

Meeting Minutes

Technical Advisory Group on NDIS Functional Capacity	
Time/Date	Thursday 9 July 2026, 12:00pm – 2:00pm
Location	via Microsoft Teams

ATTENDEES – CO-CONVENING MINISTERS

The Hon Mark Butler MP	Minister for Health and Ageing, Minister for Disability and the National Disability Insurance Scheme
Senator the Hon Jenny McAllister	Minister for the National Disability Insurance Scheme
Ms Suzanne Orr MLA	ACT Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services

ATTENDEES – CO-CHAIRS

Prof Christine Imms (Co Chair)	University of Melbourne and Royal Children's Hospital
Ms Mary Wood (Co Chair)	Deputy Secretary, Disability and Carers Group, Department of Health, Disability and Ageing

ATTENDEES – ADVISORY GROUP MEMBERS

Dr Lisa Chaffey	Occupational Therapist, Founder of Equipped for Action
A/Prof Shane Clifton	University of Sydney, Centre for Disability Research & Policy
A/Prof Anita D'Aprano	Indigenous Child Health, Department of Paediatrics, Melbourne Medical School
A/Prof Jill Duncan OAM	School of Education, University of Newcastle, Chair NDIS Evidence Advisory Committee
Prof Valsamma Eapen AO	University of NSW (Sydney Clinical), Academic Head at South-Western Sydney Local Health District
Prof Richard Madden AM	University of Sydney, Former Director Australian Institute of Health and Welfare & former Deputy Australian Statistician
Dr Michael McDowell	School of Medicine, The University of QLD, Developmental Medicine Consulting
Prof Frank Oberklaid AM	Murdoch Children's Research Institute
Prof Jennie Ponsford AO	Monash University and Monash Epworth Rehabilitation Research Centre
Prof Joel Townsend	Faculty of Law, Monash University
Prof Nick Glozier	Psychological Medicine, University of Sydney

ATTENDEES – OFFICIALS

Mr Joe Young	Executive Director, Ageing, Disability Policy and Safeguarding, Department of Human Services (South Australia)
Ms Carley Northcott	Executive Director, Disability and Complex Needs, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (Victoria)
Prof Nick Lennox	Senior Medical Adviser, Disability and Carers Group, Department of Health, Disability and Ageing
Ms Helen Beaven	Branch Manager, Technical Advisory and Practice Improvements, NDIA
Ms Peggie Tobin	Branch Manager, Policy, NDIA
Ms Sarah Sinclair	Assistant Secretary, NDIS Access Branch, Department of Health, Disability and Ageing

ATTENDEES – PRESENTERS AND OBSERVERS

Blair Comley PSM	Secretary, Department of Health, Disability and Ageing (attended part of the meeting)
s22	A/g Director, NDIS Access Policy, Department of Health, Disability and Ageing

APOLOGIES

Nil

AGENDA ITEM 1 – WELCOME

- Co-Chair, Professor Christine Imms, welcomed members to the meeting and offered an Acknowledgement of Country. Professor Imms outlined that the meeting would discuss the role of the Technical Advisory Group (TAG), operating arrangements, work plan and initial priorities relating to functional capacity assessment and NDIS access reform. Professor Imms noted administrative arrangements, including confidentiality, accessibility supports and meeting protocols, and invited members to identify any additional business for inclusion on the agenda. No additional items were raised.

AGENDA ITEM 2 – CO-CONVENING MINISTERS – STRATEGIC OVERVIEW

- Ministers thanked members for agreeing to contribute their expertise and noted the breadth and depth of the experience represented. The value of direct ministerial engagement in the advisory group process was emphasised.
- The importance of ensuring the system is objective, understandable, predictable and repeatable was highlighted. It was noted that transparent and consistent access decisions would support greater confidence in the NDIS. The need to streamline

assessment for those who would clearly meet the NDIS access criteria was also discussed.

- The importance of state and territory perspectives was highlighted, including the interface between NDIS reforms and supports outside the Scheme. The importance of aligning the TAG's work with broader disability reforms and achieving the best outcomes for people with disability was discussed.

