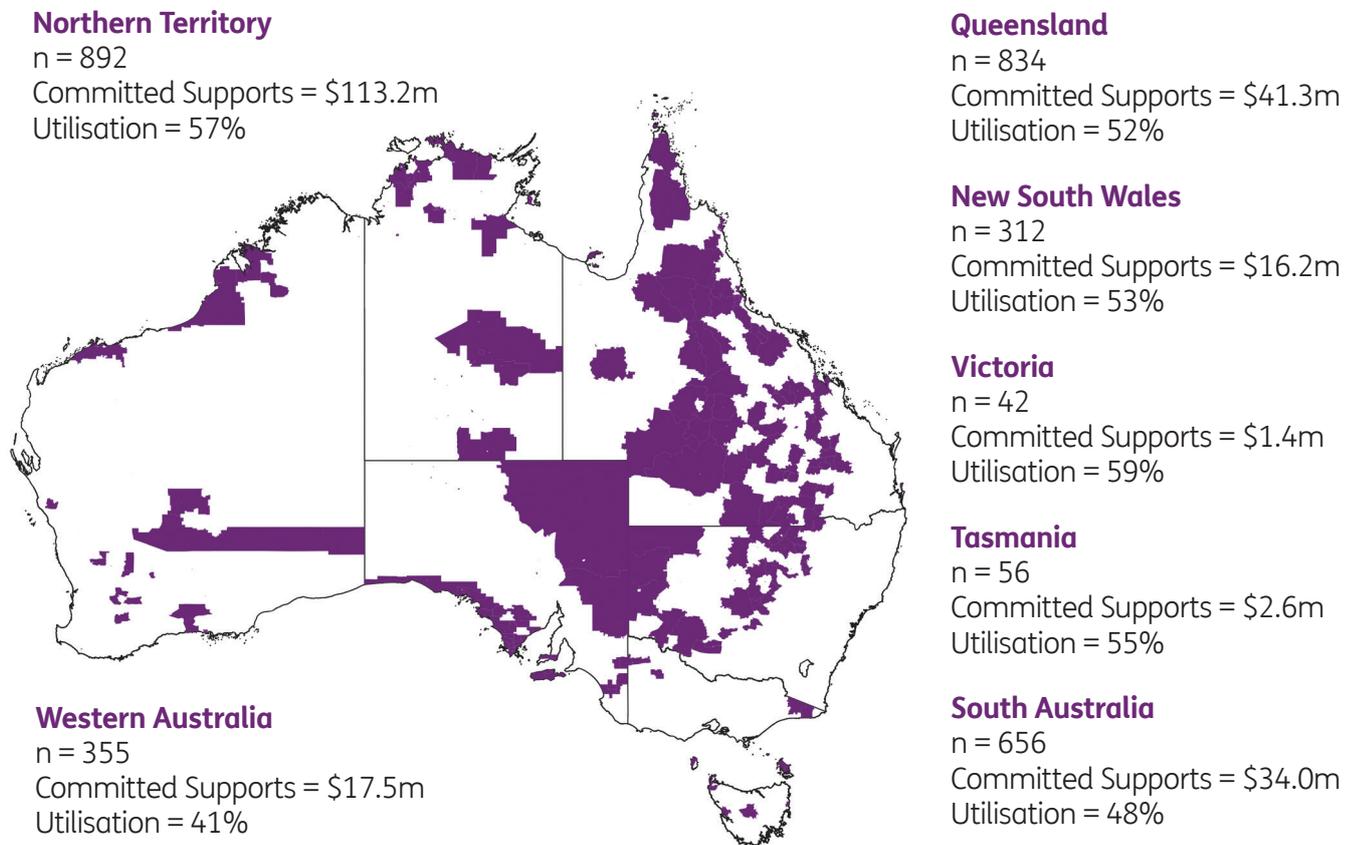


Figure 24: Utilisation of supports by location¹⁶

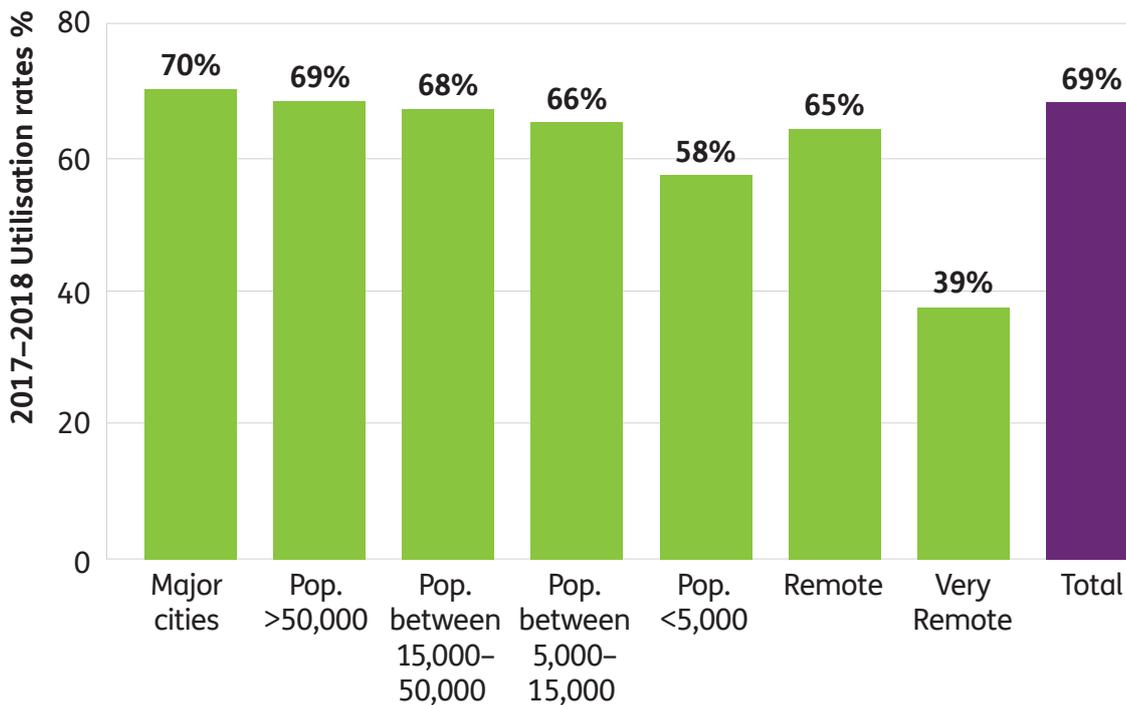
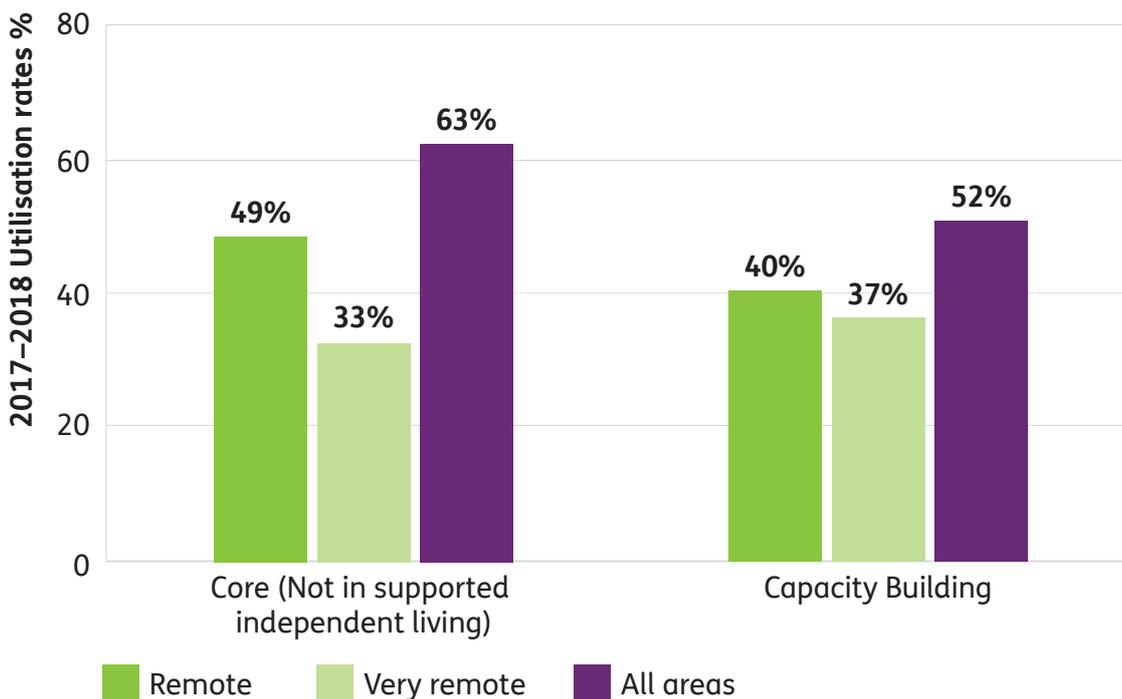


Figure 25: Utilisation by support type in remote and very remote locations



Overall, there are market opportunities for providers to assist in increasing participant capacity to improve independence and also reduce the need for core support. There are additional opportunities in remote and very remote areas for core and capacity building supports.

¹⁶ Classified according to the Modified Monash Model, which categorises metropolitan, regional, rural and remote areas according to geographical remoteness and town size.

2.8 Actions to improve participant experience

The NDIA makes improvements across different areas of the participant pathway to improve experience and outcomes for participants.

2.8.1 Participant Pathway

New specialised pathways are being rolled-out progressively across the country.

Based on extensive consultation with participants, families, carers, providers and sector representatives, the NDIA has continued to make significant improvements to the participant pathway. Changes have focused on embedding a more individualised approach with participants, and an emphasis on clearer communication to better support people with disability to achieve their goals. The changes include.

