29 August 2025

Quote from attendee: 'I think it's important to make sure there is a good understanding of the disabilities and the importance of what is not said, as much as what is, by the participant.'

What we talked about

Topic 1: Attending a Support Needs Assessment

- The NDIA shared a draft outline of what the Support Needs Assessment (SNA) experience might look like as part of the new participant pathway.
- The NDIA also shared early findings from initial co-design with participants, showing what participants need to feel prepared and supported during the assessment.
- The group gave feedback on how to make the process more inclusive, respectful, and better reflect the real-life experiences and needs of participants.

What we heard

- Trust is key for participants to feel safe when sharing their needs without fear of negative consequences.
- Participants want honesty about who holds decision-making power in the Support Needs Assessment. Saying the process is “equal” can feel unrealistic and may reduce trust. Participants feel more comfortable sharing personal information when it’s clear that the NDIA makes the final decisions, and the assessor's role is to listen and represent their support needs accurately. Being upfront about power helps create a safer, more respectful environment for open conversation.
- When power dynamics are unclear participants may hesitate to share personal information, affecting the openness and quality of the conversation.
- The Support Needs Assessor should understand the participant’s type of disability and be able to ask helpful questions to make sure the assessment accurately reflects what the participant needs.
- The Support Needs Assessment experience should be clear, transparent, and the participant and the assessor are working together.
- It must use respectful, inclusive, trauma-informed, and person-centred language. It should take place in a welcoming, non-clinical setting where participants can pause or take breaks as needed.
- Flexible formats should be tailored to individual needs, and participants should be able to choose assessment locations and communication methods.
- The experience needs to be focused on what a participant can do, helping them to envision and articulate goals for a better life, rather than focusing solely on deficits or limitations.

- The Support Needs Assessment should clearly link to the plan and budget, so participants feel confident that what they shared is properly considered in the decisions made about their new plan.
- The assessment experience and supporting resources must be easy to use for people who are blind, Deaf, non-verbal, or have low literacy.
- Materials should be available in multiple formats and languages, including easy read to meet diverse communication needs.
- Reports from the participant's treating health experts should be included in the assessment, unless the participant chooses not to include them.
- Tools like workbooks to support the Support Needs Assessment should be optional. While some participants may find them helpful, others may find them stressful or difficult to use. If used, assessors should take time to read and consider the participant's input.
- Participants' rights and responsibilities should be clearly explained before the Support Needs Assessment begins.
  Assessors should be trained in specific disabilities and cultural competency to ensure respectful and informed assessments.
- The assessment experience must be flexible, accommodating fatigue, cognitive load, diverse backgrounds and family needs.
- Feedback loops are essential. Participants should be able to review and correct what's being recorded during the assessment.

What we agreed on

- Continue co-designing the Support Needs Assessment process with participants and the broader disability community.
- Co-design easy to use resources and tools to help participants navigate the future planning journey.

Next meeting

The next working group meeting is on 12 August 2025.

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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