



## 2020 in review

2020 was a year of unprecedented challenges, particularly for people in the disability community. The devastating bushfires in January were followed by the outbreak of the COVID-19 global pandemic in March.

Like the rest of Australia, the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) had to quickly adapt to sustain our community through this very stressful time.

Our immediate challenge was to meet the urgent needs of our participants, their families and carers, and our providers as the pandemic unfolded. We supported participants as they navigated the constant changes and restrictions to their daily lives, while making sure staff, partners and providers kept delivering essential services.

The data from our latest quarterly report, and quarterly reports through the year, shows we managed all this and more.

# COVID-19

We moved quickly to deliver a range of supports to participants, families and carers and providers as the pandemic evolved. We:

- Made sure NDIS participants had priority access to supermarket home delivery services during the initial national lockdown.
- Contacted more than 74,000 participants we identified as our most vulnerable, to check on their wellbeing and make sure they received essential supports.

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Really appreciated being able to talk freely like this - it has really helped me to be able to sort things out in my mind...thank you.

- NDIS participant

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- Collaborated across governments (including with the Department of Social Services, the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission, Services Australia, and State and Territory governments) to ensure participants received essential supports. The current rate of infection amongst participants is two and a half times lower than the general population.
- Continue to collaborate across governments on the national roll out the COVID-19 vaccine to make sure our participants are protected against COVID-19 in the future.
- Provided over \$660m in advance payments to registered NDIS providers to give them immediate cash flow relief.
- Assisted registered and unregistered providers and self-managed participants access the National Medical Stockpile of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).
- Made changes so that eligible NDIS participants could use plan funding to purchase low-cost Assistive Technology, including smart devices (up to \$1500).
- Introduced greater plan flexibility to ensure access to supports.
- Made funding available for deep cleaning of residences in the event a support worker returns a positive COVID-19 test.
- Provided additional support, including a deep cleaning service, for participants who test positive for COVID-19 or who are required to isolate in a Supported Independent Living (SIL) setting.

# Improving outcomes for participants

NDIS participants are at the centre of everything we do. We saw it as vital that participant outcomes kept improving in 2020, despite the challenges of physical distancing.

Importantly, results show significant improvement in outcomes for participants the longer they are in the Scheme. For example, data for participants who have been in the Scheme for at least four years shows:

- 76 per cent of parents of children aged 0 to before starting school think the NDIS has improved how their child fits into community life, an increase of 19 per cent since their first review.
- 70 per cent of parents of children starting school to age 14 think the NDIS has helped their child to become more independent, an increase of 14 per cent since their first review.
- 71 per cent of young adults think the NDIS has helped with daily living activities, an increase of 11 per cent since their first review.
- 80 per cent of adults aged 25 and over think the NDIS helped them have more choices and more control over their life, an increase of 13 per cent since their first review.

Also, for participants who have been in the Scheme for at least two years, their community and social participation has increased since they entered the Scheme. There has been a 10 per cent increase from 36 per cent to 46 per cent for participants aged 15+ years.

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The NDIS is helping my daughter along her journey in life and to be the best person she can be and not have limitations because of her disability.

- Parent of an NDIS participant

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# Improving the Scheme

Despite the challenges of COVID-19, we forged ahead to make the Scheme simpler, fairer and more consistent. The Scheme is now rolled out across Australia, and, after seven and a half years, we have a better understanding of how the Scheme is working and where improvements can be made. We are now focused on ensuring the Scheme delivers a consistent and high quality experience for all participants.

In January 2020, the NDIS Act Review report was released with 29 recommendations to improve the experience of participants with the NDIS. We took those recommendations and worked with participants and providers through the pandemic. In August, we released the Participant Service Guarantee (PSG) and the Participant Service Improvement Plan (PSIP). These plans set out how we are implementing those 29 recommendations through a series of service delivery commitments.

We are also committed to making the Scheme fairer and more equitable. In 2020, our data showed there were differences in how each state and territory collected information about someone's functional capacity. This has led to inconsistent decisions. The data also indicated participants in higher socio-economic areas receive more funding.

With a global pandemic as our backdrop, we made changes to how we deliver our services. We announced the introduction of independent assessments to help make sure the Scheme is fair and equitable for all participants. We began implementing recommendations from the PSG and PSIP. Our most recent Quarterly Report data shows the great strides that have been made in one year.

