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 a meeting to talk about legislation reforms to NDIS supports and plan use.

Section 33 of the NDIS Act – plan use

Section 33 of the NDIS Act is about the information that must be in a participant's plan. The Co-design branch talked about a proposed change to Section 33.

The proposed change would help NDIS participants better manage their NDIS funding. The change would mean the participant's NDIS plan can show:

- how much funding is in the plan for all reasonable and necessary supports
- how much funding can be spent on different types of supports
- how much funding can be spent at one time, for example in a year – this is called a funding period.

This would help participants spend within their NDIS funding budget. It would also help the Scheme to be sustainable.

PRG members noted there should be more support for people to self-manage. Self-managed participants should have help before changes are made to their plan. They said if a participant is plan managed, invoices can be paid without the participant knowing or agreeing.

PRG members felt the term over-utilisation blamed the participants. They said providers or support coordinators may have told participants to use more budget than they have. PRG members said

under-spending needs to be looked at too.

PRG members said some participants and their families don’t track their budgets. The NDIA needs to help participants understand how to use their plan. The NDIA also needs to provide calculators and tools. PRG members noted the calculators on the NDIA website. They said a calculator in the portal and app would be better. They suggested a game version on the app.

Frontline staff need training on how to talk with participants. They need to help them manage their budgets. They need to explain the rules for plan categories and how to use plans flexibly.
PRG members said that participants should be able to change the funding periods for longer plans. There may be changes in their life. For example, if a participant is starting university or starting a job they may need different supports.

Section 10 of the NDIS Act – NDIS supports

The NDIA and PRG members talked about the proposed transitional rule at the meeting on 24 July 2024. They continued talking about it at this meeting.

PRG members noted the lists are very long and hard to understand. They said participants could end up with debts. This could be because they spent NDIS money on things that are on the out list.

PRG members noted that if they didn’t have a disability, they would do some things themselves. But because of their disability, they need some services. For example, someone may not be able to safely wash their hair. The NDIS should cover those services.

PRG members noted that there were things on the out list that participants needed because of their disability. For example, an iPad may be the only way a participant can talk to other people.

PRG members noted some sections where there should be carve outs, like special clothing. They also said there should be an option to cover part of an item. For example, school uniforms are not an NDIS support. If a child needs more uniforms because of their disability, the NDIS should pay for that. Students have to pay for textbooks. If they need a Braille version the NDIS should pay to translate it.

PRG members were concerned about how psychosocial disability will be covered. They noted some items on the out list that would mean participants lose dignity. Some items that were on the out list would mean participants lose choice and control. They noted participants could face harm or injury, for example moving furniture.

PRG members felt the consultation period was too short. Consultation should start when the information is available. PRG members felt the NDIA doesn’t listen to them. They say the same things in meetings and in submissions, but nothing changes.

PRG members noted their submission to the second inquiry included solutions. They said their submission wasn't in the inquiry report. PRG members said they do not support the lists.

Final comments and close

Donna thanked PRG members for their time and contribution.

Next meeting

Planned: Tuesday 17 to Wednesday 18 September 2024

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