# ndis

# NDIA Research and Evaluation Strategy

2022-2027

## Acknowledgment of Country

The National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia, and their continuing connection to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to them and their cultures, and to elders both past, present and emerging.
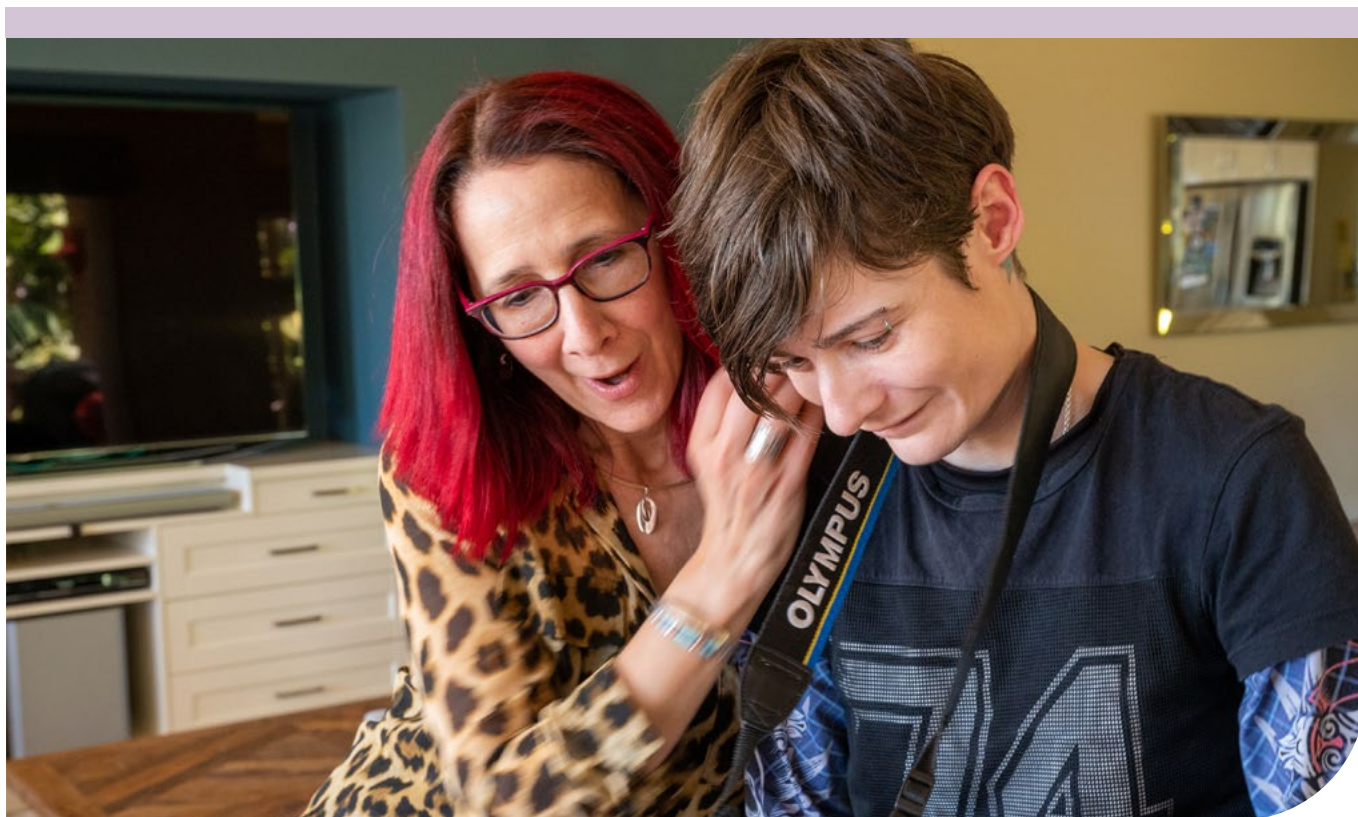
# Contents

# Executive Summary

The Research and Evaluation Strategy 2022 to 2027 sets out a pathway to build and mobilise evidence to enhance the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), and shape innovative services and supports that optimise the lives of participants.

