19 February 2026

Thursday 19 February 2026, 11:00am-4:00pm (AEDT)

Who we met with

Disability Representative and Carers Organisations (DRCO) attendees: Australian Autism Alliance, Australian Federation of Disability Organisations, Carers Australia, Children and Young People with Disability Australia, Community Mental Health Australia, Deaf 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.

Department Health Disability and Ageing (DHDA) attendees: Sarah Hawke and Marg Renwick

Independent Advisory Council (IAC) attendees: Vaughn Bennison, Sharon Boyce, Assoc. Professor Lorna Hallahan, Dr Gill Hicks, Dr Leighton Jay, Samantha Jenkinson, Danielle Loizou, Sam Paior, Mark Tonga, Leah van Poppel and Andrew Vodic.

NDIA attendees: Aaron Verlin, Clair Wheeler, Alex Rosenthal, Susan Moore, Charlotte Ramage, Jamie Bannister, Phillip Wakefield, Emily D'Arcy, Elizabeth Fay, Kitty Howard, Kathy Cameron, and Linda Trembearth-McMorrow.

Apologies: Autistic Self Advocacy Network of Australia and New Zealand, Blind Citizens Australia, Deafness Forum Australia, First Peoples Disability Network, Jane Wardlaw and Tricia Malowney.

What we talked about

Topic 1: Working Group updates

Short updates were provided by each of the Co-design Co-chairs.

Assessment and Budgeting working group

Co-chairs: Erin Papps, Down Syndrome Australia, and Clair Wheeler, NDIA (proxy for NDIA Co-chair)

Over the past 12 months, the group has provided key feedback on:

- the Personal and Environmental Circumstances Questionnaire (PECQ)

- budget model principles, and
- improvements to targeted assessment modules.

The group navigated challenges such as changes to NDIA co-chairs and limited ability to influence the approach to market for the support needs assessment tool due to probity constraints. The group has not had co-design opportunities for the proposed budget model.

The group's focus for 2026 is:

- supporting the rollout of the support needs assessment
- ongoing refinement of the support needs assessment and core tool, and
- improving transparency and feedback loops.

Navigation working group

Co-chairs: Bronwyn Markham, Young People in Nursing Homes National Alliance, Imogen Westfield, NDIA

Over the past 12 months the group helped to shape thinking on the navigator working model by offering engagement expertise, independent review, and strong participant driven insights. However, expectations around designing the navigator model sometimes exceeded the group's advisory remit and probity limitations restricted discussion on market design.

The group's focus for 2026 is contributing to the definition and future direction of a navigator service model.

Participant Safeguarding working group

Co-chairs: Skye Kakoschke-Moore, Children and Young People with Disability Australia, Sophie Cusworth, Women with Disabilities, and Jamie Bannister, NDIA (proxy for Fleur Campbell, NDIA Co-chair)

Over the past 12 months the group worked closely with specialist disability organisations and successfully built a strong, supportive co-design culture. This was achieved despite early challenges related to clarifying scope and balancing organisational roles.

The group's focus for 2026 is prioritising high impact work such as trauma informed practice and reforms to quality and safeguards.

Participant Pathway Experience

Co-chairs: Nick Avery, Every Australian Counts, Dr George Taleporos, and Jarrad Cuthbert, NDIA Co-Chair (apology)

Over the past 12 months the group contributed to the participant experience of the new planning pathway, including reducing the number of touch points and staff involved, work on impairment notices and Support Needs Assessments. Limited early detail made it difficult for members and participants to fully visualise the future approach.

The group's focus for 2026 is ensuring a shared understanding across all members so they can provide strong, meaningful contributions to the design work ahead.

Topic 2: Briefing on the NDIA's Support Needs Assessment (SNA) tool

Charlotte Ramage, Acting Branch Manager New Framework Policy and Emily D'Arcy, Director, New Framework Policy provided the following update.

