

Consultation Paper – Independent Assessments

Overview

The Client Consultative Committee (CCC) of CPL Choice Passion Life was started in 1993 in recognition that clients wanted a platform to advocate issues. The CCC provides engagement forums for clients to be able to speak about their issues and get involved in organisational decision making and planning.

With a 30-year history, the CCC representatives continue to provide feedback to CPL executives and senior management on a number of internal and external issues including things like transport, housing, health, staff training, rostering, support needs and NDIS matters of concern.

Ms Jennifer Johnston, current Acting Chair of the CCC, is submitting client feedback that has been captured with regard to the NDIS request for consultation paper 1 - Access and Eligibility Policy for Independent Assessments.

CCC and CPL worked collaboratively to gather opinions from participants and parents relating to this consultation paper and with a focus for feedback on the questions of;

- 1. What impact do you believe independent Assessments would have on your experience and engagement with the NDIA?*
- 2. What impact do you believe the Independent Assessments would have on your funding?*

Participant and parent feedback was sought across Queensland and from the following locations;

- Jenny, Gold Coast (participant)
- Nigel, Brisbane (participant)
- Andy, Ipswich (participant)
- Ben, North Queensland (participant)
- Brendon, Logan (participant)
- Sruti, Brisbane (participant)
- Chris, Wide Bay region (participant and parent of 4 participants)
- Juno, Gold Coast (parent of a participant)
- Wendy, Gold Coast (parent of a participant)
- Jenn, Brisbane (parent of a participant)
- Peter, Brisbane (parent of a participant)
- Effie, Caboolture (parent of a participant)
- Anonymous male, Ipswich (parent of a participant)
- Dainie, Darling Downs (parent of a participant)

- Merv, Brisbane (parent of a participant)
- Julie, Gold Coast (parent of a participant)
- Susan, Caboolture (parent of a participant)
- Yvonne, Central Queensland (parent of a participant)
- Diane, Sunshine Coast (parent of a participant)
- Melinda, Gold Coast (parent of a participant)
- Trudy, Sunshine Coast (parent of a participant)

1. What impact do you believe independent Assessments would have on your experience and engagement with the NDIA?

All of the responses (except one) highlighted very strong concerns that the experience with an Independent Assessor would be negative for the participant and ineffective in understanding the participant's true support requirements.

Response:

I am a young woman living independently and find the idea of a stranger coming to my home to assess me quite intimidating. I have developed a really good relationship with my LAC and it has taken me a long time to understand the NDIS. A big change like this will be hard for me to process. *Participant, Brisbane.*

Response:

I think that the IA and the planning meeting are going to be incredibly disjointed. My experience this past week with NDIA in their usual planning process has been absolutely appalling and has delivered an unsatisfactory and at risk review. I now have less funding that I had previously and this means my support workers will be at risk. The current situation is that the NDIA are not transparent in how the funding is allocated to a plan. The introduction of the Independent Assessments does not give me any hope that the process will be more transparent. The NDIA currently chooses to ignore the recommendations of qualified therapists and then cuts my funding without having to provide any justifications for their decisions. *Participant, Brisbane*

Response:

I could imagine that people with autism would really struggle with having an independent assessment by someone they don't know. *Participant, Logan*

Response:

I do not think the Independent Assessor will be able to really understand myself or my son after one meeting. If my son is having a random good day, then they will not see what he is truly like. Because he has Autism, people often think he is just a

naughty boy and needs to be told what to do. That is not true. *Participant and Parent of a Participant, Wide Bay region*

Response:

I don't think it would make it a very pleasant experience because I don't believe they will fully understand or know the background of my child enough to be able to assess him correctly. I also don't feel that my 18 year old son would not be able to engage with somebody for 3 hours and frankly, I would be lucky to be able to get him to actually go along to the assessment. *Parent, Gold Coast*

Response:

The person doing the assessment won't know me or know my situation. They don't know my needs or requirements. I would prefer to be assessed by someone I know. *Participant, Logan*

Response:

In the midst of the Covid19 pandemic, having an assessor attend multiple households would pose significant risks to participants. Without therapists input in reports, outcome measures and goal progression would not be recorded. *Parent, North Queensland*

Response:

How can a one size fits all approach fully address his individual needs? This is how things used to work in the "old days" – NDIS was at last addressing his individual needs and focussed on trying to assist him to reach his goals. I believed the NDIS was focussed on the individual but with these changes, the individual is no longer the focus! My son may even refuse to cooperate and have a meltdown with a stranger "assessing" him (even with a support person present) – what happens then? *Parent, Caboolture*

Response:

Would be an unrealistic expectation for my children to sit and participate for the duration of the assessment. I would not be surprised if the oldest did not participate as he does not like being asked questions and he would probably refuse to do any tasks. I think the experience would trigger behaviours. *Parent of 4 children with a disability (aged 10 to 17), Ipswich*

Response:

It takes a lot of effort for my son to build rapport with people, including therapists. I do not envisage an IA who assesses my son for a couple of hours will understand the complexity of his support needs. *Parent, Darling Downs*

Response:

I feel that an Independent Assessment would not benefit my son as they only get a snapshot of his life, not the whole story. We have had independent assessment at school and on the day, he was perfect, and they didn't get the real person. *Parent, Central Queensland*

Response:

I know that this is going to add an unnecessary extreme amount of stress to the review process. We have been working hard to gather accurate evidence and assessments about my adult daughter's functional capacity and her complex needs so that she can move out of the family home. This has been her wish for 13 years. My daughter initially presents as higher level than she functions. My daughter believes that she can do much more than she can. This means that during the assessment I would need to constantly correct her – which is extremely upsetting to my daughter and will affect her self-esteem and trust of me. I will have to make choices between her mental and emotional wellbeing and an accurate assessment. This has made me rethink supporting my daughter to move out of home as I am extremely concerned about the impact on her of the assessment process. *Parent, Gold Coast*

Response:

I feel like our voice and perspective will be diminished, as the Independent Assessor will be coming in and making their own judgements about our child. Whereas in the past, we have relied on our own therapists who have worked with our child for many years and know and understand them, to articulate back to the NDIA that the current and on-going needs are going to be. And this is from a number of different professionals (OT, Physio, Speech) – I worry that one assessor cannot possibly get a holistic view of the child over one assessment. Getting a holistic view of the participant during one assessment is not realistic. Each person will have good days and bad days. The Independent Assessment feels very final and not open to discussion, which is guess is why they are doing it, to make it more uniform across the building of NDIS Plans. *Parent, Gold Coast*

Response:

It will impact hugely as a stranger doing one assessment is not going to be able to tell if the person needs assistance. They should take into account the person's current position, the supports they need across a number of different services – therapy, employment, community participation – and the impact of an independent assessor not getting it right. *Parent, Caboolture*

Response:

This will just create more stress and anxiety for participants and families (as if there isn't enough already). The NDIA have proven to be very uncompromising and

totalitarian in their administration. There is no accountability or justification provided in respect of their decisions. *Parent, Brisbane*

Response:

I cannot see how a 3-hour assessment by a person who doesn't know my son, would result in a true reflection of the complexities of his needs. *Parent, Gold Coast*

Response:

Why do I have to give the "in's and out's" of my most private life to an Independent Assessor when the actual funding I will eventually receive on my Plan is just a tokenistic funding based on diagnostics and is not itemised or transparent? Why should I then have to lodge a review request and go through months of back and forth with NDIA in order to get the supports that I absolutely need? *Participant, Brisbane*

Response:

I am concerned that the Independent Assessors are all qualified in their own specific area however with minimal training from NDIS, they will be expected to use the assessment tools and work out what the client needs. Previously if a person required funding for equipment, they would require an assessment from an OT. I am concerned that I could end up with a speech therapist that may not fully understand my daughter's equipment needs. *Parent, Sunshine Coast*

Response:

I don't think my son would be able to be engaged for 3 hours – he gets very frustrated by all the self-analysis tools he has had to complete over the years and would be thinking "here's another one of these". *Parent, Brisbane*

Response:

I am unsure of the logistics of how this will even be possible in the case of my son. His needs are incredibly varied (stable one day, meltdowns the next) and he is unable to articulate this, especially to someone unknown. We have been working with a team of therapists on a weekly basis for the last year who have developed a relationship with him and are in a much better position to determine what his needs/functional abilities are (potentially even more so than I as his parent could). It would be incredibly stressful for my son to be with someone unknown to him. This would certainly decrease my faith in the system and its ability to provide a healthy future for my son. *Parent, Brisbane.*

Response:

I am concerned that my son would answer to what he thinks the person (IA) wants to hear because he does not fully understand the questions nor the implications that it

could create for him. I feel that the assessor may make a determination based on a participants' answers, not on having a full understanding of the participant and their needs. *Parent, Sunshine Coast*

Only one person stated he was not bothered about the Independent Assessments. He said "I usually have assessments conducted by therapists I don't know. I have a spinal injury and the impact on my function is straight forward. If anything, my level of function will deteriorate over time." *Participant, Ipswich*

2. What impact do you believe the Independent Assessments would have on your funding?

Response:

If the IA has an understanding of my son's support needs and the impact that his disabilities has on his daily life, I imagine there will not be much of an impact. Currently participants are assessed by NDIA Planners who show zero interest in the person, their needs and the recommendations outlined by the professionals who are involved in the persons daily life. The IA model does not appear to be any different. *Parent, Darling Downs*

Response:

I recently moved into a SIL and SDA. If the funding level reduces or I am assessed as suddenly not being eligible for current level of ISL and SDA, then I could lose my current home and care. This concerns me. *Participant, Ipswich*

Response:

If the IA results in reduced funding for me, I could literally lose my job because I won't have enough support other than to get out of bed. The impact is enormous to myself, my wife and my family. If I can't go to my job, then I can't pay my mortgage. *Participant, Brisbane*

Response:

I am really worried that we will both get less funding. I had to fight to get on the NDIS. I had to show a lot of reports. Now they may kick me off. *Participant and Parent of a Participant*

Response:

I am worried that they could make a decision that could poorly impact on my funding. I have had to go back for unscheduled plan reviews for every NDIS plan. This process is already a long process. Independent Assessments may slow the process

down further which will lead to further anxiety. I am concerned about the impact this will have on people's mental health. *Participant, Logan*

Response:

I present as someone who is very capable (which I am) but have only been living independently for about 12 months and still have a lot to learn about taking care of myself. My fear is that someone who doesn't know me, may not be able to recognise the level of support I need based on a one-time interaction, and therefore my funding will be insufficient to meet my needs. *Participant, Brisbane.*

Response:

I am afraid that due to him not being assessed correctly, therefore his funding would not be correct and he could be missing out on vital services that are required. *Parent, Gold Coast*

Response:

If the funding is based on the assessors' determination during a 3 hr assessment, I am very concerned that there would be a negative impact on the funding, with a very real possibility that the funding will be reduced and not accurately reflect his needs. *Parent, Gold Coast*

Response:

I am hoping and praying that it doesn't impact our funding at all. Our daughters NDIS plan works pretty well to meet her current needs, based on her function and capacity. I really don't understand the process if you do not agree with the assessment and how that can be discussed and with who? *Parent, Gold Coast*

Response:

Clearly there is a conflict of interest with the NDIA specifying which professional service will perform the assessment. Three hours for an assessment is too long for a participant and may affect the assessment outcome. Ignoring all other assessments or reports carries a significant risk of under-resourcing the reasonable and necessary supports. Our last formal plan review for our daughter was a farce. The NDIA Planner was purposely misleading and deceptive, giving us the impression that all was ok but in fact, the funding was substantially cut with significant change to the SIL component. We no longer trust the system and believe based on past experience, that the aim will be to further reduce supports to unacceptable and unreasonable levels. *Parent, Brisbane*

Response:

I am terrified about the use of time limited, standardised testing for my daughter who has highly individualised needs and functional capacities. I fully expect the

result of the IA could be that her funding will be cut and she will receive far less than she requires to live an average life. *Parent, Gold Coast*

Response:

I am concerned that the funding may be less if it is based on the score that someone gets using the assessments tools and is not based on the requested support needs. *Parent, Sunshine Coast*

Response:

If the Independent Assessor determined that my daughter did not need all of her funding, or any of it, that would negatively impact her funding. *Parent, Caboolture.*

Response:

It seems like a massive pot-luck scenario. Do we get a sympathetic assessor? How is my son feeling on the day he meets his assessor? Too many unknowns. He could get a massive increase in funding, or lose out altogether, depending on the given day in question. *Jenn, Brisbane*

Response:

I'm not really sure how this would impact. It really depends if the Assessor agrees with how we've been using our funding. *Parent, Brisbane*

Response:

I think the Independent Assessment will be of no benefit for him and they will only get a snapshot of what he is really like and needs. *Parent, Central Queensland*

Response:

I am concerned that the results of the assessment will determine the plan funding and not meet my daughter's full needs. As she is non-verbal, I will have to answer the questions on the basis that I know my daughters needs from day to day. Will this be taken into consideration? *Parent, Sunshine Coast*

Response:

Hard to say, the assessor may not understand my children's needs or know much about my child's disability and that would directly impact the funding my children would receive. *Parent, Ipswich*

Response:

I am concerned this is just a measure to standardise the amount and cut funding down. I am seriously concerned that my son's complex needs will not be funded sufficiently. *Parent, Caboolture*

Response:

Due to the current threat of Covid19, the frequency and availability of support is highly unpredictable. Unused funding in this time would have significant impacts in future plans. *Parent, North Queensland*

The CCC would welcome further opportunity to engage with NDIA in similar consultation processes.

Thank you for your consideration.

Jennifer Johnston

Acting Chair

Client Consultative Committee (CPL - Choice Passion Life)

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