24 January 2025

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

The Participant Reference Group (PRG) makes sure the 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 virtual meeting to talk about the draft replacement supports application form.

Draft replacement supports application form

The NDIA sent a draft version of the application form to PRG members. They asked for feedback on the criteria for the replacement support.

The NDIA noted that the replacement support:

- must replace something already in the NDIS plan
- must cost the same amount or less than the item it replaces
- needs to provide the same or a better outcome for the participant.

We said we need clear and simple questions so participants can give us all the information we need to make a decision.

We said we want to provide a form so participants can work through it in their own time or with someone they choose. We said participants can also apply in different ways. They can call the National Contact Centre. They can send an email.

PRG members noted the form asks the participant to sign saying they understand they can't ask for a review of the decision. They said this should be a statement and the participant shouldn't have to sign or tick a box.

They said this should be somewhere else in the document, for example at the start.

PRG members said there should be a question asking if the support addressed a risk. They said the NDIA needs to provide duty of care if they approve the request or if they deny it.

The NDIA needs to have a good answer if we say no to a replacement support.

PRG members said they gave feedback about different ways to apply for a replacement support in the last meeting. They said forms weren't accessible for a lot of participants.

They said it was important to talk to the person making the decision.

The NDIA said we have a lot of ways for participants to apply. We said participants can talk to the person making the decision. We said some people had asked for a form as it was easier for them. We will look at a web-based form but this won't be ready for 3 October.

PRG members said the form is very long. The NDIA said we want to make it easier. We said PRG members can tell us if they had some ideas to make it shorter. PRG members said the comments with each question didn't need to be there.

The NDIA asked PRG members about moving the essential questions to the front of the form. They said we could then put questions about the supplier if the participant knows that. And we can put the optional things at the end.

PRG members agreed that the questions that need answers should be at the start. They said there needs to be a short explanation that explains why the NDIA needs to know the optional things. They said this could be in a separate document.

PRG members said participants may not have a lot of details about the product. They said it would be easier to answer one question about the replacement support. They asked if a quote could be attached instead of putting the details into the form.

The NDIA used an example of a participant asking for a smart watch, so they don't need as many support worker hours. We said we need to understand the tradeoff.

PRG members said supports are different for everyone. They said the NDIA wants to know the dollar value of the replacement support. The NDIA suggested we could ask a yes or no question. We can provide space for free text to tell us how it will work.

PRG members asked if the replacement support could be talked about at the needs assessment. The NDIA said participants can talk about this at a plan meeting. We said participants can also ask about a replacement at another time.

The NDIA said they are 2 separate processes. The replacement is outside of the plan decision. The participant needs to have a plan with supports before they can ask to replace a support.

PRG members said one-off supports isn't correct – they are one-off purchases. They also said there isn't an option for fluctuating needs. They asked if the question about how often a participant buys something is relevant.

PRG members said the NDIA is asking for personal information. They said the NDIA needs to be clear about the intention and purpose. They said the NDIA should only ask questions when they need to know the answer.

PRG members asked about supports they have bought that aren't stated in their plans. They wanted to know if they could keep buying them if they are on the banned list.

The NDIA said if a support is stated in the participant's plan, even if it's on the banned list the participant can keep buying it. We said we are working on some transitional rules for supports that participants have bought as part of their support needs.

PRG members asked about the time frame for the process. They asked if participants could be told what stage their application is at. They asked if participants could put their preferred method of communication on the form.

PRG members said the NDIA told them this is a first version. They asked if they can see the final version before it goes live.

The Department of Social Services (DSS) said they are still working on the document. They said it hasn't gone to the Minister yet. They said it has to be registered on 2 October. They said they will come back to PRG members and keep talking about the process and the form.

Final comments and close

Donna thanked PRG members for their time and contribution.

Next meeting

Wednesday 9 October 2024

October meeting

This meeting was a private discussion and no notes were taken.

Next meeting

Wednesday 13 and Monday 18 November 2024

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