19 August 2025

August Quarterly Reform Forum

Tuesday 19 August 2025, 11:00am-3:30pm (AEST)

Who we met with

Disability Representative and Carers Organisations (DRCO) Attendees: Australian Autism Alliance, Australian Federation of Disability Organisations, Autistic Self Advocacy Network of Australia and New Zealand, Blind Citizens Australia, Brain Injury Australia, Children and Young People with Disability Australia, Community Mental Health Australia, Deaf Australia, Deafblind Australia, Deafness Forum Australia, Disability Advocacy Network Australia, Down Syndrome Australia, Every Australian Counts, Inclusion Australia, JFA Purple Orange, Mental Health Australia, National Ethnic Disability Alliance, National Mental Health Consumer and Carer Forum, People with Disability Australia, Physical Disability Australia, ReImagine Australia, Self Advocacy Resource Unit, Women with Disabilities Australia, Young People in Nursing Homes National Alliance.

Independent Advisory Council (IAC) Attendees: Leah van Poppel, Vaughn Bennison, Dr Sharon Boyce, Assoc. Professor Lorna Hallahan, Dr Leighton Jay, Sam Paior, Mark Tonga, Andrew Vodic, Jane Wardlaw, Kelly Cox, Cherry Baylosis, Danielle Loizou, Samantha Jenkinson.

NDIA Attendees: Aaron Verlin, Clair Wheeler, Alex Rosenthal, Susan Moore, Phillip Wakefield, Jackie Saddington, Carolyn Tetaz, Scott Fitzpatrick, Byron Adu, Sarah Coad, Catherine Burkitt, Elizabeth Fay, Kathy Cameron, Linda Trembearth-McMorrow, Iffy Anwasi (session 5-7), Thomas Cavicchia (session 5-7).

Apologies: Dr Gill Hicks (IAC), Tricia Malowney and First Peoples Disability Network.

What we talked about

Topic 1: NDIA update

Aaron Verlin, Acting Deputy CEO, Service Design and Improvement, provided the following update.

1. New way of planning

The new way of planning is now expected to start from 1 July 2026 with testing to commence from 1 April 2026.

- The Agency is preparing communications about the expected start date, to be released shortly.

2. Support Needs Assessment Tool

- The procurement of a new support needs assessment tool is now complete.
- Briefings will be held with DRCOs and IAC members about the outcome of the procurement and to discuss next steps.

3. Funding periods

- There have been changes to the guidance about funding periods, including:
  - Being clearer that not everything in the list of things staff consider have to be in place to set a funding period longer than 3 months.
  - Including guidance that the first funding period of a plan may be appropriate when there is behaviour supports in the plan.
  - Starting at 6-month funding periods for plans with $15,000 funding or less.
- Attendees raised concerns about short funding periods for Home and Living and neurodegenerative conditions. The Agency acknowledged these issues and will continue to listen to feedback and update staff guidance about funding periods.

4. Eligibility reassessments

- Participants who are having an eligibility reassessment now have 90 days to provide information. The Agency increased the time to provide information from 28 days to 90- days earlier this year.
- There are a large number of eligibility reassessments coming up to the end of the 90-day period. This means the Agency will start to make decisions about whether these participants continue to meet the eligibility criteria very soon.
- Eligibility reassessments have always been part of the NDIS.
- There is an opportunity for Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA) to review communications about eligibility reassessments. Attendees raised concerns about the lack of support for children exiting the Scheme. The Agency acknowledged many children need supports outside of the NDIS when they leave the Scheme. However, the Agency must follow what the NDIS Act says about participants who are no longer eligible having to leave the NDIS.

5. Duckett Review (Art and Music Therapy)

- The independent review into the effectiveness of arts and music therapy, and the Agency's response, will be shared soon.
- There will be a period between when changes are announced and when they are put into action.
- The Agency will brief DRCOs and IAC members before the Review and response are published.

6. Short-term respite

- A new operational guideline – Short-term respite - will be published soon, with clearer information about the purpose of short-term respite, who it is for, and how the NDIA makes decisions about including it in a plan.
- The Agency will brief DRCOs and IAC members before changes are made.

7. Impairment information

- The Agency is updating how we provide participants information about their impairments, including the language we use, based on the disability community's feedback.

8. Responses to enquiries

- The Agency clarified the responsibilities of the plan delegate role, including:
  - reviewing the support needs assessment
  - making decisions about plan management type, funding periods and plan duration, and
  - helping implement plans.
- The Agency clarified:
  - there is no change to how supports are matched to a participant's impairments
  - the new impairment information letters for new participants don't affect the funding in the plan.