The strategy focuses on producing evidence on 'how' the Scheme improves outcomes for participants (and more broadly people with disability). Our objectives and approach to this is designed around 4 research focus areas:

- Decision making for access and planning

- Early interventions for high volume cohorts

- Home and living supports

- Market stewardship and employment.

The strategy also shows our commitment to developing partnerships with academic institutions and research bodies to drive and shape the disability research agenda.

This document sets out our mission and objectives and each of our research focus areas. It also details our guiding principles and approaches to ensure that the evidence produced can be used to improve participant outcomes, policy and practice and the Scheme.

# Strategy objectives at a glance

| | 1. Generate new evidence | 2. Test innovations and discover ways to do things differently | 3. Measure participant outcomes | 4. Turn evidence into action |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Workstream 1:** Decision-making for access and planning | Ensure the NDIA's Information Gathering for Access and Planning (IGAP) project is informed by the best available evidence. | Support the development of a new person-centred model for information gathering. | Evaluate the implementation of changes to the NDIA's information gathering approach. | Support the use of evidence to inform the development of future model(s). |
| **Workstream 2:** Early interventions for high volume cohorts | Review research evidence to compare a range of early interventions across a range of disabilities and cohorts. | Work with industry to test a series of technology innovations as part of early intervention pathways. | Evaluate the effectiveness and fidelity of a range of early childhood supports and pathways. | Drive the use of evidence into policy and practice to improve child outcomes and produce evidence-based resources on what works for whom. |
| **Workstream 3:** Home and living supports | Explore participant experiences to help design new innovative home and living solutions for a range of disability cohorts. | Trial new technologies or innovative approaches to help participants achieve greater independence in diverse living arrangements. | Evaluate the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of home and living innovations and test their scalability. | Ensure Home and Living Policy and implementation strategies are informed by evidence and produce evidence-based participant facing resources on what works for whom. |
| **Workstream 4:** Market stewardship and employment | Identify effective interventions to drive improvements in the market and investigate ways to support participants transition from supported to open employment. | Promote research and the development of innovations in the market. | Evaluate the effectiveness of market interventions and the effectiveness and equity of provision of supports on participant outcomes. | Develop participant and workforce facing evidence-based resources on what works for whom to drive market change. |

# 1. Introduction

Research and Evaluation is critical to the NDIS and a core function of the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA).

The National Disability Insurance Scheme Act 2013 specifies that the NDIA has a function that 'develops and enhances the disability sector, by facilitating innovation, research and contemporary best practice' (section 118(1) (c)). Research is also integral to the insurance approach that underpins the NDIS and reflects the original intent of the 2011 Productivity Commission Report, which highlighted research capacity and capability as an important role of the NDIA.

## 1.1 Research and Evaluation at the NDIA

We produce evidence that is used to support positive participant outcomes by ensuring policies, practices and priorities are informed by trustworthy and robust evidence. Research and evaluation contributes to the discovery of new ways of working and innovation to improve the lives of people with disability. This enables the NDIS to be effective, now and into the future.

We also partner with academic institutions and research bodies to drive and shape the national and international disability research agenda and to develop insights that improve outcomes for people with disability.

Our research and evaluations help:

- inform policies and programs and contribute to the advancement of provider markets
- participants become informed consumers, fully equipped with the information they need to get the most out of their plans
- ensure participants receive best practice supports and services that helps them pursue their goals
- improve participants' accessibility to innovative supports.

Our approach and contribution to research is in line with the NDIA Corporate Plan 2022-2026 and Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031. These highlight the importance of investing in research and innovation to improve participant outcomes.

**Evaluation** is an essential part of policy development, program implementation and service delivery. It involves collecting, analysing, interpreting and communicating information about the performance of policies, programs and services in order to inform decision-making and support the evolution of programs.

