

Disability

Introduction

We all want to be included, and to participate fully in society. The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) gives people choice and control over their disability supports, but only covers 10% of people with disability in NSW. In regional consultations, communities told us the NSW mainstream service system needs to be responsive to people with disability, whether or not they are eligible for the NDIS. We heard about the gaps in services and supports for people with disability that will be created with the closure of the Department of Ageing and Disability and Homecare (ADHC) in June 2018.

We also heard that an inclusive society is critical and there is a real need to improve accessible transport and housing, while creating opportunities for people with disability to participate in their local communities.

What can you do?

Across NSW we heard about the types of things that would make a difference in our communities. If you have any other ideas or want to get involved in our work in the below areas, please contact Ya'el Frisch (Policy & Research Officer for Disability and Ageing) on 02 8960 7908 or yael@ncoss.org.au.

Need for independent disability representative advocacy and information organisations after June 2018

What we heard

Across NSW, we've heard strongly that people with disability need information and active assistance outside the NDIS to help them take control of their lives. Our members emphasised that they provide everyday assistance to people with disability with issues such as getting a job, being included in school and TAFE, securing a tenancy and understanding their bills. There is deep concern about the unmet need created when independent advocacy and information organisations lose their ADHC funding.

Our members also emphasised the crucial role played by advocates navigating the system and reducing barriers to inclusion, so that people with disability can access services on the same basis as other citizens in NSW.

We heard that the NDIS will not reduce the need for independent representation, advocacy and information. In fact, these organisations are a critical component of ensuring all people with disability experience the choice and control which underpins the NDIS.

What our members told us would make a difference

Our members emphasised it was critically important that the NSW Government maintain the funding which currently supports representative advocacy and information organisations. Further, this funding should be combined with growth funding that acknowledges the enhanced need for advocacy in the NDIS environment and the current unmet demand.

Next steps

As part of our [Pre-Budget Submission 2018/19](#), NCOSS is advocating that the NSW Government invest \$13 million to maintain funding to organisations providing representation with independent advocacy information to people with disability and their families so that these crucial supports can continue after 30 June 2018. In lobbying for this change, we will be supporting the work of our members in the Advocacy Alliance.

We also need to mobilise our communities for this change to happen. We have prepared an [advocacy kit](#) for members to use to lobby their local MP.

Further gaps left by the closure of the ADHC

What we heard

Our members were concerned that people with disability would be at risk when the non-disability services currently provided by ADHC ceased after 30 June 2018. Examples of these services include:

- Nurses in each Local Health District specialising in the needs of people with intellectual disability.
- Court support programs providing volunteers to assist people with intellectual disability at police stations and in court.
- Programs providing intensive support to families including children with disability under significant stress and at risk of seeking alternate accommodation for their child.

What our members told us would make a difference

A whole of Government approach must be taken to disability, in line with the *Disability Inclusion Act 2014*. This involves each Department assuming funding responsibility for the programs and services provided by ADHC which fall within its remit. This would also ensure Disability Inclusion Action Plans of each Government agency encompassed broader definitions of inclusion.

Specifically, our members told us the following actions would make a difference:

- Funding for agencies to implement actions in their Disability Inclusion Action Plans.
- Establishment of specialist intellectual disability health teams in each Local Health District, expanding on a model which is currently being piloted.
- Maintenance of funding for intensive family supports for families living with disability.

Spotlight: [Intellectual Disability Health Teams](#)

Three pilot teams of doctors, nurses and allied health professionals with expertise in the health issues faced by people with intellectual disability, work collaboratively to provide a patient-centred approach to health care. This specialised approach improves health outcomes for people with intellectual disability.

These pilot teams are funded by the NSW Ministry of Health and currently operate in Kogarah, Fairfield and Cremorne.

Next steps

As part of our work in this space, NCOSS attends Executive Briefings related to the NDIS implementation in NSW, where we monitor issues emerging through the transition.

NCOSS will also be bringing our members and stakeholders together for a series of roundtables to discuss our members' experiences of the interaction between the NDIS and mainstream systems. The roundtables will enable us to provide collective advice to Government on current gaps and emerging issues in the transition to the NDIS. The roundtables will aim to ensure the NSW mainstream service system is equipped to be fully inclusive of people with disability in an NDIS environment.