- Three pathways for tailoring approaches around the needs of the NDIS participant, including complex support needs and Early Childhood Early Intervention pathways;
- Two service streams for psychosocial disability and hearing, to deliver targeted support to provide participants with an experience more suited to their specific disability needs; and
- Four service enhancements to meet the communication and engagement needs of people from different backgrounds or areas, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, culturally and linguistically diverse people, remote and very remote communities, and people who identify as LGBTIQ+.
- In response to participant feedback, a key improvement being rolled out is changes to the participant plan format, which now provides participants with a single point of contact. This contact is listed in each participant's plan document and in the myplace participant portal.

The **Complex Support Needs Pathway** is providing specialised support for people with disability that experience extraordinary complex support needs, and who have a greater need for coordination of multiple services. This may include voluntary or involuntary involvement in other government service systems (such as justice systems, child protection, and/or mental health programs) and transitional supports for returning to the community, for example, exiting incarceration or an acute rehabilitation environment.

In March 2019, the complex support needs pathway began expanding to all States and Territories, with ninety planners who have human service qualifications and/or extensive expertise in complex case coordination being transferred to the Complex Support Needs (CSN) Branch. These planners are supporting complex participants to easily access the Scheme and are closely monitoring their plans, including how the plans link to other mainstream services. Skilled support co-ordinators are also being connected to these participants to further assist with implementing plans and helping participants achieve their goals.

During the March 2019 quarter 305 children benefited from streamlined access to early intervention supports, through a stream developed in 2018 for **children aged 0 to 6 with newly diagnosed hearing loss**. The NDIA is now working on developing further hearing streams for participants aged 7 to 64, and has commenced consultation with key external stakeholders in the deaf community to provide input across key life transition points.

In addition, work is underway to transition eligible clients within the Commonwealth's Hearing Services Program (HSP) to the NDIS. This commenced in partnership with Australian Hearing at the beginning of March 2019. All eligible clients will transition by the end of June 2020.

The NDIA acknowledges that delays are occurring for children aged from 0 to 6 in accessing supports through the **Early Childhood Early Intervention program**. The reasons include the rapidity of the roll-out in some jurisdictions, where large numbers of files may be transferred on a single day, creating additional delays for new participants.

The NDIA is working expeditiously to reduce the wait times for children and to ensure that early intervention supports are provided as quickly as possible. This includes working with groups such as the Autism Advisory Group.

There is a continuing focus on **improving supports for people with psychosocial disability**. During the quarter foundational training was extended from the initial states of South Australia and Tasmania to include Victoria, Queensland, Western Australia, the Australian Capital Territory, and the Northern Territory. The training is designed to increase the skills of the workforce to better understand psychosocial disability. Its national rollout is expected to be completed by June 2019, and all new NDIA service delivery staff and Local Area Coordinators (LACs) will receive this training as part of their standard induction training.

Streamlined access for participants from Commonwealth psychosocial programs is available in all areas. Streamlined access for participants from State or Territory programs commenced in South Australia and Tasmania in November 2018, and in April 2019 the NDIA will finalise the timing for the remaining States/Territories. The NDIA has received positive feedback from mental health service providers in relation to improvements to the Streamlined Access process in South Australia and Tasmania. Service providers have also indicated improvements with consistency and responses from call centre staff when supporting clients to access the NDIS through Streamlined Access process.

The NDIA has produced 10 new resources on Access available to staff and providers. The NDIA has also held a series of Mental Health workshops in Tasmania and South Australia during February and March to health services and providers.

The NDIA continues to build staff skills and competencies, to improve the NDIS experience for participants from diverse backgrounds. This includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, people from culturally and linguistically diverse groups, people living in remote or very remote communities, and participants identifying as LGBTIQ+. This is being achieved through:

- preparations for the implementation of service enhancements to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in WA (Pilbara and surrounding communities);
- a new eLearning module “Contemporary Disability Rights” and a disability navigator for NDIA staff and partners—an online portal providing access to a suite of disability awareness resources which was released in February 2019; and
- a cultural awareness online training module, Celebrating Diversity: LGBTIQ+ Inclusion which was released to all NDIA employees in February 2019.

2.8.2 Independent Assessment Pilot (IAP)

High levels of participant engagement to support the NDIA's aim for greater consistency and reliability in access and planning decisions.

The IAP launched in November 2018 to better understand and assess the impact of disability for people accessing the NDIS. It aims to improve consistency, accuracy and reliability in access and planning decisions. People with autism spectrum disorder, intellectual disability and psychosocial disability, have been invited to join this voluntary pilot, to undertake a functional assessment with an independent assessor using standardised assessment tools.

The level of engagement from participants has been very positive, with 73% of those invited to join the pilot taking part and expressing high levels of satisfaction with the process (93% were “satisfied” or “very satisfied”). The pilot is on track to reach a target number of participants before closing at the end of April 2019. The NDIA will then conduct a detailed evaluation of its results.