**Research** is the creation of new knowledge and/or the use of existing knowledge to generate new concepts, methodologies, inventions and understandings. This could include synthesis and analysis of previous research to build higher level of insights from multiple sources or the generation of new evidence through the collection or use of data.

# 1.2 Research and Evaluation Branch

The NDIA established a research and evaluation branch in March 2020.
The branch has 6 areas of specialities. These areas work together to achieve our goals.

## Evidence synthesis and innovation research

- Find, appraise, synthesise and communicate the best available evidence from the research literature in a systematic way, including environmental scans, desktop audits, systematic reviews and meta-analyses.

- Design and execute rigorous research to test technology-focussed innovations which can benefit participants.

## Evidence for action

- Produce evidence informed resources to support participant, families and carers with their decision-making.

- Support the translation of research into policy and programs and build capability across the NDIA to embed research into everyday decisions.

## Clinical advice and design

- Provide clinical advice to support the delivery of evidence-based practices.

## Targeted research and strategic evaluation

- Conduct research to understand factors influencing NDIA outcomes and address evidence-practice gaps.

- Conduct evaluations of strategic NDIA programs, to understand processes and measure and monitor outcomes.

## External research partnerships

- Manage and support external researchers to access data and partner with the NDIA to support research and evaluation that is valuable to NDIS participants.

## Manage large scale pilots

- Operationalise and pilot new ways of working and link to evaluation and knowledge translation to transition towards business as usual.

- Oversee and manage the governance for all pilot programs.

# 2. Our strategy

The Research and Evaluation Strategy 2022 to 2027 sets out a pathway to build and mobilise evidence to enhance the NDIS, and shape innovative services and supports that optimise the lives of participants.

We recognise that policy and practice must be informed by evidence in order to achieve the best outcomes for participants. The strategy focuses on producing evidence on 'how' the NDIS improves outcomes for participants (and more broadly people with disability), delivering value to the NDIS. The strategy also includes the role of innovation research designed to disrupt or challenge out of date practices, to stimulate the market and build an evidence base which reflects modern life.

## Our mission:

To embed a culture of research and evaluation excellence at the NDIA and support evidence-informed decision-making internally, by our participants and across the NDIS.

## Our goals:

- To generate high quality, pragmatic research and evaluations that meet the needs of the participants and the NDIA.

- To support the NDIA in using research and evaluation to underpin evidence-informed decision-making.

## We are successful when:

- Our research contributes to improving informed choice, control and outcomes for participants.

- The evidence we generate is used to inform improvements in policies and practice.

- Positive and productive partnerships with external researchers lead to independent research outputs with greater relevance to NDIA priorities.

## 2.1  Our objectives

The strategy has 4 key objectives:

1.  To generate new evidence to support the delivery of the NDIA Corporate Plan 2022-2026

2.  To test innovations and discover ways to do things differently

3.  To measure participant outcomes to inform policy and service delivery improvements

4.  To turn evidence into action.

## 2.2 Our key focus areas

We have aligned our research and evaluation agenda to the NDIA's strategic priorities. This ensures that the evidence produced can be used to improve participant outcomes, frontline practice, and the wider NDIS. Each of our research focus areas and key deliverables are outlined below, and in more detail in the next section.

- Improving the quality and consistency of **decision-making for access and planning**.

- Generating evidence on the impacts and outcomes of **early interventions**, particularly **for high volume cohorts**.

- Enabling reform of NDIS **Home and Living** supports based on evidence of what works.

- Enhancing the NDIA's approach to **market stewardship** and improving participant **employment outcomes**.

# 3. Our research focus areas

## 3.1     Decision-making for access and planning

By 2027 we will support the co-design and implementation of a person-centred model by producing robust evidence that is used to inform the Information Gathering for Access and Planning (IGAP) project and evaluate the implementation of changes to the NDIA's information gathering approach as part of the co-design process.

**Generating new evidence:** We will ensure the NDIA's IGAP project is informed by the best available evidence.

**Testing innovations:** We will support the co-design of a new person-centred model(s) of information gathering to ensure it is grounded in best practice and provides equitable and consistent access to the NDIS.

