

Civil Society NDIS Statement to the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) and the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA)

CALL FOR STRONGER ENGAGEMENT WITH PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY IN THE NATIONAL DISABILITY INSURANCE SCHEME (NDIS)¹

We are a diverse partnership of representative organisations of people with disability, disability advocacy organisations and disability peak bodies that have come together to call for stronger engagement with people with disability and our organisations in all aspects of the implementation of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

Collectively, our organisations are made up of, represent, work with and / or support hundreds of thousands of people with disability, including current and future NDIS participants. We have substantial, direct knowledge and understanding of the positive and negative impacts experienced by people with disability in relation to the NDIS, as well as expertise in identifying solutions and solving problems for implementation challenges, complexities and emerging NDIS issues.

The NDIS is a significant reform measure for all Australians, and it is to be expected that there will be significant challenges in governance and implementation, particularly as the NDIS transitions to full roll out across Australia. These challenges must not be allowed to weaken or compromise the vision, intent and objectives of the NDIS, which broadly aim to support independence, social and economic participation, choice and control in the pursuit of life goals and the realisation of human rights. It is not the vision, intent and objectives of the NDIS that is problematic or in need of modification, but the processes, methods and means of pursuing NDIS implementation.

In many cases, limitations and failures in NDIS design and implementation have resulted in significant additional costs to manage and address. These situations and the associated significant costs may well have been avoided if people with disability and our organisations were integral to the NDIS from the outset. Our involvement is underpinned by the vision, intent and objectives of the NDIS, but importantly, our involvement also makes good economic sense.

Our organisations are 100% committed to the success of the NDIS. We continue to greatly appreciate bipartisan support and the strong multi-jurisdictional commitment demonstrated by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) to a successful NDIS. We also greatly appreciate that the Board and staff of the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) are committed and working hard to progress the full roll out of the NDIS.

However, we raise the following concerns:

- ▶ There is widespread and growing concern across Australia about an array of NDIS issues that demonstrates that we have reached a critical and risky moment where the NDIS appears to be shifting from its vision, intent and objectives.
- ▶ Limitations and failures in NDIS design and implementation have resulted in significant additional costs to manage and address adverse outcomes, which may well have been avoided if people with disability and our organisations were integral to the design and implementation planning of the NDIS from the outset.
- ▶ NDIS engagement mechanisms operate in an unconnected and disparate manner, are not genuinely inclusive of people with disability, are often disconnected from the 'grassroots' reality of NDIS participants, are often unresponsive to the issues we raise, and at the local level, often have no authority or practical scope to act on concerns.

We seek to work in a genuine co-design context with COAG and the NDIA to ensure the success of the NDIS. We call for people with disability and our organisations to be integral to every stage of the design, implementation and evaluation of the NDIS through the following actions:

¹ This Statement is a summary version of a full Civil Society NDIS Statement that elaborates more fully on our position, concerns and call to action.

NATIONAL DISABILITY INSURANCE AGENCY

The NDIA cannot become another Commonwealth agency that is part of 'big' bureaucracy and removed from the people it is meant to serve and engage. It has to listen to, and be available to people on the ground, be responsive to participant concerns and feedback and have good local connections to people. A number of measures need to be integrated into best practice service systems and quality assurance and improvement processes, such as local level advisory structures, staff 'values creation' workshops, reverting back to original planning processes, regular 'grassroots' engagement with senior NDIA staff, and an issues register with a guaranteed response time.

THE NDIA BOARD

NDIS governance must reflect the unique blended nature of the agency which is not purely an exercise in industry and financial management focusing on profit and shareholders. NDIA board members require specific technical and disability knowledge, skills, expertise and lived experience as well as financial and governance expertise. This requires a strong focus on identifying individuals with disability who hold the expertise required for such a robust Board. The integrity of the NDIS is at stake if the Board proceeds to favor corporate insight over disability acumen and excludes the skills and expertise of people with disability.

NDIS INDEPENDENT ADVISORY COUNCIL (IAC)

The IAC needs solid 'grassroots' linkages to people with disability, including NDIS participants and future participants. The NDIA Board needs ongoing regular advice and accountability to and from an IAC whose membership is also accountable and open to frank, fearless and genuine advice that comes directly from the 'grassroots'. The IAC needs to have resourcing and capacity to conduct regular, open and planned discussions, with randomly selected NDIS participants to more thoroughly examine participant experiences, and to ensure a solid evidence base for its advice to the Board.

NATIONAL DISABILITY AND CARERS ADVISORY COUNCIL (NATIONAL COUNCIL)

The success of the NDIS is dependent on the accessibility and inclusiveness of mainstream services and supports, and implementation of the NDIS must be achieved in parallel with implementation of the National Disability Strategy 2010-2020 (NDS). Many issues that are of concern to people with disability in relation to NDIS implementation will have relevance for both the National Council and the IAC. Ongoing engagement mechanisms need to be established with the IAC, as well as strong engagement mechanisms with people with disability, including NDIS participants and representative and advocacy organisations.

NATIONAL DISABILITY REFORM SUMMIT

A COAG National Disability Reform Summit would demonstrate ongoing commitment to disability reform, enable review of progress and highlight best practice across NDS and NDIS implementation. The National Summit would bring together Premiers, Chief Ministers and Disability Ministers, the Australian Local Government Association, business representatives, experts with disability and representatives from disability and advocacy organisations as well as members of the NDIA board, IAC and the National Council. It would be a public, high profile engagement mechanism to consider issues and make recommendations for future progress.

NATIONAL DISABILITY RESEARCH AGENDA

The disability reform agenda requires investment in a user-led and co-designed national research agenda that can build a solid evidence base for effective and efficient disability support and inclusive mainstream systems that achieves social and economic gains for people with disability and independence and community inclusion.

THIS CIVIL SOCIETY NDIS STATEMENT IS SUPPORTED BY:



ACT Disability, Aged and Carer Advocacy Service (ADACAS)



Blind Citizens Australia



ACT Mental Health Consumer Network



Barwon Disability Resource Council (BDRC)



Advocacy for Inclusion



Community Mental Health Australia



Advocacy Tasmania Inc



Deafness Forum of Australia



Developmental Disability WA



Disability Justice Advocacy Inc



Disability Advocacy Network Australia (DANA)



Disability Rights Advocacy Service (DRAS)



Disability Advocacy NSW



Disabled People's Organisations Australia (DPO Australia)



Disability Advocacy Victoria



Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA)



First Peoples Disability Network Australia



Melbourne East Disability Advocacy (MEDA)



Imagine More



Mental Health Australia



Inclusion Australia



Mental Health Community Coalition ACT (MHCC ACT)



Leadership Plus



National Ethnic Disability Alliance (NEDA)



National Mental Health Consumer and Carer Forum (NMHCCF)



Richmond Fellowship ACT Inc



People With Disabilities ACT (PWDACT)



Queensland Advocacy Incorporated (QAI)



People with Disability Australia (PWDA)



Rights Information and Advocacy Centre (RIAC)



Physical Disability Council of New South Wales (PDCN)



Schizophrenia Fellowship of NSW (SFNSW)



Spinal Cord Injuries Australia (SCIA)



Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA)



**St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra
Goulburn**



**Multicultural Disability Advocacy
Association**