2.8.3 Assistive Technology

Since February 2019, participants who require replacement of their existing AT (valued between \$1,500 and \$15,000) that is not repairable or has reached the end of its service life, may have funding included in their plan without the need for reassessment. Repairs and maintenance to AT, including the addition of an annualised amount can be included in a participant's NDIS plan

Further, as expenditure under \$1,500 no longer requires a quote, the wait times that have been experienced should reduce.

2.8.4 Hospital Discharge

The NDIA has been working in collaboration with South Australia Health to develop a Hospital Discharge Framework. The Framework aims to improve outcomes for patients / NDIS participants, with a timely and supportive experience of transitioning from hospital to community in a safe and timely way and with the supports that they need.

The Framework is guided by the premise that Health and the NDIS are centred on the needs of participants, and it acknowledges the important role that families and other informal supports play in the lives of participants, alongside community and mainstream services, and the NDIS.

The Framework will be tested and evaluated in a six month pilot commencing on 1 April 2019, with the intent to implement a nationally consistent approach for hospital discharge in all jurisdictions. The Framework includes scope, roles and responsibilities, improved processes, and key performance indicators focused on improving timeliness and minimising delays in the discharge process.



Six year old Emma was born with a hearing impairment and several other health complications. She initially struggled with verbal communication and shed a lot of tears when she couldn't express herself.

“Since the NDIS we have noticed big changes in Emma’s speech – she is able to chat with her friends and classmates and it’s just phenomenal” says Emma’s mum Jenny.

Part Three: Providers and the growing market

More providers are registered to provide supports and work is underway to encourage innovation.

3.1 Growth and diversity of providers

The provider network grows, increasing participants' capacity to exercise choice and control.

Access to a growing, vibrant and competitive provider market is vital to participants achieving their goals. At 31 March 2019, there were a total of 20,208 registered providers, representing 6% market growth on last quarter. Of the total number of providers, 57% (or 11,418) were active at 31 March 2019.

An active provider is an individual or organisation that has been registered with the NDIS and is offering services to participants. An inactive provider is an individual or organisation who has registered with the NDIS, but is not currently offering services to participants.

The jurisdictions that experienced the highest level of growth in active providers were Queensland with a 22% increase, and Western Australia with a 17% increase.

The largest registration groups in the NDIS, including both active and inactive providers, which experienced growth this quarter were:

- **Therapeutic supports** from 8,993 to 9,636 (7% increase)
- **Household tasks** from 5,283 to 5,883 (11% increase)
- **Assistance with travel/transport arrangements** from 3,912 to 4,334 (11% increase)
- **Innovative Community Participation** from 2,925 to 3,328 (14% increase)
- **Early Intervention supports for early childhood** from 2,997 to 3,151 (5% increase)

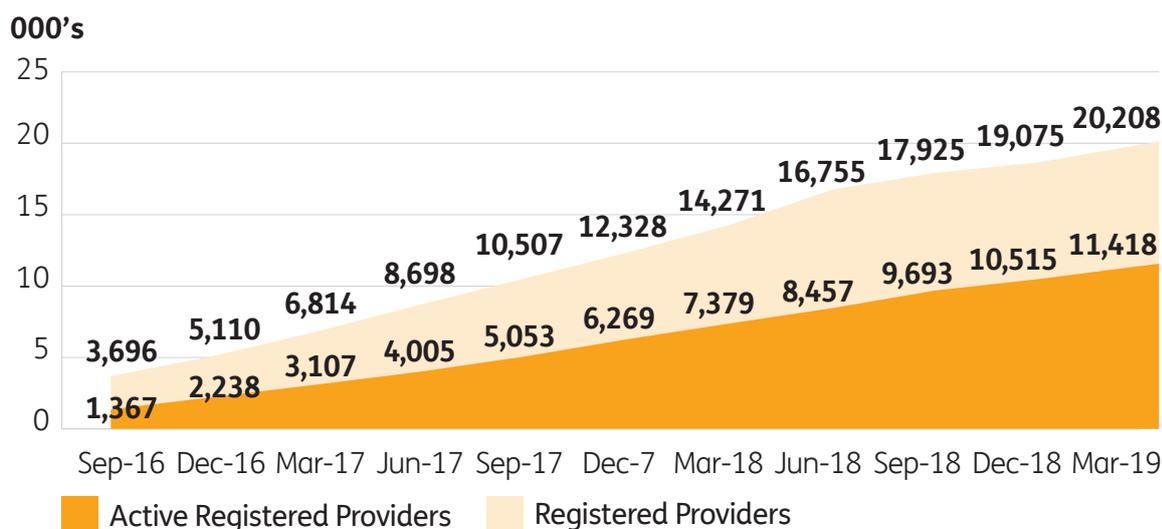
Of the total number of registered providers, 45% are individual / sole traders and 55% are organisations/companies.

