

Participant Reference Group

Meeting summary – 26 and 27 August 2025

This is a summary of the Participant Reference Group's (PRG) recent meeting. The PRG is a key platform. The PRG makes sure the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) hears and understands the participant voice. The NDIA uses feedback from PRG meetings to keep improving our processes.

Chairperson's welcome

Donna Purcell is the Branch Manager of the Office of the Participant Advocate. She welcomed members to the meeting.

Session 1: Accountability statement

Donna talked about the updated PRG accountability statement. She talked about:

- the new section which says what the NDIA PRG secretariat's responsibilities are
- changes to language using members' own words
- grouping similar ideas to make them clearer
- a new glossary.

Session 2: Debt management

Presentation summary

The NDIA spoke to the PRG about improving debt management processes and support.

There are different kinds of debts. For example, someone can make a mistake.

Someone might use funds the wrong way. Someone might get paid twice, once from the NDIS and once through insurance.

The NDIA has added information to our website. This will improve how we communicate with people. We plan to work with financial counselling services.

We looked at past debts to see why they happened. The main reason was because of mistakes in how they were handled.

We found mistakes in how participants put information into claims. We know mistakes are easy to make. We know we need to be fair, clear, and supportive when we talk to NDIS participants about mistakes.

We also found mistakes in how the NDIA processed the claims. We have made changes to our training to support our staff to improve.

Breakout Groups:

We explored two key questions:

1. How can the NDIA better support people who cancel their claims?
2. What should the NDIA think about when recovering debts?

What we heard:

- Messages should be easy to understand. They should show the NDIA understands that people make mistakes. They should be the same across all channels.
- Mistakes should not automatically lead to harsh actions or changes in plan management.
- The NDIA should have a specific hotline for questions about the portal. There should be clearer instructions on how to use the portal.
- Participants want advice that they have made repayments. They want to know when they have repaid a debt. They want visibility into that process.
- Terms like “fraud” can be triggering. The NDIA should accept human error.
- There should be more education and access to financial counselling services.
- PRG members said they have concerns about debts being unfairly allocated to participants when providers are at fault.

The NDIA has noted all the feedback provided during this session.

Session 3: Executive update with Scott McNaughton

Presentation summary

Acting Chief Executive Officer, Scott McNaughton talked to PRG members about a new program called Thriving Kids. This will help children with developmental delays or mild autism.

Thriving Kids will give families more support when their child is younger. This means families will not have to rely as much on the NDIS. If someone is already receiving support, nothing will change for now. Existing services will continue.

From mid-2026, there will be specially trained staff called Support Needs Assessors. They will help plan what supports a participant may need in their NDIS plan. NDIS plans may last up to five years. NDIS budgets will be more flexible. Participants can help test and shape the new system.

Participants will get their NDIS funding in smaller chunks, for example every few months. Any unused funding will carry over to the next funding period.

New pricing rules will limit travel charges for therapists. This will keep things fair and sustainable. There will be exceptions for participants living in remote areas.

PRG members raised issues around:

- using terms like “mild autism”
- lack of consultation with disability representative organisations
- qualifications, trauma-informed training, and lived experience of Support Needs Assessors
- how Support Needs Assessors will be trained, and will the training be disability aware
- wanting Section 46 review rights and clarity on historical debt decisions
- poor provider practices
- participants forced out of properties because of providers going out of business
- requests for more adaptable plans and consistent advice from NDIA staff.

The NDIA has noted all the feedback provided during this session.

Session 4 Part A: Navigators

Presentation summary

The NDIA is introducing Navigators. Navigators will help people with disability find and use the supports they need.

Navigators will guide people to services. They will help with scheduling. They will help people build their confidence to manage things on their own.

There will be several types of Navigators depending on a person's needs. For example, general help for those who don't need a lot of support. Or specialist support for people with more complex needs.

Navigators will not provide services directly. They will not make decisions about NDIS access, payments, or early childhood supports.

PRG members felt the name "Navigator" might be confusing. It may not explain what a "Navigator" does.

PRG members said there should be training in trauma-informed and culturally safe practices. PRG members were concerned about outsourcing the role to providers who have previously not provided a good service.

PRG members said Navigators need to have local knowledge. They need to be able to build trust.

PRG members said this needs to be real reform, not just a name change. There needs to be ongoing consultation with people with lived experience.

Next Steps

- Breakout sessions to explore how to set up the Navigators program.
- More consultation on debt management and planning reforms.
- More consultation on how the Navigator role will work.
- The NDIA will invite PRG members to take part in pilot programs.
- We will ask PRG members to give feedback on tools and processes.

Session 4 Part B: Navigators

The second part of Navigators was in breakout discussions. PRG members talked about the proposed Navigator function. This included expectations, safeguards, and participant experience.