**Measuring outcomes:** We will evaluate the implementation of changes to the NDIA's information gathering approach to inform policy and roll out of a national approach.

**Turning Evidence into Action:** We will translate evidence so it is easy to understand and can be used to inform the development of the NDIA's new information gathering approach.

## 3.2    Early intervention for high volume cohorts

By 2027 we will build a body of knowledge on the effects of the most frequently accessed early intervention supports including dose, outcome and mode of delivery. We will compare intervention outcomes to better understand the benefit and value of service offerings to the individual and the NDIA. We will also drive sector change through a range of research translation approaches.

**Generating new evidence:** We will review research evidence to compare a range of interventions and cohorts to understand what works best for whom and across all age groups.

**Testing innovations:** We will work with industry to test a series of technology innovations as part of early intervention pathways.

**Measuring outcomes:** We will evaluate the effectiveness and fidelity of a range of early childhood supports and pathways and measure the longer-term benefit and impacts of these supports on broader childhood outcomes.

**Turning Evidence into Action:** We will drive the use of evidence into policy and practice. We will also produce evidence-based resources on what works for whom to support informed choice and control (Guides for Understanding Supports).

## 3.3     Home and living supports

By 2027 we will produce evidence to better understand the value and impact of a range of innovative home and living solutions and how they can benefit participants (as aligned to UNCRPD Article 19) and the NDIS. Knowledge of outcomes and benefits will be used to inform the co-design of the Home and Living Policy, drive market innovation and support participants and service providers to make evidence-informed decisions to improve outcomes.

**Generating new evidence:** We will explore participant experiences, barriers and benefits of home and living options to help design new innovative home and living solutions for a range of ages and disability cohorts.

**Testing innovations:** We will trial new technologies or innovative approaches to help participants achieve greater independence in diverse living arrangements, across a range of cohorts. We will also work with industry to keep up to date with aspirational technology projects which can support participants within their home.

**Measuring outcomes:** We will evaluate the effectiveness and cost effectiveness of home and living innovations and evaluate their scalability. We will also seek to understand what supports benefit to quality of life, choice and control and social and economic participation across different cohorts.

**Turning Evidence into Action:** We will work with key internal stakeholders to ensure the Home and Living Policy and its implementation strategies are informed by evidence. We will also produce evidence-based resources to help participants, planners and service providers make informed decisions about the most appropriate supports (Guides for Understanding Supports).

## 3.4  Market stewardship and employment

By 2027 we will build a body of knowledge that helps to increase market effectiveness through competition and innovation and improve equitable access to supports and outcomes. Further, we will build and translate the evidence to support individuals to gain employment opportunities aligned to UNCRPD Article 27.

**Generating new evidence:** We will identify effective interventions to drive improvements in the market. We will also investigate ways to support participants to move from supported employment to open employment and foster innovation with ADEs.

**Testing innovations:** We will promote research and development of innovations in the market (e.g. Artificial Intelligence enabled assistive technologies).

**Measure outcomes:** We will evaluate the effectiveness of market interventions and the effectiveness and equity of provision of supports on participant outcomes across different locations of Australia.

**Turning Evidence into Action:** We will translate evidence to support market policy and reforms and to inform NDIA decisions about products and markets. We will also produce evidence-based resources on what works for whom to support informed choice and control (e.g. transiting to employment) (Guides for Understanding Supports).

# 4. Our guiding principles

To successfully deliver this strategy our work is underpinned by 5 key principles.

## Participant focused

Participants are central to the design and delivery of our research and evaluation activities to ensure the voice of the participant can be heard through all that we do. All our activities adhere to the 5 engagement principles of the Participant Service Charter.

## Inclusive

We ensure that our research and evaluation activities are culturally safe, responsive and inclusive to the needs of all population groups, including vulnerable populations.

## Better outcomes

Research and evaluation activities focus on producing evidence which can achieve better outcomes for participants and the NDIS.