The highest level of growth in **active** providers was demonstrated in the following registration groups:

- **Specialist Disability Accommodation** from 118 to 140 (19% increase)
- **Innovative Community Participation** from 314 to 361 (15% increase)
- **Exercise Physiology and Physical Wellbeing activities** from 653 to 743 (14% increase)

Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) is a fast growing and significant provider registration group. There are currently 12,356 participants with SDA in their plan, representing an increase of 13% since last quarter.

Figure 26: Growth in registered providers



The NDIA recognises the integral role a safe and competitive provider market plays in the success of the Scheme.

The NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission, launched on 1 July 2019, continues to manage provider registrations in New South Wales and South Australia, and will commence operations in all other States and Territories by July 2020.

3.2 New NDIS Demand Tool

Helping providers grow in the NDIS.

In a separate initiative, during the March 2019 quarter a new NDIS demand forecast tool was released by the Department of Social Services. The NDIS Demand Map is designed to help providers grow in the NDIS. It includes forecasts of the NDIS demand by postcode across Australia, including how many NDIS participants are expected to live in a postcode, how much participants are expected to spend and on what types of support, and how many workers may be required.¹⁷

3.3 Innovative approaches to services and supports

Increasing opportunities for participant choice.

The NDIA is developing a strategy to encourage growth of new and better services across Australia, which will increase opportunities for participant choice. The strategy will identify contemporary and innovative approaches to supports and services that build participant capacity, seek to increase independence, and encourage social inclusion.

Contemporary approaches already exist either locally or internationally and have clear evidence to demonstrate improved outcomes for people with disability.

Innovation, or innovative support models, are novel approaches likely to have high demand across Australia. They can be evaluated to demonstrate how participants will be enabled to achieve their goals and improve their outcomes even further.

¹⁷ A beta version of the Demand Map is located at <https://blcw.dss.gov.au/ndis-demand-map/>

The strategy will outline the NDIA's vision for an innovative marketplace with informed participants and families, and how the NDIA plans to achieve this vision. The NDIA will consult with a range of stakeholders including participants, providers and industry leaders, ahead of releasing the strategy later in the year.

3.4 NDIS Pricing

Changes made to the NDIS Price Guide improve maximum prices available in the market.

The NDIA is acutely aware of its role as market steward and the need to set prices that encourage market development, particularly in thin markets.

Supplementing the work of the Independent Pricing Review, which is currently being implemented, and the Western Australia Market Review, the NDIA has undertaken extensive consultation on therapy prices and pricing for attendant care. That work, initiated and promoted by the NDIA, has been rigorous and fact-based, using extensive data not previously available to the Independent Pricing Review.

As a consequence, it was announced towards the end of the quarter that from 1 July 2019 significant price increases will be made for both therapy and attendant care.

More specifically in the case of therapy supports, in New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory, differential prices were set for psychology supports versus other types of therapy, with increases of 17% and 6% respectively. In addition, for South Australia, Western Australia, Tasmania and the Northern Territory, differential prices were set for psychology, physiotherapy and other therapies, with increases of 28%, 23% and 6% respectively.

In relation to attendant care, increases of between 5.6% and 15.4% to the base price for attendant care, depending on location, times and days of shifts, and skill level will be available from 1 July 2019. In addition, a Temporary Transformation Payment of 7.5% will also be made to providers, reducing by 1.5% each year over 5 years. This conditional loading will assist providers continue to transform their businesses as the market evolves.

Overall, the increases will help ensure the availability of supply in the attendant care and therapy markets, thereby assisting participants to achieve their goals.

3.5 Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA)

SDA is a fast growing and significant provider registration group that experienced a 19% growth in the quarter (118 to 140) for active SDA providers. This coincided with the number of participants with SDA in their plan increasing by 13%. During the quarter an additional 746 places in SDA properties became available to NDIS participants.

On 8 February 2019 the Minister and Assistant Minister announced a package of reforms to SDA, following a review of the SDA Pricing and Payments Framework by the Disability Reform Council (DRC) in 2018.

The changes announced include a revised SDA Pricing and Payments Framework and revised SDA Rules, to:

- Recognise the centrality of choice and control in SDA for eligible participants
- Provide greater visibility and certainty to investors regarding pricing
- Embed a requirement for the NDIA to provide quarterly updates on SDA data
- Embed the establishment of an SDA Reference Group by the NDIA
- Remove the requirement for participants to exhaust all other options before they can have their eligibility for SDA considered
- Enable the NDIA to provide SDA funding in a plan even if a dwelling is not available or soon to be available.

