

Stay informed with the CEO – A focus on the future

On 18 March I met with Commonwealth, State and Territory Disability Ministers for the first Disability Reform Ministers' Meeting (DRMM) of the year.

During this meeting, Ministers reflected on the latest [NDIS Quarterly Report for Q2 2021-2022](#).

The report highlighted that the NDIS is now providing disability-related support to more than 500,000 participants across the country; a major milestone for the Scheme. I spoke about our focus for 2022.

We are proud of the work we have done to bring more than half a million Australians with disability into the Scheme, but we know there is still more to do.

Continued work on Co-design and Engagement

This year, we adjust our focus from bringing participants into the Scheme and working with them on first plans, to improving the overall participant experience.

We are committed to listening and [working with participants, their families and carers and the disability community](#) to make sure each improvement is a step in the right direction and the Scheme is available for generations to come.

We have made a good start on formal co-design work on a [few key topics](#).

We've released our [Engagement Framework](#) and are working closely with the Co-design Advisory group to update the Roadmap of co-design activities.

Operating and Service Delivery

A key focus will be on improving our processes and systems – getting the basics right and making things as simple as we can.

We are good but need to keep getting better.

We are committed to delivering services in line with the [Participant Service Guarantee](#), which was agreed by the Parliament on 30 March, while also supporting participants to achieve good outcomes.

We will continue to implement the [Participant Service Improvement Plan](#) initiatives.

We are continuing to respond to the COVID-19 situation by introducing new measures and enhance existing measures to strengthen [NDIS COVID-19 supports for participants](#).

Introducing a new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) business system

A new CRM system is being developed by the Agency to improve the end-to-end participant journey and planning process.

The improvements will enable the Agency to deliver on many of the commitments in the [Participant Service Improvement Plan](#) and ongoing implementation of Tune Review recommendations.

The new CRM will be more user-friendly, and make it easier for NDIA staff and partners to do their job, giving them more time to deliver a quality experience for participants.

We are currently working with participants, providers and staff on the design and build of the new system and it will be progressively rolled out over two years, starting later in 2022.

Pricing Review

Pricing work is another key focus this year. A combination of market data, research, public consultation and regular industry engagement in 2022 will inform changes to pricing arrangements and price limits.

The annual [NDIS price limits review](#) is well underway, with key issues being considered including therapy prices, support worker cost model overheads, support coordination and plan management price limits.

We are committed to the continuous improvement of the methodologies underpinning the NDIS price controls framework.

We will also start early work on the review of SDA pricing for effect from July 2023 in accordance with strong requests from the sector.

Fraud and Integrity work continues

[The NDIS Fraud Taskforce](#) will be extended indefinitely to protect the integrity of the Scheme and the participants it supports.

The Taskforce is one of the measures we are using to detect fraudulent activity.

The Taskforce works with the NDIS regulator, the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission, and other bodies to ensure the plan funding of NDIS participants remains protected.

We are continuing to use a range of strategies to identify, investigate and [act on provider-focused fraud](#) and sharp practice in 2022, including a substantial uplift in our data analytics capabilities.

Scheme affordability

The 2022-23 Commonwealth Budget committed \$157.8 billion for the NDIS over the next four years.

The NDIA is also releasing monthly summary reports as part of our promise to make our data easier to see.

Continued improvement

We are delivering a world-first scheme.

Together, we remain committed to delivering quality service to participants so they can live the life they choose as part of a more inclusive Australia.

Stay informed with the CEO - launch of Home and Living consultation report

On December 8 I presented at the Disability Services Consulting (DSC) Housing & Home Conference and the National Disability Services (NDS) CEO's meeting.

The Home & House Conference was a timely opportunity, with the [results of the NDIA's Home and Living consultation](#) released on our website.

We asked participants, nominees, providers and stakeholders to provide feedback on how we can improve home and living. The report summarises the 143 written submissions and 304 online survey submissions we received over the 12-week consultation period.

