18 November 2022

First Nations Australians living with disability are accessing the NDIS in greater numbers, according to new data.

The latest NDIS Quarterly Report shows that of the 23,137 new participants to enter the Scheme in the quarter, 9.4 per cent (2,169) identified as First Nations peoples.

As of 30 September 2022, the NDIS was providing disability support to 40,842 First Nations participants, up from 34,378 at the same time last year – an increase of more than 18 per cent.

Minister for the NDIS, Bill Shorten, and Senator Malarndirri McCarthy are pleased to see the number of First Nations participants increase, as the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) continues to focus on ensuring First Nations peoples with disability can more easily access support.

Increasing the number of First Nations staff working at the NDIA is also a priority for the Australian Government. In the 2022 APS Census, three per cent of NDIA staff identified as First Nations people.

The NDIA's First Nations Employee Network (FNEN) Conference was held for the first time since COVID, with Senator McCarthy as a guest speaker.

The focus of the conference was for almost 50 First Nations NDIA staff to come together to reconnect and to collaborate on how the Agency can increase the number of First Nations people in their workforce.

Crucial to supporting First Nations people is ensuring the Agency has staff reflective of the communities they serve.

The NDIA, informed by the NDIS Review, will start a co-design process to develop a new First Nations Strategy with the aim of improving outcomes for First Nations people living with a disability.

Since June 2022, the NDIA has:

- Discussed the potential of a partnership agreement with First Peoples Disability Network Australia (FPDN) to support the NDIA in the co-design of the strategy.
- Engaged with key internal and external stakeholders to discuss their involvement and input in the strategy co-design process. Progressed a detailed desktop review of NDIA data, NDIA and Australian Government First Nations strategies and policies, and conducted internal consultations to support understanding of the current state challenges and preliminary priority areas facing First Nations people living with a disability.

The NDIA funds specialist community connectors to deeply understand how First Nations people prefer to engage with the Scheme and the NDIA.

The Agency wants First Nations people to help shape the way the NDIS is delivered and to ensure those methods are culturally appropriate for every participant.

The findings from the Independent Review of the NDIS will also contribute to improving the NDIS for First Nations people.

Quotes attributable to Minister for the NDIS, Bill Shorten

“The NDIA recognises First Nations people need better support to understand the NDIS and how they can become participants.”

“The Labor Government also recognises prior Coalition governments did not do enough work directly with First Nations people to address difficulties accessing the scheme, especially in remote and very remote parts of Australia.”

“There’s a clear connection that when we engage and support First Nations the best way possible, they can live the life they choose.”

Quotes attributable to Senator Malarndirri McCarthy

“Having attended the NDIA’s latest First Nations Employee Network Conference, the Agency has increasing the number of First Nations NDIA staff on their agenda.

The network’s conference will help the NDIA’s efforts to deliver culturally appropriate NDIS support to First Nations communities."

“I spoke directly to First Nations NDIA staff and gave the Australian Government’s overview of the NDIS and First Nations matters.”

“The conference also explored the actions in their NDIA First Nations Employment and Inclusion Plan 2022-25 and what the Agency could do to bring those actions to life, including career development, recruitment and retention of First Nations peoples.”

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