

In March, I shared my first 'From the CEO' update – a note on National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) transition, my observations, and the Agency's priority pieces of work. I am pleased to provide this sector update, covering the latest NDIS Quarterly Report and key initiatives for the NDIA.

I have now visited all states and territories as I continue to meet with people and groups who are invested and experienced in the rollout of the NDIS. I have met with people with disability, their families, carers and providers, as well as sector stakeholders and representatives of state, territory and Commonwealth governments.

I have heard a lot about peoples' experiences, hopes and concerns, and had many conversations about the challenges and opportunities we face in the remainder of Transition. I appreciate the time all of these people and groups have taken to meet with me, share their stories, and help make sure the NDIS is delivering good outcomes for people with disability.

## The Scheme's progress this quarter

This morning, the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) released the [Council of Australian Governments NDIS Quarterly Report for quarter three of 2017-18](#). Importantly, this report shows that the NDIS is and remains under budget and delivering some great outcomes for participants, their families and carers. It also details the proactive measures the NDIA is taking to address issues that have emerged through trial and transition.

As the report shows, 19,228 NDIS participants received an approved plan this quarter. This is higher than the average intake for previous quarters, and brings the total number of NDIS participants to 151,970 at 31 March 2018. To date, over 10,000 children aged 0 to 6 have been supported by the NDIS through Early Childhood Early Intervention (ECEI).

To give a sense of the Scheme's cumulative growth, this quarter represents a 68 per cent increase in participant numbers since 30 June 2017. As of this quarter, almost 45,000 participants are receiving disability supports for the first time in their lives under the NDIS. This is a significant achievement for the Scheme, and for people with disability in Australia.

The number of registered NDIS providers also continues to grow quickly. As at 31 March 2018 there were 14,271 service providers registered with the NDIS, 43 per cent of whom are sole traders. Further, the number of active providers – that is, providers currently delivering services to NDIS participants – increased by 19% this quarter, to 7,421. These figures indicate the great growth opportunity and economic benefits the NDIS presents for small businesses in Australia.

## Participant outcomes

The NDIA is working to ensure that while we continue to roll out to full Scheme, the NDIS continues to empower participants to achieve outcomes. This latest Quarterly Report demonstrates that the NDIS is having a positive impact for many people. For example:

- 90 per cent of parents or carers of children between 0 and school age said the NDIS helped with their child's development and access to school services;
- 69 per cent of families or carers of children aged 0 to 14 reported that the NDIS improved their capacity to help their child develop and learn, and;
- 72 per cent of participants aged 25 and over felt that the NDIS helped them with daily living activities.

These are encouraging outcomes, particularly when considered in light of the fact that overall satisfaction with the NDIS to date remains consistent at 84 per cent.

We recognise that improvements are still needed to make sure the participant experience is consistently positive. We are identifying ways we can get more regular feedback from participants, providers, and sector stakeholders about their experiences with the NDIS. This will help us ensure it is the transformational reform our stakeholders want.

This Quarterly Report also shows the NDIS remains under budget this quarter and financial year, as it has every financial year to date. The best available estimates of the NDIS cost at full scheme remain at \$22 billion per year.

That being said, the NDIA is aware of a range of factors that have emerged through trial and transition that could place pressure on the Scheme's sustainability. As an insurance scheme, the NDIS was designed to be able to identify and address emerging issues early, and we continue to do so.

## **Key initiatives over the period**

The NDIA executive management and Board are committed to continuing to improve the participant and provider experience, supporting better participant outcomes, and ensuring the Scheme's sustainability. Below is an update on some of our recent activities to help us achieve this.

### **Improving the participant experience**

We have progressed the Participant Pathway Pilot in Victoria to make sure the revised pathway is scalable and delivers a quality and consistent experience for participants. The focus for the first stage of the new pathway is on face-to-face planning, improved communications and simpler plans. We provided our fifth pathway improvements update earlier this month. As of the end of April, over 1000 participants have been involved in the pilot with more than 400

plans approved and some very encouraging feedback received.

We are also developing tailored enhancements to the pathways to support participants with more specific needs, such as those from particular social, geographic or cultural groups. We have held 37 consultation sessions with more than 1100 participants and other key stakeholders to make sure these tailored enhancements are effective.

