11 July 2020

The National Mental Health Sector Reference Group met on Thursday June 11 2020 by video conference. This is the second meeting of this Reference Group for the year. Key highlights and issues:

Disability Reform Council Update

Sarah Hawke from the Department of Social Services (DSS), reported that the Disability Reform Council (DRC) Action Plan on psychosocial disability is continuing in spite of the coronavirus. Some of the timelines for deliverables have had to be put back.

Psychosocial Recovery Coach Update

The Reference Group received an update on the commencement of the new support item, Psychosocial Recovery Coaches from 1 July 2020. Members welcomed this initiative and commented that this was an important milestone in improving Scheme responsiveness for people with psychosocial disability.

They welcomed the inclusion of lived experience in the Recovery Coach support item. Some participants expressed the opinion that the price settings were low and need further adjustment.

They recommended that further market information and development work be undertaken to ensure that the new support items were well understood by participants and supply of Recovery Coaches is expanded.

Psychosocial Sector Response to COVID-19 Update

The meeting received a briefing on themes from regular catch-ups the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) has organised with national psychosocial disability stakeholders on the impacts of coronavirus (COVID-19) on participants with psychosocial disability and their families and carers in the NDIS. These included:

- Changes to how supports are delivered and the impacts this has on the workforce and participants
- Increased incidence of suicidal ideation, including suicidal ideation of carers.
- Homeless people’s difficulty in providing evidence for access continues
- The move to tele-link approaches for service delivery and the issues this raises for people with a psychosocial disability
- Difficulties faced by people regarding access to IT to participate in online services

- Confusion around use of flexible funding within plans
- Advice required as to when Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is warranted
- Impacts for families and carers, including consideration of how we support them as an informal workforce and provide respite
- The need for data, both quantitative and qualitative, to drive some of the lessons we might learn from this situation
- Rebuilding after COVID-19 ends
- Clarify the role and purpose of support coordination and clarify acceptable billing practices for the support coordination function to ensure consistency

The Reference Group acknowledged the flexibility in plans that the NDIA had approved as part of the pandemic response and the Agency's low-cost Assistive Technology (AT) initiative to assist people to connect to web-based services. It also recognised the adaptability and responsiveness of participants and service providers in their personal and provider responses to the virus.

The meeting discussed that some participants have reported having really liked the one-on-one focus of supports during the social distancing period while others had found this very difficult.

The meeting agreed that it is important to consider the strengths and weaknesses of the psychosocial disability responses to the corona virus and consider possible on-going implications for service delivery arrangements. The meeting agreed to put this issue on its September meeting agenda.

Office of the Scheme Actuary Update

The Office of the Scheme Actuary made a presentation on a comprehensive data report on participants with primary psychosocial disability for the period 1 July 2019 to December 2019. The Reference Group thanked the Scheme Actuary and her staff for the comprehensiveness of the data reports and their presentation.

Questions were raised by some members in relation to the levels of support coordination within plans for people with primary psychosocial disability and the need for some analysis around plan utilisation rates.

Functional Assessment Update

Agency staff provided an update on the roll out of functional assessments in the Scheme. They advised that voluntary functional assessments would commence in October 2020 on a limited basis while the final scope of functional assessments was determined. Members highlighted the importance of more informed and consistent assessment of need and the need to improve the

reliability of assessment. Some members raised the need for a deeper consultation process in relation to implementing the Independent Functional Assessment program and in particular the proposed compulsory nature of assessments.

Members Reports

The Members' Report section provided feedback from the broad range of stakeholders involved on developments and issues in regard to psychosocial disability and mental health services.

Members of the Reference Group offered their warm congratulations to Michael Burge who received an Order of Australia in the recent announcements on the Queens' Birthday Weekend. They noted that Janet Meagher will be standing down from her position on the NDIS Independent Advisory Council on 30 June 2020 and will be continuing on the Reference Group.

Next Meeting

Next meeting September 3, 2020

Meeting Close

Gerry Naughtin NMHSRG Chair said, "This was a busy and vibrant meeting. The corona virus and its impacts on NDIS participants with psychosocial disability and their families was a strong theme of the meeting. The way people have adapted has been amazing but there are consistent reports of heightened levels of psychological distress and anxiety. The Commonwealth Governments' mental health and disability supports initiatives will assist people in dealing with these challenges".

Attendees

Chairperson

- Dr Gerry Naughtin, Strategic Advisor (Mental Health)

Members

- Ms Janet Meagher AM, Independent Advisory Council
- Mr Michael Burge OAM, Consumer Representative
- Mr Evan Bichara, Consumer Representative
- Mr Patrick Hardwick, Carer Representative
- Ms Teena Balgi, Mental Health Principal Committee (for Ms Amy Wyndham)
- Ms Julie Skilbeck, Mental Health Principal Committee (for Ms Megan Boland)

- Mr Ivan Frkovic, State and Territory Mental Health Commissions
- Ms Sandra Ofei-Ferri, National Mental Health Commission
- Mr Bill Gye OAM, Community Mental Health Australia
- Ms Harry Lovelock, Mental Health Australia
- Ms Anthea Raven, Commonwealth Department of Health
- Ms Nicola Wright, Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (for Mr Peter Jenkins)
- Ms Sarah Hawke, Department of Social Services
- Ms Jen Rollins, Branch Manager, NDIA Complex Support Needs Branch

Project Managers

- Mr Mark Rosser, Director, NDIA Mental Health and Hard to Reach
- Mr Malitha Perera, NDIA Strategic Advice, Research and Inclusion Division
- Ms Erandathie Jayakody, NDIA Strategic Advice, Research and Inclusion Division
- Ms Belinda Wilson, NDIA Mental Health Section
- Ms Joanne Llewellyn, Department of Social Services
- Mr Simon De Sousa, Department of Social Services
- Ms Nikki Roach, Commonwealth Department of Health
- Ms Leanne Beagley, Mental Health Australia

Invited Guests

- Mr James Bishop, Branch Manager, NDIA Service Design and Outcomes
- Ms Lani Wandell, NDIA
- Ms Marika Thompson, NDIA
- Ms Kelly Stein, NDIA
- Ms Belinda Krause, NDIA Scheme Actuary
- Ms Fiona Walsh, NDIA Scheme Actuary
- Ms Nicole Stransky, NDIA Scheme Actuary
- Ms Felicia Auryn, NDIA Scheme Actuary

Apologies

- Mr Sam Bennett, General Manager, NDIA Strategic Advice, Research and Inclusion Division
- Ms Kathy McEwan, Branch Manager, NDIA Communities of Practice
- Dr Peter Jenkins, RANZCP
- Ms Megan Boland, Mental Health Principal Committee
- Ms Amy Wyndham, Mental Health Principal Committee

Related articles

Mental Health Sector September 2020 communique

Date
23 September 2020

Mental Health Sector November 2020 communique

Date
10 September 2020

Mental Health Sector April 2021 communique

Date
15 April 2021
Read more news