7 October 2026

More First Nations people with disability in remote communities will get trusted local, face-to-face help to understand and make the most of their NDIS supports closer to home.

The NDIA is expanding the Remote Community Connector program that helps people with disability apply for NDIS access, connect with local services and use their NDIS plans.

The program funds local workers, mostly through Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations.

Remote Community Connectors will now support over 500 communities across Australia, including 17 more communities in the Northern Territory, 8 in Far North Queensland and 4 in New South Wales.

The expansion delivers on feedback from First Nations communities and the Disability Royal Commission’s call for more community-led connectors, making NDIS support more local, trusted, culturally safe and easier to access.

The NDIA is also delivering 9 further Remote Access Clinics to provide face-to-face information and access support in remote communities, including recently at Wilcannia in New South Wales, Carnarvon in Western Australia and Belyuen in the Northern Territory.

From 2024 to August this year, 14 Remote Access Clinics and engagement events supported 227 people to access the NDIS, including at least 196 First Nations people.

NDIA staff, allied health professionals and local organisations work together on site to help people gather evidence and progress their NDIS access requests.

Local communities, Remote Community Connectors, Traditional Owners, local leaders and organisations support planning of clinics, which run over two or three days.

This work supports broader efforts to improve access to the NDIS in remote communities, where people often face long distances, limited local services and complex systems.

First Nations voices are shaping this work, from local clinic planning to national consultation on how the NDIS can work better in remote communities.

The expanded Remote Community Connector program and Access Clinics support the goals of the Agency’s First Nations Strategy by making NDIS support more community-based, culturally safe and easier to access.

They will also help inform the First Nations Strategy Implementation Plan, now in development. The plan has been informed by consultation with First Nations communities, organisations and stakeholders across Australia.

Roundtables were held in every state and territory, where 274 participants shared priorities for improving NDIS access, cultural safety, coordination and accountability.

The NDIA then convened a National First Nations peak body roundtable to consider the priorities and practical actions for improving outcomes for First Nations people with disability.

Extra services:

Remote Community Connector program:

NT (Alyangula, Angurugu, Aputula (Finke), Barunga, Beswick, Bulman Weemol, Groote Eylandt, Jilkminggan, Numbulwar, Maningrida, Manyallaluk, Mataranka, Milyakburra, Minyerri, Peppimenarti, Umbakumba, Urapunga); Far North Queensland (Aurukun, Ayton, Coen, Cooktown, Degarra, Kowanyama, Shiptons Flat, Wujal Wujal); NSW (Brewarrina, Goodooga, Walgett, Wilcannia).

Remote Access Clinics:

NT (Gunbalanya, Jabiru, Milingimbi, Papunya, Ramingining, Yuendumu, Belyuen); WA (Carnarvon); NSW (Wilcannia).

Quotes

Quotes attributable to First Nations NDIS participant Dylan Moreen, who recently accessed the NDIS through the Remote Access Clinic in Belyuen, NT:

“I wanted support to learn skills and do more things for myself. Finding all the evidence I needed was difficult, but the Access Clinic helped me find the things I couldn’t.”

“I felt really good having the Access Clinic help me. The support will help me with things like cooking, cleaning and shopping.”

Quotes attributable to Miwatj Health Aboriginal Corporation (Eastern Arnhem Land) NDIS operations manager Tom Poutu:

"Our Remote Community Connectors live in community. Community is home. They're there every day, building trust, helping people understand their supports and making sure culture and community remain at the centre of service delivery."

"We've seen more First Nations people access the NDIS by having someone trusted in community they can communicate with. Having trusted local community members makes a

real difference to how people understand and access the NDIS."

Quotes attributable to NDIA CEO Graeme Head:

“First Nations communities have told us NDIS support needs to be local, trusted and easier to access. That feedback is helping to shape how the NDIA delivers services in remote communities.”

“Remote Community Connectors and Access Clinics combine local knowledge with practical, face-to-face support, helping more people understand and access the NDIS closer to home, no matter where they live.”

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