

COAG Disability Reform Council

4 March 2016

Communique

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Disability Reform Council (the Council) met today in Adelaide and discussed a number of issues critical for the successful roll-out of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

The Council confirmed that the NDIS is running on track and on budget. As at the end of December 2015, 25,875 participants are in the scheme and 22,281 have approved plans. Average annual package costs are \$35,450, excluding large residential centres.

NDIS Implementation - Transition to full scheme

Bilateral agreements for the NDIS transition to full scheme are now in place for New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania, and the Australian Capital Territory, providing coverage for 64 per cent of the estimated 460,000 people expected to be eligible for the scheme. Transition commenced in South Australia on 1 February 2016 with children aged under 14 continuing to be the first group to access the NDIS. From 1 July 2016, transition will commence in New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania, and by the end of the 2016-17 year it is expected that around 140,000 participants will have entered the scheme.

Active negotiations are continuing with Queensland and the Northern Territory, while the trial in Barkly in the Northern Territory and the early transition sites in Queensland continue to be implemented. A comparative trial of the two service delivery models, NDIA and My Way, is underway in Western Australia and discussions are underway about how best to implement the transition to full scheme in Western Australia.

Specialist Disability Accommodation

The Council noted the good progress being made to implement the Specialist Disability Accommodation Pricing and Payments Policy Framework it agreed in November 2015. The National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) has held consultations with housing providers, participants and their families, academics and other experts, and state and territory governments on the framework. The NDIA is due to publish benchmark prices for specialist

disability accommodation by end March 2016, together with administration details, subject to any jurisdiction supplying relevant information in advance of that date.

This means that from 1 July, as transition commences, participants with high needs who are eligible for specialist disability accommodation, will have provision made in their approved plans to cover the cost of their accommodation. This will give participants security and opportunity, over time, to choose accommodation that best meets their needs.

National Disability Insurance Agency

The NDIA, Board Chair, Mr Bruce Bonyhady, was invited to present to the Council and spoke on how the Agency is managing implementation and related risk, including through participant and provider pathways processes. The Chair reported that local area coordination and planning functions are in place to support transition from 1 July.

Quality and Safeguards

The Council agreed in-principle to the key features of a new national quality and safeguards framework for the NDIS, noting it will be implemented for full scheme.

The Council expects to make a decision on the final framework and the respective roles of the Commonwealth, the states and territories and the NDIA by the end of May 2016. The Council noted the Commonwealth's proposal to establish new national functions for provider quality and registration, as well as national functions for handling complaints, including investigating serious incidents, and overseeing the use of restrictive practices.

The Council asked its officials to continue to work on finalising the framework and assessing the regulatory impacts, as well as doing more work on restrictive practices functions and worker screening.

Market Sector and Workforce

The Council discussed progress in implementing the Integrated Market, Sector and Workforce Strategy. The Council noted the range of actions taken by all governments to build the capacity of participants to exercise choice and control, and to work with service providers to understand and prepare for the NDIS so that they are able to respond to participants demands for supports and services.

The Council was particularly concerned about there being adequate workforce to meet participants' needs, especially in rural and remote areas and areas where some markets are thin. The Council agreed that further action was needed to grow a diverse and high-quality workforce to ensure a successful transition to full scheme.

NDIS Governance and Funding

The Council agreed to increase the size of the NDIA Board from eight members and a Chair to eleven members and a Chair. The additional three Board members would enable greater stability and diversity in the Board's composition during transition to full scheme. The Commonwealth agreed to introduce legislation to give this effect.

The Council also confirmed its agreement to reappoint current NDIA Board members for six or twelve months and will announce the reappointments shortly.

The Council also agreed to further develop consultation processes with all States and Territories to form part of the future recruitment processes to appoint Board members. This will ensure the requirements of the NDIS Act are achieved and the skills of the Board enable it to lead the implementation of one of the largest social reforms Australia has ever seen.

The Council discussed issues of governance and access to the DisabilityCare Australia Fund and deferred further consideration to the next COAG meeting.