

In July last year, the staff of the National Disability Insurance Agency opened the doors in four sites across Australia to people with disability. Together, immediately, the Agency staff and the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) started to make real difference to people's lives.

John from Tasmania has found a better and more secure future for his children.

"I feel reassured and more confident about my children's future. I'm 59 years old, and I will love and support all of my children for as long I live. But I can't do it at this level forever, and I don't want to put that burden on my youngest daughter. Now I have more peace of mind that they will be looked after."

Heather from Victoria has hopes that her boys are going to lead as normal lives as they possibly can.

"The NDIA is going to level the playing field for both Scott and Ben, give them access to programs that they've never been able to access before."

More generally, satisfaction with the NDIS from participants is very high.

In the history of major social reform in Australia, there has never been a smoother start to a nation building program of the scope, necessity and ambition of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

However, in late December, the Board decided that in the light of future demands on the Agency it was an appropriate time to commission an independent review of the capabilities of the Agency to ensure that it would be best positioned for the continuing rollout and development of the Scheme.

Mr Jeff Whalan AO, Dr Peter Acton and Dr Jeff Harmer AO conducted the review using the capability framework adopted by the Australian Public Service Commission. Similar frameworks are also used in the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Canada. The fundamental purpose of such a review is to identify strengths and developmental areas in the context of the anticipated future operating environment.

As would be expected of a start-up organisation implementing such an ambitious national reform, areas were identified across the organisation that require priority action and development. This is not surprising particularly given the compressed timetable for establishing the Scheme.

The Board is pleased that the review provides clear guidance on where Management needs to direct its efforts to strengthen the Agency's performance. As a result, the Board is in a much stronger position to ensure that the Agency is prioritising correctly, the Scheme is sustainable and that the expectations of all stakeholders are realistic.

Nation building reforms take time and must be managed carefully, based on a well-managed capacity to deliver the desired outcomes.

The review acknowledges the extraordinary achievement of the Agency in launching the Scheme so successfully and in retaining a high level of support from the Australian public.

However, it found that the focus on launch has been at the cost of building organisational capability for the future. A strong message of the review is that too much of the current effort of the Agency is on the short-term priorities and more attention needs to be given to planning, building and learning, including building the Agency itself, while relocating the head office to Geelong.

The Board welcomes the review and the positive response from the CEO, Mr David Bowen, and will monitor Management's progress in implementing the necessary changes arising from the Review's findings.

The Board is also intending to commission a follow up review in a year to ensure that the Agency's capabilities continue to grow in line with the needs of the Scheme.

The Board and the staff of the Agency are fully committed to building an open, learning organisation that can deliver a long-term and sustainable Scheme for people with disability.

The Review is consistent with and supports these objectives.

The future success of the NDIS is dependent on the way the Agency learns from every experience and continually improves the operations of the Scheme and on behalf of the NDIA Board I wish to express our appreciation to all Agency staff for the huge effort and contribution you are making, particularly during these challenging first months establishing the Scheme.

Mr Bruce Bonyhady AM, Chair of the Board of the NDIA, 2014.

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