13 February 2026

NDIS participants are playing a lead role in helping design and test the new way of planning for the NDIS, with the first live testing of the new Support Needs Assessment underway.

An initial group of 30 NDIS participants are undertaking a simulated support needs assessment to test useability, accessibility, comprehension and participant experience.

The simulation covers introductory information and an opportunity for the assessor to get to know the participant, complete the assessment questions, and check the details with the participant and their supporters to confirm the information provided.

This builds on more than 10,000 desktop exercises already conducted by the NDIA as part of developing the new support needs assessment experience.

A second, more comprehensive testing phase will start in March, adding complexity into the test scenarios with a broader range of participants and including both virtual and face to face sessions.

Participants are guided through the support needs assessment practice sessions by experienced NDIS planners who are undertaking the required training and accreditation to deliver the I-CAN support needs assessment tool.

Live assessments are a critical part of the assessor accreditation process with the Centre for Disability Studies at the University of Melbourne.

The practice sessions have revealed important insights that are informing best practice principles for assessors, including assessment conversation flow, completeness of information gathered, and supporting emotional safety.

NDIS participant and co-design working group member LJ Atkinson from New South Wales said the session was calming, inclusive and genuine – and very different to previous planning experiences. She said she was given the opportunity to take breaks and ask plenty of questions.

The NDIA will use insights gained from the live testing to inform and design the assessment experience for participants.

The support needs assessment simulation is just one of the activities underway to prepare for the phased rollout of the new way of planning from the middle of 2026.

The new way of planning is being designed to make NDIS planning clearer and more transparent, with more flexibility and certainty for participants, with longer plan periods and fewer reviews.

The Department of Health, Disability and Aged Care is working with disability sector to develop the rules that will underpin the new planning framework. Consultation is open until 6 March 2026 .

NDIS participants can nominate to be part of the design process through NDIS Engage .

The gradual introduction of the new way of planning over several years means many participants will not experience any changes to their current way of planning for some time.

The NDIA will reach out to each participant when a change might impact them, with specific details about what the changes will mean and how they can engage.

Quotes attributable to Senator Jenny McAllister, Minister for the NDIS:

“We’ve begun testing the face-to-face conversations between real people that will be at the heart of the new Support Needs Assessment process.

“This is just the beginning of what will be a very extensive process of testing. There will be more testing in March involving more participants and even more complex scenarios.

“We know how important it is to work with the disability community to get this process right and I thank NDIS participants for their valuable contributions.

“We need a new way of planning because while every person is different, their experience of the NDIS shouldn’t be. The size of a person’s plan shouldn’t be determined by which planner they get or how much they can afford to pay for allied health reports.

“The NDIS has been life-changing for many people with disability, their families, friends, carers and support networks. We want to make sure we can provide that support for generations to come in a way that is fair and transparent.”

Quotes attributable to NDIS participant LJ Atkinson:

“I can't begin to tell you the difference it makes to do it this way. It was like it's tailor-made for you.

“I was asked questions about how things affect me. It was a very trusting, fulfilling experience.”

“It gave you the ability to talk, to speak, to feel comfortable, to be honest. The way it’s structured is conducive to a better result for people with disability.”

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