A number of themes have been identified. People told us they wanted:

- to better understand how the vision aligns with the way we are currently managing home and living
- more options to try innovative and creative home and living supports.

People also told us that they support the introduction of more flexible budgets to spend on home and living supports in ways that matter to them.

We are committed to working collaboratively to address the issues raised and improving our approach to home and living in the year ahead.

At the NDS CEO's Meeting, I had the opportunity to reflect on what has been a significant and challenging year, set against the backdrop of COVID-19. I highlighted the vital role disability providers play in helping deliver the Scheme, and the significant effort and innovation that has gone into ensuring continuity of support throughout the pandemic.

The NDIS now supports more than 480,000 participants and has more than 16,500 registered service providers across Australia. As of 31 October 2021, the NDIS has provided \$8.63b in paid supports to participants so far this financial year, up 21% in the same period last year. This represents a strong market that is driven by participant choice and control.

Each year, the NDIA conducts a Provider Sentiment and Satisfaction Survey to better understand feedback from the sector and guide areas for improvement. The 2021 survey closed recently and all 16,500 registered service providers were invited to participate.

Results from the 2020 survey showed provider sentiment had increase, with 59% of providers feeling optimistic about the health of the NDIS market, up from 47% the previous year.

I also spoke about the Annual Pricing Review, which is underway. It examines whether the existing NDIS price control framework continues to be appropriate or should be modified. A combination of market data, research, public consultation and regular industry engagement informs changes to pricing arrangements and price limits.

More broadly, the NDS CEO's meeting gave me an opportunity to not only reflect on the year but also talk about my optimism for the year ahead. A number of the improvement projects the Agency is currently working on will come to fruition in 2022.

We are investing in our infrastructure, which includes delivering a point of support payment system, and building a new IT business system to better serve participants.

We have already made significant inroads in setting out how we will work with the disability community to co-design and implement Scheme improvements.

Our initial focus will be on information gathering necessary for decision making, support for participant decision making, home and living, as well as reinvigorating our focus on specific cohorts, including CALD and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Our work to improve the Scheme continues, and I look forward to working with the disability community and providers to deliver a better Scheme in the year ahead.

Stay informed with the CEO - CEO powers in NDIS Amendment Bill 2021

The *NDIS Amendment (Participant Service Guarantee and other measures) Bill 2021* was introduced to Parliament on 28 October 2021. You can read the Bill and the explanatory memorandum on the [Australian Parliament House website](#).

There is some conversations in the community about the CEO powers in the Bill. I want to address this issue because I'm concerned it is causing unnecessary worry for participants and the disability community.

The intent of this Bill is to improve the experience and outcomes for people with disability engaging with the NDIS. It is centred on recommendations from the 2019 Review of the National Disability Insurance Scheme Act 2013 conducted by Mr David Tune AO PSM.

I note concerns have been raised in particular about the Bill allegedly "granting new and unprecedented powers to the CEO of the NDIA to alter and amend participant plans without consent or agreement from the participant".

This is not the case. The power to vary a participant's plan, either at the participant's request or at the CEO's initiative, is not new. The current legislation provides for plan reviews at either the participant's request or the NDIA's instigation and this has been the case since the NDIS Act was first passed in 2013. In fact, the new variation power is more limited than the existing power, only to be used by the CEO in prescribed circumstances and as outlined in the explanatory memorandum, is intended for the benefit of the participant. All the same protections in the use of the existing review power apply to the proposed new variation power, including that no variation can happen without the participant's knowledge and involvement.

The CEO's powers can only be actioned in accordance with the decision making requirements of the NDIS Act, and the NDIS Plan Administration Rules will also prescribe limits for variations.

Some recent commentary on the proposed plan variation powers has also raised the issue of "consent". While the goal will always be to work collaboratively with the participant to meet their needs, there may be occasions where a final funding decision or change is made where the participant does not agree. In such situations, the participant can be assisted with reasons for the decision and also has rights of internal and external merits review. This is also consistent with the sound administration of Government social services programs and schemes, and is consistent with fair administrative decision making practice.

