What we learnt from the test of our new computer system in Tasmania

Plain English summary

14 November 2022 – 31 March 2023

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1.   Introduction

We've had our existing computer system since 2016. It is old and slow, and it doesn't help NDIA staff, NDIS partners and providers work together, the same way, with all participants across Australia.

In 2021, we started to build a new computer system to help us deliver a better experience for everyone connected to the NDIS.

Our new computer system is modern and easier to use. It will help us in our work, to make consistent decisions and deliver a better experience for participants. And because we designed and built our new computer system ourselves, we can make changes to it when we need to.

After we finished building our new computer system, we started to use it in a real-time, real-world test in Tasmania. We started this test in November 2022.

As part of our Tasmania test, we tried some new ways of working with participants.

These new ways were improvements participants and the disability community told us they wanted to be part of the NDIS. They include more help for people with disability to learn about the community and mainstream supports available and apply to the NDIS, participants meeting with the NDIA planner who approves their plan, and easier and faster ways to make changes to NDIS plans.

To make sure our computer system and improvements to the participant experience worked the way they should, we asked everyone involved in the Tasmania test to tell us about their experience.

We wanted to measure how the test went, including what worked well and what needs to be improved to help us plan for how we will introduce our new computer system to the rest of Australia.

This document describes what we learnt from participants, their supporters, providers, NDIA staff, NDIS partners and the disability community in the Tasmania test between November 2022 and March 2023.

2.   What did we test in Tasmania?

We tested 4 things in Tasmania.

1. **We tested some of the features we built in our new computer system.**

These features help us keep track of:

- How we make decisions, and the rules for our decisions.
- Our participant records, keeping together all the contact and conversations we have, the letters and emails we send and other details like nominees or representatives.
- Who we ask to do work, to make sure the right people with the right skills at the NDIA are doing the work.
- Real-time NDIS plan budgets, payments, and available funds.
- Where plan reassessments and requests for reviews of our decisions are up to, what needs doing and how long it will take.
- Questions from participants, providers, and the disability community, including who is responsible for answering them and how long it takes.

2. **We built and tested new participant and provider portals, and a new participant app to work with our new computer system.**

3. **We tested new ways for NDIA staff and NDIS partners work with people with disability and participants.**

For people with disability looking for services and supports, we tested:

- Community and Early Connection plans to help them connect with community and mainstream supports.
- How NDIS partners could help people and families who think they are eligible for the NDIS apply for access.

For existing NDIS participants, we tested:

- Meetings for participants with the NDIA planner who approves their plan, to talk about their situation, NDIS plan and budget and how decisions are made.
- How we help participants to use and make the most of their NDIS plan.
- How we make changes to NDIS plans, without making a whole new plan.
- A way for Agency-managed participants to tell us which providers they want to work with.
- SMS messages to Agency-managed participants or their nominee to check we could pay some claims from providers.
- Checking with participants to see if their plan is working for them and help them prepare for a plan reassessment.

4. **We tested new processes for providers.**

These processes included:

- Removing service bookings when a participant's plan moved to our new computer system.
- Changes to support categories to make our language simpler and more consistent, plus adding 5 new categories.
- Using the new provider portal to help connect participants with support coordinators and psychosocial recovery coaches.
- New reporting templates which ask for standard information from providers to help with planning.

3.   Who was involved in the Tasmania test?

More than 1,600 participants were involved in the Tasmania test between November 2022 and March 2023.

We started the test with people with disability looking for services and supports, and with people joining the NDIS for the first time.

Then, we brought existing participants into the test. These participants were due for a plan reassessment or asked for a change to their NDIS plan.

We chose Tasmania for our real-time test because the state represents the broader NDIS population, with more than 500 registered providers and two experienced NDIS partners.

Of the participants involved in Tasmania test during the evaluation period:

- More than 760 were aged 0 to 18 years.
- Around 850 were aged 19 and over.
- More than 600 participants identified as female.
- Over 960 participants identified as male.
- Nearly 160 participants identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.
- Almost 35 participants identified as coming from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- Over 80 participants were receiving supported independent living services.

Some of the primary disabilities recorded for participants in the evaluation period were:

- More than 530 participants with autism.
- Over 260 participants with intellectual disability.
- More than 150 participants with a developmental delay.
- Over 100 participants with a psychosocial disability.

Other primary disabilities recorded for participants in the evaluation period included acquired brain injury, multiple sclerosis, visual impairment, hearing impairment and spinal cord injury.

4.　How we listened

We asked participants, providers, NDIA staff and NDIS partners to tell us about their experience in the Tasmania test. We talked to as many people connected to the test as we could, to find out:

- What worked well?
- What could be improved?
- What we need to do to help the rest of Australia prepare for the introduction of our new computer system and improved processes?

We asked for feedback in different ways, to make sure we heard from everyone involved.

We got:

- More than 150 survey responses from participants.
- Close to 250 survey responses from people with disability, families, and carers.
- Almost 150 survey responses from Tasmanian providers.

We held engagement sessions attended by more than 340 participants, families, and carers.

We asked Tasmanian Disability Representative and Carer Organisations to help us collect feedback. These organisations sent out 26 surveys and held 43 focus groups with more than 140 participants, families, and carers of people with disability.

We got feedback from 24 Tasmanian provider working groups sessions and 25 Tasmanian provider question and answer sessions.

5.　What we learnt from participants, providers, NDIA staff and NDIS partners

What we learnt from participants

Many participants said they had a positive experience in the Tasmania test, or an experience that was better than last time they worked with the NDIS.