Topic 2: Scheme reform update

Clair Wheeler, General Manager Co-design and Engagement, provided the following update.

1. New way of planning

- The Agency is focussed on working with the disability community to shape a new and fairer way of planning for delivery by mid-next year.

- The Agency will work with the four co-design working groups to identify opportunities to test and design the products and practices to support the new way of planning.
- The Agency has identified there may be a need for more flexible working arrangements in the co-design program. For example, holding workshops and simulations with participants.
- The Agency acknowledges the depth of insights the sector has already provided through previous co-design and engagement activities. The intent is to use this information, and fill gaps in Agency knowledge through new engagement activities where needed.
- The Agency remains committed to learning from past engagement and co-design efforts. This includes implementing the recommendations from the recent co-design evaluations, led by the Co-design Advisory Group.

2. Inclusive engagement

- The Agency has established a First Nations Consultation Group to ensure a more active First Nations voice across our reform work.
- The First Nations Group and the Office of Participant Advocacy have recruited 14 participants as group members. The members have a diverse range of disability and lived experience.

3. Attendee feedback

- QRF members provided the following insights and feedback:
  - Some co-design working group members feel their role has shifted from guiding broader engagement to just giving feedback.
  - There were calls for the Agency to better validate feedback with the sector and provide clearer communication about how their input is being used.
  - Concern was raised about how the Agency will ensure diverse voices, especially for people with intellectual and complex disabilities, continue to be included in fast moving reform work.
  - Suggestion to embed people with lived experience directly into design teams.

Topic 3: Future Navigator service design

Scott Fitzpatrick, Branch Manager for Intermediary Design and Navigator Lead, delivered an overview of the proposed service design for Navigators.

The presentation centred on the proposed service design for the navigator role. This included the key functions the navigator would deliver and the different levels of the navigator service which would respond to different levels of need.

What we heard

Key discussion points raised by attendees about the future Navigator service design

- People don’t fit neatly into categories, and people’s needs change over time so flexibility is critical.
- Navigators must have local knowledge and understand community-level accessibility and transport.
- Navigators must be able to operate effectively in an evolving system.
- Quality assurance practices need to be put in place to avoid poor outcomes.
- Supported decision-making should be a core competency for Navigators.
- Digital tools and AI are useful for self-navigation but should not be a replacement for human support.
- People should be able to access Navigators from any entry point in the system.
- Pilot programs are recommended in diverse locations including metro, regional and remote areas.
- The Agency should not communicate too early but wait until the model is well-developed to avoid confusion and anxiety.
- Evaluate the model from the start to measure outcomes and make changes if needed.
- Avoid replicating current gaps in support coordination.
- Place a strong emphasis on co-design, lived experience and inclusive practice.
- Transitional planning is vital to build knowledge and prepare stakeholders before rollout.

Actions

Actions	Details	Responsibility
1	Provide an update on how sector representatives can review Agency communications before publication	Co-design Branch
2	Provide an update on when the new way of planning will start	Co-design Branch

3	Provide a written update on the progress of a policy position for plan spending flexibility rules, including stated supports.	Co-design Branch Engagement & Inclusion Branch
4	Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA) to review draft communications about Eligibility Reassessments	Stakeholder Engagement team
5	Arrange an out of session online briefing for DRCOs and IAC members on the report into the independent review into music and art therapy	Engagement & Inclusion Branch
6	Arrange an out of session online briefing for DRCOs and IAC members on short term respite	Co-design Branch Engagement & Inclusion Branch
7	Arrange an online briefing for DRCOs and IAC members on the insight reports of the participant groups: • participants living with autism, and • participants living with psychosocial disabilities	Co-design Branch Engagement & Inclusion Branch
8	Provide a list of the different NDIA participant engagement groups established as part of the co-design reform program	Engagement & Inclusion Branch
9	Provide further information on the participant Rapid Response Group	Co-design Branchjenn
10	NDIA to respond to questions taken on notice during the QRF NDIA update and Scheme reform update sessions	Co-design Branch

11	Inclusion Australia to share principles to support the inclusion of people with decision support needs in Agency design and engagement activities.	Inclusion Australia

What we will do next

The next Quarterly Reform Forum will be held Friday 21 November, 11:00am to 4:00pm (Australian Eastern Daylight Time).

Related articles

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