The Department of Social Services (DSS) managed the public consultation on the draft legislation and you can [read the summary report](#) on the DSS website.

A [parliamentary committee](#) has also been established to review the Bill and to hear community feedback. They will report back to the community on 25 November.

We are deeply committed to listening to, and learning from, participants and the disability community to improve the NDIS.

I look forward to hearing more about the findings of the committee.

Stay informed with the CEO - create a better future together, by learning from the past

On Thursday 24 September I spoke to disability community stakeholders as part of a [co-design workshop](#).

I spoke about my reflections on the first co-design workshop and my commitment to work together to solve the problems the Scheme faces and the improvements we've been asked to make. You can read my full statement for further detail on how we want to work together.

How we want to create a better future together, by learning from the past

- The first co-design workshop was, I hope, a start in our commitment to learn from the past and do things differently in the future.
- In that I wanted to acknowledge and discuss some of the themes that came out of last week's workshop.
- I heard that, before we can reset our relationship and work together to build a better Scheme, there needs to be some acknowledgment of how and why we find ourselves in the current position.
- The Agency, consistent with stated policy and intent of the Government, attempted a major set of reforms to improve the Scheme based around the introduction of independent assessments.
- While our intentions to improve the Scheme were genuine, the Agency failed adequately to deeply engage with the sector and to develop an agreed approach.
- We regret the real concern and uncertainty that created for participants and their families. For that, we sincerely apologise. It was not our intention, but we acknowledge that it is what happened.
- Those last words will appear exactly as I have just stated in the Chairman's Review to the 2020-21 Annual Report of the Agency, and be fully supported in my CEO review to be released in October. I am also already on the Hansard record in Parliament with very similar statements.

- We will learn from this experience and work together to build a mutual understanding of the challenges facing the Scheme, and how to address them to achieve the benefits for participants originally envisaged for the Scheme.
- Secondly, I would like to discuss the Agency's view on a compact or agreement.
- A compact or partnership agreement was initially recommended by the Independent Advisory Council's advice to the NDIA Board, and provided to the July Disability Reform Ministers' meeting (DRM).
 - We support the recommendation for a formal agreement.
 - But we understand from our first workshop that many of you would prefer a more practical outcome from these workshops.
- There was feedback that we should learn by doing co-design and that we build mutual trust through our actions rather than words on paper.
- From my own conversations with attendees after last week's workshop, it is not to say that there will never be an agreement. It's just not the priority now.
 - I fully support that position. It aligns very much with my own instincts and experience.
- Of course, there are already words that describe how we can work together.
- We have the Participant Service Charter and its principles – Transparent, Responsive, Respectful, Empowering, Connected. These will be embedded in the legislation as part of the Participant Service Guarantee. We already have awareness training about them across the Agency.
- Last year, disability advocates prepared 'Terms of Engagement' to reset the relationship between the NDIA and people with disability, their families and community.
 1. People with disability must be at the centre of decision-making as partners in the NDIS.
 2. People with disability must be represented in NDIS governance, in the leadership of the National Disability Insurance Agency, and in the delivery of the NDIS.
 3. Engagement must be honest, transparent and respectful.
 4. Changes to the NDIS need to be co-produced in collaboration with people with disability, our families and our representative organisations.
 5. Australia's obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities underpin engagement.
- We have no hesitation in supporting those engagement principles, noting only of course that the second is not wholly a matter for the Agency itself.
- It has been said that the governance of the NDIS is pretty complicated, and as CEO I would have to agree!.
- The NDIA is governed by its Board as a corporate Commonwealth entity (CCE), and must comply with our responsibilities set out in the NDIS Act.
- We also must adhere to decision by governments on implementing the NDIS. The Commonwealth; and all jurisdictions via the DRM Council, in accordance with the Act.