Since the announcement the NDIA has:

- Published an updated 2018-19 SDA Price Guide which includes the final SDA pricing assumptions, adjusts SDA prices for the 2018-19 financial year using CPI, and confirms that CPI will be used to adjust prices going forward
- Internally launched the SDA Panel, an improved process for determining SDA eligibility that was initially trialled last year. Starting from February 2019, all new SDA eligibility decisions are now referred to an internal panel of experts for consideration. The SDA Panel is already leading to more consistent and timely SDA decisions as it assists to implement the recently revised SDA Rules.
- Published updated SDA data in its reports to COAG (including this report). The data provided expands on that provided last quarter and now includes more information on the distribution of demand, and improved detail on enrolled dwellings. The NDIA will continue to expand and update SDA data in future reports.
- Announced the establishment of the SDA Reference Group. The NDIA has appointed members who represent the variety of SDA stakeholders through an open expression of interest process. The first meeting was held in March 2019.
- The NDIA will continue improving SDA in 2019, with plans underway to:
 - Launch a new third party dwelling certification program to increase the surety of providers that their dwellings comply. The certification process will allow providers to have their dwellings certified at the design phase.
 - Announce an SDA Innovation Plan that will detail the actions the NDIA will take to encourage more innovation in SDA and accommodation and support models.



Kenny Dhurrkay is from Milingimbi Island which is part of the Crocodile Island Group in the Arafura Sea.

It is approximately half a kilometre off the north coast of Central Arnhem Land, 440 km east of Darwin and 200 km West of Nhulunbuy. This is the first ever scooter in Milingimbi. It will allow Kenny, who has demyelination syndrome, to have greater community access and participation.

Part Four: Information, Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC)

New ILC grant rounds increase the capacity of Australian organisations to support people with disability.

4.1 Building inclusive communities

New Economic Participation grants announced to boost employment opportunities for people with disability.

The NDIA introduced the 'ILC Strategy Towards 2022' in December 2018, which will guide investment of almost \$400 million in ILC funds from 2019-20 to 2021-22.

ILC provides grants to organisations to carry out activities in the community. Activities that are funded seek to create connections between people with disability and the communities in which they live, encouraging inclusion and participation and promoting a diverse Australian society. The outcome sought through these activities is that people with disability, their families and carers actively contribute to leading, shaping and influencing their community. In doing so ILC seeks to ensure that people with disability, their families and carers:

- Have the knowledge, skills and confidence to participate and contribute to the community
- Are connected and have the information they need to make choices and decisions
- Use and benefit from the same mainstream services as everyone else
- Use and benefit from the same community activities as everyone else

To date, the NDIA has allocated 222 grants totalling \$85.9 million (excluding GST) to organisations across Australia to deliver a wide range of ILC initiatives.

In addition to this, the NDIA has recently announced that 114 Disabled Peoples Organisations and Families Organisations (DPFOs) will share in \$13.8 million in grants, including 13 organisations led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) or LGBTI communities, which will benefit from \$1.6 million in grants.

The DPFO grant round will lay the foundations for a stronger DPFO sector, building the overall capacity of user led disability organisations to better support, connect and foster the capacity of people with disability in the community.

The **ILC Economic Participation of People with Disability** grant round 2019-20 opened on 15 February 2019. Working with the NDIS Participant Employment Taskforce, the goal of the Economic Participation of People with Disability grant round is to build the capacity of businesses and organisations to employ people with disability through community engagement, improved resources and training.



For Elizabeth, getting a job was always going to happen,” says Elizabeth Frost’s mother Kim.

With no funded support when she left school, Elizabeth found the transition from school to employment challenging.

As an NDIS participant since 2017, and funding to support her goals and everyday needs, Elizabeth has one-to-one support to assist her to learn how to cook, perform household tasks, and access the community.

She now works as part of the team in the kindergarten room at JAC’s Learning World, employed with the same entitlements as the other child care assistants. Elizabeth is more independent, with a strong friendship group, and a network of colleagues and extended family.

Part Five: Financial sustainability

A financially sustainable Scheme focuses on outcomes that will support participants now and across their lifetime.

5.1 Delivering within budget

The NDIS remains within budget.

The NDIS has been within budget each year of its operation. The NDIS remains within budget in the third quarter of 2018-19 and is projected to remain within budget for the whole financial year.

After almost three years into the full scheme roll out of the NDIS, States and Territories have entered the Scheme on time and according to schedule together with a large number of new participants who have not received funding before. Despite this, the number of participants currently entering the Scheme is lower than the bilaterally agreed estimates of participants for transition to full scheme.

The transition bilateral estimates across the States and Territories is approximately 377,000 at 30 June 2019, compared with 287,000 actionable records received by the NDIA. An actionable record relates to a person who could be contacted, who met the access requirements and whose records were provided to the NDIA. The difference of 90,000 between bilateral estimates and actionable records includes duplicates, deceased individuals, or information that did not allow the NDIA to identify or contact individuals¹⁸.

In 2017-18, \$7.7 billion was committed in plan supports, with \$5.3 billion paid. This represents a utilisation rate of 69% and reflects the increased proportion of first plans approved in the year (see page 38).

As participants grow in confidence their use of NDIS plan funding increases. Experience shows that participants on average use 48 per cent of their funding in their first plan, which increases to 72 per cent by their fourth plan. This is to be expected in such a large-scale shift from block funding to a system centered on participant choice and control. The difference between committed and paid supports will narrow as the Scheme matures and participants utilise more of their plan supports.