The I-CAN tool was developed by the Centre of Disability Studies (CDS). The NDIA's SNA tool is a customised implementation of I-CAN v6.

The SNA tool will form part of the SNA for participants aged 16 and over, measuring support frequency and intensity across 12 life domains using a flexible, strengths-based approach. It will be used together with the Personal and Environmental Circumstances Questionnaire (PECQ) and targeted modules such as assistive technology, home modifications, and behaviour support. The combined assessment will inform both flexible budgets and stated supports like Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) and behaviour supports.

The validation of the tool includes a large desktop review, direct participant assessments, and a five-year partnership with the University of Melbourne and CDS. More than 700 people have expressed interest in participating in the Agency's SNA tool validation process, through the Agency'sParticipant First Engagement initiative .

Attendee feedback

- The validation sample size needs to be large enough to reflect complex cohorts.
- More clarity is needed on how the SNA tool, the PECQ, targeted modules and informal supports interact.
- Members asked for a demonstration of the SNA in practice, including PECQ and targeted modules.
- Concerns were raised about possible impacts on Home and Living funding.

Topic 3: NDIS Rules public consultation update

Sarah Hawke, Assistant Secretary, Policy, Legislation and Engagement, Department of Health, Disability and Ageing (DHDA) and Marg Renwick, Director, Strategic Engagement, DHDA, provided the following update.

Consultation has begun on new planning rules for:

- the full SNA process
- the required content of assessment reports, and
- how flexible and stated supports will be calculated.

Many elements are still in development.

Updated NDIS Support Rules, including the supports list, will be released for public consultation in March 2026.

Attendee feedback

- Exposure drafts are urgently needed so the disability community can provide meaningful feedback.
- The term ‘circles of support’ should not be used in the SNA assessment as it may conflict with established meanings.
- Capacity-building supports, including supported decision-making, need clear recognition and funding.
- Members expressed concern about transition timing, and the new way of planning being implemented in mid-2026.

Topic 4: NDIA Engagement Framework and 2026 Co-design workplan

Alex Rosenthal, Branch Manager Engagement and Inclusion, and Susan Moore, Branch Manager Co-design, provided the following update.

The NDIA is updating its engagement framework to give clearer guidance on its spectrum of engagement, when to use certain engagement tools, and how to use them. In 2026, the Agency will continue to manage demand for faster collaborative work to support the implementation of the new way of planning in mid-2026, and planning for deeper collaboration beyond mid-2026. The Agency confirmed the 3 working groups paused in March 2025 will remain paused until mid-2026 when the co-design program will be reviewed based on demands.

Engagement priorities include:

- monthly webinars for participants
- monthly technical briefings for the sector, and
- place-based engagement in early transition communities.

Broader Agency and Commission consultations will continue across the Annual Pricing Review, service agreement improvements, and provider regulatory changes.

Other business

Significant plan reductions

- A number of members raised they are hearing consistent feedback about substantial reductions in plans, particularly for people with high support needs.
- The NDIA acknowledged that although average plan values continue to rise and 60% of plans are increased when they are reassessed, more data is needed to understand if there are emerging themes and patterns. The NDIA took an action to provide this data to the DRCO forum on 18 February, and the data will be shared with QRF.

Actions

Action	Details	Responsibility
1	Agency to send updated communications on the status of the paused co-design working groups to all working group members.	Co-design Branch
2	Commence NDIA Reform town halls, beginning in March, to provide a walk-through of the SNA process, including the SNA tool, Personal and Environmental Circumstances Questionnaire (PECQ) and target assessments.	Co-design Branch
3	Respond to questions taken on notice.	Co-design Branch

Action	Details	Responsibility
4	Share Navigator co-design and engagement insights report.	Co-design Branch
5	Confirm approach for how new representative organisations can participate in the co-design working group program.	Co-design Branch
6	Share data on emerging themes and patterns regarding outcomes of plan reassessments.	Co-design Branch

What we will do next

The next Quarterly Reform Forum will be held on Friday 29 May 2026.

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