## Ethics and human rights

All research and evaluation activities adhere to the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and NHMRC National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research.

## Research integrity

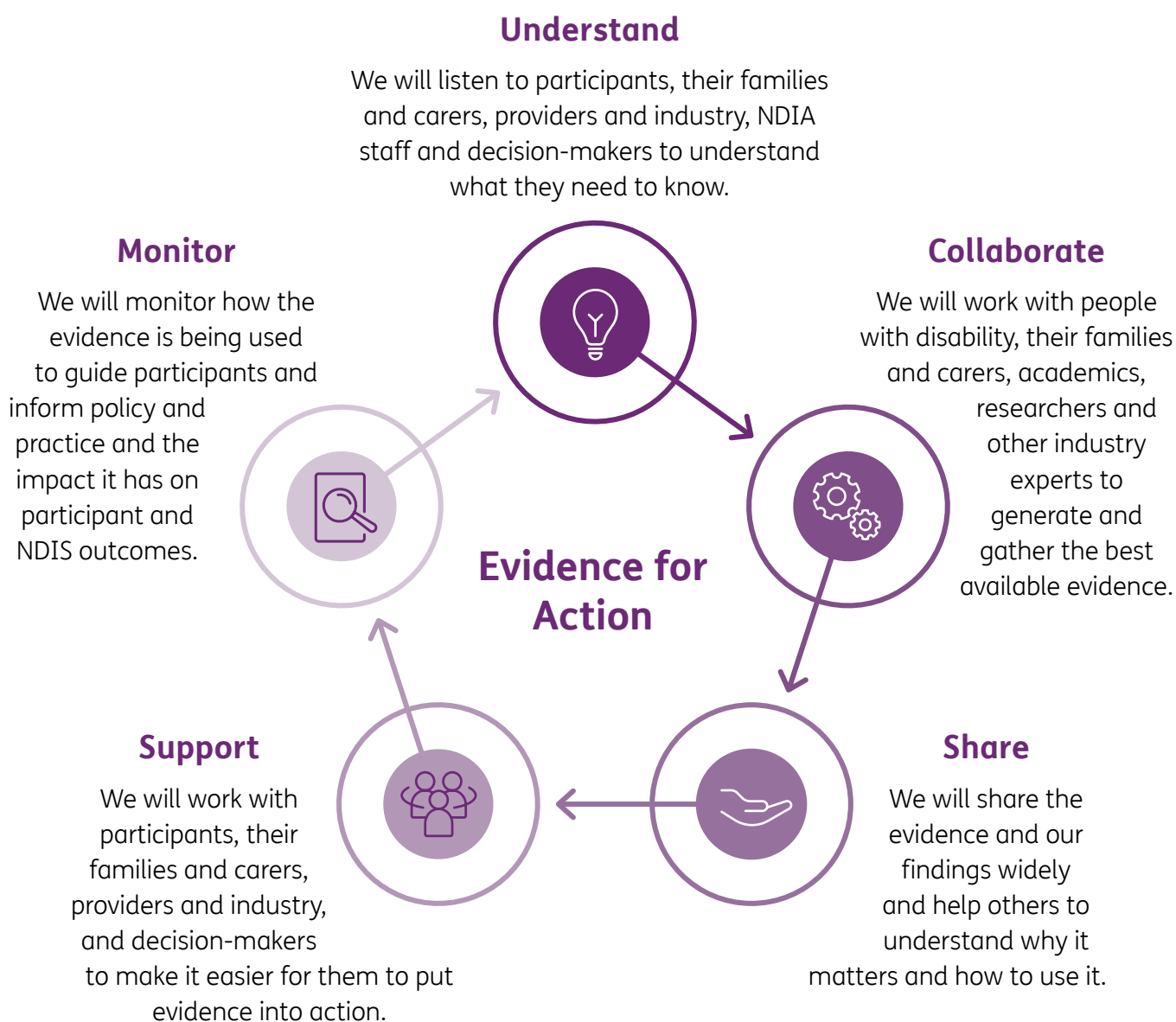We use robust methods to ensure we generate high calibre trustworthy evidence that can be used with confidence.

