14 July 2025

Friday 13 June 2025

What we talked about

Topic 1: Reset of co-design for National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) reforms, working group ways of working

The National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) discussed recent work with the sector to focus co-design work on 4 main areas – Navigation, Assessment and Budgeting, Participant Safeguarding and Participant Pathway Experience.

The NDIA aims to increase the depth and breadth of its engagement activities with participants, the market and Disability Representative and Carer Organisations (DRCOs).

The Navigator co-design working group (working group) is seen as having a critical role in:

- leading and informing the engagement that should occur with participants
- leading and guiding the best approaches to participant engagement activities in focus groups – for example, through topics discussed or questions asked.

Working group meetings will be moved to every 8 weeks and will run for a shorter time. This will allow enough time for the NDIA to set up each phase of focus groups, analyse the information and report back to the working group.

Topic 2: Engagement updates – NDIA and Sector-led

Update from Scott Fitzpatrick, Navigator initiative lead

In June, the NDIA met with State and Territory departments with disability responsibilities to discuss the Navigators service design and separately, with the CEOs of Partners in the Community organisations.

The NDIA’s CEO also met with DRCOs to get their views on the Navigator reforms and service design.

The NDIA noted that there will be significant levels of engagement over the next 2 years as Navigator functions are designed and delivered.

Update from Bronwyn Morkham, Navigator co-design working group co-chair

There is a general sense in the sector that it had not developed a position on the Navigator role. The sector held meetings with disability representative organisations and DRCOs with the intention to share those findings with the working group. The recent reset had paused this activity.

Topic 3: Future engagement activities and workplan

The NDIA will be sharing a draft workplan with planned engagement activities for the working group to review and give feedback.

The draft includes proposed topics and stakeholders and participant groups prioritised for engagement.

Topic 4: New Framework Planning (NFP) Participant experience

The NDIA presented a conceptual design of the participant experience under new framework planning.

What we heard

- The working group asked if there were opportunities for members to take part in the focus groups and / or facilitate sessions – noting the skills required to facilitate these sessions and the experiences of the group that could be drawn upon.
- It is critical to recognise the disability sector isn’t homogeneous and that there are different ways people access and receive services. For example, for deaf and blind communities there could be limits to who could access Navigators if they hold insufficient skill sets.
- When engaging, it is important to use simple language with direct questions – avoiding jargon wherever possible. An example could be asking specifically what they believe a Navigator should do or what would help make participants more self-sufficient or in control of their lives.
- There are opportunities to learn from other organisations that have previously led focus groups with participants and people with disability (e.g. Brotherhood of St Laurence, Neuromuscular WA).
- It is important to hold focus groups with a range of different participant groups including people with psychosocial disability, participants from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and participants who are Deaf and / or Blind. Peer-facilitated focus groups could improve how focus groups are run and enable more genuine and honest feedback.
- Some participants are non-speaking or not able to engage in written surveys and papers, so the engagement process should capture these cohorts in different ways.

- Some participants also display challenging behaviours. There is a role for parents or nominees to participate in focus groups for participants who are unable to do so due to disability type or barriers to participation.
- The engagement process should capture the views of participants who are not using support coordination or do not have access to it due to their plans – to understand what they believe that a Navigator should be doing for them.
- There is potential to explore what type of services or support participants believe would best suit them as they move through different life stages. For example, whether participants prefer to work directly with specialists / subject matter experts in transition periods (e.g. moving out of home),or work directly with somebody who knows and understands their situation but may need additional support during these transitions.
- Sometimes participants think that intermediaries – such as interpreters – are representing the NDIA, rather than simply conveying information. This can lead to confusion about the interpreter's role and difficulty distinguishing between the interpreter and the NDIA.
- Participants and their nominees are having difficulty understanding the new funding periods and what this means for them. There should be a role for Navigators in supporting participants' understanding of these kinds of changes.
- The NFP process requires multiple actors as part of the assessment process which can be a stressful and unsettling process for people if needing to re-tell their stories. The NDIA should consider if this process can be more streamlined or if there's a role for a support coordinator to participate in meetings.
- The NFP processes require letters to be sent to participants. The Agency should make sure recipients of NDIA letters not only receive them but are able to open and understand the information. Receiving correspondence from government agencies can be a stressful experience for participants and people with a disability.
- Navigators should have specific disability skills when working with different groups (for example psychosocial skills when working with psychosocial disability). This is also relevant under all stages of the planning process and the skillsets and experience of everyone who will be working directly with participants.
- The NDIS system is quite stretched with intermediaries not having the time or capacity that they would like. The NDIA needs to communicate to support coordinators its expectations on how they will need to help participants implement their plan. Possible ways to do this could be through video content explaining steps and processes and some information sessions with support coordinators. Support coordinators may require more funding and a lower workload if they are expected to take on more work under the NFP process.
- Intermediaries (plan managers, support coordinators, local area coordinators) have a range of tools and resources to help support their work with participants. It was strongly recommend to engage with them rather than create new tools when these may already exist. This could be helpful for monitoring under the new planning process.

What we agreed to do

- Recirculate for new members a copy of earlier findings from engagement activities with support coordinators.
- Provide further information on best practice approaches to focus group engagement and potential involvement of working group members.
- Share a summary of the key themes raised during engagement activities to date.
- Develop a forward workplan outlining planned engagement activities, focus groups and potential topics and share this with the working group for feedback.
- Circulate a copy of the Independent Pricing Committee report and its commentary about Navigators being funded through a commissioned model.

Who we met with

Participants, Disability Representative and Carer Organisations, Independent Advisory Council and Reference Group members, subject matter experts and NDIA staff.

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