20 October 2025

Key themes and insights

NDIA update

Key themes:

- The NDIA has started training the first group of support needs assessors, internal NDIA staff.
- The gradual rollout of the new approach to planning, including the introduction of support needs assessments, will begin the middle of 2026. Not all participants will move at once.
- The NDIA is closely monitoring outer regional locations that aren't classified as remote or very remote in relation provider travel. The Agency is considering options to reclassify some locations.
- Thriving Kids was announced by Minister Butler.
    - The NDIS will remain available for children and adults with permanent and significant disability.
    - The NDIA and Department of Health, Disability and Ageing both acknowledge that Autism is a lifelong neurodevelopmental condition and individual experiences are unique.
- The independent review of art and music therapy recommended the NDIS should fund art and music therapy that is evidence based, delivered by a qualified therapist and will improve the person's function.

Key insights:

- Concern that assessment of function may take the place of assessment of support needs with the introduction of Thriving Kids. Members expressed interest in the Agency continuing work on improving the NDIS children's pathway.
- Concern from members who are hearing from participants who have experienced cuts to their NDIS funding despite the NDIA saying the data is not showing this.
- Members are keen to understand the evidence that has informed the Inklings Pilot, that was referenced in the Thriving Kids announcement, and how are the benefits and impacts are going to be measured.
- Members expressed concern that providers are withdrawing in-home/at school support due to pricing changes for travel. There is an impact to providers in areas not classified as remote/very remote but where significant travel is required.

Fraud and Integrity

Key themes:

- The Agency has conducted a review of a sample of debts raised between 2017 to 2024.
- Of the 475 debts reviewed, the majority were handled correctly. There were 115 cases where it was decided to revoke the debt and issue an apology.
- There were 28 cases where the debt to be revoked had been paid in part or full, and refunds are being made, with interest.
- The Agency now has controls in place to avoid future errors. As of July 2024, all new debts go through a three-step process before being raised:
    - Review by the debt team with accurate records and consistent guidance
    - Review by debt leadership team and legal specialists
    - Review by the Agency's debt panel which includes CEO and 3 other members of the senior leadership team.
- The provider market has seen a range of interventions that includes the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission banning (over 900 providers have been exited), re-education, and referrals to the ACCC.

Key insights:

- Members are concerned that the NDIS website lists debts raised against participants before debts raised against providers raising the public perception of participants rorting the system.
- Members expressed support for the new three-step approach before debts are raised but have concerns around making sure there are previsions in the legislation to protect these changes.
- Concern that the error rate for debts in the sample reviewed is 24.2%, and a suggestion to ensure review of debts is continued.
- The new three-step approach to raising debt has been running for a year, and members would like to see a comparison between debts raised pre and post implementation of this process.

NDIS communications

Key themes:

- The Agency is improving how we communicate clear and timely information about reforms and integrity concerns to minimise uncertainty for participants and their families.
- The NDIS website is being redesigned to embed accessibility design principles including focusing on plain, simple language, and LOTE and Auslan translations.
- The Agency has been working with Down Syndrome Australia (DSA) on an accessible communications pilot that's now in the second stage. Key findings from stage one are:
    - Easy Read documents need to be shorter
    - Reduce paragraphs to short sentences and break up resources into easy to consume topics
    - Simplify complex language and explain what NDIS terminology means.

- As part of implementing the findings the Agency has consulted and engaged with over 300 participants on the website redevelopment, and is working on voice to text options, translation capabilities, and exploring how plain English and Easy Read should look.

Key insights:

- Members discussed the importance of tailored communications for culturally and linguistically diverse communities.
- Members expressed the importance of testing Easy Read with users and would like to see Easy Read summaries provided with NDIS plans as a priority.
- Concern was raised that the Participant Reference Group is not representative of people with intellectual disability.

DRCO Forum 2025 workplan

Key themes:

- The monthly caucus meeting to gather member feedback and provide the NDIA with input on the Forum agenda has improved DRCO members involvement in agenda setting.
- The membership working group has begun piloting the previously endorsed Membership Criteria. Currently, there are three applications being assessed against the criteria.
- The accessible communications working group has provided feedback on eligibility reassessments and early intervention communications.
- The DRCO employment working group is supporting the NDIA to develop employment conversation guides for staff and partners when supporting participants with goal setting.