What we heard

- PRG members said they want to choose their Navigator. They want to decide how and when their Navigator contacts them.
- PRG members want clear, easy-to-understand information about Navigators. This will help them make informed decisions.
- Participants need to feel safe sharing concerns, including anonymously, with no risk of changes to their plans. There must be strong safeguards and independent complaints processes. This will build trust.
- PRG members said they want consistent support. They don't want to repeat their stories to new Navigators.
- There should be clear agreements on how the relationship works. This should include communication preferences. It should include how often Navigators will meet with participants.
- Navigators with lived experience of disability are highly valued. They must be well-supported to avoid burnout.
- Navigator organisations should reflect the diversity of their community.
- Navigators should understand local services. They should make sure supports suit each person's disability and situation. Supports should be flexible and easily changed to suit individual needs.
- Navigators should not duplicate existing roles or make NDIS decisions. Their role must be clearly separate from NDIA processes. This will avoid confusion and conflicts of interest.

The NDIA has noted all the feedback provided during this session.

Session 5: Self Service and Improving interactions with the NDIS

Presentation summary

The NDIA is looking at how self-service tools can make things easier, faster, and more user-friendly. Self-service lets users manage their own services. Users can solve problems and find information quickly. They may not need help from other people.

Right now, users can ask questions and upload documents online. In the future, people will be able to update their contact details and their bank information. They will also be able to change how the NDIA communicates with them.

What we heard

- Participants should be able to choose how they use the system. This may be with the app, by email, by phone, or other accessible formats
- Appointment booking systems should let participants choose a time that suits them, noting that "life happens."
- A portal should let participants:
 - see what evidence is on their file
 - see upcoming tasks or appointments
 - book or reschedule check-ins.
- Systems should automatically fill in known data. Participants shouldn't have to type in everything every time.
- Participants want to be informed and prepared for plan reviews and other interactions with the NDIA.
- The NDIS planner should share their screen during plan reviews. This can help participants see what the NDIA has recorded and feel more involved.
- Participants want to be able to see all interactions. This would reduce confusion. It will clearly show what they talked about.

- Participants want to be able to see where they are in their journey. They want to see how they're progressing.
- Participants should be able to submit feedback or a complaint online. They should be able to see where it is in the system and get updates.
- Data shown to participants must be accurate, transparent, and secure.
- Participants should be able to update and share their own information easily.

The NDIA has noted all the feedback provided during this session.

Session 6: Mobile App Budget Tool

Presentation summary

The NDIA is working on a budget tool for the My NDIS mobile app. The tool will help participants manage their NDIS funding more easily and by themselves. This will give them more control and confidence to use their supports.

Some of the features may include:

- budget tracking and future planning
- options to change the settings on the app, like turning prompts on or off
- digital identity choices
- easy-read versions for better accessibility
- notifications when updates occur.

The tool would connect with existing price guides and funding periods. This will make sure information is correct and up to date.

What we heard

- Participants want notifications for when they are at risk of overspending. Especially during high-cost periods like holidays.
- Participants want to be able to download budgets in formats like PDF and Excel.
- Budgets should link to goals and support future planning.

- Participants should be able to share selected budget sections without showing full plans.
- There should be insights like the banking apps have. For example, showing spending trends.
- Participants would like to try out budget scenarios. These should not affect actual plans.
- Participants need plain English, multilingual support, and adaptive technology.
- Participants suggested having a 24/7 chatbot, direct contact options, and training resources.
- Participants said they want support from navigators to help them learn to use the app.
- The app should not replace existing supports that help participants manage their budgets.
- The app should have an auto save function. This will stop participants losing data if they forget to save while using the app.
- The app should include a budget tool. Participants would not have to use external tools like Excel.
- The app should have AI assistance and error prompts. It should show future spending and how that impacts funding budgets.
- The app could connect budget items to provider qualifications and requirements.
- Participants need tips and webinars.
- Participants want to view budgets by category and overall plan.
- The app should reduce clutter and improve accessibility.
- Participants need financial counsellors who understand NDIS-specific processes.

The NDIA has noted all the feedback provided during this session.

Session 7: Strategic Change

Presentation summary

The NDIA gave an update on its strategic change agenda. This includes improvements to planning processes. It includes improved communication and participant engagement. A key focus is delivering the right information at the right time. This will be tailored to each participant's journey.

We will make changes gradually. This will make sure people have time to understand them. We will make sure our communication is clear, respectful, and in plain English.

People with lived experience of disability will help to design training for NDIS staff. Participants will have more choice in how and when they engage. There will be self-service options. There will be clear pathways to navigate the system.

Since April, over 50 hours of engagement have taken place across 26 sessions. These sessions included co-design groups, advisory panels, and disability-specific focus groups. The NDIA will let participants know what we have heard and how they can give feedback.

What we heard

- Training: Needs to include lived experience, be consistent and high quality.
- Disability Representation: Have more inclusion beyond autism and psychosocial groups.
- Transparency: Show what feedback is actioned and how.
- Evidence-Based Practice: Make sure tools and programs are best practice and looked at by experts.
- Global Learning: Look at what other countries do when they have similar challenges.

The NDIA has noted all the feedback provided during this session.

Final comments and close

PRG secretariat noted open questions during the meeting. We will get answers to these and send them out to PRG members.

Donna thanked PRG members for their time and commitment. She thanked them for travelling to the meeting or working online to give their valuable feedback.

Next meeting

Wednesday, 10 September 2025 (Online)

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