10 October 2014

Nearly 700 people with psychosocial disability are now part of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

Today, World Mental Health Day, the NDIS would like Australians to know it is continuing to work hard to ensure people with a psychosocial disability are able to access the support they need from the Scheme.

A psychosocial disability is one where people experience impairments related to mental health issues. Sometimes a psychosocial disability is permanent with significant functional impacts and reduces opportunity to participate in life activities without appropriate supports in place.

For those Australians with a psychosocial disability, who meet the NDIS access requirements, the full rollout of the NDIS, from 2016, will provide a great opportunity to receive reasonable and necessary psychosocial disability supports right across Australia.

To ensure the NDIA gets this right, in April this year it engaged former WA Mental Health Commissioner, Eddie Bartnik, as a Strategic Adviser, to oversee the related mental health, Tier 2 and Local Area Coordination portfolios.

Mr Bartnik's intention is to develop mental health strategies and models of support but he did stress mental health services remain very much a part of each state and territory's health and mental health systems and the NDIS was not in any way designed to replace them.

"The NDIS is only responsible for non-clinical supports, which enable people with psychosocial disability to participate in every-day life so they can enjoy greater social inclusion and economic participation," Mr Bartnik said.

"The Productivity Commission estimated approximately 57,000 people with a psychosocial disability will eventually benefit from a full NDIS, and at the end of August 2014, we had 685 participants with a primary psychosocial disability and a further 340 more where it was a secondary condition."

Mr Bartnik said participants came primarily from the first Victorian and New South Wales trials sites, with a smaller number coming from Tasmania and the newer trial sites.

"Of the 685 participants, 558 now have approved plans," he said. "It's a great result given the NDIS phased mental health in later in its trial sites.

"We've also witnessed some great examples of people who were homeless or stuck in temporary accommodation but with the help of NDIS staff, they have been able to complete their plan and begin living in their own home with all the necessary supports to help them improve their health and wellbeing."

Mr Bartnik said any person with a psychosocial disability clearly needs the support from family and friends. They also need support from local community networks, non-government and government services.

“As stated in the original Productivity Commission Report, people with a psychosocial disability also require access to a range of services across government. These can include health and clinical care, education, training, employment and community support.

“The efforts of all mainstream and community services are essential, along with disability support coordination and integration with mental health sector clinical supports. So far that support and collaboration has been great.”

To date, Mr Bartnik has consulted widely with the mental health sector and as a result several work streams are underway. They include:

- Sector Development Fund projects through Mental Health Australia and other groups with the aim of building capacity across all sector groups.
- Finalisation of a resource paper on: “A holistic concept of psychosocial disability support” following a national Roundtable meeting earlier this year.
- Working closely with members of the Scheme’s Independent Advisory Council and collaborating on important literature reviews and need analysis.
- Speaking at state, territory and national roundtables and conferences, including the recent national Mental Health Services conference in August 2014.
- Collecting and analysing data and feedback on psychosocial disability in the Scheme, including access decisions, where continuity of support is needed and examples of good practice that illustrate and clarify key Scheme features.
- Scoping a review of access tools, documentation and processes so these processes can be as engaging and appropriate as possible for people with a psychosocial disability.
- Scoping a review of support clusters and pricing in response to feedback from the sector on the existing supports catalogue.
- Establishing a National Consultative Reference Group on psychosocial disability so a national work plan and priorities can be developed and shared.
- Ensuring full Scheme design, around Tier 2 (Information, linkages and capacity building) and Local Area Coordination, maintains a strong focus on the needs of people with a psychosocial disability, their families and carers.

“Mental illness is complex in its own right and incorporating into the Scheme will be challenging because permanent impairment is central to the NDIS and it does not sit easily within the framework and language of recovery, which is the basis of current mental health best practice so there is a great deal of work to be done,” Mr Bartnik said.

“The Agency is working closely with Mental Health Australia through the Sector Development Fund to co-design some of these important reviews and share the expertise from their member community mental health organisations and also the National Mental Health Consumer and Carer Forum.”

For more information on the NDIS or to assess eligibility, visit the NDIS website.

NDIA media contact: 0477 703 960 or media@ndis.gov.au

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