Hello, my name is Deborah Roberts, I’m the Director of the Mental Health Team with the National Disability Insurance Agency. I’m a registered Clinical Psychologist with more than 30 years’ experience in the disability and mental health field, both here in Australia and in the UK.

Hi, I’m Mark Rosser, I’m the Assistant Director for Mental Health here at the NDIA and have more than 10 years’ experience working in the community mental health sector. The Mental Health Team gets many, many requests to attend events all over the country. We’re a very small team so we’re not always able to attend so we thought it would be a good idea to do a bit of an “On the Couch” question and answer session for you.

So Deb, what is the NDIS?

The NDIS is a new way of providing support for people with disability, including people with psychosocial disability, to have an ordinary life. It’s about building skills and capability so that people can engage in their community and undertake employment. It’s person centred, and what that means is the person has an individual plan and they have individual funding. The person sets the goals of the plan, they decide what supports they want, they decide how they want the supports delivered and they decide on the Provider. They can also decide how they want the plan managed.

So Deb, you mentioned psychosocial disability, what is psychosocial disability?

Psychosocial disability is the term used to describe a disability arising from a mental health issue. Not everyone who has a mental health issue will have a disability but for those who do, it can be severe and longstanding and it can really impact on somebody’s recovery.

So Deb, you mentioned recovery, what is your understanding of recovery?

My understanding of recovery from people with lived experience is that it is about achieving a state of optimal personal, social and emotional wellbeing that’s defined by the individual, not by a service system, and that may mean living with or recovering from mental health issues.

So we spoke about recovery, how does recovery align to the NDIS?

The NDIS understands that recovery is a journey. Hope and optimism are very important on that journey. The lifetime commitment to reasonable and necessary supports really underpins that hope and optimism. There are key principals of the NDIA that align well with recovery, the choice and control is central to the NDIA and it’s the persons’ plan, their goals, they make decisions about supports and who provides those supports for them. That aligns really well with an individual recovery journey. The other key principal of the NDIA is about increased social and economic participation. Of course, in recovery, we know that connectedness and relationships are really important and that also aligns very well with the NDIA.

How does someone with a psychosocial disability access the NDIS?

There are three criteria to access the NDIS. The first criteria is age – You must be under the age of 65 when you apply for the NDIS. The second criteria is residency and that has two components: you must be an Australian citizen or a permanent resident or meet specific visa requirements and you must also be living in an area where the NDIS is rolling out. The third criteria is a disability criteria.

Tell us a bit more about disability requirements.

For a person with a psychosocial disability to access the Scheme, they need to have a permanent or likely-to-be permanent disability as a result of their mental health condition. The condition must have a significant impact on their day to day life and the person’s ability to participate in the community. It also needs to be likely that the person will need support for the rest of their life.

People’s reasonable and necessary supports are included in the plan, can you tell us a bit more about plans?

OK, so, with the NDIA you will have a first plan for your first 12 months and that plan will cover the supports you get now and any urgent, un-met needs. An LAC or Support Coordinator will then work with you to implement that plan and during that time help you think about what your future goals may be, what the opportunities may be and explore.

So let’s talk a bit about someone who is now in the Scheme, they’ve met the access criteria, what reasonable and necessary supports could they expect to have?

The reasonable and necessary supports will be around those everyday activities and supporting people’s capacity to build their skills and engage with their community and employment. We spoke about recovery, and that recovery journey is very individual, often people’s recovery journey goes up and down so they might need increased supports at a certain time in their journey and less so in other times. Does the Scheme work in that way?

Yes, so in a persons’ individual plan we can build flexibility in the plan so that they can have more support when they need it and less when they don’t.

How does the NDIS work with other systems?

The NDIS is designed to work alongside other systems and it’s not designed to replace all the other funded services that Governments may provide. So, typically, for a person with psychosocial disability they may well have a funded plan with supports from the NDIS but they would be involved with other services such as clinical mental health services or community mental health services.

So if people want to know more about psychosocial disability and the NDIS where do they go, what do they do?

So, the NDIS has a range of resources on psychosocial disability and the NDIA on the website. There are videos, there are communiqués, there are fact sheets and there are reports from projects that are there and I would encourage everybody to go to the website and have a look at those. To make it particularly easy we a have a “Key products and resources” fact sheet that has links to everything that the Mental Health Team and the NDIA have produced and people can find that easily on the web.

The web being?

www.ndis.gov.au Thanks for your time today Deb.

Thank you Mark, and just to let people know they can contact the Mental Health Team to answer specific questions at the email address that is on the screen now:

For further information email mental.health.team@ndis.gov.au