People falling through the cracks in the transition to the NDIS

What we heard

Our members are concerned about people they support who will 'fall through the cracks' when the NDIS rolls out. Particular concerns were raised around people:

- Receiving a Community Care Support Program Package who are ineligible for the NDIS.

- 'On the fringe' who may not be connected to networks to inform them about the NDIS.
- With psychosocial disability who have lost support from the Commonwealth Personal Helpers and Mentors (PHaMs) and Partners in Recovery Programs.
- Whose health conditions would not be supported by the NDIS.

Members were particularly concerned about messaging around the Continuity of Support Program. There is a public perception that the program guarantees people who are ineligible for the NDIS the same level of support they previously had; in reality, it provides these people with short-term support (through their service provider) to access mainstream services. The difference between expectations and reality has created widespread disappointment.

What our members told us would make a difference

There was strong support for:

- Government developing a process to track those who fall through the cracks if deemed ineligible for, or not connected with the NDIS to identify the impact of their ineligibility and strategies to ensure they remain supported in the community.
- Clearer messaging around the Continuity of Support Program to manage people's expectations of the support they will receive.

Next steps

NCOSS will look for advocacy opportunities to progress these issues, including in the Executive Briefings mentioned above. We are joining a coalition of our members in the Community Care Forum to advocate that the NSW Government continues to support people on the Community Care Support Program. More broadly, we will argue that people deemed ineligible for the NDIS receive the support they need.

A quality workforce to meet the needs of the NDIS

What we heard

We know that the roll-out of the NDIS is substantially increasing demand for disability support workers, and this trend will continue. Communities told us it will be difficult to attract quality workers to meet this demand. Indeed, they feel that the quality of qualifications in the disability area has decreased, so that they cannot be confident that students graduating with particular qualifications (for example a Diploma) would have the requisite base level of knowledge and skills to effectively work in the industry.

On the other hand, regional TAFE colleges are finding it difficult to fill their disability courses. There are concerns that support work is not an attractive career option because of the low pay, lack of career progression and casualisation of the workforce. There is a particular need to attract, develop and retain culturally appropriate staff to assist Aboriginal people with disability.

Our members tell us that their services face pressure to train and develop their staff, but are unaware of the training opportunities available.

What our members told us would make a difference

- Greater investment in training and development of support workers, including the development of a workforce strategy to meet demand.
- A skills audit of qualifications to ensure comparable quality. Ensure courses focus on the provision of person-centred support, in line with the principles of the NDIS.
- Subsidise courses to encourage further enrolment.
- TAFEs advertising their courses to both individuals and employers.

Next steps

It is important that the Government provides incentives to grow the disability support workforce to meet demand, while ensuring that people with disability retain the ultimate say over who supports them. We will be starting consultations about ways to strike the balance between workforce quality and consumer choice and control.

Limited access to transport

What we heard

We've heard that lack of accessible transport is a major issue, particularly in rural and regional areas. Schedules for accessibility upgrades to train stations are not known, there are very few wheelchair accessible taxis available, and there is no requirement for embedded transport services (such as those provided by local clubs and sporting teams) to be accessible.

We know that community transport is already stretched, and many operators will struggle to survive once most of their funding is transferred to the NDIS. Options provided in regional areas are often inflexible. A small errand could often take the whole day because of the limited services available.

What our members told us would make a difference

In relation to improving accessible transport generally, there was support for:

- An easily accessible map of the NSW transport network showing current accessibility of train stations and bus interchanges.
- Increased community transport funding through the transition to the NDIS to help ensure existing linkages are maintained as sources of block funding cease.
- Driver education and training modules developed across a full range of transport modes (including embedded transport drivers) to increase the overall capacity to provide safe and appropriate services to all people with disability.

In relation to improving accessible transport in regional areas, there was support for:

- A fixed and public schedule for the full accessibility upgrade of all major regional transport infrastructure.
- Increased incentives to provide and operate wheelchair accessible taxis and other universal access point to point services in rural and regional areas, including higher subsidies for wheelchair accessible taxi drivers in these areas.
- Incentive for community transport operators to provide universally accessible point to point services in rural and regional NSW.
- Services working together to buy accessible buses.
- Fund community development style approaches to transport solutions.