AGENDA ITEM 3 – INTRODUCTIONS

- TAG members introduced themselves and outlined their relevant expertise and perspectives.
- Members emphasised the need to minimise assessment burden, support equitable access, promote transparency and fairness, and ensure cultural safety. They also noted the importance of administrative law principles, workforce capability, safeguarding and alignment with the ICF.
- Members noted the complexity of functional capacity assessment and that no single tool is likely to suit all cohorts and circumstances.

AGENDA ITEM 4 – NDIS ACCESS PROJECT OVERVIEW AND DRAFT WORKPLAN

- Officials presented the TAG work plan, covering foundations and design principles, development of a functional capacity assessment model, and implementation, testing and validation.
- Officials outlined the advice sought from the TAG, including assessment frameworks, thresholds, streamlined access pathways, workforce capability and safeguards.
- Officials outlined the proposed NDIS Amendment legislation and its links to functional capacity, access criteria and legislative rules.
- Members emphasised the need for an evidence-based framework and practical guidance to support consistent, transparent NDIA decision-making.
- Members discussed the work plan and the need for shared understanding of core assessment concepts.
- Members noted the need to schedule future meetings early.

Action items:

1. Secretariat to finalise and circulate future meeting dates for 2026.

AGENDA ITEM 5 – STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT PLAN INCLUDING PUBLIC CONSULTATION PAPER

- Members discussed engagement options, including state and territory consultation, targeted consultation, public consultation, communiqués and deep dives with experts and representative groups.

- Members discussed the s47C [REDACTED] and the need to engage people with disability, peak bodies, clinicians and state and territory representatives. They noted the value of testing emerging ideas through formal consultation and members' networks.
- Members sought clarification on external engagement and confidentiality. Officials advised members may consult colleagues and stakeholders, provided confidentiality is maintained and TAG deliberations, individual views or emerging advice are not disclosed.
- Discussion highlighted the need for shared understanding of key concepts, including impairment, functional capacity and the assessment framework, and for consultation to support policy design and implementation.
- Members requested further information on NDIA access decision-making processes, legislative definitions, and links between NDIS reforms and Foundational Supports.

Action items:

2. Members to provide feedback on the consultation papers and proposed stakeholder engagement approach by 16 July 2026.
3. Members to provide suggestions for membership of the proposed Stakeholder Reference Group by 16 July 2026.
4. Secretariat to arrange a briefing on current NDIA access decision-making processes, Foundational Supports and on key legislative terms and proposed amendments relevant to the TAG's work.

AGENDA ITEM 6 – OTHER BUSINESS / CLOSE OF MEETING

- Members considered the draft communiqué, noting it would provide a high-level public summary to support transparency and engagement. Minutes would be prepared separately for members.
- Members were reminded to provide feedback on draft consultation papers and proposed Stakeholder Reference Group membership by 16 July 2026.
- The next TAG meeting was confirmed for 5 August 2026 in Melbourne, with Secretariat to coordinate logistics.
- The Secretariat is finalising meeting dates for the remaining work program.
- Professor Imms foreshadowed discussion on working arrangements, including a SharePoint site and TAG decision-making processes.

Action items

5. Secretariat to engage with members to arrange travel and meeting logistics for the in-person 5 August 2026 meeting in Melbourne.



Australian Government

Department of Health, Disability and Ageing

Technical Advisory Group (TAG) meeting

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Technical Advisory Group on NDIS

Functional Capacity - Project Overview and Workplan

9 July 2026

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NDIS Access - Project overview

Situation



- Access to the Scheme has grown significantly more than expected, contributing to pressure on Scheme sustainability
- Access decisions are inconsistent and inequitable, and not sufficiently based on function rather than diagnosis (key finding from 2023 NDIS Review)
- The NDIS is supporting people whose needs can be more appropriately met through mainstream, foundational or community supports
- 940,000 expected participants by 2031 without policy change

