23 April 2021

In response to hearings at the Joint Standing Committee inquiry into independent assessments, which began on Friday 23 April, the NDIA would like to reassure and provide more information to participants, their families and carers.

The NDIA fully respects and welcomes discussion regarding the inquiry and proposed changes to the NDIS, however, it is important that any misinformation or incorrect statements are addressed.

- Functional assessments have always been part of the NDIS for both access and planning decisions – to help identify what supports a person may need to live the life they want, at that point in time.
- The current approach relies on individuals seeking their own assessments at their own expense, resulting in those who have the capacity to pay for and gather assessments receiving more funds in their plans, on average.
- Independent assessments deliver on the Productivity Commission's original design for the NDIS and are based on recommendations from reviews and inquiries, including the 2019 Independent Review of the NDIS Act (Tune Review).
- Independent assessments will not determine a participant's specific supports but help develop an overall personalised budget, and independent assessors will not make access and planning decisions.
- There are no proposed caps for individual plans and eligibility criteria will not change under independent assessments.
- There is no directive for independent assessments to reduce individual participant plans. At each plan review, a participant's plan may go up or down depending on their functional capacity and circumstances. That is true today.
- The right for people to seek a review of NDIS access and planning decisions does not change. If a participant thinks a decision made about them or their plan is wrong, they will be able to request a review and then appeal if necessary – the NDIA respects everyone's right to do so.
- Independent assessments are not a ‘three hour consultation’. There will be no time limit on assessments and they may be conducted over one or more days. They will be completed by health care professionals, people will be able to choose their assessor from the panel where possible, and whether to have the assessment in their home if they choose, they will be free – paid for by the NDIS.
- The recommended tools meet certain criteria, are focused on functionality and are disability-neutral, so can be used across all disability-types. In fact, the approach of assessing function is designed to ensure that the impacts of all disabilities are well understood, where a focus on the diagnosis or disability may not identify all of the ways the disabilities affect a person’s life. The tools align with the World Health Organization International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (WHO ICF).

- We spoke to academics, allied health professionals and the disability community to understand the kinds of assessment tools that would work best for the NDIS. As part of this process, we looked at and assessed more than 100 recognised and standardised tools.
- Independent assessments completed as part of the independent assessment pilot are conducted by allied health professionals.

The introduction of independent assessments has been part of ongoing discussion regarding improvements to the NDIS experience, including consultation with more than 40 peak health and disability bodies from across the sector, ongoing completion of two pilot programs to trial independent assessments and gather feedback from participants and their families on their experience, and release of consultation papers, with submissions having closed in February.

Importantly, independent assessments will allow for participants to have a more accurate, flexible plan through use of an improved way of developing personalised budgets.

NDIS participants are the experts in their own lives, so it is the NDIA's job to ensure they have the right funding in place – and that the funding is flexible enough – so that they can choose the services they need, within the guidelines of what is covered by the NDIS.

The NDIA continues to seek the feedback of participants and their families, through a comprehensive consultation program and continuing pilot.

We are also working to provide more information and clarity on independent assessments to support further consultation. We want to get it right. We must get it right.

Read the NDIA's joint response detailing the introduction of independent assessments. An Easy Read version of the JSC submission is also available:

- Joint Standing Committee inquiry into independent assessments (DOCX 106KB)
- Easy read - Inquiry into independent assessments (PDF 7MB)
- Easy read text only - Inquiry into independent assessments (DOCX 55KB)

We will also issue a more detailed response to today's hearing early next week.

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