Next steps

NCOSS convenes the Transport Policy Advisory Group, which advocates around these issues and works to ensure that transport policy at all levels fosters inclusions of people with disability. Improving transport accessibility of transport, the affordability of transport for people with disability, ensuring the sustainability of community transport, and improving the availability of transport in rural and regional areas are particular focuses of this group. If you would like to be involved in TPAG, contact Douglas McCloskey (Policy & Research Officer for Transport, Planning and Environment) on 02 8960 7923 or douglas@ncoss.org.au.

NCOSS also sits on the Accessible Transport Advisory Committee convened by Transport for NSW, which advises on access implications of developments in the transport system.

Need for more accessible housing

What we heard

In many of our consultations there was a strong focus on the lack of housing appropriate to the needs of people with disability. We need an increase in accessible housing stock if we are to realise the goal of providing people with disability with choice and control over their lives.

In Sydney, there was particular concern that mobility needs are not being properly taken into consideration in the move towards higher density living.

For people who require home modifications, key issues include resistance by landlords in the private rental market, and the lack of eligibility for funding for people who live in housing owned by community housing providers.

What our members told us would make a difference

- A NSW Affordable Disability Housing Strategy building on the Social and Affordable Housing Fund (SAHF) with a focus on accessibility. The Fund could enable proof of concept trials to encourage innovation. Some money should be put aside for investment in regional areas.
- All new social housing should be fully accessible.
- Encourage rent to buy schemes to allow people on lower incomes to enter the housing market.
- Expand shared equity schemes, which are helpful in increasing access to home ownership.
- Accessibility should be required in affordable rental properties.

Next steps

NCOSS will continue to advocate for an integrated housing policy, incorporating higher standards of universal accessibility across all new housing in NSW. Through our involvement in the Greater Sydney Commission planning processes, and submissions to review of planning regulations guidelines, we have argued that:

- The minimum universal standard of accessibility should be the Liveable Housing Australia silver standard of accessible design.
- New developments should include targets for the incorporation of accessibility higher standards.

These issues will be a key priority for the Forum of Non-Government Agencies (FONGA), a cross-sectoral group convened by NCOSS. FONGA has formed a working group on housing, with a focus on accessibility. If your organisation is a member of FONGA and you would like to be involved in the working group, please contact Clara Bradley (Policy Lead for Housing and Homelessness, Sector Reform) on 02 8960 7910 or clara@ncoss.org.au.

Focus on inclusion and community participation

What we heard

We know that an inclusive society is one where people with disability can fully participate in the community. It is important for Government to actively encourage this participation by funding programs which take a holistic community level approach.

Members highlighted that while Disability Inclusion Action Plans existed at State Government and Local Government level, the actions were often 'internally' focused on process, rather than focusing on building an inclusive community.

We heard that programs with a holistic and flexible approach, such as Ability Links have been very successful in

facilitating local community development, and that Aboriginal Ability Linkers have been particularly successful in their communities. Members expressed disappointment that the Ability Links program would end in June 2018, suggesting there was merit in extending this approach to other areas.

We also heard about whole-of-community approaches to creating inclusion, such as Macarthur Access Group for Inclusive Communities (MAGIC) project in the Wollondilly area, which encourages partnerships between business and community in terms of creating welcoming spaces for people with disability.

What our members told us would make a difference

- More community support initiatives welcoming participation by all.
- Extend the Ability Links program, broadening the approach to other areas so that Linkers work with a range of vulnerable people (for example those in need of early intervention or at risk of recidivism).
- Encouragement of partnerships between business and community to support inclusion.
- Actions in Disability Inclusion Action Plans taking a broad approach and focussing on community inclusion.

Next steps

NCOSS participates in the Disability Inclusion Plan Implementation Committee, where we hear experiences of Government Departments in implementing the Disability Inclusion Action Plans. In this space, we will monitor the DIAPs to ensure the actions within them address the main issues faced by people with disability, making measurable progress. We will also look for other opportunities to advocate for a community development approach to inclusion.

Regional spotlight: [MAGIC Project](#)

The Macarthur Access Group for Inclusive Communities (MAGIC) project commenced in 2014 in response to consultations with people with disability and their families who identified challenges accessing services, businesses and the broader community. It represents a collaboration between three local governments in South West Sydney area, AbilityLinks, Western Sydney University and people with disability.

The project aimed to provide incentives for local businesses to become more accessible and inclusive of people with disability through training and endorsement. Over 120 businesses in the Macarthur region have been endorsed by the MAGIC project. The project steering committee is looking for opportunities to expand into other local government areas.