

Disability Inclusion

Think Tank

Delivering on the promise of the NDIS for Aboriginal & CALD people

Background

The NDIS is a once in a generation economic and social reform capable of supporting a transformation of the lives of people with a disability in Australia. Its vision is to optimise the social and economic independence, participation, choice and control of people with disability. In the context of a demonstrated history of large-scale government policy producing ‘gaps’ between outcomes for Aboriginal and CALD communities and the general population, the NDIS also represents a rare opportunity to address this possibility upfront and avoid the expensive need to ‘retrofit’ policy and practices to ‘close the gap’ down the track.

On 10 March 2016, NCOSS released its report *Plan First, Don't Retrofit: delivering on the promise of the NDIS for Aboriginal and CALD people in NSW* at the *Disability Inclusion Think Tank*. The report looks directly at the historic experience of Aboriginal and CALD people and seeks to inform the development of policy and practices relating to the implementation of the NDIS in NSW, and how it works for them, highlighting the access barriers to the scheme for Aboriginal and CALD people, and identifying practical opportunities for change throughout implementation.

At the heart of the report is the desire to plan ahead, incorporating principles and practices that work for Aboriginal and CALD people from the outset, and ensure that the transformational promise is delivered equitably, preventing the emergence of gaps between the outcomes for Aboriginal and CALD people, and the broader population. The report highlights a series of enablers to improve engagement of the NDIS with Aboriginal and CALD people, and puts forward a suite of recommendations for the implementation moving forward.

Disability Inclusion Think Tank

The Disability Inclusion Think Tank was held as part of the launch of *Plan First, Don't Retrofit* to explore opportunities to act in line with the Report's recommendations. It brought together thought leaders from Government, Sector and Community organisations to:

- 1. Identify practical strategies and actions to ensure that the promises of the NDIS are delivered fully for Aboriginal and CALD people in NSW.**
- 2. Identify the key decision making structures, processes and bodies that should be engaged with to influence the NDIS outcomes for Aboriginal and CALD people**
- 3. Form on-going partnerships, strategies and connections to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and CALD people eligible for the NDIS.**

Summary of the Day

The Think Tank included three stages of discussion, starting with an introduction to the report, its purpose and a summary of the key issues relating to NDIS engagement with CALD and Aboriginal people, a discussion about what specific actions can be taken to start to address these issues, and what the next steps might be.

Think Tank participants spoke about their experience of the key issues, and their perspective on the immediate way forward, such that:

- Aboriginal and CALD people with disability were identified as experiencing a range of specific issues in engaging effectively with, and benefiting fully from, the NDIS implementation to date (such as reduced rates of general health and literacy, a lack of identification with the concept and language of disability, less access to the internet, less awareness of and access to mainstream services, and a potential culture of distrust of government services)
- There is a real need for the planning and implementation of the NDIS to better take account of the key importance of culture, and the practical implications it has to the way the NDIS engages with, and works for Aboriginal and CALD people.
- The experience in trial and early implementation sites so far had demonstrated the need to engage with individual communities well before implementation, and the success that comes from being flexible and responsive with communication styles, planning, and ongoing community engagement processes that respond directly to input from each local community.
- Aboriginal and CALD Community organisations and representatives don't have a good understanding of the consultation and organisational planning structures and processes of the NDIA and their NSW partners. In the interests of fully recognising and incorporating the importance of culture in the implementation of the NDIS, it would be beneficial to have greater clarity, together with more transparent engagement and consultation structures at all levels to increase the inclusion of CALD and Aboriginal people in all stages of NDIS implementation.
- Education, training and capacity building of people with disability, community workers, the general public, service providers and agency workers, is key to ensuring a sustainable scheme and delivery of outcomes for Aboriginal and CALD people with disability.
- The implementation of the NDIS is a major policy and systemic change, and will take at least a decade to be fully implemented and integrated successfully into the broader policy and social fabric. Throughout the process it is necessary for each step to be regarded as iterative and subject to review, consultation and adjustment according to the input and experience of Aboriginal and CALD people.
- The NDIS, particularly in relation to delivery for people Aboriginal and CALD people, will need the support of communities, and integration with a range of mainstream and other services, in order to be sustainable and successful.
- The involvement of Aboriginal and CALD people and their communities at all levels of delivery, from planning, policy and management, to front-line service delivery, is a key part of ensuring those services understand and address the specific needs of Aboriginal and CALD people with disability.

