15 April 2021

The National Mental Health Sector Reference Group (NMHSRG) met on Thursday, 15 April 2021 by video conference for its first meeting of 2021.

Key highlights and issues discussed

Gerry Naughtin (Chair) welcomed participants and noted that this meeting would focus on the following four issues:

1. Seeking feedback from members on the draft Psychosocial Disability Recovery-Oriented Framework (Recovery Framework) and the planned consultation process for community feedback.
2. An update on the work to improve access and planning.
3. A detailed statistical report from the National Disability Insurance Agency's (NDIA) Office of the Scheme Actuary on psychosocial disability in the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).
4. Members' feedback.

The Chair noted the considerable work within the NDIA and amongst mental health consumer, family and carer and service provider organisations over the past six months in responding to the gradual winding back of COVID-19 restrictions and transitioning back psychosocial support services to the new COVID-19 norm for service supports for participants with psychosocial disability.

He congratulated Community Mental Health Australia and Mental Health Coalition of South Australia on their running of the third NDIS and Mental Health Conference in February 2021. He commented that a number of the presentations that he attended noted the importance of the assistance that NDIA planners and staff from Local Area Co-ordination Agencies had provided, in addressing their goals.

He highlighted the significance of the financial investment in psychosocial disability by Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments through the NDIS with $2.2 billion committed to participants with primary psychosocial disability in 2019-20 financial year, an additional $1 billion over the previous financial year.

He highlighted the importance of the work of the National Mental Health Sector Reference Group in providing on-going advice to the NDIA on improving the responsiveness of the NDIS to participants with psychosocial disability and their families and friends.

Recovery Framework

The NDIA's Mental Health team introduced the draft Recovery Framework, its purpose and detailed the six principles proposed: Supporting personal recovery; Valuing lived experience; Shared responsibility with mainstream services; Supporting informed decision-making; Being responsive to fluctuating support needs; and Building recovery-oriented practice competencies.

The meeting heard a summary of the feedback from the Psychosocial Disability - Stakeholder Reference Group and supported their suggestions for improving the document. The meeting discussed the draft Recovery Framework and added its suggestions for improving the document.

Erin Ingham, Director Mental Health Team advised the meeting that a targeted consultation on the draft Recovery Framework would be undertaken over the next few months. Feedback from these consultations will inform the final version of the Recovery Framework that Disability Ministers will consider later in 2021.

Update NDIS Scheme Reform Program

Sam Bennett General Manager, Policy Advice and Research Division provided an update on the on-going work in the NDIA to improve the fairness and effectiveness of access and planning processes. He spoke of the rationale for the proposed reforms and the current work occurring in analysing the 769 submissions that have been received on independent assessments. The NDIA is systematically reviewing the feedback and considering suggestions for improving the reforms.

He advised that preliminary results from a qualitative evaluation of participants and families experience were indicating 80% were rating the experience of the independent assessment as good to excellent. The meeting discussed the proposed reforms and implications for people with psychosocial disability. It noted that Mental Health Australia and Lived Experience Australia have supported changes to the Scheme which will improve consistency of access outcomes in principle, with suggestions of how they could be implemented to be more responsive to the needs of people with psychosocial disability.

The meeting acknowledged the article in The Australian on 15 April 2021, quoting the new Minister for NDIS Linda Reynolds as saying that she would not be undertaking any decisions to progress with enabling legislation for scheme reforms until the current independent assessment trial is finished and there is time to consider the feedback. Minister Reynolds has signalled her intention to consult widely in her role as new Minister.

The meeting reaffirmed the NMSRG's position that improving the flexibility of plan budgets was a critical element of the NDIS reforms that needs to be retained.

Members feedback

Department of Social Services

- Highlighted the work being undertaken on the development of the next National Disability Strategy and the recognition of the need to include people with disabilities associated with mental health in the new strategy.
- National Register of Mental Health Consumers and Carers
- Noted their appreciation of the clarity of the presentation by Sam Bennett and how helpful this had been in assisting them to understand the rationale and nature of the proposed scheme reforms and how they could contribute to greater fairness and equity in access to the NDIS.
- Highlighted the need to ensure the draft recovery framework gave sufficient recognition to the role of family and friends in recovery.

Department of Health

- Transition of clients from ceased Commonwealth community mental health programs (Partners in Recovery, Day to Day Living and Personal Helpers and Mentors) has continued steadily. As at 28 February 2021, there are 914 clients remaining in the National Psychosocial Support -Transition program from the original cohort of 15,484.
- A service navigator measure was rolled out on January 1, 2021 to improve regional service integration and referral pathways.
- From 1 January 2021, consumers of Psychosocial Support Measure and Continuity of Support programs can now access support to test or re-test eligibility for the NDIS, where they require more intensive support.

The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatry

- Noted that it was supportive of the principles in the draft Recovery Framework and was working closely with the NDIA in addressing issues about participants on the autism spectrum.

State Mental Health Commissions

- Advised the meeting of its submission to the Queensland Productivity Commission Inquiry into the NDIS and noted on-going questions from other state Mental Health Commissions

about independent assessments.

NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission

- Noted that the Commission and the NDIA are working together about quality and safety issues for participants with psychosocial disability in the NDIS.

Next meeting

Thursday, 17 June 2021

Attendee list

Chairperson

Dr Gerry Naughtin, Strategic Advisor (Mental Health)

Members

Ms Janet Meagher AM, Independent Advisory Council Liaison
Mr Michael Burge OAM, Consumer Representative
Mr Evan Bichara, Consumer Representative
Mr Patrick Hardwick, Carer Representative
Ms Karen de Mar, 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 Kate Murray, National Mental Health Commission
Mr Bill Gye OAM, Community Mental Health Australia
Ms Ingrid Hatfield, Mental Health Australia (for Mr Harry Lovelock)
Dr Elizabeth Moore, Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists
Mr Tully Rosen, NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission (for Mr Robert Griew)
Mr Sam Bennett, General Manager, NDIA Policy Advice and Research Division

Project Managers

Ms Erin Ingham, Director, NDIA Mental Health Team
Mr Malitha Perera, NDIA Mental Health Team
Ms Sandra Natale, NDIA Mental Health Team
Mr Chris Ingamells, NDIA Mental Health Team
Ms Belinda Wilson, NDIA Mental Health Team
Ms Deb Biggins, Department of Social Services

Ms Christine Zorzi, Department of Social Services

Invited guests

Mr Tully Rosen, NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission
Ms Teena Balgi, Mental Health Principal Committee
Ms Julia Colcott, Mental Health Principal Committee
Ms Felicia Auryn, NDIA Scheme Actuary
Ms Nicole Stransky, NDIA Scheme Actuary
Ms Farheena Ahmad, NDIA Scheme Actuary
Ms Carina Hart, National Mental Health Commission

Apologies

Ms Megan Boland, Mental Health Principal Committee
Ms Amy Wyndham, Mental Health Principal Committee
Ms Anthea Raven, Commonwealth Department of Health
Mr Trent Tolra, Branch Manager, NDIA Agency Policy Branch
Mr Robert Griew, NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission
Ms Nikki Roach, Commonwealth Department of Health
Mr Harry Lovelock, Mental Health Australia
Ms Irene Gallagher, National Mental Health Consumer Alliance
Ms Sarah Hawke, Department of Social Services
Ms Erandathie Jayakody, NDIA Mental Health Team

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