22 December 2021

The fourth meeting of the NDIS Mental Health Sector Reference Group for 2021 was held on 25 November 2021.

The Chair, Dr Gerry Naughtin, thanked Members for their considerable contributions to these meetings during the year.

COVID-19 has made 2021 another difficult year, however it is encouraging to note the significant progress made for people with psychosocial disability.

The Chair wishes all members a safe and enjoyable festive season.

The meeting focused on five matters:

Psychosocial Disability Recovery-Oriented Framework (Recovery Framework)

- The Recovery Framework is currently being considered Disability Reform Ministers.
- When approved, the NDIA is hoping to release the Recovery Framework as soon as possible.
- Implementation will commence in 2022.
- The NDIA thanks everyone involved in the development of the Recovery Framework and looks forward to working with key stakeholders during its implementation.

NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission (the Commission), Workforce Capability Framework

- The Commission presented on the Workforce Capability Framework (Capability Framework). Discussions focused on:
    - The purpose of the Capability Framework including its five objectives that are key to service provision
    - The importance of improving workforce quality to build a responsive and capable workforce
    - Core capabilities and specialised support capabilities for workers
    - Capabilities for supervision and frontline management, senior management, and leaders.
- All tools and guidance have been co-designed with stakeholders.
- To learn more and get involved, please visit: Framework Implementation Project .

Annual Sustainability Report 2021 – projected number of participants with a primary psychosocial disability

- There have been recent revisions to the projected numbers of participants with psychosocial disability in the Scheme.
- Revisions project that there will be 65,835 participants with a primary psychosocial disability in the Scheme by 30 June 2024, and 88,180 by 30 June 2030.
- This is similar to the previous projection of 64,000 at full Scheme, and shows high annual growth in the following years. The high growth is due to higher entrant rates assumed for new participants with a primary psychosocial disability and is based on actual experience in the Scheme over the last four years.

Proposed legislation changes in regards to psychosocial disability

The Department of Social Services (DSS) provided an update on the proposed amendments to the NDIS Act and Rules.

- The Bill was amended in a number of ways following consultations. The key changes related to adding people with disability to one of the criteria as well as adding lived experience with disability to the criteria for Board membership.
- A further set of rules that limit how plan variations can be used was added to demonstrate they are closely aligned with the Tune Review.
- The Bill proposed modernisation to the language with the inclusion of ‘psychosocial disability’ rather than ‘psychiatric condition’. It recognises that psychosocial disability is episodic and fluctuating which does not mean it can’t be considered permanent.
- Feedback from consultations showed that psychosocial conditions are not the only conditions that are episodic and fluctuating in nature, and that other conditions could have that permanency attached to them.
- The Government will look at the outcomes from the Senate and Joint Committee reports and at the amendments it wishes to make to secure passage of the Bill.

Members’ Reports Highlights

- The Chairperson welcomed Jacqueline Hrast from DSS to her first meeting. The recent DSS restructure now sees Jacqueline looking after all of the interfaces under the NDIS and mainstream service systems, including: mental health, justice, transport, education, child protection and health.

- The Independent Advisory Council finalised their submission to DSS on the proposed legislative changes. Recommendations were made for a requirement for the NDIA Board to have representation from a person with a disability. A recommendation was also submitted regarding the misuse of the term ‘lived experience’ in the sector.
- Mental Health Australia provided a submission to the Joint Standing Committee on the NDIS enquiry into current Scheme implementation and forecasting.
- Community Mental Health Australia continue work on the Assisting Communities through Direct Connection (ACDC) project. This project uses a combination of best practice approaches including door-to-door outreach and informed, community sensitive engagement to reach marginalised communities to gain further understanding of the social and emotional wellbeing support needs for people with social or emotional distress, and to where possible connect them with relevant supports and services.
- The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists have been liaising with the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care on fact sheets for high quality care for intellectual disability. They are also engaging with the NDIS Commission regarding psychotropic medication and the balance between inappropriate medications, whilst making sure that there is also appropriate prescribing.
- The National Mental Health Commission has released the National Children’s Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy. This focuses on children from birth through 12 years of age as well as their families and the communities.
- The Department of Health provided updates on the National Mental Health Suicide Prevention Plan, psychosocial supports outside the NDIS and the National Mental Health Workforce Strategy.
- The Victorian Department of Health welcomes Mary O'Hagan to the Mental Health and Wellbeing Division as the Executive Director of Lived Experience. The Victorian Government has introduced legislation for the establishment of the Collaborative Centre for Mental Health. This was one of the Royal Commission recommendations and it will make a major contribution to workforce development and training in Victoria and will have national implications.

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