Key insights:

- Concerns there are no Mental Health lived experience peaks represented on the section 10/section 33 evaluation advisory group.
- Members are keen to hear more about the employment conversation guides being developed, and ensure it complements work done in other spaces.

Participant Pathway Experience

Key themes:

- As a direct result of feedback, the Agency has made changes to the pathway around reducing how often participants need to tell their story.
- Under the revised pathway design, participants can meet with the plan delegate before the plan is approved, and implementation meetings will become optional.
- Key stages in the new participant pathway:

    - Preparing for a support needs assessment
    - The support needs assessment discussion
    - Validating the assessment report and building the NDIS plan
    - Support when receiving and using your NDIS plan.
- Under the new approach delegates will need to review and decide if the support needs assessment is valid or needs to be sent back for reassessment. The results of the support needs assessment will inform the participant's NDIS plan, including their budget.
- The NDIA wants to work with the sector to develop a quality assurance framework for support needs assessments, to help the plan delegate decide if they need to order a new assessment.

Key insights:

- Concerns that participants can't ask for edits to the support needs assessment summary report before they see their plan.
- Concern over the many interfaces and contact points for children, and a need for a consistent point of contact to build trust while learning to navigate the system.
- Members are keen to see more work done on what happens when the process isn't going smoothly. It's unclear what happens if there is a disagreement or what the formal review pathways are.

Support Needs Assessment Tool

Key themes:

- The Agency is close to procuring a support needs assessment tool. The Agency can then start to test and modify the tool and assessment approach as we learn over time. Work will also start on staff training and accreditation.
- The tool facilitates a semi-structured interview, so the assessment conversation will vary depending on the participant, their disability, and cultural factors.
- The tool will be used alongside targeted assessment modules for more complex needs.
- Examples of targeted modules are:
    - Assistive technology
    - Home and vehicle modifications
    - Disability related health supports
    - Some NDIS funded home and living supports.

Key insights:

- Members stated that modifications to the targeted tools for different cohorts should be tested before they are rolled out.
- Members expressed that the tools should consider and accurately score if someone needs supervising and prompting when carrying out daily tasks.

- Members cautioned around simplifying physical disability as easy to assess and how this language dismisses the impact of comorbid disabilities.

NDIA Workforce Transition

Key themes:

- The transition of the NDIA workforce to support the new planning approach will take time. It will involve a multi-layered process of redesigning work environments, structures, technologies, training and processes to ensure staff are supported.
- The transition will be completed in 3 stages:
  - Supporting staff to know what the change means for them
  - Delivering training and recourses so staff are equipped with the right skills and tools
  - Continuous improvement to ensure the Agency is supporting staff to embed and refine the skills in their daily practice.
- Workforce capability uplift and recruitment will be phased, with defined diversity and inclusion principles. The NDIA wants to:
  - Grow and retain high quality staff
  - Support the mobilisation and transition of current staff to the right roles
  - Explore strategic recruitment opportunities e.g. care economy and sector workforces.

Key insights:

- Members expressed the need for the outcomes of support needs assessments to be checked and overseen by clinical supervisors.
- Members acknowledged the challenges of staff retention during this period of change and highlighted the importance of strong recruitment and retention strategies.
- Members expressed the importance of valuing the lived experience of disability as a key requirement in recruitment.

Attendees

Australian Federation of Disability Organisations, Autistic Self Advocacy Network of Australia and New Zealand, Blind Citizens Australia, Brain Injury Australia, Carers Australia, Children and Young People with Disability Australia, Community Mental Health Australia, Deaf Australia, Deafblind 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, Women with Disabilities Australia, Young People in Nursing Homes National Alliance, Australian Autism Alliance, Deafness Forum Australia

Apologies: A4 Autism Aspergers Advocacy Australia, Self Advocacy Resource Unit

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