17 October 2024

This is a summary of the Participant Reference Group's (PRG) meeting.

The Participant Reference Group (PRG) makes sure the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) hears and understands the participant voice. The PRG has 23 members from participant and carer organisations across Australia.

The NDIA uses feedback from PRG meetings to keep making the NDIS better. PRG members work on what the NDIA plans to do. They work on new and current policies, improving the systems we use, and how we deliver services.

Chairperson's welcome

Donna Purcell is the Branch Manager, Office of the Participant Advocate, and chair of the PRG.

She welcomed members to an out of session meeting to talk about legislation changes and the implementation plan.

Summary of immediate changes

The NDIA has to make some changes on the day the legislation is made into law. There are other changes that the NDIA will make after that day.
This meeting talked about the changes that the NDIA will make on the first day. These include:

- participants getting clearer information about how they meet access requirements to the NDIS. This could be a disability or an early intervention
- limits on how long someone has to make a new access request
- total funding amounts, funding amounts for a support or group of supports
- the amount of time to use a funding amount
- the list of NDIS supports that will be used until the new rules are put in place
- how substitutes work

High level action plan

The NDIA is looking at how we tell people about these changes. Some of the things we will do include:

- key messages in a lot of formats
- training for staff, the National Contact Centre (NCC) and partners
- talking to other government services like Health and Justice

Discussion

PRG members noted they talk with their communities and pass along information. They said they need the NDIA to give them more information. The information needs to be clear. We need to use a range of formats.

They said people are worried about the changes. The NDIA noted there are a lot of changes coming in, including the new computer system PACE and the legislation changes.

PRG members said to be aware that words have meaning, and that it takes time for people to understand all the changes and new words. They said timelines are helpful.

PRG members said there had been a clear set of guiding principles when the NDIS first started. These principles seem to have been lost. They said there are a lot of staff changes, and a lot of new NCC staff and local area coordinators. The NCC staff and local area coordinators often have the wrong information.

PRG members noted the Changes to NDIS Supports letter isn't clear. They offered to send through some feedback. The NDIA said sometimes we have to use certain words and we need to explain them better.

PRG members said if the NDIA is changing the words we use, we need to explain and be clear about those changes.

PRG members said people are worried about having to pay money back. The rules aren't clear. They said people don't understand the changes.

PRG members noted some NDIA staff use the scripts and some don't. They said some staff make their own decisions. They said that people should hear the same decision from all the people they contact.

PRG members said it was important for them to feel heard. They said they are told to call the local area coordinator or the NCC. They said nobody wants to call those people because they may not get the correct information.

PRG members said the NDIA must be honest if it wants to build trust. They noted that sometimes the Minister and the Department of Social Services say different things. They said that is confusing and doesn't help to build trust.

The NDIA said the CEO will be the only person who can issue a debt or waive a debt. PRG members said that should be communicated because there's so much fear about doing the wrong thing and

having to pay money back. They said it’s good to know the CEO will have that oversight.

PRG members noted the changes will affect people in different ways. They said NDIA staff need to be sensitive when talking to people.

PRG members said the NDIA needs to understand how the changes will impact different groups. They said people in rural and remote areas will have extra challenges. They said the NDIA needs to make sure participants don’t lose their voice.

PRG members said people want to know how the changes affect their personal situation.

Final comments and close

Donna thanked PRG members for their time and contribution.

Next meeting

Out of session: Wednesday 4 and Thursday 12 September 2024

Planned: Tuesday 17 to Wednesday 18 September 2024

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