

10 September 2021

Submission to NDIS Consultation Paper – An Ordinary Life at Home (June 2021)

Project Independence (PI) is pleased to provide a short submission in response to the NDIS Consultation Paper – An Ordinary Life at Home (released June 2021).

*About Project Independence*

PI provides a unique and sustainable housing and home ownership solution for people with an intellectual disability. PI was established in 2012 and represents a unique model of home ownership – not only in Australia, but internationally.

Access to secure and affordable housing has long been recognised as fundamental to our well-being. In Australia, home ownership has long been a widely held aspiration – providing owners with stability and numerous long term social, health and economic benefits. Home ownership rates for people with an intellectual disability lag far behind the rest of the population, with people living with disability over- represented as renters in both public and community housing. Overwhelmingly, the limited housing options available to people with an intellectual disability don’t provide a pathway towards future home ownership.

PI provides individuals with an intellectual disability the opportunity to progressively build home equity using just their Disability Support Pension within a safe and supported environment that encourages the development of independent living skills. PI empowers people with an intellectual disability to move to truly independent living in the broader community and grow beyond social housing as they move up the home ownership ladder.

PI currently runs two purpose-built PI facilities in the ACT providing homeownership to 20 people with an intellectual disability. In addition, PI has further developments underway in Canberra and Melbourne and is actively working with developers in Sydney.

*Consultation Feedback*

PI wishes to contribute feedback to this consultation process based on its specialist knowledge of housing for people with intellectual disability and its unique model that fosters financial equity alongside independence.

The following comments on the Consultation Paper are provided for your consideration:

* The PI model does not readily fit the NDIS definition of ILO or SIL or SDA. NDIS funding should not be tied to these standard housing options. PI believes that innovation and growth in the sector should be encouraged. PI urges the NDIS to recognise and support existing and emerging models that offer alternative housing options to groups that cannot take advantage of the standard NDIS housing categories.
* The Consultation Paper makes reference to moving away from traditional group home models, which are loosely defined as those with more than four people with disability living together and where people with disability live with people they have not chosen.

PI have proven that its model does offer an attractive option for people despite having both of those features.

PI provides accommodation and related support services in a purpose built premise. Each PI premise consists of ten ensuite units for residents (each with separate entries and outdoor spaces), communal kitchens, living areas and a separate area for an on-site resident coordinator. The PI model is constructed in this manner to offer residents autonomy, while still providing support within a safe environment as residents acquire decision making and life skills.

The PI model provides a viable and appealing option for many people with an intellectual disability – as evidenced by high numbers on its waitlist and reported satisfaction of residents and families.

PI would urge that the NDIS should not be overly prescriptive about model features, but rather support people to find the model that meets their individual needs and preferences. People with intellectual disability tell us that they find some comfort in living in settings where their needs are understood and supported. This is true choice and control.

* Stability of housing arrangements should be balanced with levels of independence and informal support.

For example, house share, host arrangements and living together models are great while they are working but they rarely last long term because they usually involve living with someone who will eventually move onto something else. This leaves the individual to find a whole new arrangement every few years. External support for someone to live in a private house or unit can also lead to the person being alone most of the time. Living with a group of likeminded people who are relatively stable in the household can offer higher levels of social connection especially when combined with good external supports to encourage additional connection with the outside community.

* It is PI’s view that ILO – stage 1 – exploration and design funding should be available to any NDIS participant with a goal for more independent housing rather than being linked to the level of support required. This will enable all participants with this goal to explore an array of options and make the right choice for them. Housing exploration processes must recognise that people with disability have specific challenges in finding suitable and affordable housing and therefore funding is justified for participants at all levels of ability and support needs.
* PI would like to see the NDIS acknowledge that people with intellectual and psychosocial disability have specific challenges and needs in relation to safe and secure housing and living supports. Discussion of housing often focuses on accessible housing (ie: building modifications, assistive technology or standards) which relates more to people with physical disability and does not include the specific needs of this cohort.

I hope our submission is of assistance to the enquiry. PI would be pleased to further discuss any of the aspects outlined above if this would be of assistance to the enquiry.

Yours sincerely,

Dianne O’Hara

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Chief Executive Officer