Throughout the general discussion and the smaller group discussion, the aims of the Think Tank were addressed through four key questions

- 1. What are the 2 or 3 key practical actions that will help ensure that the promise of the NDIS is delivered fully to Aboriginal & CALD people in NSW?**
- 2. What are the key decision-making structures, processes and forums that will determine the effective engagement of Aboriginal & CALD people and representatives?**
- 3. What can we do, and what partnerships and relationships can we form, to influence the key decisions and actions that will help deliver the benefits of the NDIS for Aboriginal and CALD people in NSW?**
- 4. What is the most important thing we need to do, and what are the most important actions that we need to take next?**

Discussion of these questions highlighted a number of key themes that members of the Think Tank felt informed the practical next steps to deliver on the recommendations of the report, and provide improved linkages for Aboriginal and CALD people in NSW to benefit from the NDIS. Each of these key, broad themes has practical examples of what the next steps could look like. These key themes included:

Transparency of process in consultation and implementation planning

With a seismic, long-term reform such as the NDIS, the sustainability and success of the change depends heavily upon the ongoing support and co-operation of communities, community organisations, service providers and other stakeholders, with transparency of implementation planning, consultation and evaluation a key determinant of building and maintaining the trust and support of all stakeholders.

What could that look like?

- The NDIA Aboriginal Engagement Plan and attendant NSW Working arrangements of the Operational Plan being made available for comment and consultation as soon as practicable, ensuring that there is clear opportunity for input that can be meaningfully integrated into implementation. Recognising the roll-out schedule, this would need to happen as a matter of urgency.
- The NDIA Multicultural Plan and attendant NSW Working arrangements of the Operational Plan to be made available for comment and consultation as soon as practicable, ensuring that there is clear opportunity for real input that can be meaningfully integrated into implementation. Recognising the roll-out schedule, this would need to happen as a matter of urgency.
- Ensuring that implementation benefits from the ongoing and strong community ownership and support of Aboriginal and CALD people by having the structure of NDIA and NSW plan development, the structure of consultation, and the process for evaluation and review, outlined explicitly and made publicly available. This will help to ensure that all stakeholders understand how decisions are made, who is being consulted, and how further feedback and input can be undertaken as part of continuous process of iterative improvement.
- Ensuring that operational plans, and their constituent elements and working arrangements related to Aboriginal and CALD people, include strong, explicit criteria for structured inclusion of CALD and Aboriginal people in consultation and decision making processes at a range of levels. Singular representative consultation at the broad national level should be augmented by meaningful consultation at each level, to provide valuable linkages from national policy decisions directly to their application in each state and local implementation site. Channels should be developed and maintained to allow local level experiences of CALD and Aboriginal people to inform system improvements at all stages, which have potential to improve delivery and outcomes for CALD and Aboriginal people.

Consulting and engaging at site level, at least 6 months prior to implementation

It was highlighted by both community and agency representatives that there are a range of specific geographic, cultural and community considerations that have a large impact on the success of the NDIS engagement in each implementation site, and that structured consultation with the full range of local community representatives is a key factor determining success.

While it is understood that communities (especially those relating to Aboriginal and CALD people) need to be consulted to determine the best processes for engagement and implementation, who these groups are and the issues that need to be considered, vary widely between implementation sites as demonstrated by test site experience to date.