Complication



- System/service gaps outside the NDIS is driving demand into the scheme
- Variability in evidence and decision-making contributes to inconsistency, with inadequate approach to setting thresholds for testing substantial reduction in functional capacity
- Access lists contributed to an over-reliance on medical diagnosis rather than functional impairment
- Access processes are complex, inefficient, burdensome and difficult to navigate

Response



- Introduce standardised, evidence-based assessments of a person's functional capacity to determine NDIS access (Reco 3, 2023 NDIS Review)
- More consistently assess if the NDIS is the appropriate system of support and if treatment can alleviate or remedy an impairment
- Reinforce the boundary between the NDIS and mainstream services
- Est. impact of changes would reduce participants to a total of 600,000 by 2031.

Purpose of the TAG

- The TAG will provide independent, expert technical advice to support the development of a robust, consistent framework and processes for assessing substantially reduced functional capacity (SRFC) relating to access to the NDIS.
- The advice of the TAG will support a shift towards a more consistent access process, with standardised evidentiary requirements and thresholds that reduce variability and minimise burden on prospective participants and their families. This includes how assessment model can support streamlined and dignified approach to persons with severe levels of impairment (including existing participants).

NDIS Access

Vision

- People with permanent and significant disability can access the NDIS through a fair, consistent and evidence-based process that is clear and easy to navigate

Preconditions for success

- **Robust evidence-base** to support access assessments and decision making
- **Assessment and evidence pathways are practical, accessible and proportionate**, without creating unnecessary burden on individuals, families or clinicians
- **Capable and trained workforce**, supported by clear systems and decision framework
- **Shared understanding** of the purpose of the NDIS **and confidence** in the ecosystem of supports
- Effective leveraging of **mainstream and universal systems - priority on scaling up existing services where possible, avoiding duplication.**

Overarching principles

- Participant-centred and based on functional capacity, not diagnosis
- Consistent with the objects and principles of the NDIS Act, including Australia's human rights obligations
- Informed by lived experience, including consideration of participants, families and carers
- Evidence-based and clinically informed
- Equitable and non-discriminatory, including for episodic and psychosocial disability and progressive and degenerative conditions
- Proportionate and accessible, avoiding unnecessary administrative burden
- Nationally consistent

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Objectives



Ensure access decisions are fair, consistent and evidence-based, based on functional impairment



Strengthen the integrity and sustainability of NDIS access outcomes



Improve participant experience through a clearer and more transparent access pathway

Estimated impact

- Fairer, consistent and efficient decision making that is in line with policy intent and less contested
- Dignified assessment model that is proportionate and streamlined for persons with severe impairment
- Improved experience of people with disability and their families/carers with access pathway
- Moderated participant growth contributing to NDIS sustainability, ensuring the NDIS is available for future generations

Sequencing of advice

The TAG will progress advice through three phases

1. Assessment Framework and Design Principles: Establish a shared evidence-informed conceptual framework for assessing SRFC for NDIS access, grounded in the objects and principles of the NDIS. This Assessment Framework will provide a structured and consistent foundation for operationalising the assessment of SRFC.

2. Advice on the Assessment Model Design and Options: Advise on feasible assessment methodologies to assess SRFC, in line with the Assessment Framework. This will include the identification of assessment tools, evidence requirements and threshold options to inform NDIS access. This includes options to streamline assessment approaches for those who will clearly meet the NDIS access criteria.

3. Implementation Readiness and Design: Provide technical advice to support implementation, testing and validation of the proposed assessment approach ahead of statutory NDIS rules development.

Advice from the TAG will include

- The design and development of an overarching assessment framework for determining substantial reduction in functional capacity for the purposes of NDIS access. This includes:
 - Identification of suitable assessment tools and methods, and supporting evidence
 - Thresholds and interpretation of assessment results in a standardised model
- How to streamline access assessments for people with very significant and permanent impairments, in line or integrated with the assessment of support needs
- Considerations for the assessment of permanency of impairment and appropriate treatment when determining substantially reduced functional capacity
- How access processes can support and integrate with planning processes
- Appropriate workforce and competency standards for assessors and delegates
- Safeguards and quality assurance processes

Current legislative amendments to support access reforms

NDIS Amendment (Securing the NDIS for Future Generations) Bill 2026 - Access Measures

Part 1: Defining Functional Capacity – provides a new definition of functional capacity and confined assessment to a person's intrinsic ability to undertake an activity (consistent with WHO ICF capacity definition).

