

Unfogging the future, an update on the National Disability Insurance Scheme

Jodie Caruana

CHW School-Link Coordinator

The Children's Hospital at Westmead

Recently I attended the *Getting the Best from the NDIS - Making it Work for People with Intellectual Disability!* Hosted by the NSW Council for Intellectual Disability from 28th to 29th August in Newcastle. This is an excellent time to reflect and summarise on the NDIS in NSW.

Background

What is the NDIS?

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is a form of social security for people with permanent and significant disabilities that affect their participation in everyday activities (NDIS website). The scheme is administered by the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA).

Who is eligible?

An estimated 460 000 Australians will participate in the full roll out of NDIS by 2018 (Commonwealth of Australia 2014).

To access the NDIS, the following criteria currently applies. People need to:

- Have a permanent and significant disability that affects their ability to take part in everyday activities;

- Be aged less than 65 when they first access the scheme;
- Be an Australian citizen, a permanent resident or a New Zealand citizen who holds a Protected Special Category Visa;
- Live in a trial site location (during the trial).

The NDIS has three tiers or targets for investment.

Tier 1: Targets everyone in Australia, and aims to create community awareness about people with a disability, and promotes inclusion and opportunities for people..

Tier 2: Targets 800000 people with disability plus their carers, providing general information about the most effective support options.

Tier 3: Targets 400,000 people with an ongoing permanent disability, providing individual funding and resource allocation under NDIS.

How will it work?

NDIS is a whole-of-government, whole-of-life approach, where after meeting eligibility criteria, individuals will make a plan for their future (assisted by NDIA planners if needed)



and choose self-directed funding or a voucher system to purchase services. The government has committed to double the current disability expenditure. The scheme was introduced as a concept in 2011 by the Productivity Commission and began its implementation in several launch sites in July 2013:

- Tasmania for young people aged 15-24;
- South Australia for children aged 13 and under (on 1 July 2014);
- Barwon area of Victoria;
- Hunter area in NSW for people up to age 65.

From July 2014 the NDIS commenced across the ACT, the Barkly region of Northern Territory, and in the Perth Hills area of Western Australia. Roll-out in other areas will commence progressively from July 2016 (NDIS website).

The remaining state disability sectors are funded under a welfare model whereby state government disability agencies receive funding and outsource many services to non-government organisations with grant or block funding until the NDIS is completely rolled out by 2018.

The progress report from the first 9 months reported that 5400 people had drafted plans and congratulated the scheme for giving participants choice and control in how they managed their supports and pursued their life goals. The report also acknowledged several challenges including:

- Transition from state supports to the NDIS;
- Capacity of the disability workforce to support the pace of rollout;
- The interface of the NDIS with mainstream services;
- The definition, development and funding of Tier 2 services;
- Supporting greater economic and social participation;
- Supporting NDIS participants to find suitable accommodation;
- Assisting Indigenous people living with disabilities; and providing ongoing advocacy.

(Commonwealth of Australia, 2014).

Commentary

The positive implications of this philosophical policy shift are listed below, however with any new scheme there are also many imperfections.

Self-determination and free choice

Fawcett and Plath suggested that placing the person with a disability at the centre of decision making is an important step towards self-determination (2012). Similarly, choice can lead to decision making which the productivity commission argued can lead to improvements in quality of life (2011). The commission also argued that increased consumer choice can give service providers a greater incentive to innovate and provide better quality services.

Fawcett and Plath highlighted that rural and remote areas may have less choice when it came to services and sup-

“NDIS is a whole-of-government, whole-of-life approach...”

ports, which is often referred to as ‘fake choices’ and choice overload when too many 2012.

Eligibility and Assessment

In regards to eligibility requirements, what constitutes a permanent disability? In particular, individuals with a psychiatric disability may be at risk of not meeting these requirements. The issue of recovery from mental illness is contradictory to permanent disability (Mental Health Council of Australia). Also, a substantial number of people of working age with disability may also miss out on funded supports because their disability may be assessed as not severe enough (Baker, 2012). Similarly, Fawcett and Plath suggested that this scheme has the potential to alienate marginalised groups such as Indigenous Australians who face historical disadvantages in accessing services and supports (2012).