- We must interface with many other services and systems, including the state, territory and Commonwealth Government health, education, justice and transport services. To do this we operate under the Applied Principles and Tables of Support (APTOS) agreed by Commonwealth, state, territory and governments.
- The NDIS is one part of the plan to drive change over the next decade for people with disability in Australia, outlined in the Australian Disability Strategy 2021-2031, to be formally released before the end of this year.
- We work with the Quality & Safeguards Commission; a separate agency, but a sibling agency under the same Act.
- The Independent Advisory Council also plays a critical role in the success of the NDIS, with its advice functions set out in the NDIS Act.
- And we also recognise the effective community ownership of the NDIS.
- The NDIS exists because the disability community demonstrated to all governments and to the Australian people the value of a Scheme that supports people with disability to improve their social and economic participation.
- So I acknowledge the genuine and legitimate role of Disability and Carer Representative Organisations (DCROs) who represent the interests of many thousands of participants, their families and caregivers.
- There will be times the Agency works with the IAC, the Council and with the DCRO CEOs – both together or separately depending on the matter or situation. It's not either or. It's both. That can only be for the good.
- It is also essential for the NDIA to directly engage with current and future participants, their families and carers and the wider disability sector, and we have a number of channels for doing that.
- Thirdly, We are today discussing an engagement roadmap for various changes and improvements to the Scheme.
- We've included in the pre-reading a detailed list of 20 initiatives the Agency has set out in our Corporate Plan for 2021-24. They respond to feedback and advice we have received from many parties and from our governance environment as I have just listed, including from many of you over a long period.
- We would like to use them as the basis for discussion today, including about those most suited to co-design, noting the general acknowledgement that not every change or improvement can or should be co-designed, but all benefit from participant-centred engagement of one form or another.
- We have to respond to the specific tasking of DRM 9 July: to work in partnership with those with lived experience of disability through the Independent Advisory Council and disability representatives, on the co-design of a new person-centred model that delivers consistency and equity in access and planning outcomes, consistent with the legislative requirements for assessments as set out under the Act.
- So this is not the "Agency" setting the priority; this is DRM's tasking of us all.

- But there are other opportunities for co-design as well. I am keen to hear about those. And to hear about relative priorities, and even new priorities.
- Finally, I also wanted to acknowledge feedback from the last workshop from Disability Representative and Carer Organisations around funding and paying for your expertise beyond sitting fees.
- We have heard you on this issue and we are thinking deeply about this issue and considering what options are available to the Agency, in consultation with the Department.
- I'm happy to answer any questions now, or we can dive straight into our first breakout session.

Stay informed with the CEO – the future of the NDIS

On Wednesday 21 July I spoke at the DSC 'Where to from here?' conference about the future of the NDIS.

I spoke about the outcome of the recent Disability Reform Ministers' Meeting, our shared goal to improve the Scheme and the way forward through co-design. You can [read my full speech](#) for further details

Joint Standing Committee on the NDIS

On Tuesday 4 May 201, I was called to share a statement at the Joint Standing Committee on the NDIS.

I'm keen to share what I said with participants, their families and carers and the sector.

[Transcript for 'An update from our CEO Martin Hoffman'](#)

Scheme reform update

There has been a lot of focus on the NDIS in recent weeks.

The Hon Linda Reynolds has been appointed the new Minister for the NDIS and is taking the opportunity to consult further on Scheme reforms, including independent assessments, ahead of releasing draft changes to legislation.

I've recorded a short video for participants, their families and carers, and the sector, to let you know where we are in terms of Scheme reforms and set a clear picture of what we're working towards – ultimately, an affordable Scheme that supports participants to have more control over their supports and their lives.

[Transcript for 'Stay informed with the CEO – Scheme reform update'](#)

Consultation input summary reports on proposed NDIS changes

Recently we released the consultation input summary reports on proposed changes to the NDIS. These reports capture what we heard through the recent consultation process, which was an opportunity for participants, families, carers and the sector to provide feedback and input on the implementation of the proposed Scheme reforms.

We received 769 submissions through the consultation process, which ran from 25 November 2020 to 23 February 2021. I want to sincerely thank everyone who took the time to provide us with feedback on the papers, and contribute to making a better NDIS that is simpler, fairer and faster for participants.

