

**MEETING OF THE COAG DISABILITY REFORM COUNCIL
TELEPRESENCE – 9 APRIL 2020
COMMUNIQUÉ**

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Disability Reform Council (the Council) met by telepresence today.

The focus of the meeting was on the national response to the coronavirus pandemic, in particular the effects of the response on people with disability.

The Council noted the coronavirus pandemic has caused a significant shift in the Council's immediate priorities.

The Council was provided with updates from the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) and National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) Quality and Safeguards Commission on how they are supporting more than 340,000 NDIS participants and the disability sector during this difficult time while continuing to deliver a world leading scheme.

The Council's key focus during this time is to ensure people with disability and their carers remain safe and healthy, and continue to receive the supports and services that meet their daily living needs. The Council acknowledged that where necessary this has meant a change in the way that disability supports are provided in accordance with measures put in place by all governments to protect all Australians.

The Council acknowledged the anxiety and concern that many people with disability, their families and carers have about their safety, health and wellbeing during the pandemic, including that changes to supports for some people could add to that anxiety, particularly if changes are not undertaken with care and empathy. The Council thanks all of those organisations and front line disability support workers who are continuing to deliver much needed support for people with disability and their families during this difficult period.

The Council is also committed to working together to ensure the significant improvements that have been achieved by and for people with disability since the commencement of the NDIS in 2013 are not lost as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. The Council is committed to a strong, vibrant and innovative disability sector that can bounce back once the coronavirus pandemic ends and continue achieving greater independence, choice and control, and social and economic participation by people with disability.

The Council welcomed the significant progress made since its last meeting on 18 March to deliver the key priorities it set in response to the coronavirus pandemic.

The Council welcomed the work to develop a [Management and Operational Plan for People with Disability](#) as part of the Australian Health Sector Emergency Response Plan for the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19). The Council also welcomes the consideration of that Plan by the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee and looks forward to receiving updates on implementation of the Plan at future meetings.

The Council noted that thousands of disability support workers had undertaken the [Department of Health's online training](#) module in infection prevention and control for the coronavirus pandemic. The Council welcomed the establishment of a dedicated email for NDIS providers and self-managing participants to request access to the National Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Emergency Stockpile (NDISCOVIDPPE@health.gov.au) and noted the [advice](#) from the NDIS Commission about the use of PPE and how requests for PPE are prioritised.

The Council welcomed the new Priority Home Delivery Service [announced by the Minister for the NDIS](#) on 5 April 2020. Developed in collaboration between the NDIA and leading supermarkets, the initiative will ensure NDIS participants can remain safe at home and choose to receive priority home delivery during the coronavirus pandemic.

The Council discussed progress in implementing the measures [announced by the Minister for the NDIS](#) on 21 March 2020 to ensure continuity of support for people with disability. In particular, the Council noted the progress made by the NDIA in proactively contacting 62,000 high-risk participants to ensure they are continuing to receive the supports and services they need for daily living. The Council encourages any NDIS participant or their family to contact the NDIA should they require additional assistance during this time.

The Council noted work underway to plan for the impact of coronavirus on the continuity of service provision in the case of an outbreak of coronavirus in a disability support setting. The NDIA, in consultation with the Commonwealth Department of Social Services, the NDIS Commission and states and territories, is planning for a range of potential scenarios and the appropriate financial and other supports required for participants and providers. This planning will continue to be informed by the health advice provided through the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee and will be provided to disability Ministers out-of-session, prior to their next meeting in early May 2020.

The Council acknowledged that NDIS participants and providers may be looking for workers to deliver much-needed disability supports, and provide extra cover in these times. To support participants and providers, the NDIA is encouraging use of a number of matching platforms that can quickly allow participants and providers to recruit and deploy available and qualified support workers. Those arrangements would be in accordance with the NDIS quality and safeguarding arrangements. A webpage explaining this is at ndis.gov.au. The Council agreed to support awareness of this important resource.

The Council agreed to expedite work to develop a NDIS workforce plan in light of the possible challenges posed by the coronavirus pandemic. This will be considered by disability Ministers out-of-session, prior to their next meeting in early May 2020.

Ensuring the ongoing viability of the disability sector is critical during this time. The Council discussed progress in implementing the existing measures aimed at supporting the sector, including financial assistance to providers to support retention of workers. The Council noted the NDIA's introduction from 25 March 2020 of a 10 per cent coronavirus loading on certain support items and changes to cancellation policy that took effect from 30 March 2020, at an estimated cost of \$512 million. It noted the NDIS had also made \$587.8 million in advance payments to almost 5,000 NDIS providers, ensuring much needed financial support. The Council also acknowledged the importance of providers reporting changes to service arrangements to the NDIS Commission, as an important input into evidence based data on market and workforce changes during the pandemic.

The Council welcomed the announcements from the Commonwealth and state and territory governments to support businesses and discussed ways to ensure businesses in the disability sector benefit from these supports. This includes the [temporary cash flow support](#) of up to \$100,000 for eligible small and medium-sized businesses, and not-for-profits (NFPs), and the [JobKeeper payment](#) for employers and sole traders of \$1,500 a fortnight per eligible employee, including specific eligibility criteria for registered charities.

The Council also recognised the \$90.7 million announcement by the Commonwealth Government to support people with disability as part of a broader community support package to ensure community services have the resources they need to support those who need it most. This funding will support a dedicated phone line, the [Disability Information Helpline](#), for people with disability that will provide accessible information, and counselling and outreach services and will ensure people with a disability continue to be supported to keep their current job or be ready for new opportunities as the economy recovers.

States and territories provided an update of actions being taken in response to the coronavirus pandemic including provision of public health guidance, planning for emergency accommodation responses, workforce initiatives and engagement with the disability sector and people with disability, their families and carers. All states and territories committed to working closely with the Commonwealth Government and its relevant agencies to plan for the needs of people with disability.

Up-to-date information on the coronavirus pandemic and supports available for individuals and businesses can be found at www.australia.gov.au.

The Council discussed how to balance delivering the critical and time-sensitive activities in the Council's work plan with delivering the national response to the coronavirus pandemic, to ensure people with disability continue to receive the supports they rely on as the situation evolves.

The Council noted that both the Commonwealth Government's response to the review of the *National Disability Insurance Scheme Act 2013* (NDIS Act), implementation of the Participant Service Guarantee and consultations for the development of the National Disability Strategy have been deferred.

These projects will require significant engagement with the disability sector. The Council agreed with the Commonwealth's proposed approach to consult with people with disability and the disability sector to determine the best way of engaging with them during the coronavirus pandemic to ensure the voices of people with disability continue to be heard and remain at the centre of decisions.

The Council reaffirmed the acknowledgment of the role of states and territories to support people with disability in their own jurisdictions and agreed to continue to meet regularly and work closely to support people with disability, their carers and the disability sector as a whole through this challenging time.