This will allow a consistent approach to assessing substantially reduced functional capacity for assessing NDIS access

Clarifies the legal framework for determining access to the NDIS based on substantially reduced functional capacity.

- *A person's functional capacity, in relation to an activity, is the person's ability to undertake the activity:*
 - (a) without assistance from other people, assistive technology or modifications; and*
 - (b) in a context that excludes, as far as possible, the impact of the person's environmental and personal circumstances*

Part 8: Tightening meaning of permanence to reduce access where an impairment can be treated - clarifies the definition of permanence in the Act, specifying that access will only be granted when:

- all appropriate treatment to remedy or alleviate an impairment has been undertaken
- no other treatment is likely to materially improve the impact of the impairment
- the impairment is likely to be lifelong.

Part 9: Eligibility based on access to other services - clarifies where an individual is not eligible for NDIS if they access other service systems

The work of the TAG can commence alongside the consideration of the Amendment Bill, with the Bill Senate Committee Inquiry continuing to 19 August 2026.

Further amendments may be required in relation to potential reforms of the Early Intervention Pathway (Section 25)

TAG's Forward Work Plan (high level)

Advice Phases	Deadline	Key milestones	Activities
Phase 1 – Assessment Framework and design principles	Late August 2026	Updated definition of developmental delay	Conceptual framework for the new definition
	Late September 2026	NDIS access assessment framework	- Approach and principles for NDIS access assessments - Evaluation of public consultation - Workforce considerations
Phase 2 – Assessment model and design options	Late October 2026		- Identification of suite of functional capacity assessment tools - Supplementary evidence to inform access decision - Threshold options and considerations - Workforce and competency requirements - Targeted consultation with key stakeholders
	Late October 2026	Permanence considerations	
Phase 3 – Implementation readiness and design	Mid-late December 2026	Model for access decision-making	- Consolidation of evidence requirements into a delegate decision framework - Threshold and scoring methodology, including statistical analysis and modelling
	Late February 2027	Clarification of permanence	Targeted consultation with key stakeholders
	Late February 2027		Implementation considerations including workforce capability

Intersecting policy challenges

Changes to NDIS access to support Thriving Kids and further investment in Foundational Supports

- Thriving Kids Advisory Group announced in August 2025 to provide expert advice to governments on how design can best support child development from a national system perspective. This advice will help ongoing design of the programs.
- Establishment of Foundational Supports was agreed as part of the National Agreement on Foundational Supports and a key response to the 2023 NDIS Review recommendations.
- The first state and territory Thriving Kids services will be available from 1 October 2026. Full rollout of services by January 2028.
 - \$4 billion over 5 years for children aged 8 and under with developmental delay and/or autism with low to moderate support needs 'Thriving Kids' as a first step
 - \$1.4 billion of the Cth's \$2 billion contribution will go to states and territories to support their rollout
- Existing and new services outside of the NDIS in environments where kids live learn and play.

s47C

- Additional investment in Foundational Supports will focus on broader disability cohorts.

s47C, s47E(d)

- Not all diverted or exited participants from the NDIS will be eligible for targeted Foundational Supports. However, they will benefit from proposed mainstream uplift as part of the broader investment in the disability ecosystem.

Intersecting policy challenges (cont'd)

Introduction of support needs assessments to rollout New Framework Planning

- New Framework Planning rollout will now commence from April 2027 and will be completed by the end of December 2030
- The staged rollout of New Framework Planning (NFP) together with the implementation of Thriving Kids and NDIS access reforms creates a complex implementation intersection.
- Consideration will be given to integration opportunities for integrating assessment for access with support needs for setting budgets (SNA model - ICANv6 and other assessment tools).
- Careful consideration will be required for the role of sequencing of implementation of access reforms from 2028 to ensure alignment while supporting timely rollout of NFP and balance operational pressures on the NDIA.

