13 August 2024

The Children's Expert Advisory Group (CEAG) met for the first time on Monday 22 July in Melbourne. This was a hybrid meeting conducted in person and online.

The Minister for the NDIS The Hon. Bill Shorten MP joined the meeting for a short time, welcoming members and highlighting the importance of the scheme reforms that have been recommended by the NDIS Review and his particular focus on making sure that the NDIS provides better outcomes for children with disability and their families.

Minister Shorten expressed his thanks to all members for their commitment in supporting the NDIA to design much needed improvements, and shaping the way that the NDIA will engage with other experts, the community and importantly children and their families directly. The Minister's priority is initially for advice on improvements to the way the NDIS supports young children (0-9 years).

Focus of the meeting

This first meeting was focused on members getting to know each other and working through the terms of reference so they had a shared understanding of their focus and role.

Introductions and Terms of Reference

As the chair, Ms Samantha Taylor, General Manager, Children's Taskforce NDIA further welcomed members. Ms Taylor explained how important this group will be in supporting the NDIA to implement changes. Ms Taylor said this will be achieved through the CEAG members' breadth of experience and expertise which is growing the knowledge base available to the NDIA.

CEAG discussed the Terms of Reference and recommended some refinements to better clarify their focus, including:

- The focus on 0–9 year olds not limiting the CEAG in looking into issues for children older than 9, and young people. This clarification recognises that the strategies to improve outcomes for young children are designed to set them up for later life.
- To be clear that they are advising the NDIA, and that their advice should be purposeful and enable practical actions that the community can see and experience.
- Specifically advising on ways to enable children to speak to the NDIA directly.
- Being purposeful in linking its advice with other reforms, such as Foundational Supports as they are defined and developed, the Early Years Strategy, and broader changes that affect all NDIS participants.

- Strengthen how advice will intersect with work of other NDIA reference and advisory groups, including the statutory role of the Independent Advisory Council.

NDIS Reform and setting priorities

Ms Taylor briefed all members on the current NDIS Reform program and members discussed:

- the need to work purposefully with other areas of the NDIA and government
- the role of CEAG members to use their broader connections, and those of other groups, to gather information and inform the development of advice to the NDIA

CEAG agreed that in setting priorities for its advice, they will consider the experience of children and families as they move through the NDIS as a ‘journey’ identifying possible changes to improve experiences at each stage in that journey – looking at the supports a child and their family connects with outside the NDIS, the journey to access the NDIS if needed, and from access to first plans, to how their plan is implemented and changes over time as their needs change.

This approach will reflect the diversity of the community and the need to reflect cultural, linguistic. geographic and social-economic differences, amongst other factors. They talked about the opportunity provide advice on how the NDIS can be better joined with other systems, and supporting children to better participate in those systems, particularly education.

Next Meeting

CEAG plans to meet again in September 2024. The next meeting will focus on NDIA co-design around children’s issues, focus areas for CEAGs initial exploration, and how the CEAG will make practical connections with other experts and networks.

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