You said, we heard

All submissions were reviewed and analysed, with core themes identified.

The feedback we received was mixed.

We know some of the proposed changes have made people uncertain and worried, and this came through in the submissions.

We heard that people with disability are anxious about how independent assessments will be carried out, and how information from the assessments will be used to make decisions on access, ongoing eligibility and plans.

We also heard that people want the NDIS to be easier. People told us they can see inequity and inconsistency in our current practices, and want their experiences with the NDIS to be better.

Many advocacy organisations, providers, peak bodies and other stakeholders offered clear recommendations and suggestions for how we can roll out these reforms to allow for individual needs of different participants, their families and carers.

Consultation input summary reports

The 'You said, we heard' consultation input summary reports capture the feedback we received. We have released these reports to provide an overall summary of feedback, and so people can read what others had to say. The reports provide an overview of themes, sentiment and quotes from submissions.

Next steps - what we're doing with the feedback

The feedback received through this consultation process will inform how the Scheme reforms are delivered and the support, resources and information provided to participants, planners and Local Area Coordinators.

From here we will:

- incorporate feedback into our design and implementation plans.
- undertake further targeted consultation on specific topics, such as how to best deliver independent assessments in rural and remote, culturally and linguistically diverse and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- actively participate in legislative processes and parliamentary processes, including the Joint Standing Committee on the NDIS inquiry into independent assessments.

Beyond telling you what we'll do with your feedback, our commitment to transparency includes showing you how your feedback has been used in the design and implementation of the planned reforms. We are committed to showing you where what we heard directly contributed to implementing changes in way that makes a better NDIS for all participants. I'll provide an update when we have more details to share.

Addressing misunderstandings and misconceptions

In addition to identifying key themes and analysing feedback in the submissions, we also identified several areas where there appears to be misunderstandings about the proposed changes. This means we've got a job to do to help you better understand the changes. We'll continue to provide you with more information so everyone is on the same page and hopefully working together to build a better NDIS.

Joint paper on independent assessments

Today the NDIA has released a joint paper with the Department of Social Services about independent assessments. The paper is the Government's submission to the Joint Standing Committee (JSC) on the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) inquiry on independent assessments. Our

submission sets out a clear picture of the planned reforms and why they are necessary to deliver a simpler, faster, fairer and more flexible NDIS will benefit all Australians.

Joint submission

The paper we released today provides a summary of the background, key reasons independent assessments are being introduced and clarifies the intent of independent assessments.

The concerns raised in the recent reforms consultation process indicate that there are misconceptions and misunderstandings about the details of independent assessments and how they will be implemented. The submission paper is the Government's clear statement on independent assessments and is an opportunity for us to clarify details about the planned reforms. I've provided some background on the reforms below as a starting point.

The NDIA is committed to actively seeking feedback on independent assessments and other reform proposals through an ongoing and comprehensive consultation program.

I encourage you to read the [joint submission paper \(DOCX 106KB\)](#), an Easy Read version will be available soon.

The need for independent assessments

The reforms will help deliver an NDIS that empowers participants, is easier to understand and provides greater flexibility, choice and control to improve outcomes for all people with disability, their families and carers.

The planned reforms to the Scheme will also mean the NDIS will more closely resemble the model originally recommended by the Productivity Commission.

It has been a remarkable transformation in a few short years to trial, transition and grow the Scheme, which is now supporting over 430,000 Australians. But the development of the Scheme is not yet complete.

Changes are required to resolve inequities in access and planning outcomes. This is critical as we work towards a mature and financially sustainable NDIS, which will benefit well over 500,000 Australians with disability by 2023.

It is fundamentally important to the success of the Scheme that we receive quality of information to make decisions on who is eligible for the NDIS and the amount of funding they receive for supports.

At 31 December 2020, almost half of current NDIS participants have been required to source their own evidence of their functional capacity. This contributes to inconsistent decisions as the quality of the evidence provided varies, which leads to variability in the amount, type and quality of information people assemble.