Linking eligible impairment/s and support needs

- How to operationalise the concept of impairment for the purpose of access and planning decision-making.
- Operationally, the NDIA typically receives/captures information on diagnosis or condition at access, which has impacts for recording of eligible impairments at access and attribution for planning.
- Consideration of evidence requirements that enable a clear understanding of a person's eligible impairments for access and support needs assessment is required to support access reforms and enable attribution at an impairment level.

The TAG can build on previous work undertaken by NDIA and lessons learned

Developmental Delay

- In 2025 the **NDIA Children's Expert Advisory Group** provided advice to the Agency the approach to defining substantial developmental delay, consistent with the recommendation of the 2023 NDIS Review:
 - Holistic, multi-point assessment process with information gathered at multiple points, including developmental and functional assessment, needs assessment and consideration of family support, social context and natural settings observation.
 - Equitable access for First Nations, CALD and rural communities, stressing co-design with children and families for effective service delivery.
- In 2021, the NDIA undertook a comprehensive review of international definitions, screening practices and assessment tools for developmental delay in children under 6.
 - Definitions and thresholds for DD vary internationally, but most approaches assess multiple developmental domains.
 - The ASQ and PEDS are the most commonly used screening tools internationally.
 - The PEDICAT, used by the NDIA, showed poor ability to distinguish developmental delay from developmental concerns

Early Childhood Early Intervention (ECEI) Implementation Reset Project

- Launched in May 2020 to address challenges and recommendations from the Tune Review of the NDIS (2019).
- Consultation and engagement activities identified poor access to early supports, confusion for families, inconsistent decision-making, quality concerns and misalignment with best practice.

Independent Assessments

- Significant reform program led aimed at improving the consistency, fairness and transparency of decision making within the NDIS through the introduction of standardised functional assessments to inform access and planning decisions.
- The program or work was ceased in 2021 due to community concerns.

s47C

The TAG can build on the findings of the NDIS Review recommended an integrated, graduated model of supports for all people with disability

The Review made **26 recommendations** with **139 supporting actions**

Rec 1 and 2 – Build alternative support systems outside the NDIS

- Invest in foundational supports (Actions 1.1-1.13)
- Improve mainstream inclusion and connections (Actions 2.1-2.16)

Rec 3 - Provide a fairer and more consistent participant pathway

- Reframe eligibility around functional capacity (Action 3.1)
- Introduce clearer, simpler access processes and guidance to support consistency and transparency of decisions (Action 3.2)
- Reform the early intervention pathway (Actions 3.7) and introduce an early intervention pathway for people with psychosocial disability (Action 7.2)
- Strengthen legislative clarity for access (Action 3.9)

Rec 6 – Improved supports for children aged 8 and under and their families

- Reform the early childhood intervention pathway (Action 6.2)
- Introduce more consistent and robust approach to assessing developmental delay (Action 6.3)

Discussion

- **Clarifying scope and terms of reference**
- **Focus for the next meeting – 5th August (TBC)**
 - Assessment Framework/approach to setting thresholds
 - Modelling and approach to validity
 - Developmental delay definition
 - Assessment tools review
 - Streamlined model for assessment of severe impairment
- **Other questions**

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Appendices

1. Scheme projections
2. Other

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Scheme projections

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Projected NDIS participation rates prior to access reforms

Without changes to access arrangements, 4.0% of all Australians aged 0 to 64 years old would be supported by the NDIS.

The latest Scheme projections in the 2024-25 Annual Financial Sustainability Report (AFSR) expects that **under current access arrangements:**

- Projected NDIS participation rates for those aged 0 to 64 years old would increase from 3.1% in 30 June 2025 to 4.0% in 30 June 2035.
- These participation rates imply that:
 - About 1 in 33 people in Australia aged between 0 and 64 years was a NDIS participant at 30 June 2025
 - By 30 June 2035, this would increase to about 1 in 25 people.