Participants liked working with NDIS partners to understand the community and mainstream services available to them. They also liked meeting the NDIA planner who approves their plan.

Participants think we can improve

Participants want NDIA staff, NDIS partners and providers to learn more about our new computer system and the new ways of working to be able to explain:

- what has changed
- what stays the same
- what happens in the next step of their NDIS journey

Participants want us to use more plain English and easy-to-understand terms when we talk about our new computer system and ways of working, as well as more easy read information and animations to explain their NDIS experience.

Participants would like more information about how to use the new my NDIS participant portal and app. Participants said a portal testing environment as well as training support would be helpful.

What we learnt from providers

NDIS providers said the information on our website was useful. They also liked that NDIA representatives met with them regularly during the Tasmania test, sharing information and answering their questions.

Providers think we can improve

NDIS providers would like us to help them prepare their business change how they work with us. We can do this by giving providers more resources and training to learn our new ways of working, and to share with participants.

Providers would also like us to give them more notice when participant plans move to our new computer system, as well as alerts from the new provider portal when there is something they need to do.

Providers are concerned about plans in our new computer system not having service bookings. We removed service bookings because not having them gives participants more flexibility, choice, and control over how they use their NDIS funding. We are not planning to bring back service bookings for plans in our new computer system.

What we learnt from NDIA staff

NDIA staff liked how the test started with a small number of participants, so they could get used to our new computer system. They also liked how we helped them to use our new computer system, especially the on-the-ground support in Tasmania.

NDIA staff think we can improve

NDIA staff thought we could improve how we help them learn about our new computer system and way of working. They would also like more and better training,

which closely matched to the way our new computer system. They would also like more time to practice on the system before they must use it every day.

NDIA staff would like more information about how the service we deliver participants has changed and improved, to help them explain it the right way.

What we learnt from NDIS partners

NDIS partners said they can see how our new computer system will be better than the one we use now, and they would like to have more time to help people with disability connect to services and support participants to use their plans.

NDIS partners think we can improve

NDIS partners want us to be clear about what's expected from NDIA staff and what's expected from NDIS partners and how these roles work together, including when responsibilities are different to what they are now.

NDIS partners would like more and better training, which is matched to our new computer system as well as the way we'd like them to work with participants.

6.   What we learnt about our new computer system

Overall, our new computer system did what we thought it would do in Tasmania test. It made some of our work easier and faster, but we need to do more to help our staff and partners feel confident to use our new computer system.

Early in the test, NDIA staff told us that some parts of our new computer system were not working properly, or the way they expected them to. To keep doing their work, staff needed to do some off-system work. During the test, we were able to fix or improve the parts of our new computer system that weren't working properly.

We heard from some Tasmanian providers they were not paid as quickly as expected. We found that our new computer system and our payments system were not always working together the way they should. We fixed most of these issues in February and March 2023.

Providers told us that they needed more information to help Agency-managed participants with endorsing their providers and what to do when they received an SMS about paying claims. We put more information on our website to help with this, as well as gave NDIA staff and NDIS partners more detail to support participants and providers.

7.   What we are going to do next

We aim to introduce our new computer system to the rest of Australia in the second half of 2023.

We'll keep using it in Tasmania to help us decide which parts of our new computer system or the ways we work need improvements before we introduce them everywhere else.

We'll keep working with the organisations who represent the disability community. We will also ask some representatives from the provider community to join this group to help us decide which parts of the way we work should be introduced first, and which ones we need to work together on to make sure they are right.

As we keep using our computer system in Tasmania, more participants will experience the new way NDIA staff and NDIS partners work. We'll keep asking participants what they think about their experience, and what we can improve.

We know that when things change, it can sometimes be hard to know what to do next, or what to expect. That's why doing the test in Tasmania and talking to the people involved is important.

There are already some things we heard in the Tasmania test that we can do better. We want to:

Make our new computer system easier for NDIA staff and NDIS partners to use.

We will do this by:

- Making it easier to transfer participants from our old computer system to our new one.
- Updating the information staff and partners need to use our new computer system, making sure it closely matches how everything works.
- Making sure we use plain English in everything we do and be clear about what has changed and what stays the same.
- Making sure our new computer system and portal works properly for participants in remote or very remote areas of Australia.
- Looking at how we track questions, to see if we can improve how this works.

Make our new provider portal and ways of working are simpler for NDIS providers.

We will do this by:

- Building alerts into our systems, so providers know when they have an action in the provider portal to complete.
- Making the explanation and language about participant-endorsed providers simpler.

- Making information in the participant and provider portals easier to see and find.
- Working with provider groups, to make sure we have the right information and resources for them to understand, use and talk about our new computer system and ways of working.

Help everyone get ready for the change to our new computer system.

We will do this by:

- Talking to participants, providers, and the disability community in Tasmania, bringing people together for group discussions to give us advice on how we should our new computer system to the rest of Australia.
- Being clear about what changes and what stays the same with our new computer system and ways of working, giving the right information to participants, providers, NDIA staff and NDIS partners.
- Building a new website, to sit next to www.ndis.gov.au. This new website will have information for everyone about each step of their NDIS journey, so that participants, providers, and the disability community can find what they want to know, when they need to know it. We'll also make sure the information is in in plain English, and easy to find and understand.
- Looking at how we can provide access to the new portals for participants and providers so they can see and test them before using them.
- Improving our training and learning materials for NDIA staff and NDIS partners, so they feel more confident to use our new computer system and support participants in their NDIS journey.