

Submission to the National Disability Insurance Agency

Re: An Ordinary Life at Home consultation paper

AUGUST 2021



AASW

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Australian Association
of Social Workers

About the Australian Association of Social Workers

The Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) is the national professional body representing more than 15,000 social workers throughout Australia. The AASW works to promote the profession of social work including setting the benchmark for professional education and practice in social work, while also advocating on matters of human rights to advance social justice.

Acknowledgements

This submission has been developed in consultation with AASW members who are working across Australia in various social work areas of practice, including disability and other areas intersecting with the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). The AASW has formalised consultative mechanisms through our National Advisory Panel (NAP's) which consist of experts in their field of practice. For this submission, we have specifically consulted with members of the NDIS NAP for guidance and expertise.

For more information or questions relating to this submission, please contact:

Authors of this submission

Tegan Leeder – Social Policy and Advocacy Officer

tegan.leeder@asw.asn.au

Manager, Social Policy and Advocacy

Rachel.reilly@asw.asn.au

Executive Summary

A core value of the social work profession is its respect for people's dignity and autonomy, and so enhancing the self-determination of every person they work with is a central element of the work of a social worker. Therefore, social workers are familiar with the need to maximise people's capacity to determine and have control over their living arrangements and know that this is most effective in the context of a respectful, trusting relationship built around a full appreciation of their unique circumstances, strengths and world view. Social workers who work with people living with a disability have broadly welcomed the NDIA's proposed Home and Living policy. Within this broad agreement, they have expressed the concern that implementing this policy will inevitably be complex and will require careful monitoring to ensure that it in fact translates into better outcomes for participants.

Background and context for this submission

Social work, the NDIS and living arrangements

The AASW has welcomed the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). The values of 'choice and control' that underpin the NDIS are consistent with the values and principles of self-determination and empowerment that have guided the social work profession for many decades. The AASW Code of Ethics aligns closely to the Objectives and Principles of the NDIS Act¹ and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons². Because social workers focus on enhancing quality of life and empowering people to full social and economic inclusion, the values, qualifications, and skills that social workers bring are aligned with the person-centred approach of the NDIS.

Social workers are present throughout the NDIS in a variety of roles, working as individuals or in organisations. Many who have extensive experience in assessment, planning and case management with people living with multi-faceted disabilities are providing Coordination of Supports or Specialist Support Coordination. Many social workers are also providing positive behaviour support, counselling and psychosocial recovery coaching. Social workers are also working in other roles within the NDIS including service development, planning, and local area co-ordination.

In all contexts, social workers operate from a person-in environment perspective which recognises that individuals can best be understood within the multifaceted context of their environment.³ Social workers focus on individual, family, carer and community strengths and needs, taking a holistic approach that includes the individual's characteristics and the systemic factors that limit or enhance their lives.

¹ <https://www.ndis.gov.au/about-us/operational-guidelines/overview-ndis-operational-guideline/overview-ndis-operational-guideline-about-ndis>

² United Nations Declaration on the Rights of disabled Persons,
<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/RightsOfDisabledPersons.aspx>

³ *Australian Association of Social Workers 2015. "The Scope of Social Work Practice: Psychosocial Assessments."* *Australian Association of Social Workers*. December. Accessed April 18, 2019. <https://www.aasw.asn.au/practitioner-resources/the-scope-of-social-work-practice>

An Ordinary Life at Home consultation paper

The AASW overall agrees with the principles contained in the An Ordinary Life at Home consultation paper. People with disability should have access to the same opportunities for home and living environments as the broader community. AASW members have continually raised concerns about the current model of supported disability accommodation and therefore we are pleased to see the NDIS address this by moving to an informed choice-based system of housing supports and living arrangements, in particular the model of Independent Living Options.

Our members however have raised some concerns about the potential for these proposals to become a way for the NDIS to shift disability supports onto other sectors, we therefore recommend that the following issues are addressed prior to any policy changes:

- Will access to Supported Disability Accommodation (SDA) housing move to a means-tested model?
- Is a consequence of this policy a move away from Supported Independent Living (SIL) funding?
- If a participant moves into social housing who will the cost of disability modifications fall under?
- The undersupply of affordable housing, including social and public housing options, which has the potential to stifle the aims of this policy
- An acknowledgment that the private rental market is an inadequate housing option for many NDIS participants due to unaffordability and inaccessibility, particularly in regional and rural areas, and the support required for participants to maintain their tenancies

Cultural considerations

Our members have also raised concerns that the consultation paper doesn't take into account different cultural worldviews and is based on Western ideals of living arrangements. The paper appears to be informed by a narrow view of disability, "the ideal participant" who speaks English, has a well-developed informal support network, including family, and who is able to articulate their housing needs. For example, an Aboriginal person with a disability living on Country will have much different housing wants and needs than someone living with their family in a major city. This person may have a network of overstretched informal supports owing to their remote location, and their wish to remain on Country despite a lack of appropriate formal supports may lead to the participant being seen as difficult or unable to make informed decisions despite their decision being the most culturally appropriate for them. Therefore, the AASW recommends any change in policy take into account cultural safety and appropriateness for those from different cultural backgrounds.

Conclusion

The AASW welcomes the proposed Home and Living policy. People with disability deserve the choice in their living arrangements that people without disability have and we believe the proposed Home and Living policy, if properly implemented, will go a long way to bridge current gaps in this area of the NDIS. We would further welcome the broader distribution of this document among all

these stakeholders for their input into this framework, in particular the housing sector. The AASW anticipates that collaboration across all these sectors will be required to ensure that this framework is adopted and enacted for the benefit of participants; and we look forward to continuing to participate in that work.

Submitted by and on behalf of the Australian Association of Social Workers.



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