20 June 2021

The Autism Advisory Group (AAG) met on 17 June 2021 by video conference. All AAG members attended the meeting.

The National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) provided a broad overview of the feedback received on the Interventions for Children on the autism spectrum consultation paper from more than 450 written submissions.

AAG members acknowledged widespread views about aspects of the paper including:

- the perception that funding caps will be applied to the supports available for autistic children;
- the need for the NDIA to recognise that all autistic people and their families are different;
- the needs of children and families with multiple disabilities and complexity need to be explicitly recognised and addressed;
- the needs of children and families across life stages and transition points need to be more explicitly accommodated;
- that consideration of the needs of families (including siblings) is critical, including provision for respite care.

The NDIA advised the paper proposes indicative levels of funded support and some participants may receive funding that varied from the funding levels published in the paper.

The NDIA confirmed it did not intend to suggest that parents would be asked to deliver interventions in the place of professionals, as opposed to the benefit of their being involved in the provision of supports.

The NDIA reaffirmed its intention is to:

- develop advice for participants, their families and providers regarding reasonable and necessary funding of early childhood intervention support for children on the autism spectrum; and
- work more effectively with parents, caregivers and other professionals to collectively deliver the best outcomes for autistic children and their families.

AAG members noted the progress on the consultation process and encouraged the Agency to continue listening to feedback being provided by families, the sector and health professionals, and to actively collaborate on solutions.

The AAG highlighted the need to further develop an approach for capacity building and support for families, as part of the NDIA’s broader focus on reasonable and necessary decision-making.

The Scheme Actuary presented the NDIS Quarter 3 2020-21 report, including insights on autistic participants who make up the largest cohort of participants in the Scheme.

In addition, the Scheme Actuary briefly spoke about the Personalised Budgets paper.

The Autism Family Support Association (AFSA) presented to the group.

AFSA is a collective voice for autistic people in Victoria with complex and high support needs and their parents, carers and families. AFSA presented on the challenges their family members are currently experiencing, including:

- suitable services for autistic people with complex needs;
- support for autistic children in the education system;
- appropriate housing for autistic people, including access to Specialist Disability Accommodation; and
- a shortage of NDIA accredited allied health practitioners with the appropriate qualifications and expertise to prepare Communication and Behaviour Support plans.

AAG members offered their support to AFSA to ensure their insights and views continued to be brought to the attention of AAG and to all levels of government.

The NDIA committed to continuing to engage with AFSA, as part of its broader engagement processes.

AAG members agreed an additional out-of-session AAG would be scheduled in approximately one month.

This was the second meeting for the group for 2021. AAG met in February 2021 to discuss and provide feedback on three NDIA consultation papers:

- Access and Eligibility policy with independent assessments;
- Planning policy for personalised budgets and plan flexibility; and
- Supporting young children and their families early, to reach their full potential.

Following this meeting, the AAG continued to provide feedback to the NDIA on these papers.

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