18 February 2026

Key themes and insights

1. New framework planning transition

- Key themes:
  - Work is ongoing between the NDIA, Department of Health, Disability and Ageing (DHDA), and State and Territory Governments on the rules, policy settings and participant transition plan for the introduction of new framework planning.
  - The rollout of the new approach to planning, including the introduction of a new NDIS support needs assessment, will take several years.
  - The NDIA is committed to supporting participants, the sector, providers, partners in the community and NDIA staff through the new process.
  - A broad communication and engagement program is being delivered to ensure participants are informed about these changes. An email about new framework planning was sent to all participants and nominees in February 2026.
  - The NDIA is working with Melbourne University and the Centre for Disability Studies to accredit staff that will be using the I-CAN version 6 as part of the NDIS support needs assessment.
  - The first group of NDIA staff to complete the training are individuals with an allied health qualification.
  - The NDIA is currently testing the new approach to planning with participants and staff. Testing of the support needs assessment process will be continuing over the coming months.
- Key insights:
  - Members requested information they can share with the disability community about the transition plan to help alleviate anxiety.
  - Members were keen to see the transition plan to understand the sequencing of the rollout so they can help identify where safeguards might be needed.
  - Members suggested building cultural safety from the outset to ensure any and all automated systems recognise diverse disability experiences and language needs to avoid creating new barriers.
  - Members recommend proactive monitoring to ensure CALD participants aren’t disproportionately affected by the transition and that new framework planning approaches should seek to align with recommendations from the NDIA’s CALD Strategy.

2. Scheme Eligibility

- Key themes:
  - In late 2024 there were legislative changes to how the NDIA can consider if a person meets the disability or early intervention requirements.
  - Since then, and following feedback from DRCO members, the Agency has made improvements to the eligibility assessment process. This includes increasing the time for participants to provide information from 28 days to 90 days and changes to the letters the Agency provides to participants and nominees at the start of an eligibility reassessment process.
  - Early 2026 insights are showing access decisions being made well within the 21-day timeframes.
- Key insights:
  - Members raised community concerns that some children will be exited from the NDIS and moved into the foundational support system which is not currently equipped to provide adequate support. Members asked for clarity on what the process will look like for determining who can access foundational supports and Thriving Kids verses NDIS supports.
  - Members expressed the importance of providing requests for more information to participants with Acquired Brain Injury or Intellectual Disability in easy English as not everyone has someone in their life to support them to understand letters from the NDIS.

3. NDIA CEO Update

- Key themes:
  - The NDIA CEO, Graeme Head introduced himself and shared his professional background. The NDIA is the seventh public service organisation he has led across, Commonwealth and NSW Governments. Including setting up the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission (Q&S Commission).
  - Graeme noted the NDIS as the most significant social policy reform in his lifetime, and the first in the world of its kind. This means change within the NDIS is to be expected, and evolution and improvement to the Scheme will be ongoing.
  - Since starting in November 2025, the CEO has been focused on implementing new framework planning and involving people with disabilities and their reprehensive organisations in design and implementation.
  - The CEO discussed his early observations and priorities:
    - Need for better communications across more channels. Including reaching out to participants directly, particularly while people are anxious about change.
    - Understanding what the Agency can do to improve participant experience over the short, medium, and long term.
    - The role the NDIA plays in participant safeguarding.

        - Understanding issues affecting Scheme sustainability which is critical to the future of the NDIS.
    - The CEO acknowledged that stakeholder engagement, including DRCO members, has been constructive, robust, and respectful.
- Key insights:
    - With the rollout of new framework planning, members are keen to understand how the Agency is going to address risks in a timely manner that keep participants safe and ensures their needs are met.
    - Concern was raised about the lack of progress for NDIS Review recommendation 7 ‘Introduce a new approach to NDIS supports for psychosocial disability, focused on personal recovery, and develop mental health reforms to better support people with severe mental illness.’
    - Members want to understand how the Agency is planning to work more effectively with the Quality and Safeguards Commission to ensure the Commission and the Agency are collaborating in the strongest way possible for participants.
    - Members raised concerns that current reforms could lead to a 2-teir system due to increased effort and focus on new framework planning and less attention to participants who will have old framework plans for up to 5 years.