The main drivers of the increase in participation rates are:

- participants with a primary disability of autism
- participants aged between 15 and 24 years old.

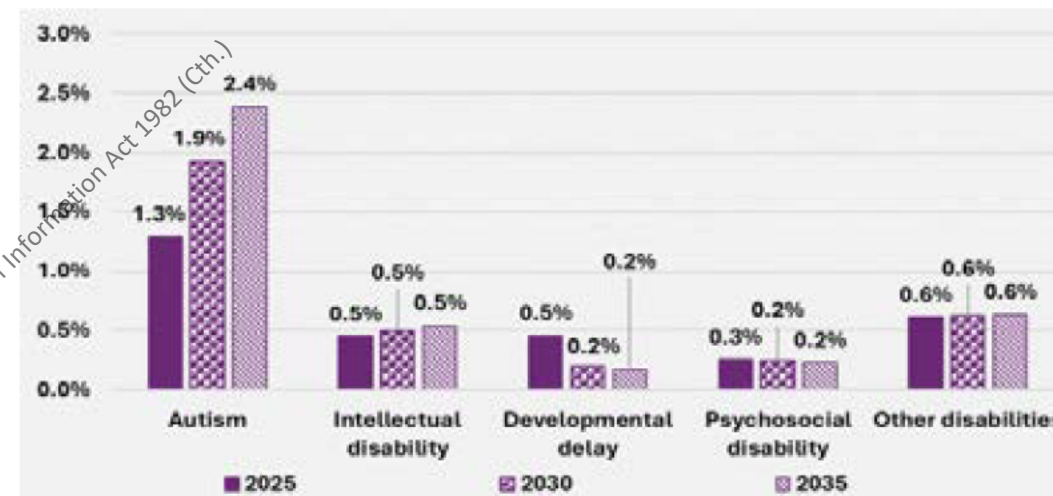
These projected participation rates would include assumptions about:

- existing participants who would stay in the Scheme – such as children aged 8 and under with developmental delay staying in the Scheme under a different primary disability (e.g. autism, intellectual disability), children aged 14 and under with other primary disabilities, and so on.
- future participants who would enter the Scheme – such as, people of all ages with primary disability of autism.

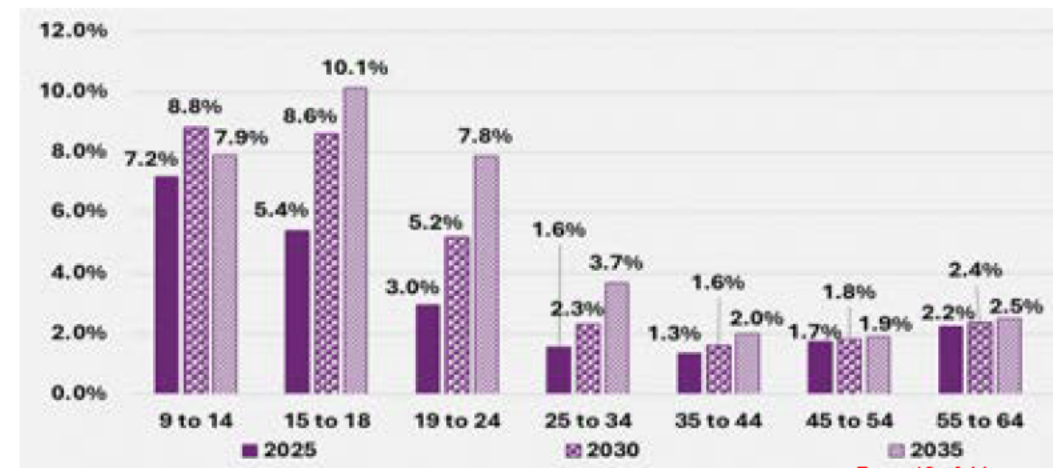
Note: The 2024-25 AFSR has already factored in expected diversion of children aged 8 and under with mild to moderate developmental delay or autism as a result of rolling out Thriving Kids in 2026-27. It does not factor in any changes to access arrangements to divert these children from the NDIS.

