30 July 2026

> "My trust is already gone. It's gone out the window. I'm sorry, I just don't trust the system anymore."
> Group member

What we talked about

Participant experience testing with First Nations participants

The NDIA presented an overview of the participant testing opportunities for the new way of planning. The team discussed the proposed approach for engaging with First Nations participants.

What we heard

- Some First Nations participants may not trust the testing process or be reluctant to participate because of poor experiences with the NDIS.
- Overly complex recruitment processes may create confusion and/or concern within the community and could discourage engagement.
- Participants wanted assurances testing would not affect their current or future plan, records, or access to supports.
- Appropriate safeguards must be in place, noting the importance of trauma-informed approaches that prioritise emotional and cultural safety as well as the protection of participant information and Indigenous data sovereignty. The Agency said testing uses separate systems (from NDIA systems) with de-identified information that does not affect participant records or plans.
- Cultural safety depends on how conversations are conducted, not just respectful treatment. Assessors who are unfamiliar with First Nations communication styles may miss signs of distress, misunderstand silence or disengagement, and fail to build trust before asking structured questions. Communication gaps could lead to incomplete or inaccurate assessment outcomes. Trust-building is needed before moving to structured questions.
- Members asked about assessor qualifications, accreditation and cultural capability, including whether any assessors or accreditors are First Nations people. The Agency said assessors complete accreditation, cultural safety and trauma-informed training.
- Members asked about the testing approach. The Agency said testing will involve 30 First Nations participants over multiple rounds, with up to six hours of testing per participant. Testing is focused on people aged 18 and over living in metropolitan areas, and separate teams are testing in remote and very remote communities. Members wanted the full diversity of First Nations participants and experiences to be reflected in testing, including:

    - Torres Strait Islander participants
    - People with hearing and/or vision impairments
    - People with an intellectual disability
    - Carers and nominees
    - Participants requiring interpreters
    - People living in regional, remote, and transient circumstances
    - People who may require additional support or a support person to participate.
- Initial engagement by phone alone is inadequate. Members suggested using multiple communication methods for onboarding and supporting participation in trials, for example, contacting participants by email before phone calls about onboarding to confirm who and when they will be contacted. This provides assurances the call is legitimate, particularly as NDIA numbers may appear as private or unknown numbers.
- A two-step engagement process involving a First Nations contact prior to testing activities was suggested to help build trust and participant confidence.
- One-on-one onboarding was seen as preferable to large group onboarding sessions.
- Recruitment materials emphasise the payment over what participation involves, including the purpose, expectations and potential risks. Participants need clear information to make an informed decision about whether to take part. The Agency agreed to pass this feedback on to the communications team.
- Members suggested participating in testing themselves to better understand the process and provide informed feedback.
- Members were concerned participants will not receive an assessment report during the testing, limiting their ability to check whether their circumstances were accurately captured and provide meaningful feedback.
- Video-based explanations, visual aids, and culturally tailored communication materials will be valuable resources for engaging with First Nations people with disabilities. Materials must be accessible and written in plain English.

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