



Joint Standing Committee Inquiry—Current Scheme Implementation and Forecasting for the NDIS

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Terms of Reference

As part of the committee's role to inquire into the implementation, performance and governance of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), the committee has decided to conduct an inquiry into current scheme implementation and forecasting for the NDIS, with a focus on how the NDIS is implemented and funded, and what supports are or should be available for people with disability in addition to the NDIS. The committee will inquire into and report on current scheme implementation and forecasting for the NDIS, with particular reference to:

- a. *The impact of boundaries of NDIS and non-NDIS service provision on the demand for NDIS funding, including:*
 - i. *the availability of support outside the NDIS for people with disability (e.g. community-based or 'Tier 2' supports), and*
 - ii. *the future of the Information, Linkages and Capacity Building grants program;*
- b. *The interfaces of NDIS service provision with other non-NDIS services provided by the States, Territories and the Commonwealth, particularly aged care, health, education and justice services;*
- c. *The reasons for variations in plan funding between NDIS participants with similar needs, including:*
 - i. *the drivers of inequity between NDIS participants living in different parts of Australia,*
 - ii. *whether inconsistent decision-making by the NDIA is leading to inequitable variations in plan funding, and*
 - iii. *measures that could address any inequitable variation in plan funding;*
- d. *How the NDIS is funded, including:*
 - i. *the current and future funding sources for the NDIS,*
 - ii. *the division of funding between the Commonwealth, States and Territories, and*
 - iii. *the need for a pool of reserve funding;*
- e. *Financial and actuarial modelling and forecasting of the scheme, including:*
 - i. *the role of insurance-based principles in scheme modelling, and*
 - ii. *assumptions, measures, and methodologies used to forecast and make projections about the scheme, participants, and long-term financial modelling;*
- f. *The measures intended to ensure the financial sustainability of the NDIS (e.g. governance, oversight and administrative measures), including:*
 - i. *the role of state and territory governments, and the Disability Reform Ministers Meetings,*
 - ii. *the arrangements for providing actuarial and prudential advice about the scheme, and*
 - iii. *the way data, modelling, and forecasting is presented in public documents about the NDIS, (e.g. NDIS Quarterly Reports and Reports by the Scheme Actuary), and*
 - iv. *measures to ensure transparency of data and information about the NDIS;*
- g. *The ongoing measures to reform the scheme including:*
 - i. *the new early childhood approach, including whether or how early intervention and other supports intended to improve a participant's functional capacity could reduce their need for NDIS funding, and*
 - ii. *planning policy for personalised budgets and plan flexibility; and*
- h. *Any other related matters.*

PAFRA Comments

We are writing on behalf of the Parenting and Family Research Alliance (PAFRA)—a multidisciplinary research collaboration of experts from leading Australian universities and research centres (www.pafra.org). The alliance is actively involved in conducting research, communication, and advocacy pertaining to parenting, families, and evidence-based parenting support. *PAFRA is supported by the Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for Children and Families over the Life Course.*

Summary of Submission

- Parenting programs have been shown to enhance lasting skill development associated with participation and day-to-day functioning in children with neurodevelopmental and sensory disabilities.
- An inadvertent consequence of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is that fewer parents are accessing evidence-based parenting support and fewer children benefiting from optimal parenting practices.
- The NDIS should incorporate mechanisms to permit greater access and participation in evidence-based parenting support.

We ask that the Joint Standing Committee on the National Disability Insurance Scheme consider the following:

Regarding TOR:

- c. The reasons for variations in plan funding between NDIS participants with similar needs, including:
 - i. the drivers of inequity between NDIS participants living in different parts of Australia,*
 - ii. whether inconsistent decision-making by the NDIA is leading to inequitable variations in plan funding, and*
 - i. measures that could address any inequitable variation in plan funding**

Since the Australian Government's NDIS came into full operation in 2020, agencies are no longer block funded to provide parenting support. Instead, parents negotiate with NDIS planners for the services they will receive within their disability support plan¹. There is inconsistency in the provision of parenting support through the NDIS and confusion amongst parents, service providers, and NDIS planners as to whether parenting support may be funded through the scheme. Parenting support is less likely to be provided since it requires parents (and NDIS planners) to have to have knowledge of parenting programs, their benefits, and to advocate for them. Further, compared to individually delivered parenting programs, group programs are less likely to be funded because these require multiple parents/caregivers to request the same service. The consequence is that parents are less likely to access this form of support, and children do not benefit from optimal parenting practices during their formative early years².

Regarding TOR:

- g. The ongoing measures to reform the scheme including:
 - i. the new early childhood approach, including whether or how early intervention and other supports intended to improve a participant's functional capacity could reduce their need for NDIS funding, and*
 - ii. planning policy for personalised budgets and plan flexibility.**

Parents and caregivers have a central role in optimising their children's development and wellbeing³. Children with neurodevelopmental disabilities, such as autism, cerebral palsy, foetal alcohol spectrum disorder, and intellectual disability, typically require high-impact teaching practices and

additional opportunities to learn communication, language and daily-living skills⁴. Parents and carers are children's first teachers and have a pervasive influence on children in their early years. Parenting practices have been found to be an important modifiable factor for optimal child development⁵. As such, it is vital that parents of children who have a range of disabilities receive high-quality support for their important role.

How do Children with a Disability Benefit from Parenting Support?

Parenting affects many different aspects of a child's development. Parenting is the common pathway through which many interrelated developmental goals relating to children's language, capacity for self-regulation, relationship with siblings and peers, cognitive functioning, mental health, and overall well-being can be supported¹. Specifically, for children with developmental disability, the lasting benefits of parenting support has been shown to:

- Promote language and communication (e.g., initiating communication, vocabulary, functional use of communication)^{7, 8, 9, 10}.
- Build social and peer interaction skills (e.g., joint attention, play skills)^{11, 12, 13}.
- Enhance daily living skills (e.g., dressing skills, toileting skills)^{14, 15}.
- Strengthen emotion-regulation, reduce challenging behaviour, increase children's community participation, and learning readiness^{16, 17, 18}.
- Reduce mental health symptoms and enhance children's wellbeing^{19, 20, 21}.

How do Families with a Children with a Disability Benefit from Parenting Support?

Parents and other family members also benefit from participating in parenting programs. Parents of children with a disability who participate in evidence-based parenting support report:

- Enhanced parenting skills^{5, 20, 21}.
- Less conflict within the home^{5, 16, 20, 21}.
- Less stress^{5, 20, 21, 22}.
- Stronger and happier relationships with all family members^{5, 20, 21}.

Enhanced parenting skills, less conflict and stress, and stronger relationships within the home increase parents' capacity to support their children's development^{23, 24}.

Is Parenting Support Cost Effective and Likely to Reduce the Need for Future NDIS Funding?

Evidence-based parenting programs typically result in considerably more savings than the cost of implementing them¹. In the case of parenting support for families who have a child with a disability, cost savings often stems from an increased capacity of parents to return to work⁵. They also represent a means of sustainable support for children with a disability^{25, 26, 27}.

Recommendations

- The benefits of evidence-based parenting support for children and families should be promoted to NDIS planners, parents/guardians, and agencies providing NDIS supports.
- While the primacy of individual service selection should be retained, mechanisms should be introduced that will increase access and participation in evidence-based parenting programs including group programs. Organisations need to be funded to organise and deliver parenting support.

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