4 February 2026

The Rural and Remote Advisory Group met on Wednesday, 4 February 2026.

The meeting was held online.

Focus of the meeting

The focus of the February meeting was:

- First Nations Market and Sector Strategy
- Supported Needs Assessment Tool and Process.

First Nations Market and Sector Development Strategy

In 2024 First Nations providers made up less than 1 per cent of the 55,000 providers in a First Nations National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) market valued at $3.38 billion.

The First Nations Market and Sector Development Strategy aims to:

- Grow Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and Aboriginal Business Enterprises to deliver NDIS supports.
- Make sure NDIS supports are culturally safe for all First Nations participants.

A First Nations Market and Sector discussion paper was released in October 2025 and invited written responses.
The National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) held 15 in-person provider roundtable discussions across Australia in November and December 2025. The providers at the roundtable discussions included First Nations organisations and non-Indigenous organisations.

The roundtable discussions helped the NDIA confirm key issues and identified practical ideas to guide the First Nations Market and Sector Development Strategy.

Supported Needs Assessments

A support needs assessment will be part of the NDIA’s new way of planning from the middle of 2026.

The assessment will collect information from participants, and their families and carers, about the support they need in everyday life. This information will be used to create fairer and more flexible budgets and plans.

The NDIA will use the Instrument for the Classification and Assessment of Support Needs (I-CAN v6) as a base for developing the new Support Needs Assessment.

The I-CAN v6 was developed in Australia, by the Centre for Disability Studies.

A Support Needs Assessment will help the NDIA understand what supports a person with disability aged 16 and over might need.

Members gave advice on issues the NDIA should think about when introducing support needs assessments to participants in rural and remote areas. This advice included:

- A lack of qualified interpreters in rural and remote areas might make it hard to have a fair assessment. This was highlighted for participants who are:
  - Deaf or hard of hearing
  - First Nations people where English is not their first language
  - From Cultural and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds.
- Having to use family members as interpreters might lead to inaccurate assessments.
- Consideration of the balance of face-to-face and virtual assessments, noting that for many participants, virtual may not be effective.
- Participants in rural and remote areas may only be able to manage short assessment sessions. Assessments must be allowed to happen over multiple days.

Next meeting

The Rural and Remote Advisory Group's next meeting is Tuesday, 7 April 2026.

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