Figure 27: Committed supports (\$m) and payments¹⁹

	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19 Q1-Q3	Total
Total Committed	132.8	496.9	939.4	3,236.1	7,719.6	10,101.3	22,626.1
Total Paid	85.8	370.9	704.0	2,179.1	5,345.4	6,195.4	14,880.5
% utilised to date	65%	75%	75%	67%	69%		66% ¹⁵

¹⁸ Approximately 9,000 additional records were received between 31 December 2018 and 31 January 2019. The number of actionable records reported in Senate Estimates by the NDIA CEO Mr Rob De Luca was 278,000.

¹⁹ Only committed supports expected to be used by 31 March 2019 have been used to calculate the utilisation from 1 July 2013 to date, and this will increase as there is a lag between when support is provided and when it is paid.

5.2 Addressing Scheme pressures

Pressures on the NDIS have been identified and are being responsibly managed.

The primary drivers of costs to the NDIS include the number of participants, the amount of support allocated to each plan, how that allocated amount will change over time, the utilisation of individual supports, and the rate at which participants exit the Scheme. It is the responsibility of the NDIA to monitor primary pressures, detect any associated risks and manage them appropriately, using the insurance-based structure as a means to evaluate emerging experience against expectations.

The current primary financial pressures relate to:

1. Scheme access and on-going eligibility

The number of children in the Scheme is higher than expected, and the number of participants transitioning out of the Scheme who have entered under the early intervention criteria is lower than expected.

2. Participant costs

Plan budgets continue to grow by more than expected solely due to inflation and ageing. This is particularly the case for participants in SIL and SDA, where costs are higher than expected.

Specific management responses are being developed to address the two primary sustainability pressures:

Participant Pathway Review

The NDIA is working on strengthening the 'outcomes focus' of the Participant Pathway Review to improve participant satisfaction and enable individuals to reach their goals, while also increasing the consistency and reliability of access and plan budget decisions.

This includes the Independent Assessment Pilot which was launched in November 2018.

Reference package and guided planning process

To better align a participant's support package with their level of function, the NDIA introduced the reference package and guided planning process, which works to ensure that the right assessment questions and tools are being used to inform plan decisions. A review has commenced to incorporate new learnings since the reference package and guided planning process was first implemented.

Supported Independent Living (SIL) and Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA)

The NDIA is working on consistent and equitable decisions for those seeking access to SIL and SDA, which constitutes a large proportion of NDIS cost.

The NDIA continues to monitor and address emerging pressures and implement strategies to combat risk. Improving data quality, tools and reporting supports the management team to make quick and efficient decisions. Consequently, the Scheme continues to remain financially sustainable and invested in the experience and outcomes of its participants.



Shelly Lynde shed tears of happiness when she arrived at her son Alex's school and was told by his support worker that a little boy in his class had asked to play with him. By the end of lunchtime, a little girl had joined the two boys and the seeds of friendship were firmly sown.

“Socialisation is a bit of a challenge for Alex,” Shelly said.

“But I've always found that the other children at kindy and at school are beautiful towards him. The kids don't judge, they just think ‘that's just Alex and he has a support worker but who cares’”.

Part Six: Staff, advisory groups and the NDIS community

A strong and dedicated NDIS community delivers the best possible experience for participants.

6.1 Official opening of the new NDIA National Office in Geelong

The new NDIA National Office was officially opened on 8 March 2019, with staff moving in from early April.

The state-of-the-art accessible building, located at the site of the heritage listed Carlton Hotel in Malop Street, Geelong, will house approximately 600 NDIA staff, centralising the NDIA's national operations.

The new NDIA office exceeds building accessibility standards, with wider access to accommodate wheelchairs and scooters, self-opening and closing doors to cater for staff with varying abilities, and integrated braille signage throughout. Meeting rooms are equipped with hearing loops, the kitchens have accessible sinks and there is the ability to adjust lighting levels to meet staff needs, including for people who experience light sensitivity.

Almost 12 per cent of NDIA employees identify as having a disability, so this new office will ensure the NDIS's workforce has the accessible facilities, technologies and work environment needed to continue the important work underway to deliver the NDIS to Australians with disability.



6.2 Collaborating with NDIS stakeholders

The NDIS is improving participant experience with the support of the disability community.

The NDIA is working inclusively with stakeholder groups and the disability community to reflect participant needs. Specific sector engagement activities that occurred during the quarter are outlined below.

Participant Employment Taskforce

In November 2018 the Department of Social Services and the National Disability Insurance Agency formed a participant employment taskforce, to recommend measures to improve employment outcomes for NDIS participants (see page 41).

Since January 2019 the Taskforce has been engaging with a range of stakeholders who are active in the delivery of NDIS employment supports or invested in improving participant employment outcomes. These have included:

- Participants, Parents, Carers and Advocates
- Providers, including Australian Disability Enterprises (ADEs)
- NDIA Planners and Local Area Coordinators (LACs)
- Government, Education and Peak Bodies

Consultations have occurred in Geelong, Canberra, Sydney and Hobart. Further consultations will be undertaken with service delivery staff, rural and remote communities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and employers.

