1 May 2025

The Rural and Remote Advisory Group (RRAG) met for the first time on 1 May 2025.

The meeting was held online.

Focus of the meeting

The meeting covered:

- Ways of working
- Remote Service Delivery Model
- Department of Social Services (DSS) Engagement Strategy.

Ways of working

The Chair, Ms Fleur Hill, NDIA, General Manager, SA, WA, NT Regional and Remote Services, discussed the role of the RRAG.

Ms Hill sought feedback from the group on both the Draft Terms of Reference and Draft Workplan.

- The Terms of Reference was discussed, including outputs and outcomes to be achieved, confidentiality, conflicts of interest and meeting cadence.
- The group agreed to hold monthly meetings for an initial three months with the anticipation that bi-monthly meetings would be the standard meeting cadence.
- Updates to both documents, including meeting cadence will be circulated to the group at the next meeting.
- Both Terms of Reference and Workplan were reviewed and endorsed.

Remote Service Delivery Model

The NDIA shared an overview of the way the Agency will work with participants living in rural and remote areas.

Topics included:

Market Intervention:

- The NDIA will engage with whole communities, not just with individuals.
- The mandate will be to build up the ability of communities to access disability support services locally through deliberate market intervention activities.

- Ensuring local work programs are driven by local priorities and needs, defined in each place.
- Market development work will enable the NDIA to plan with communities locally and use alternative commissioning approaches to secure servicing where the NDIA has not previously.

Connection to Reforms:

- The NDIS Review made recommendations around strengthening the coordination of the NDIS market and improving access to supports for First Nations and remote community participants, through alternative commissioning arrangements.
- The Disability Royal Commission made a specific recommendation to expand the Community Connector program. It also made recommendations regarding remote workforce development, to enhance local problem-solving.
- The Remote Service Delivery Model is also guided by the Australian Government's focus on better, more holistic, place-based, and locally informed services for First Nations people, alongside the NDIA's commitments under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

Continuous Service Improvement:

- The current Remote Service Delivery is a starting point, based on advice that remote Australians have consistently provided to the government. Prioritising face to face servicing, by people who they will work with over time, who understand how life is in remote Australia.
- The next step is working locally, with communities, to understand their priorities and how service delivery needs to look for each unique place. This is where service co-design occurs.
- Reforms will mean rebalancing some participant facing activities, however the model will stay consistent.

Place Based Operation:

- The model features geographically-tied teams that will service communities on a repeat basis so they have local understanding and relationships.
- Existing Remote Community Connectors are a key part of our place based presence and are in the process of being expanded.

NDIS Rules: Department of Social Services Engagement Strategy

The Department of Social Services (DSS) gave a presentation to members about the current proposed DSS Engagement Strategy and schedule for the NDIS Rules. Feedback was sought from members on how to best engage with people from remote communities.

The discussion included:

Engagement Strategy:

- The role of the DSS is to work closely with the NDIA. This includes, listening to feedback that is gathered through the wide and varying engagement channels and working with the Agency to develop policy and materials to communicate, test and consult on the scope of the NDIS Rules.
- Regular meetings are being held with the NDIA and States and Territories to discuss a range of reforms and to ensure that engagement is timely, inclusive, and respectful.

NDIS Rules:

Improving the access pathway:

- Review the current Becoming a Participant Rules.
- Commence work to clarify key access criteria.
- Clarify when and why eligibility reassessments will happen.

Participant journey for new framework:

- Transition to new framework plans.
- Method for calculating total funding amount for flexible funding and stated supports.
- Needs assessment process and relevant assessment tools.
- Needs assessment report – content and structure.
- Replacement needs assessment.

Spending flexibility:

New planning framework:

- Stated supports.
- Funding periods.
- Restrictions of how flexible funding is spent.
- Funding periods – exemptions.
- Requirements for receiving a service or buying supports.

RRAG next meeting

The RRAG’s next meeting is 20 June 2025.

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