Fawcett and Plath continued that an assessment approach that focuses on personal engagement and relationship building is desired and can be seen as an empowering process to help identify barriers and need rather than a gate-keeping exercise.

Those with limited capacity to decide for themselves

There needs to be safeguards in place for those with limited capacity to make decisions such as individuals with psychiatric, intellectual or developmental disability and children with various disabilities. There are procedures in place for plans to be made by the person with the disability, their carer or an NDIS independent broker (Fawcett and Plath, 2012). The independent broker needs knowledge of appropriate and effective supports and services for a variety of disabling conditions.

Workforce Issues

As the market is driven by need, workers may be employed on a casual rather than permanent basis in order to meet the ebb in supply and demand for services at different times.. The type of workforce required may also see a radical change. For example, case managers may not be prioritised as a service to purchase by users .

Existing NGO services will adjust to a user pays system. Competition between organisations means that marketing costs will be a new expense to their fragile budgets (Crozier and Muenchberger, 2013). Accreditation and quality assurance of services may also be an issue.

Some Key Messages from the NDIS conference in Newcastle

The following key points were taken from the official conference report (NSW CID 2014) and relate to children and adolescents with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The NDIA needs robust systems to ensure input by people with an Intellectual disability (PWID) into the continuous improvement of the NDIS.

- **Meeting complex needs:**
 - ◇ Comprehensive, person centred, active support is the basis for meeting complex needs.
 - ◇ Robust systems are needed so that skilled professionals can be identified, accessed and act as a close knit team.
 - ◇ Historically, State/Territory disability agencies have developed systems to meet complex and specialist needs. The NDIA should identify and ensure the maintenance of key functions of these systems in a form appropriate to the NDIS environment.
- **Ensuring good health care:**
 - ◇ Strong collaboration between disability and health services is key to addressing the stark inequalities in physical and mental health experienced by PWID.
 - ◇ NSW and some other State/Territory Government disability services fund vital health services for PWID.
 - ◇ Unless the Commonwealth Government commits to continuing these services, they and their funding should be brought under State/Territory health agencies.
- **Finding the right support:**
 - ◇ PWID and their families need guidance and support to access support services suited to their preferences and needs.
- **Tier 2 and ad hoc or crisis support:**
 - ◇ The development of Tier 2 of the NDIS needs to include a focus on people who are not NDIS participants but who need ad hoc support with month to month problems or occasional intensive crisis support.

Conclusion

The NDIS is a unique opportunity to allow people with significant ongoing disabilities and their families or carers the chance to plan for their preferred future and access funds to turn their plans into a reality. NDIA needs to ensure that vulnerable people do not fall through the cracks in accessing plans and much needed specialist services. These services need to be monitored for quality and accessibility. Although a large task, the NDIA is already ensuring processes are in place to manage these issues. There is a unique opportunity in our history to educate all Australians about disability which will hopefully lead to further awareness and social inclusion of everybody in our community.



References:

Baker, A. (2012). *The New Leviathan. A National Disability Insurance Scheme; Centre for Independent Studies, Policy Monograph 131*

Commonwealth of Australia (2014) *Joint Standing Committee on the National Disability Insurance Scheme Progress report on the implementation and administration of the National Disability Insurance Scheme. July 2014.*

Crozier, M and Muenchberger, H. (2013) 'It's your problem, not mine': does competence have anything to do with desire and aspiration to self-direct? In *Australian Health Review*, 2013, 37, 621-623.

Fawcett, B., & Plath, D. (2012). A National Disability Insurance Scheme: What Social Work Has to Offer. *British Journal of Social Work*. (2012) 1-16.

Mental Health Council of Australia (2013) *The National Disability Insurance Scheme and Psychosocial Disability. Advocacy Brief – October 2013. Draft for Consultation.*

National Disability Insurance Scheme (2014) What is the National Disability Insurance Scheme? http://www.ndis.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/what_is_the_ndis.PDF

NSW Council for Intellectual Disability (2014) Conference Report: Getting The Best from the NDIS. Making it Work for People With Intellectual Disability. Based on the national conference held in Newcastle August 28 & 29 August 2014.