Common themes that emerged during these workshops included the need for improved NDIS resources and communication products, improvements to training for NDIA staff and LAC partners, and stronger connections with local communities regarding the rollout of the NDIS. This engagement will help us develop approaches, resources and communication products that better meet the needs of our participants.

There are still some challenges to work through, including managing the logistics of the time taken in the new pathway, and ensuring our planners and partners have the specialised skills and training required.

Further, we are working closely and collaboratively with the states and territories to ensure supports are in place for participants in crisis situations, and to identify where gaps in service provision might emerge as the NDIS rolls out. We are calling this project “Maintaining Critical Supports”. We discussed the need for a collaborative approach between states, territories and the NDIA on this project at the [recent meeting of Disability Ministers at the COAG Disability Reform Council \(external\)](#) .

## **For our providers**

As I mentioned in my March update, the NDIA Board has accepted all 25 recommendations of the [Independent Pricing Review](#), and in April we released an updated timetable for implementing them. We are listening to feedback from people in response to the review and working to ensure it delivers

We are also working to improve the experience for providers. This includes work to develop a Provider Finder to make it easier for participants and providers to connect according to the participant’s needs and the businesses’ services and availability. This will be beneficial to both participants and providers looking to benefit from the growing disability market. These new features of the provider finder will be in place in this month, and further improvements are planned for late July 2018.

The dedicated National Provider Payments Team are working well with providers to resolve specific claiming issues while broader improvements are made to the payments system. Providers can contact their local account manager, or e-mail the National Provider Payments Team please email: [provider.support@ndis.gov.au](mailto:provider.support@ndis.gov.au).

## Process for Assistive Technology

We have also established the Assistive Technology (AT) and Home Modification Redesign Project, and are rolling out improvements to existing processes for quoting and claiming for AT.

We have implemented the first phase of AT changes, which will help the 45 per cent of participants who are likely to require low-cost (Level 1 and 2) AT items access funding and equipment in a timely manner. In addition, there will be no requirement for therapy reports or quotes to support the inclusion of Level 1 and 2 AT items in a participant's plan. We will be releasing a new factsheet for participants who have funding for Level 1 and 2 AT to help with understanding their funding and how to purchase their equipment.

The next phase of this project will consider the processes for Level 3 and 4 AT funding, and how these can be improved for both participants and providers.

## Staff and partner news

On 18 May 2018, the Commonwealth Government the NDIA's Partners in the Community for the Northern Territory. \$14.8 million is being provided to deliver Local Area Coordination (LAC) and Early Childhood Early Intervention (ECEI) services in the Darwin Urban region. Thanks to the work of our Partners in the Northern Territory, we will be able to make sure the Scheme is delivered effectively for communities in the Territory.

We will continue to provide information about LAC arrangements in other jurisdictions as they are finalised. We recognise the impact delays in announcing these arrangements have on the phasing in of participants in new regions, and are working to ensure staffing solutions are in place for all areas transitioning on 1 July 2018.

We have also announced that we are making some changes to how the NDIA works, so that we are best placed to deliver a quality and consistent NDIS. These changes will see the Agency move to functions-based operating principles and make the process and structure-based improvements necessary for the Agency to meet the challenge of rollout through the next two years. Like the Scheme, the Agency is still in transition, and we are constantly improving and making sure we are flexible enough to meet the Scheme's emerging needs.

## Making a more inclusive Australia

Finally, the Federal Government recently made an important announcement that will benefit all Australians with disability; \$56 million in grants through the Information, Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) program. This encompasses the second ILC National Readiness grant round, and state-based grant rounds across South Australia, New South Wales and the Australian Capital

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Territory.

ILC is crucial to the sustainability of the NDIS, as it helps make Australian communities more accessible for people with disability, and helps connect people with disability with supports and networks to live more independently. You can find out more about ILC, and what these grants will help achieve in local communities on the [ILC grants](#) page of our website.

## Thank you

Thank you for your ongoing support and commitment to the Scheme. I speak on behalf of everyone at the NDIA and our Partners delivering the Scheme when I say we appreciate the overwhelming support for the Scheme that exists in the community. We know we have a significant challenge ahead through the remainder of Transition, and we are committed to delivering a high-quality NDIS that enables people with disability to live more independently in inclusive communities and workplaces.

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