Accordingly, commencing a site specific consultation and engagement process at least 6 months prior to implementation is key to identifying the range of community stakeholders who need to be consulted and engaged with, and putting in place an ongoing structure that works.

What could that look like?

- In addition to other broader consultation or advisory bodies, the Regional Manager in each roll-out site could convene a reference group at implementation site level, specifically for key Aboriginal and CALD community representatives (along the lines of the collaborative, ongoing structure of the successful Hunter CALD Disability Engagement Group model utilised in the Hunter site), at least 6 months prior to implementation. Recognising the roll-out timeline, this would need to commence for the Central Coast, Northern Sydney, South-Western Sydney, Southern NSW, and Western Sydney, as a matter of urgency
- This reference group identifies local communities, groups and leaders to be consulted regarding a site-specific plan for community engagement, communication and the ongoing implementation process. Such a process would help ensure that local voices are heard, local expertise and community support engaged, and local issues addressed through the use of the most appropriate engagement methods (addressing NDIS experience to date, for example, where the use of inappropriate communications and engagement methods with a range of CALD communities, necessitated a review and re-think that could have been avoided).
- This regional or local reference group could provide an ongoing source of community connection for the Regional Manager, assist with continuous monitoring and advice, and help ensure that all relevant elements within the local community (particularly those relating to CALD and Aboriginal communities) are included and supportive on an ongoing basis.

Ensuring that education, training and capacity building at all levels is planned for and funded

There was almost universal agreement that, at all levels, education, training and capacity building are key to the delivery and ongoing success of the NDIS. This education and capacity building should be planned for and built into the process of implementation, with adequate resources committed on an ongoing basis.

What could that look like?

- Planning and providing resourcing for Aboriginal and CALD organisations to deliver education and cultural competency capacity building for Local Area Co-ordinators, Planners, Agency employees and Service Providers, to build their ability to understand and be responsive to culture in their interactions with CALD and Aboriginal people.
- Ensuring that those organisations that have been awarded LAC tenders and those successful in the ILC commissioning process, have meaningful, structured and adequately funded plans to employ staff from Aboriginal and CALD backgrounds, train and educate their workers to be culturally competent, support Aboriginal and CALD communities to work with them, and have adequate budget provision to build capacity in Aboriginal and CALD communities to support themselves on an ongoing basis.
- Ensuring that training and capacity building for Aboriginal and CALD people with disability and their families is funded to continue to roll out with, or in advance of implementation, to enable them to become leaders and ‘champions’ within their communities, helping to translate the interaction between culture and disability, and provide ongoing support for community understanding, boosting the capacity for mainstream informal supports to wrap around and integrate with NDIS services.
- Ensuring implementation in each site includes funded, culturally appropriate, education for people with disability, their families and communities, on the NDIS system and the range of other mainstream supports and services available to them (such as mainstream health, community service, etc).
- Recognise Aboriginal and CALD providers as the key capacity builders in the community, by funding them to develop and provide training and capacity building activities around the NDIS and supporting their vital role in referral and inclusion of people with disability into the scheme.
- Further, there should be funding and structured support for Aboriginal and CALD organisations and their communities to develop their capacity to be service providers themselves. This will:
 - help support the delivery of more culturally responsive and effective services;
 - spread the economic benefits of the NDIS more widely among communities;
 - encourage community ownership, empowerment and trust in NDIS services; and
 - help ensure the long term financial viability and sustainability of the Scheme.

Flexibility and adaptability of engagement and plan-making processes

Direct experience in NDIS trial sites, and across a range of related agency and community activities, highlights how important it is that NDIS communication, engagement and personal plan-making processes are more flexible and able to respond appropriately to the needs of different communities, including those from CALD and Aboriginal backgrounds. Specifically, the Think Tank identified a range of measures that would assist in more efficiently communicating and engaging with people from Aboriginal and CALD backgrounds in each site, and help them more effectively to create a plan that works for them.

What could that look like?