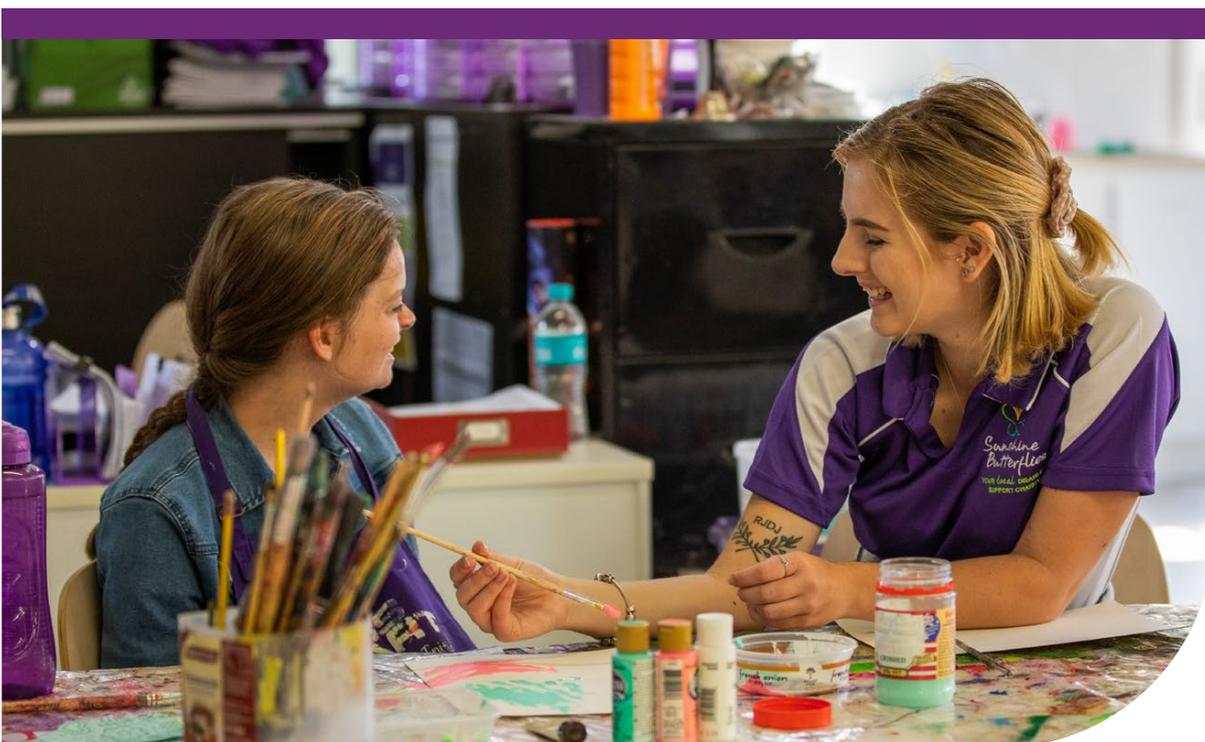
- 100 per cent of access decisions are made within the 21 day timeframe. In July 2019 we were taking an average of 42 days to make an access decision.
- 98 per cent of first plans are approved for participants aged 0-6 within 90 days, compared to 85 per cent a year ago. For participants aged 7 and above, 92 per cent of first plans are approved within the 70 day timeframe, compared to 64 per cent a year ago.
- Review timeframes have significantly improved over the last year as well. 100 per cent of decisions to undertake a participant requested review are made within 21 days. A year ago, 56 per cent of decisions to undertake a participant requested review were made within 21 days.
- 98 per cent of reviews of reviewable decisions are completed within the 90 day timeframe, compared to 60 per cent a year ago.
- 92 per cent of complaints are closed within 21 days. A year ago, the NDIA was closing 58 per cent of complaints within 21 days.



# Growing the Scheme

Despite the challenges of 2020, we continued to grow the NDIS, delivering more supports to more people in more places than ever before: For example:

- We welcomed an average of 24,800 people each quarter in 2020.
- We are now supporting over 430,000 people with disability, an increase of more than 93,500 participants since December 2019.
- Significantly, almost half of all NDIS participants (212,504 people) are receiving these supports for the first time.
- The Scheme continues to be increasingly diverse, particularly for participants who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. 9 per cent of participants who received a plan this quarter identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, compared to 6.6 per cent in previous quarters combined.
- The number of younger people in residential aged care has reduced by 22 per cent over the past two years.
- On 1 July 2020, the NDIS was available nation-wide. After seven years of hard work, the Scheme became available to all Australians, a wonderful milestone to reach.
- The National Contact Centre (NCC) received over 1.078 million calls in 2020, with only 1.2 per cent of people ending their call before it was answered. The NCC also introduced webchat as another channel for communication. In the December quarter, the NCC responded to 11,310 chats, answering 98.5 per cent of chat requests within 10 seconds.
- We funded the introduction of Health Liaison Officers and Justice Liaison Officers to help participants connect and interact with service providers in their state and territory. The introduction of specialist community connectors in remote, culturally and linguistically diverse, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities was also funded, to help these participants navigate the Scheme and to get a deeper understanding of how they want to engage with us.



# Continued support for providers

Equally critical to supporting participants achieve better outcomes is the continued development of an innovative, engaged provider sector. And we are getting there. In a recent provider sentiment survey, nearly 60 per cent of providers said they felt optimistic about the health of the NDIS market, an increase of 12 per cent from the previous survey in September 2019.

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To witness the evolution of the Scheme and the way it's improved over time has been amazing. For companies like ours, the amount of funding available for participants to spend in the marketplace allows us to invest in research and development in a way we never could have before.

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- NDIS Provider

The provider market grew in 2020:

- Over \$20bn was paid to providers to deliver participant supports throughout 2020.
- Averaged payments per participant have increased by 32 per cent over the past two years, from \$39,600 to \$52,300.
- Registered providers grew by more than 12 per cent over the past year.

In 2020, we supported providers by:

- Running thin market trials in various locations throughout Australia, to improve our approach to monitoring and identifying market challenges.
- Releasing detailed Specialist Disability Accommodation data.

# A Scheme for the future

We will all remember 2020 as a year of challenge and change. For the NDIS, it was the year we learned to adapt to an ever-changing environment, while we continued to grow, supporting more Australians with disability than ever before.

A key part of our growth was reflecting on the strengths of the Scheme and where we need to improve. In 2020, we made time to listen to our participants and providers, consider our data and look for ways to make the Scheme better.

We developed a new NDIS app and trialled the app with participants, we improved service delivery and timeframes on access decisions and reviews, we introduced more flexibility for participant plans and announced independent assessments.

We made progress, but we know we have more to do. The Scheme needs to work for everyone. In 2021, we will continue to improve and we will continue to listen. With your input, we will ensure the NDIS works for all Australians, for generations to come.