At the moment, participants must cover the cost of getting evidence themselves, or rely on the good will of the professionals who provide the evidence. This has meant that those with greater resources (time, money, the support of family) or a better capacity to understand and navigate the evidence process can have an advantage over those with fewer resources or who find the process challenging, confusing and frustrating.

Data shows that there are significant differences in average plan budgets depending on where you live and these experiences can challenge the credibility of the Scheme at the outset.

Importantly, the idea of independent assessments is not new. Evidence of a person's functional capacity has always been part of the NDIS and is embedded in the NDIS Act as being a key input to decision making.

Greater plan flexibility

As part of the reforms we will deliver greater flexibility for participants to spend their plan funding on disability-related supports. We will provide more guidance and support about best how to use the plan funding to pursue the participant's goals.

Further updates

I plan to post here over the coming weeks about the next steps with the consultation summary reports and to address misunderstandings that have come through strongly in the consultation process. It's important that the plan for independent assessments is understood fully so we are not causing any unnecessary stress for participants as we progress towards implementation.

JSC on the NDIS

Just for background, you can read more about the [JSC on the Parliament of Australia website](#) . Occasionally the JSC undertakes inquiries into specific aspects of the Scheme and invites submissions from individuals and organisations. The JSC decided to conduct an inquiry into independent assessments, with submissions closing on 31 March 2021.

Planning meetings

Today I want to touch on planning meetings.

We have seen some discussion online, through social media and in news that suggests you will no longer have a planning meeting or that the NDIS is phasing out planning meetings. That's not true. Your planning meeting will still happen – that won't change.

You will still meet with your planner. You will still be able to choose to meet in person or virtually through phone or video conversations. We'll continue to support you no matter which option you choose.

Here's what will change – you will get a draft plan and budget before your planning meeting. And your planning meeting will be with the delegate (the decision maker). This doesn't mean we will be telling you what supports you need, only what the plan budget is likely to be based on your functional capacity and needs.

This means you will be able to start thinking about what your plan might look like and the supports you might want to use before you meet with your planner.

It's important to remember that you will have a much more flexible plan. You won't need to use your planning meeting to justify every support, down to the hour, to plan for the next year or beyond, as you have done in the past. You will be able to make decisions and changes to supports week to week as you need so that they fit better with your life.

You are the expert in your life and we want planning meetings to give you the chance to discuss how we can help connect you to community and mainstream supports and how you can use your flexible plan budget to purchase the disability related supports you need to pursue your goals.

We've heard that some people are worried they won't be able to make changes during their planning meeting because the funding is already decided. Changes will be able to be made, particularly for specific things like Assistive Technology and Supported Disability Accommodation funding.

Our decision review process also won't change. If you think a decision made about you and your plan is wrong, you will still be able to request a review and then an appeal if necessary – we respect everyone's right to do so.

After the plan is decided, we will be checking in to see how your plan is going, and supporting you to find and access services. We are also developing an app for you to track your plan spending more easily.

You can read more about the [budget and planning process](#) and [have your say](#).

The need for independent assessments

I want to talk to you about why we are introducing independent assessments. I'll explain the issues we're addressing with the assessments and where the recommendations for using independent assessments have come from.

An independent assessment is an assessment of your ability to carry out everyday tasks and your individual circumstances. It will build an overall picture of how you function in different areas of your life in a variety of situations, such at home or at work. It also takes into account your environment, like where you live and who you live with. The assessments are conducted by qualified health care professionals and will be used by the NDIS to make decisions about access and planning.

You can read more about [independent assessments](#) and [have your say](#) on the proposed changes.

Consistent and fairer decisions

What we know now is that the current approach to assessing a person's functional capacity and providing information to the NDIS is leading to inconsistent and unfair decisions across all participants in the Scheme.

This means that decisions can be influenced by where you live, your ability to describe your circumstances and needs, and even whether English is your first language. For example, the proportion of the population (aged 0-64) receiving NDIS supports differ significantly by State and Territory and don't match Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) population surveys on disability.