# 5. Our approach

## 5.1  How our research findings are used

### 5.1.1  Evidence for Action

Successful evidence-driven decision-making requires good dissemination and effective implementation of research and evaluation findings. We work with internal and external partners to ensure the research and evaluations undertaken are designed to have impact. Our approach helps to prevent misuse, underuse or overuse of evidence.

**Understand**

We will listen to participants, their families and carers, providers and industry, NDIA staff and decision-makers to understand what they need to know.

**Monitor**

We will monitor how the evidence is being used to guide participants and inform policy and practice and the impact it has on participant and NDIS outcomes.

**Collaborate**

We will work with people with disability, their families and carers, academics, researchers and other industry experts to generate and gather the best available evidence.

**Evidence for Action**

**Support**

We will work with participants, their families and carers, providers and industry, and decision-makers to make it easier for them to put evidence into action.

**Share**

We will share the evidence and our findings widely and help others to understand why it matters and how to use it.

We use our expertise in implementation science to:

**Produce tailored products** that summarise research evidence and are accessible to make it easier to understand and use. This includes resources for NDIS participants and their families and carers.

**Identify innovative ways** to increase the use of research evidence within the NDIA, across the broader NDIS and by NDIS participants. These are informed by theories of change. We act as knowledge brokers to understand the issues and how research can be used to drive evidence-informed change.

**Improve the use of evidence** to influence participant and NDIS outcomes. We build NDIA capability for evidence-informed approaches.

### 5.1.2 Our approach to translating research into evidence-informed resources for participants.

We produce resources called **Guides for Understanding Supports**. These help participants, their families and carers think about what supports and services best meet their needs. These guides are grounded in high quality research evidence and we develop them in collaboration with participants, their families, carers, peak bodies and NDIA staff.

By providing participants with access to information which includes the evidence on the effectiveness and benefit of supports, we aim to increase alignment between a participant's goals and needs and the supports available. This can make a significant difference to participant outcomes. Access to this information also helps participants have conversations with providers about the supports they deliver. We intend these guides to be the NDIA's primary vehicle for translating research evidence into accessible formats that can be used by participants.

We publish these guides on the NDIS website and include Easy Read versions and animations alongside Our Guidelines and Would We Fund It resources.

Over the period of this strategy, we will add more topics and present content in different ways to meet the needs of NDIS participants.

We will also evaluate the benefits and impact of the guides.

## 5.2 Our approach to measuring benefits of NDIS supports and services

Our research and evaluation activities will look at 5 key participant outcomes to understand the overall benefits of NDIS supports and services and the NDIS.

These 5 outcome measures align to the NDIS Act (2013), the NDIS Outcomes Framework, Australia's Disability Strategy Outcomes Framework.

and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and provide evidence to strengthen the NDIS through better understanding of the value of services and their impact on a participant's overall wellbeing.

1. Equitable access to quality services

2. Informed choice and control

3. Economic participation

4. Daily living and independence

5. Social participation and inclusion

### Improved participant wellbeing

These measures all lead to improved participant wellbeing overall. Participant wellbeing will be measured using a newly developed bespoke composite measure of wellbeing which is differentially weighted to the wellbeing preferences of specific cohorts and individuals. The wellbeing index will allow for the generation of utility weights to derive a WALY (wellbeing adjusted life year) as a result of the NDIS and enable comparative cost-effectiveness analysis between sectors, supporting broader priority setting and allocative efficiency across government health and social service expenditure.

# 6. Our next steps

In this strategy we have set out our mission and objective to produce high quality research to support the NDIA's long term aspiration of building a stronger NDIS so it works better for everyone. It ensures that the evidence produced can be used to improve participant outcomes, policy and practice and the NDIS.

To deliver this strategy, we need to work with our stakeholders to engage and capitalise on system-wide opportunities to enable change using high-quality research evidence.

