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In 2023, the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) commissioned an independent review of the NDIA's co-design work. The aim was to look closely at past projects to identify what co-design had been done, what worked, what did not work, and any lessons for future processes. In particular, the evaluation wanted to better understand the NDIA's co-design process, identify outcomes from co-design work and consider if the co-design approach was appropriate.

The evaluation was guided by the Co-design Advisory Group which gives strategic advice to the NDIA on the implementation of co-design. The group includes representatives from the Independent Advisory Council, disability representative organisations and senior NDIA staff.

Following an open tender process, Clear Horizons was engaged to lead the evaluation. They commenced work in April 2024, with support from a dedicated working group, with leads from six major projects and Co-design Advisory Group members. They shared papers and reports to assist Clear Horizons and make suggestions for potential interviewees who had been involved in the co-design projects – including NDIS participants, family members, carers and NDIA staff.

Clear Horizons presented their findings to the Co-design Advisory Group in late 2024 with a final report delivered in early 2025. This included recommendations around next steps and ideas to strengthen co-design and engagement going forward.

Key themes and recommendations

Clear Horizon's report identified some consistent themes including:

- whilst co-design work was undertaken enthusiastically and positively by all who participated, it was inconsistently used across the Agency.
- knowledge about, understanding of, and evidence for co-design from people interviewed was mixed. This limited the evaluation's ability to make conclusive statements about the NDIA's overarching approach to co-design. One example was limited evidence to make conclusions about the appropriateness of co-design. However, there was broad support for the concept of co-design.
- the need for more clarity around how decisions are made following co-design. Feedback suggested that whilst co-design activities were regularly undertaken in good faith, the impact on policy and practice was not always clear.

The report makes recommendations around these themes including:

- strengthening accountability and oversight mechanisms for co-design
- prioritising projects for co-design that have a clear purpose, scope and limits, as well as sufficient time and support for co-design
- capacity building and support for staff and community members in co-design
- clear feedback loops for participants involved in co-design and engagement.

In accepting the report, the Co-design Advisory Group acknowledged the feedback about the need to strengthen co-design practice at the NDIA. They also noted that many of the recommendations were already in train, with considerable work already done over the period from 2023. This includes:

- establishment of a dedicated NDIA Co-design Branch and recruitment of skilled staff to implement co-design consistently
- development of a shared statement on co-design and principles for working in partnership with the disability community, endorsed by the Minister for the NDIS, the Department of Social Services, NDIS Commission, NDIA, Independent Advisory Council and Disability Representative and Carer Organisations
- establishment and support for new co-design working groups to help inform, guide and implement co-design approaches across key reform areas
- dedicated induction sessions and skill building for participants
- feedback sessions with co-chairs and NDIS participants
- renewal of the Co-design Advisory Group with updated membership
- a capability program with bespoke training and resources for NDIA teams, including co-design, facilitation, trauma informed approaches and wellbeing
- development of a continuous learning program for co-design.

This report offers a chance to learn from looking back at our co-design on the journey so far. However, our priority is to build on this work to find new ways to work closely with the disability community and to continue to travel the journey together.

Report

You can download and view the Co-design Evaluation Report by Clear Horizon through the following links:

- Clear Horizon Codesign Evaluation Report - Final (DOCX 3MB)
- Clear Horizon Codesign Evaluation Report - Final (PDF 843KB)

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