We can also see that participants living in wealthier areas are receiving more funds in their plans, on average, than those who are living in poorer areas.

Payments differ by where you live. Our latest [Quarterly Report shows](#) payments are 23 per cent higher in wealthier families for children compared with the poorest, and 13 per cent higher for adults. We are committed to changing this.

We also know that it can be very expensive to undertake the assessments required to gain access to the NDIS, and to give evidence to support reasonable and necessary funding. That probably means that some people who may be eligible for the NDIS haven't applied because they can't afford – or don't know how to get – the assessments needed to support their access request. We know that Australians with disability are currently spending between \$130 million and \$170 million on assessments associated with accessing the NDIS.

Access to the NDIS, and the level of support you receive, should not be determined or impacted by where you live, how much money you can spend gathering evidence or whether you are in a position

to advocate for particular supports or funding levels.

So the advantage of moving to the new approach will mean a level playing field, with free and consistently applied assessments for all Australians wanting to access the NDIS and seek disability related supports resulting in a fairer NDIS for the future.

You can read more about the new [budget and planning process](#) and [have your say](#).

This is what we are talking about when we say we want to make the future of the NDIS fairer, consistent and more equitable.

Our approach to independent assessments

The approach we are taking to independent assessments is backed by detailed research and evaluation. The proposed tools have been validated over multiple years in multiple countries, including specifically with people with intellectual disability, as providing a reliable assessment of functional capacity.

How a person's disability or disabilities impacts their ability to carry out everyday tasks is one of the key factors in determining eligibility for the NDIS under the NDIS Act. We refer to this as functional capacity. This means the ability to be involved in different areas of life like home, school, work and the community and to carry out tasks. It also considers other factors in a person's environment that may impact their day to day life.

You can read the [Assessment Framework](#) and [Tools selection papers](#) for further details on why the assessment tools have been chosen.

How this will impact you?

To make sure the independent assessment process is consistent, your assessment can only be done by an allied health professional on the independent assessor panel. Importantly, independent assessors, and the assessment tools do not replace the relationship you have with your doctor or allied health professional.

Your doctor or allied health professional will still be involved in your access request for the NDIS, as they will continue to be responsible for providing important information relating to your disability as part of access requirements.

Introducing independent assessments paid for by the NDIS means new and existing participants have the same opportunity to access assessments, which will provide up-to-date and complete assessment of your functional capacity.

Recommendations for independent assessments

The concept of an independent assessment is not new to the NDIS. The 2011 Productivity Commission report on Disability Care and Support talks about independent tools being “needed to determine the level of needs and funding for a person covered by the scheme”.

The report noted: “There is currently no ideal tool to use in the NDIS, but governments should not delay implementation of the scheme in the absence of ‘perfect’ tools. Accordingly, the NDIS would use the best available tools in its initial implementation phase, with the ongoing development of best practice approaches”.

You can read more on the [Productivity Commission website](#) .

So why haven’t independent assessments been part of the NDIS since the start?

Over the last few years, we have focused on making the NDIS available right across Australia, welcoming over 400,000 people with disability into the Scheme, who were previously on a mix of state and territory support programs, or receiving no assistance at all. This was done as quickly as we could as we knew the services provided before the NDIS were inadequate. Our focus was on speed. Now we are through that ‘transition period’ the time has come for us to focus on the quality of support provided to participants, and the sustainability of the NDIS into the future.

In 2019 the Government appointed Mr David Tune AO PSM to review the NDIS Act to identify opportunities to make NDIS processes simpler and more straight-forward – this is referred to as the Tune Review. In his review, Mr Tune considered information about independent assessments.

One of the recommendations of the Tune Review was that the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) require people applying to access the Scheme and existing participants to have an assessment to support decision-making under the NDIS Act, using NDIA-approved providers in a way set by the Agency.

The Tune Review report also said the benefits seen in the independent assessment pilot meant the assessments would be worth doing nationally for every person with disability wanting to test their access to the Scheme or require further evidence to support decision-making about the supports in their plans.