4. DRCO Forum 2026 workplan

- Key themes:
    - The DRCO membership working group has further developed the membership criteria to define how the membership model will work, what the intake process might look like, how many members, and the composition of membership to ensue different disability cohorts are not over or underrepresented.
    - The evaluation working group have worked closely with the NDIA on the ongoing evaluation of the implementation of funding periods and NDIS Support lists.
    - The employment working group has been working on the employment conversation guides to ensure conversations about meaningful work are safe and manageable.
- Key insights:
    - Members raised that eligibility criteria for DRCO Forum membership needs to be flexible and clear to ensure that smaller and emerging organisations have equity of opportunity.
    - The NDIA acknowledged the work of DRCO members with setting the membership criteria but noted that not all organisations who meet the criteria can be accommodated in the DRCO programme.
    - Members of the evaluation working group highlighted the positive ways the group had engaged collaboratively with the Agency and where appropriate, are wanting to see this style of engagement used across other working groups.

5. DRCO Forum strategic refresh

- Key themes:
  - Ahead and during the session DRCO members put forward several questions for response from the NDIA on:
    - How the Agency uses DRCO members feedback and advice.
    - What are the Agency's expectations of the DRCO Forum and members.
    - What is the Agency's willingness to bring priority discussions to the forum for input.
  - Members noted that when the DRCO Forum began, the Agency's engagement mechanisms were limited. While the Forum was intended to support broad discussion, members are unable to stay across everything, highlighting the need to prioritise key issues.
- Key insights:
  - The Agency sees DRCO members contributing their expertise as important during this time of reform implementation and uses members advice to:
    - Inform co-design and consultation processes, practices, and activities.
    - Provide insight on emerging issues and themes shared with the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing.
    - Provide specialist insight to inform and update policies and guidance.
  - The Agency emphasised the importance of setting shared meeting agendas that prioritise the right issues.
  - The Agency affirmed its commitment to working with members to balance providing timely information ahead of Forum meetings with the need to genuinely come without answers and gain members' support with problem solving.

6. Foundational Supports

- Key themes:
  - The Australian Government has reached agreement with state and territory governments to put new investment into supports outside the NDIS, known as 'Foundational Supports'.
  - Governments have committed to jointly contribute $4 billion over 5 years to implement the first phase of Foundational Supports, known as 'Thriving Kids'.
  - The Government is currently working with States and Territory Governments to finalise the details of which services will be implemented by each jurisdiction, including those to be delivered by the Commonwealth.
  - Details of how these arrangements will be rolled out are still being confirmed. Once confirmed, there will be public communication about the services, how they can be accessed, and who they are designed for.
  - All governments have agreed services will be scaled over time. With all services across all jurisdictions fully operational by 1 January 2028.

    - The implementation approach will include messaging to support families with understanding what this means for them, with clear messaging on the interface between Thriving Kids and the NDIS.
    - Children currently in the NDIS, including those who gain access before 31 December 2026, will stay in the NDIS and continue with usual arrangements.
    - Supports delivered through Thriving Kids are intended to focus on 4 core goals:
        - Awareness of early childhood development and developmental difference, including autism.
        - Support for parents and families with access to trusted information and advice.
        - Supporting the role parents and families play in a child's development and connecting them other parents and families.
        - Access to targeted best practice group, or to one-to-one supports (where needed) that are delivered by Allied health professionals.
    - DHDA intends for services and supports to be designed based on evidence informed best practice, while accounting for the different intersectional and cultural needs of children and their families, and varying rural and remote locations.
- Key insights:
    - Members noted the Thriving kids Advisory Group has no carer representative and expressed the need to engage with carers on the design and building of services.
    - Members raised concerns about the lack of progress in addressing gaps in psychosocial supports outside the NDIS and are keen to understand when work on designing foundational psychosocial supports is expected to commence.
    - Members highlighted that previously, some mainstream childhood development information and resources focused on prevention rather than support.
    - They also raised concern over where people and families with Intellectual Disability will get information when there is currently no place funded to provided it.
    - Members keen to understand what the appeal and resolution process will be for services delivered between state and federal government.

Attendees

Australian Federation of Disability Organisations, Autistic Self Advocacy Network of Australia and New Zealand, Blind Citizens Australia, Carers Australia, Children and Young People with Disability Australia, Community Mental Health Australia, Deaf Australia, Deafblind Australia, Disability Advocacy Network Australia, Down Syndrome Australia, Every Australian Counts, Inclusion Australia, JFA Purple Orange, Mental Health Australia, Mental Health Carers Australia, National Ethnic Disability Alliance, National Mental Health Consumer Alliance, National Mental Health Consumer and Carer Forum, People with Disability Australia, Physical Disability Australia, ReImagine Australia, Women with Disabilities Australia, Young People in Nursing Homes National Alliance, Australian Autism Alliance, Deafness Forum Australia, Department of Health, Disability and Ageing, Reform Advisory

Committee Co-Chairs.

Apologies: A4 Autism Aspergers, Brain Injury Australia, Physical Disability Australia, First Peoples Disability Network.

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