



Australian Government

Australian Government response to the
Joint Standing Committee on the National Disability Insurance Scheme
interim report:

Provision of hearing services under the National Disability Insurance Scheme
September 2017

March 2018

Introduction

Interim report

The Australian Government welcomes the Joint Standing Committee on the National Disability Insurance Scheme (the Committee) interim report, Provision of hearing services under the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), September 2017 (interim report).

As part of the Committee's inquiry into the implementation, performance and governance of the NDIS, the Committee examined how hearing services are transitioned to, and delivered through, the NDIS.

The interim report focuses on the NDIS access criteria for deaf and hard of hearing people, and access to and delivery of early intervention services. The Committee intends to release a final report after the release of the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) early intervention reference packages.

The Government is committed to supporting people with hearing impairment, including through the NDIS where that is appropriate.

In September 2017, the NDIA released revised access criteria operational guidelines for people with hearing impairment.

The interim report welcomes the release of the revised operational guidelines to determine access to the NDIS for people with hearing impairment and notes that the recently released access criteria for people aged 0-25 years is consistent with the current practices of Australian Hearing, and are welcomed by the hearing sector.

The Committee delayed its final report pending the release of the NDIA baseline reference packages. It is intended that the reference package approach will reflect best practice. The approach will be evidenced based, outcomes focused and include funding reflecting individual needs and goals. The NDIA has made considerable progress towards finalising the reference packages.

The interim report's six recommendations relate to issues about the availability of services for people who are not eligible for the NDIS, eligibility criteria for determining access to the NDIS, referral pathways for access to early intervention services, and the adequacy and approach of early intervention reference packages for people aged 0 to 25 years of age.

The Government supports or partially supports all recommendations made in the interim report.

Inquiry into the provision of hearing services under the National Disability Insurance Scheme

Recommendations made by the Committee

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| 1. The committee recommends the NDIA monitors eligibility rates for adults with hearing impairments to build a clearer picture of the number and needs of the people who have been found ineligible for NDIS services and reports on its finding in 12 months. |
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Response: Partially support.

The NDIA actuarial monitoring collects data relating to NDIS access decisions.

The NDIA collects data pertaining to primary disability type (both for access met as well as access not met participants) along with the reason for the access request decision. The NDIA notes data relating to secondary disability types is not mandatorily disclosed when access requests are made.

The NDIA will conduct quarterly analysis on this data to assist to build a clearer picture of the number and needs of the people who have been found ineligible for NDIS supports.

The NDIA notes that this analysis may not fully inform what supports are required for people with hearing impairment outside of the NDIS.

Additionally, the NDIA is preparing to implement a number of initiatives to address outcomes from the NDIA's Participant Pathway review. Among these initiatives will be the development of additional information to better assist potential NDIS participants to access the NDIS.

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| 2. The committee recommends the NDIA reviews immediately the cases of people with hearing impairment who were previously found ineligible and tests their eligibility against the revised guidelines. |
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Response: Partially support.

The NDIA will identify and contact all Hearing Services Program (HSP) clients likely to meet the access criteria, including children and young Australians up to age 25 (inclusive) as part of the implementation of the transition of aspects of the HSP. The HSP and Australian Hearing will support the information sharing required to facilitate this process. An agreed process and timetable for implementation will be developed between NDIA and the HSP.

People aged between 26-65 years and not currently eligible for the HSP who believe they may meet the NDIS access criteria may submit a new access request.

Communication products relating to the revised access guidelines will include advice for current HSP clients and all prospective participants.

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| 3. The committee recommends the Australian, state and territory governments clarify and make public how they will provide services for people who are deaf and hard of hearing who are not participants in the NDIS. |
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Response: Support.

Some Hearing Services Program clients, administered by the Department of Health, will transition to the NDIS from 1 July 2019. The HSP is a continuing disability support program. Anyone who remains eligible for the HSP but does not meet the access requirements for the

NDIS will continue to receive services through the HSP. Further information on the HSP is available at www.health.gov.au

A very small number, less than 2.5 per cent, of existing National Auslan Interpreter Booking and Payment Service clients will be ineligible for the NDIS at full scheme. Similarly, one to two per cent of existing Better Start for Children with Disability clients are expected to be assessed as ineligible for the NDIS at full scheme. The Government is committed to providing continuity of support for these clients.

4. The committee recommends Australian Hearing be formally appointed as the independent referral pathway for access to early intervention services under the NDIS and funded appropriately to take on this new role.

Response: Partially support.

Australian Hearing currently functions as the primary interface in the paediatric hearing impairment referral pathway between detection and diagnostic processes and early intervention. The NDIA acknowledges the expertise required to deliver hearing services to children (and adults with complex needs), and recognises the standing of Australian Hearing as the current sole provider of Specialist Hearing Services.

During the NDIS trial and transition, Australian Hearing has remained the sole provider of Specialist Hearing Services for children aged zero to five years through an 'in kind' arrangement with the Hearing Services Program. Assessment results and expert opinion from Australian Hearing are a part of the NDIS access and planning process.

As the NDIS moves towards full Scheme, the current 'in-kind' arrangements will cease by 30 June 2019. The NDIA will continue to work with Australian Hearing on the arrangements for Specialist Hearing Services, including the interface between the detection and diagnostic functions and early intervention post 30 June 2019.

5. The committee recommends NDIA ensures that the early intervention packages take a holistic approach to the needs of participants and include:
- scaled funding, depending on need;
 - funding provision for additional services beyond core supports, depending on need; and
 - retrospective payment of the costs borne by approved service providers for the provision of necessary and reasonable supports between time of diagnosis and plan enactment.

Response: Partially support.

The revised planning guidance and baseline reference package approach will be evidence based, outcomes focused and include funding reflecting individual needs and goals. Reference packages are still in development and it is intended that they will reflect best practice.

Payments for supports delivered before an individual becomes a participant are not the responsibility of the NDIS. Revised access guidance and streamlined access processes along with revised planning guidance are intended to reduce the interval between diagnosis and commencement of early intervention.

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| 6. The committee recommends the NDIA urgently finalise, publish and introduce the early intervention reference packages. |
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Response: Partially support.

The NDIA is well advanced in producing planning guidance and baseline reference packages. The NDIA has received advice and input from key sector stakeholders on these topics. As a result, the NDIA is currently conducting further actuarial modeling to understand fully the potential impact of this advice. The NDIA continues to engage extensively with stakeholders during this time to ensure they are aware of the status of this work.

The NDIA intends to provide the Committee with further information in respect to timeframes for the finalisation of planning guidance and baseline reference packages.