

MEETING OF THE COAG DISABILITY REFORM COUNCIL

PERTH – 13 DECEMBER 2019

COMMUNIQUÉ

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Disability Reform Council (the Council) met today in Perth, Western Australia.

This meeting, the third for 2019, reinforces the Council's commitment to meet regularly to resolve issues and deliver outcomes for people living with disability.

The Council discussed the development of a new National Disability Strategy beyond 2020 and agreed further engagement with the Australian community, focusing on people with disability, in early 2020 to help shape the new Strategy.

The Council acknowledged the importance of independent disability advocacy, and agreed to undertake work to better understand the drivers of demand for independent disability advocacy and decision-making support.

Building on discussions at its 9 October 2019 meeting, the Council further considered its role overseeing expenditure and financial sustainability of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and discussed the broad policy and design parameters that will underpin the NDIS Reserve Fund. The Council agreed the operating principles of the Reserve Fund will be settled in March 2020.

In line with its commitment to resolve outstanding interface issues between the NDIS and mainstream services, the Council committed to all jurisdictions implementing, by August 2020, arrangements for the provision of respite for children with disability in the care of state and territory child protection agencies. The plan supports a consistent approach to providing respite for children with disability in statutory care arrangements and other children with disability that reflects the roles and responsibilities of states and territories and the NDIS.

The Council agreed an interim response to provide state and territory agencies responsible for child protection with access to NDIS plans for children in out-of-home care, and noted that an enduring response would be developed during 2020.

Continuing discussions at the 9 October 2019 meeting about effective administration of the Information, Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) Program, the Council agreed on ways to strengthen cooperation among governments and the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) on the commissioning and monitoring of ILC grants programs, and agreed the NDIA will develop a new evidence-based ILC Strategy, including the role of local area coordination, with an initial evaluation by the end of 2020.

The Council noted over 311,000 Australians were receiving supports from the Scheme, including almost 10,000 children in the Early Childhood Early Intervention gateway. The Council also acknowledged improvements to date and the ongoing commitment of the NDIA to improve operational performance of the NDIS, including to improve payment arrangements, enhance participant access through the National Community Connectors Program, a comprehensive program of work to increase employment of people with disability, and implementing other initiatives that aim to create a more consistent, fair and sustainable Scheme. The NDIA will work with jurisdictions to ensure that it delivers a nationally consistent approach that is also responsive to regional issues.

The Council discussed market performance during quarter four of the 2018-19 financial year. The Council noted key findings including that a majority of participants across all states and territories say they have choice and control over their NDIS plans, and improvements to plan utilisation rates as participants spend more time in the Scheme.

The Commonwealth affirmed its commitment to states and territories to provide greater transparency and engagement regarding NDIS price setting. The Council noted that the NDIA had commenced work on the Annual Review of Price Controls for 2020-21, to be implemented from 1 July 2020.

The Council noted the commencement of a project on pricing that will consider approaches to improve the effective operation of the market for NDIS services.

The Council agreed to use a more flexible approach to address market challenges in the NDIS, recognising that a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to delivering the NDIS is not suitable to address market gaps faced by certain geographic locations, particular cohorts or disability support types. Initial projects will address thin markets in all jurisdictions, including in APY Lands, North Queensland, the Top End, Wentworth and Walgett in New South Wales, Fitzroy Crossing in Western Australia, and Tasmania, and to address specific needs, such as disability support types which includes deepening the behavioural support market in Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory, and professional groups such as allied health. The Council also noted that while initial projects will occur from late 2019, a comprehensive rollout plan will be developed and brought to the Council for agreement in June 2020.

The Council reaffirmed its commitment to work to reduce, and ultimately eliminate, the use of restrictive practices on people with disability. In doing so, Council agreed to a program of work to prioritise all governments' efforts to progress the attainment of national consistency in restrictive practices authorisation. Council agreed that this work should be progressed in 2020 and be guided by shared principles for restrictive practices authorisation that reflect the interaction between state and territory authorisation arrangements and the role of the NDIS Commission in providing leadership on behaviour support in the NDIS.

The Council agreed further work will occur in relation to how vulnerable participants in the NDIS are supported through emergency response and recovery arrangements.

The Council agreed to next meet in March 2020 in Hobart, Tasmania, and to progress further matters out-of-session where it is reasonable to do so.