9 April 2024

This bulletin summarises the Participant Reference Group's (PRG) recent meeting. The PRG consists of 23 participant and carer representatives across Australia. The PRG is a key platform to ensure the participant voice is heard and understood by the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA). Feedback from meetings is used to inform strategy, policy development, system and service delivery development and review, to support continuous improvement.

Chairperson's welcome

Debbie Irvine, NDIA Director of the Participant First Engagement Initiative, welcomed members to the ninth PRG meeting for 2023. In this meeting we heard from Leah van Poppel about the Independent Advisory Council. We also asked for feedback to help us improve employment outcomes for young participants, and we spoke about developing the PRG.

Independent Advisory Council

Leah van Poppel is the Principal Member of the Independent Advisory Council. She talked about the background of the Independent Advisory Council and the work they are currently doing.

The Independent Advisory Council has up to 12 members and a Principal Member however does not currently have a full complement of members. Members come from a wide range of disability and advocacy sectors. Each member brings their own lived experience or expertise of disability.

The Independent Advisory Council focusses on issues affecting participants, family and carers, and looks at the way the NDIA is addressing those issues. They can also help guide the work of other reference groups like the PRG. A representative of the Independent Advisory Council attends the monthly PRG meetings to help share information between the two groups.

Over the years, the IAC has produced a range of formal advice, as well as the papers, reports and submissions .

Improving employment outcomes for young participants

Improvements to youth employment
The Employment Outcomes Branch spoke to the PRG earlier in the year. They asked what changes members would like to see to help young participants to get a job. They have used this feedback to improve how the NDIS provides support in young participants plans. Some of the focus areas are:

- Young people moving from school to work who have difficulty with learning, social interaction, and self-management (school leaver employment supports).
- Young people 20 – 24 years with little work experience and no previous work history who have difficulty with learning social interaction and self-management.
- Young people who need help to connect with tertiary education / training or to find a job after they finish their study.

We asked PRG members to tell us what information participants need to help them understand employment supports and to help them choose the right provider. We also asked how we can best share this information with young participants and how we can make sure NDIA staff have better conversations about how to get a job.

What we heard

- Dedicated employment staff are needed to conduct regular check-ins and help make sure participants use the funds in their plan.
- Start the employment conversation early. Connect with providers, educators and parents to make a plan on how to support the participant to move into employment.
- Make sure grant funding is actually used by providers and employers to help participants secure employment.
- Support young people to advocate for the employment supports they want and are relevant to their goals.
- Make sure planning discussions are a safe place to talk about goals. It needs to be clear that gaining employment will not affect or decrease the participants NDIS funding.
- There needs to be clearer information about employment on the NDIS website. Create a tip sheet with questions participants can ask providers to make sure they are the right organisation to deliver employment supports. Participants need to know what a good provider looks like.
- Share information through school networks, advocacy organisations and a broad range of services, to help employment conversations happen early in the planning discussions with participants.
- Codesign fact sheets and documents with young people to show a clear pathway to employment. Make information available in easy English and other languages and have all information in one place.

PRG development discussion

Debbie Irvine asked PRG members if they would like to have a session on personal development included on the agenda at our next meeting.
Members discussed what sort of information or training the Group could develop to help other

people get the most out of engagement activities like focus groups, committees, reference groups and working groups. We also discussed how we can support PRG members to gain skills to work with other organisations and government agencies.

Some ideas to work on in November are:

- Update induction documents
- Create a video showing people what it means to be part of an engagement activity or group.
- Be able to observe a meeting or watch a recording of a meeting before deciding to become a member.
- Help people learn how to have meaningful discussions and explain their point of view calmly when not everyone agrees on something.
- Upskill PRG members to mentor other participants to take part in engagement activities.
- Public speaking training.
- Self-advocacy training.

Final comments and close

Debbie Irvine thanked PRG members, Leah van Poppel and the Employment Outcomes Branch for the valuable discussion.

Next meeting

Tuesday, 14 and Wednesday, 15 November 2023

Download the meeting summary in easy read

- Participant Reference Group Meeting Bulletin Easy Read – 18 October 2023 (PDF 1.6MB)

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