You can read the Tune Review report on the [Department of Social Services website](#) .

Professor Andrew Whitehouse from the Autism CRC and Telethon Kids Institute, and Professor of Autism Research at The University of Western Australia says:

“The [independent assessment] framework is consistent with international best practice. It has great potential to increase the accuracy of assessment, which is a critical foundation in determining the most appropriate supports for each individual.”

The framework has also been endorsed by leading Australian academics.

“The NDIA has taken on one of the difficult technical and implementation problems in the disability field worldwide. They have outlined a framework on which to build a fairer and more consistent disability assessment – to enable the rights of people with disability to participate across society. This diagnosis-neutral framework combines both the need to evaluate capacity and the determining role of the environment in helping or hindering participation. The framework recognises that assessment must combine quantifiable information obtained using scientific standards with the expert knowledge of people living with disability and the families and professionals who know them.”

- Dr Ros Madden AM, University of Sydney Honorary Research Fellow, University of Sydney and Nick Glozier, Professor of Psychological Medicine, University of Sydney.

Professor and Chair of Infant, Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at the University of New South Wales, and Head of the Academic Unit of Child Psychiatry, South West Sydney, Valsamma Eapen says:

“The new functional capacity assessment framework by NDIS aligned to the International Classification of Functioning will undoubtedly enhance the development of effective programs matching each individual's functional level and needs, thereby optimising outcomes.”

GPs and independent assessments

One of the questions that comes up regularly around independent assessments is: What role can my GP play in my assessment?

We understand you may have a strong connection with your General Practitioner (GP) or doctor, particularly if they have been part of your health care for some time. They can have long-term knowledge of your circumstances and provide valuable insights.

Your GP can have a role in the assessment process, however they will not do the independent assessment.

To explain this, we should look at the purpose of the independent assessment.

A simpler, more consistent and easier to use NDIS for all Australians

The independent assessment is designed to create a complete picture of how you manage tasks and activities in your everyday life.

Independent assessments involve the consistent and appropriate use of assessment tools, which leads to more consistent decision-making when people request access to the NDIS and during the planning process.

Independent assessment tools framework

The NDIS Independent Assessment Framework was developed in consultation with academics, allied health professionals and other experts from the disability sector.

More than 100 recognised and standardised tools were assessed to ensure they:

- are disability-neutral, so can be used across disability types
- assess function rather than impairment
- are questionnaire-based, to avoid capturing a person's moment-in-time function (for example, on a 'good day')
- are accurate and reliable.

To make sure the independent assessment process is consistent, independent assessments can only be done by an allied health professional on the independent assessor panel, so all participants, regardless of their situation have the same access to internationally recognised, evidence based assessments.

While your GP or other health professional may use some of these tools, independent assessors are trained in the use of all of the assessment tools.

We have appointed assessors – people like occupational therapists, physiotherapists and psychologists – through an open and competitive tender process.

Assessors will be trained to use the assessment tools across a wide range of disabilities.

Your GP's role in supporting the independent assessment

Independent assessors, and the assessment tools, do not replace the relationship a person has with their treating medical or allied health professional.

It's important to remember that independent assessments are just one piece of information the NDIA considers when making decisions about a person's eligibility for the NDIS, and in the planning process.

Your GP, or other treating health professional, may be asked to provide the NDIA with information.

- For people applying for access to the NDIS, other than children accessing early intervention services, a health professional will still be required to provide information that an impairment is permanent or likely to be permanent (including for early intervention requirements) and evidence of disability.
- Your GP or other treating health professional may also be asked to provide evidence that early intervention supports would be beneficial and likely to reduce your future needs.
- Health professionals will be required to provide information about what interventions or supports have been considered and, where applicable, all reasonable supports and treatments have been identified and/or administered.

Your assessor will not have access to information from your GP or health professional.

There are some questions in our [independent assessment frequently asked questions](#) that talk more about the role of GPs.

Read more about the changes the NDIS is making and how you can take part.

[Have your say](#)

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