Pre-reform

Projected participation rates for major primary disability types for those aged 0 to 64 years, at 30 June, 24-25 AFSR



Projected participation rates for all disability types by age band, at 30 June, 24-25 AFSR



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2026-27 Budget access reform measure impact on participant projections

Modelling of the reform impact is only based on policy intent

The projected impact in 2026-27 Budget from the access reforms on SRFC is based on the policy objectives and figures are indicative only.

Participant projections	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31
Prior to access reforms	783,000	817,000	842,000	876,000	910,000	944,000
Exits			33,000	125,000	205,000	241,000
Post reform*	783,000	817,000	789,000	710,000	632,000	598,000

Estimates are based on the combination of:

- the **NDIA's 'severity score' metric** – an internal measure to standardise assessment results from different tools used in existing access applications. This is mapped to a score from 1 to 15 with a score of 1 to 5 assumed to have high functional capacity and low support needs.
- a **desktop file review** of a sample of existing participants against possible tightened SRFC definition. This informed assumptions about the proportion of existing and prospective participants assumed to have high functional capacity.

There are **known limitations** associated with the severity score:

- The NDIA developed a normalised level-of-function scale was used to standardise the assessment results from different tools and disability types **for reporting purposes only**. It is not used for an individual's access decisions or other operational decisions by the NDIA.
- The severity score is **not** an externally validated way to measure functional capacity.
- s47C, s47E(d)

Actual impact will depend on the policy settings around how to assess an applicant's functional capacity and the thresholds used to determine eligibility.

Other

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Roles and responsibilities

Technical Advisory Group

Provides independent expert advice to government on the development of an assessment framework and approach to NDIS access, based on functional capacity. This includes:

- Providing strategic, clinical and technical advice
- Reviewing evidence, analysis and strategic options
- Advising on assessment frameworks, methodologies and evidence requirements to support consistent access decision-making
- Identifying risks, opportunities and implementation considerations
- Advising on workforce, clinical governance and quality assurance requirements.

Department

Provides governance, coordination and administrative support to the TAG and act as the interface between the TAG, consultancy and government. This includes:

- Project management and coordination
- Providing secretariat functions including managing meetings, papers and stakeholder engagement
- Leading policy, legislative and reform development
- Supporting government reporting including liaising with other government stakeholders
- Supporting TAG's advice development including quality assurance
- Commissioning and overseeing consultancy work

Consultant

Provides technical and strategic advice to support the TAG and Department, providing analysis, design expertise, implementation advice and communication and engagement support. This includes:

- Undertaking evidence reviews, as needed
- Analysing policy options and identifying policy, operational and workforce implications
- Support the development of the assessment framework, methodologies and decision-making approaches
- Assessing workforce requirements, training needs and competency standards
- Assessing feasibility, benefits, risks, costs and implementation considerations.

Reform timeline

2026

Mid-May

Legislation introduced.

7 days after Royal Assent

Tighter criteria for unscheduled plan reassessments begins.

New claims record retention requirements begins.

Stronger NDIA compliance and enforcement powers begins.

Minister becomes the NDIS pricing decision-maker.

Mid-June

Technical Advisory Group on access established.

1 July

Rollout of mandatory registration for SIL and platform providers begins.

Consultation begins: SIL, differentiated pricing, Inclusive Communities Fund.

Early August

Consultation begins: new framework planning, access changes.

1 October

Rollout of Thriving Kids begins.

Community participation and capacity building supports budget changes begins.

2027

1 February

Changes to plan rollovers begins.

Tighter reasonable and necessary criteria begins.

1 April

New framework planning transition begins.

1 July

Rollout of registration for providers of higher risk supports begins.

Rollout of new enrolment system for NDIS providers begins.

1 October

New panel of plan management providers begins.

2028

1 January

Thriving Kids services fully operational.

Access changes for new applicants over 9 begins.

Reassessment of existing participants against new criteria begins.

Access changes for applicants aged 0-8 begins.

1 July

New support coordination and connection service begins.

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