- Recognising that 'disability' is not often something that is talked about in CALD and Aboriginal communities, or that it is often seen and addressed in different terms, and adapting processes and materials appropriately to respond as needed, and informed by local consultation processes.
- Having greater flexibility in methods and processes for community engagement and communication, informed by community engagement and consultation undertaken in advance of implementation (as per the suggestion for reference group consultation processes by implementation site). Rather than relying on web-based, text heavy, structured formal presentations, adapting communication methods according to 'what works' in specific communities. As test-site experience has demonstrated, communication is often not just influenced by language, but also by culture, literacy and local preferences, such that even translated written material, for example, may not be effective.
- Having greater scope to allow support workers, family members and other personal supporters to be present as part of the plan-making process, recognising the principle of 'person-centred' planning, does not mean 'person-only'.
- Providing adequate resourcing to facilitate longer, or staged, plan-making sessions, which recognise the need to be flexible and culturally responsive, and build a rapport and trust with individuals, to enable Aboriginal and CALD people with a disability to more effectively understand and explain what works for them.
- Developing (either directly or via funding to CALD and Aboriginal organisations) a range of flexible and culturally appropriate communication resources and methods, that help ensure people with disability and their family understand the planning process, and are able to effectively inform the planning outcome (building on the example of the Living My Way material developed by ADN as a basis for the development of more flexible and appropriate practices)

While these were the key themes of next steps raised by the group, there were also a range of additional observations and practical recommendations raised by members of the Think Tank, including.

- The importance of having known Aboriginal and CALD workers at all levels, including in senior positions
- The need to build a systemic culture of learning about working with Aboriginal and CALD people within organisations.
- Recognise that Land Councils are not the only relevant structure and include inter-agencies, Elders and other relevant community groups.
- Ensure that at all levels, Human rights principles underline the actions of the NDIS, and that the Human Rights of people with disability are not secondary to considerations of cost, policy practicality or service efficiency.
- The need to continue to review and analyse actual outcomes in the Hunter/Nepean sites, and how outcomes are being achieved for people, recognising the need to go beyond measuring the metrics of plans, people transitioned, etc, and look at how lives are changing, and use this to improve processes and responses in other areas.
- Working to plan for and ensure the embedding of culturally responsive processes into all service organisations.
- Recognising the ongoing importance of organisations that undertake systemic and individual advocacy in delivering services for people with disability, and that Aboriginal and CALD organisations are critical to engagement and information flows and need to be funded to continue this role through transition.

- Including in NDIA organisational plans and their constituent NSW Working arrangements, the development and funded provision of education and training in the Human Rights approach to understanding disability, and the operation of the NDIS, to community workers supporting and working within Aboriginal and CALD communities.
- Ensuring that those organisations that have been awarded LAC tenders and those successful in the ILC commissioning process, have meaningful, structured and adequately funded plans to employ staff from Aboriginal and CALD backgrounds, train and educate their workers to be culturally competent, support Aboriginal and CALD communities to work with them, and have adequate budget provision to build capacity in Aboriginal and CALD communities to support themselves on an ongoing basis.
- Recognising that it is not necessarily a case of needing new providers in communities, but working with and supporting communities to build the capacity to be the providers on an ongoing basis.
- Recognising the need to 'get the figures right', in response to anecdotal evidence that there are a large number of people with disability from Aboriginal and CALD communities who do not necessarily identify as having a disability and who, for a range of reasons, may not currently be counted in the system among those eligible to be transitioned.

Conclusion

It is very encouraging that there was broad support from all participants of the Think Tank for a collaborative and co-operative approach to implementation of the NDIS. It was apparent that working together to continue to adapt and improve upon the delivery of the NDIS for Aboriginal and CALD people is imperative to successfully delivering on the promise of the NDIS.

If you are interested in progressing any of the recommendations or actions outlined in this document, or would like to discuss opportunities to work on specific projects related to implementing them, please contact

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