The insights from the stakeholder consultations will inform recommendations for the Taskforce and development of an NDIA Participant Employment strategy. This strategy will guide the NDIA over the next 3-5 years to become a leader and advocate of disability employment, and to improve employment outcomes for participants and people with disability more broadly.

Independent Assessment Pilot

The Independent Assessment Pilot aims to improve consistency, accuracy and reliability in decision-making, delivering fair plan outcomes and access decisions for all participants (see page xx).

The NDIA has engaged with external stakeholders, including members of peak organisations for Autism Spectrum Disorder, Intellectual Disability and Psychosocial Disability, since the pilot was launched in November 2018. The NDIA continues to engage extensively with partner organisations, participants and participant representatives in evaluating the pilot's success.

Autism Advisory Group

The NDIA and Autism Advisory Group continue to work together to improve life outcomes for people with autism spectrum disorder. The current joint focus is on reducing the waiting time for children in the ECEI program who are waiting to receive supports.

Blind Citizens Australia

In January 2019 the NDIA launched a new NDIS website, to be more accessible, easier to navigate, user-friendly, and to improve the experience of people accessing it. Consultation with participants, families, carers, providers and sector representatives was vital in its development and testing. This included members of **Blind Citizens Australia**, who assisted the NDIA to better meet the needs of blind and vision-impaired people.

Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) Reference Group

A Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) Reference Group was formed in March 2019, with the aim to support the development of the SDA market, increase choice and control for participants, and ensure the long term viability of SDA investment.

Membership includes key Department of Social Services, NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission and NDIA staff, participants, SDA providers, investors and financiers, developers, and research and policy organisations.

Deaf Australia and Deafness Forum Australia

The NDIA has commenced working with peak organisations **Deaf Australia** and **Deafness Forum Australia** to provide input on how the NDIA can improve the experience of participants with a hearing loss, and on issues impacting the provider market.

6.3 NDIS Contact Centre

Customer experience improves for first point of contact with the NDIS.

The provider responsible for operating the NDIS Contact Centre since June 2018 has made consistent improvements to call response times, wait times and abandoned call rates for enquires made to the NDIS.

Between June 2018 and the end of March 2019 the Contact Centre answered over 890,000 phone calls and responded to over 65,000 emails.

The **average answer speed** is consistently at **28 seconds**.

The Contact Centre is contracted to reach a **weekly service level** of 80% of calls answered within 60 seconds. At end of the March 2019 quarter it was achieving a service level of just over **83%**.

Average **abandonment rates** are 1.25%, an improvement from 1.5% at the end of December 2018

The rate of **email enquiries being resolved** within the first response to the sender has risen from 80% in December 2018 to **83%** in March 2019. The last reported resolution rate prior to commencement of the new contact centre provider was 70%.

The Contact Centre is striving to improve its customer service levels, to provide an improved experience for participants and providers, and increased public engagement with the Scheme.

6.4 Building a high performing NDIA

The NDIA invests in staff training to support Agency growth.

In line with the accelerated roll-out of the Scheme, the NDIA has significantly increased the number of staff directly supporting the development of plans for participants. In the second half of 2018, the number of Planners increased by 422 to 1,764. The total workforce (including partners in the community) increased by 2,210 in the sample period (from 7,563 to 9,773). In addition, planners with deep experience were re-allocated to support the roll-out of the Complex Pathway.

At 31 March 2019 the NDIS workforce was 10,664, including 3,327 Australian Public Service Employees and 5,283 people employed by NDIS Partners in the Community.

Since July 2018, approximately 2,000 new planners and Local Area Coordinators (LACs) have participated in a new 6 week induction program. The program includes face-to-face, eLearning and on-the-job training that covers the key knowledge and skills required for service delivery staff.

Over 6,500 hours of training has been delivered to service delivery staff to support the pathways reform implementation. Training has now been fully rolled out in Western Australia, Tasmania, Northern Territory, New South Wales and Australian Capital Territory, and will be completed by the end of May 2019 in the remaining locations.

Other areas of focus for skill development in 2019 has included disability awareness, cultural awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, LGBTIQ+, and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse people. In addition, Family and Gender Based Violence Prevention eLearning was deployed as part of White Ribbon Accreditation, with over 80 per cent of NDIA managers completing the training within four weeks of release.



After struggling with fatigue but needing regular exercise to maintain her health, Sue was able to get funding for an exercise physiologist twice a week to tailor her workouts to suit her capabilities.

“The NDIS has been fabulous because exercising had been difficult. A lot of people don’t understand MS and therefore going to gyms was really hard.

“We went on holidays to Adelaide at the end of last year and I rode a bike for the first time, because in the past I had no balance at all.

“It’s been life-changing because my whole mental attitude has changed and I feel like I have hope and that I’m going to be strong in the future.”

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