The following enabling factors will strengthen our delivery of this strategy:

- Development and implementation of a wellbeing index (quality of life) measure to better understand NDIS benefits

- Ongoing collaboration with participants, frontline staff, partners and providers to ensure our work is fit for purpose and translated to support broader practice change throughout the NDIA

- Partnering with external researchers in high quality research studies to complement our research programs and support the use of data for external research and evaluation aligned to the broader disability eco-system.

We will provide updates annually on our progress on the objectives and focus areas on our website.

# 7. Glossary

| Term | Definition |
|---|---|
| Assistive technology | Assistive technology is the software or hardware support provided to people with disability to help them perform their role in the workplace. |
| Australian Disability Enterprises (ADEs) | ADEs are not-for-profit organisations. They offer a wide range of occupations and industries ranging from packaging and printing to gardening and furniture assembly. ADEs can provide ongoing employment or they can act as a stepping stone, enabling people with disability to gain the skills and confidence they need to try other forms of employment. |
| Carer | Someone who provides personal care, support and assistance to a person with disability and who is not contracted as a paid or voluntary worker. |
| Choice and control | A participant has the right to make their own decisions about what is important to them and to decide how they would like to receive their supports and who from. |
| Co-design | A design process which empowers, encourages, and guides users to develop solutions for themselves. |
| Disability | Total or partial loss of the person's bodily or mental functions (The Disability Discrimination Act 1992). This describes a person's impairment of body or function, a limitation in activities or a restriction in participation when interacting with their environment. |
| Early intervention | Providing support early in a child's life or post-onset of disability to reduce the effects of disability and to improve functional capacity. |
| Evaluation | Evaluation is an essential part of policy development, program implementation and service delivery. It involves collecting, analysing, interpreting and communicating information about the performance of policies, programs and services in order to inform decision-making and support the evolution of programs. |

| Term | Definition |
| --- | --- |
| Market | A collection of providers offering products and services to NDIS participants. |
| National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) | The Australian Government organisation that administers the National Disability Insurance Scheme. |
| National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) | The national insurance approach for providing support to Australians with disability, their families and carers. |
| NDIS participant | A person who meets the NDIS access requirements. |
| NDIS plan | A written plan worked out with the participant that states their goals, needs and the reasonable and necessary supports the NDIS will fund for them. |
| NDIS supports | Services that help a person undertake daily life activities and enable them to participate in the community and reach their goals. |
| Open employment | Work that is paid at least minimum wage, that is located in mainstream settings where people with and without disability can work together. |
| Outcomes framework | The NDIA's mechanism for measuring success for people with disability in areas like choice and control, social inclusion, education, employment, health and housing. |
| Participant outcomes | A way of measuring the aggregation of whether or not participants' goals are achieved combined with whether the NDIA is meeting its objectives. |
| People with disability | A person who experiences any or all of the following: impairments (abnormalities or changes in body function or structure); activity limitations (difficulties in carrying out usual age-appropriate activities); participation restrictions (problems an individual may experience engaging in community, social and family life). |

| Term | Definition |
|---|---|
| Person-centred approach | Places the person with disability at the centre of decision-making in terms of their own care needs. |
| Research | Research is the creation of new knowledge and/or the use of existing knowledge to generate new concepts, methodologies, inventions and understandings. This could include synthesis and analysis of previous research to build higher level of insights from multiple sources or the generation of new evidence through the collection or use of data. |
| Reasonable and necessary supports | The supports that are funded under the NDIS Act. The NDIA publishes operational guidelines to assist decisions on what is to be funded as a reasonable and necessary support. |

# ndis

ndis.gov.au

## National Disability Insurance Agency

📞 Telephone 1800 800 110

💬 Webchat ndis.gov.au

## Follow us on our social channels

## For people who need help with English

👥 TIS: 131 450

## For people who are deaf or hard of hearing

☎ TTY: 1800 555 677

👂 Speak and Listen: 1800 555 727