11 December 2025

Quote from attendee:

“I think that it does need to be more than just mandatory training when you first are inducted into things. It should be a six monthly or an ongoing learning process to keep people accountable...”

Overview

The NDIA wants to make sure its work is culturally safe. This means creating systems, services, and workplaces where First Nations people with disability feel respected, valued and heard.

This meeting focused on:

- Getting feedback on Cultural Safety and Allyship Principles and how to use them.
- Talking about gaps in services and participant experiences.

What we talked about

Cultural Safety and Allyship Principles

- The NDIA First Nations Branch developed these Principles to guide the NDIA’s culturally safe systems and services.

The goal:

- Respect and support First Nations people with disability, their families, carers, and communities.
- Use trauma-informed and holistic approaches in all NDIA work.
- The Principles are not a checklist. They will change over time. Everyone at NDIA, leaders, policy makers, and service staff, must reflect on their own biases. Non-Indigenous staff play a vital role in leading cultural change.

How the Agency created the Principles:

- We used ideas from the Lowitja Institute, Closing the Gap Agreement, NDIA First Nations Strategy, and co-design principles.
- NDIA Deputy CEO of First Nations Group Dr. Janine Mohamed leads the work with input from First Nations communities.

- The Principles were drafted by the First Nations Group and refined by First Nations staff at the ‘What is Cultural Safety for NDIA First Nations staff’ workshop in May 2025.

Next steps for the Cultural Safety team:

- Develop cultural safety training for NDIA staff, alongside the current mandatory e-learning modules.
- Create a community of practice for ongoing learning.
- Explore the idea of setting up a First Nations Contact Centre for culturally safe communication.
- Include the Principles in NDIA performance frameworks.
- Regularly check and report progress so it is not just a tick-box exercise.

What we heard

- Members want the Principles to be part of NDIA systems and processes so they become an everyday practice.
- The Principles should guide long-term cultural change, not just be a checklist.
- The Principles must be in plain English so everyone can understand and apply them.
- Use strengths-based language, especially for Principle 8.
- NDIA staff need to critically reflect on their own cultural bias and racism.
- The NDIA needs ongoing cultural safety training. Current e-learning is not enough.
- NDIS processes are complex and create barriers for First Nations people. The cost of diagnoses and long wait time for services limits people accessing support.
- Assessments often lack cultural safety. Members worry the new I-CAN tool feels too standardised and impersonal.
- NDIA should respect cultural connections but not put too much pressure on families without adequate support, as this could burden kinship networks.
- There are communication gaps between NDIA and First Nations peoples. Group members highlighted the need for safe, direct ways to talk to NDIA.
- Local Area Coordinators need training to work with First Nations communities.
- Clear reporting and complaints pathways for cultural safety concerns are essential, for both participants and NDIA staff. Anonymous feedback and complaints must lead to real outcomes.
- Principles risk becoming symbolic without enforcement and measurable outcomes. Monitoring and evaluation should be transparent and shared with First Nations communities.

Further suggestions:

- Hire First Nations staff for decision-making roles. Members suggested ‘Champion Leaders’ in each team who are responsible for leading culturally safe practices.

- Assess the Principles in pilot programs before full rollout. First Nations participants must be included in this process.
- Extend cultural safety awareness to NDIS providers and workers. Include a strengths-based and trauma-informed approach to empower participants through listening and respect.

Next meeting

January 2026 to continue cultural safety discussions.

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