



Australian Government
Department of Social Services

Information Paper

Improving the National Disability Insurance Scheme

Better Participant Experience and Improved Access and Planning

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Contents

Purpose	2
Overview	4
Part 1: Giving effect to the recommendations of the Tune Review	7
Part 2: The Participant Service Guarantee	9
Part 3: Independent Assessments	11
Why are independent assessments being implemented?	12
Who will conduct independent assessments?	12
What tools will the independent assessors use?	14
How will the outcomes of independent assessments be used for access to the NDIS?	14
How will independent assessments be used for planning?	15
Personalised Budget and Plan Flexibility	16
Specifying supports	17
Who will be required to undergo an independent assessment?	17
Part 4: Supporting participants to use their NDIS funding	19
When supports should be funded by other service systems	19
When supports should be purchased using personal income or government income support	20
Part 5: Streamlining payments for supports	21
Part 6: Improving the delivery of Early Childhood Early Intervention supports	23
ECEI Reset Next Steps and Proposed Recommendations	24
Part 7: Further Considerations and Next Steps	26
Consultation approach	26
Where can I find out more information?	27

Purpose

This paper provides information on the package of reforms that will deliver a world-leading National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS; the Scheme).

The NDIS was envisaged almost 10 years ago and, since its establishment in 2013, has helped more than 400,000 people with permanent and significant disability –many who are receiving supports for the very first time – participate in their community, get a job if they are able to and have greater independence.

Over 60,000 people in the NDIS are children under the age of seven, with the Scheme working to provide supports at the earliest possible stage to improve outcomes over time.

While most of the Productivity Commission’s original design for the NDIS has been realised – and forever changed the lives of many Australians for the better – the Australian Government recognises there remains a need for some improvements to the Scheme.

In November 2019, the Hon Stuart Robert MP, Minister for the NDIS, outlined the Government’s road map for delivering the ‘last 20 per cent of the NDIS’ to set it up for long term success. Since the announcement of the road map, significant improvements have been made to reduce wait times with the aim of bringing people with permanent and significant disability, particularly children, into the Scheme quicker so they can get the crucial supports they need. Some elements of the road map, such as the recently announced reforms, became clear as participant experiences evolved and the Scheme matured.

Importantly, these reforms will deliver on those final elements of the Productivity Commission’s original design for the NDIS, as well as recommendations of other reviews and inquiries, particularly the 2019 Independent Review of the National Disability Insurance Scheme Act 2013 (the Tune Review).

The reforms deliver on the commitment made to all Australians to seek to improve people’s experience of the NDIS. They put in place the structures to make the NDIS fairer by improving information gathering required for decision making, notably at no cost for participants and those applying to become participants.

These reforms will deliver greater flexibility and make it easier for participants to use their NDIS funds to pay for the services and supports they choose. They will also make clearer what can be paid for with NDIS funds and what should be paid for from a person’s own income (including government income support, for those receiving it).

The reforms will set up the NDIS for the future, for all Australians with a permanent and significant disability.

Implementing some of these reforms will involve changes to legislation. Due to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, public consultation on draft amendments to legislation will now occur in early 2021.

In keeping with the Government's commitment to ensuring people with disability are at the centre of the NDIS, this paper sets out the proposed changes. More detail is available in consultation papers released by the NDIA on 25 November 2020:

- [Access and eligibility policy for independent assessments](#);
- [Planning policy for personalised budgets and plan flexibility](#); and
- [Supporting young children early, to reach their full potential](#).

You can find more information and how to have your say on the [NDIS website](#).

Feedback is open on these NDIA consultation papers until Tuesday 23 February 2021.

Overview

On 28 August 2020, the Minister for the NDIS announced reforms that will make the NDIS work better for participants, their families and carers.

When implemented, these reforms will also ensure the NDIS remains sustainable for the long-term and that people with permanent and significant disability continue to be at the centre of its design.

These reforms include:

- **The NDIS Participant Service Guarantee**, which sets timeframes for the NDIA to make decisions and complete processes, and service standards that guide how the Scheme works with people.
- **Independent assessments**, to support access and planning decisions.
 - Independent assessors appointed by the NDIA will work with people with disability to obtain information using a standard set of internationally recognised assessment tools.
 - Independent assessments will be free and will be the key input used for NDIS access decisions for disability support or early intervention. They will also be a key input informing the value of a plan budget.
 - For most participants, the funding they receive will be based on the outcomes of the independent assessment, with exceptions made for some high-cost or complex support needs individuals.

Planning conversations will focus on supporting participants to make the best use of their funding to meet their needs and pursue their goals and aspirations.

- **Greater flexibility** in how participants can choose to spend their plan funding.
 - The core, capacity building and capital budget structure with up to 15 categories will be replaced with a flexible budget, which may include some specific fixed supports where appropriate (for example, SDA).
 - Participant plans will no longer be based on an assessment of each and every support they require. Rather, participants will receive a personalised budget that can be used flexibly.
 - Check-ins will be conducted to support participants to implement their plan in pursuit of their goals.

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- **NDIA direct payments to providers** on behalf of participants (or their nominees) for claims made against all plan management types, including for self-managed, plan-managed and Agency-managed participants.
 - These changes will reduce the administrative burden for participants and providers in organising and managing payments.
 - Self-managed participants will no longer need to claim a reimbursement from the NDIS for using their own funds to purchase NDIS supports.
 - **More guidance on the boundaries of the NDIS for:**
 - Supports or services most appropriately funded or provided by mainstream service systems such as health and education.
 - Service providers should not raise charges against a participant's NDIS funds for such services and should not expect any such charges to be paid.
 - Goods or services that represent ordinary living expenses:
 - These are the kinds of expenditure that everyone pays for and should be paid for using private income (including from government funded income support, for those who receive it).
 - This includes food, utilities and rent (except for specialist disability accommodation).
 - Under this category, a new rule will make clear that NDIS funding is not to be used to purchase the services of a sex worker or devices solely for sexual stimulation.
 - **Expansion of early intervention for young children** including through a reset of Early Childhood Early Intervention:
 - This will support best practice, family-centred approaches and will involve more pre-access assistance and transition support.

Implementing some of these reforms will require changes to the NDIS Act and NDIS Rules. Much of the detail will be set out in Operational Guidelines, which are still being developed and refined by the NDIA.

Consultation

The changes set out in this paper build on the recommendations of the Tune Review, which was shaped by the experiences of people with disability, their families and carers. The Tune Review involved broad national public consultation with people with

disability and the disability sector, and provided targeted opportunities for people to have their say in culturally appropriate and safe spaces.

The NDIA has discussed the changes with key NDIS reference and stakeholder groups and will continue to engage with the disability sector, the broader community, and key organisations to ensure people are informed and can provide input into the design of these reforms. With the release of the NDIA's consultation papers, the Government welcomes responses to these papers. Feedback from these processes will be used to inform the implementation of these reforms in 2021.

Part 1: Giving effect to the recommendations of the Tune Review

In 2019, the Government commissioned a review of the NDIS legislation by David Tune AO PSM (the Tune Review). This was because the Government acknowledged that the NDIS has not met expectations for many people with disability and the Government is committed to improving the experiences people have with the NDIS.

The Tune Review made 29 recommendations to improve NDIS processes and remove barriers in the legislation that make it difficult for the NDIS to effectively support people with disability. The Government supports, or supports in principle, all 29 recommendations.

The Government is committed to improving processes, implementing the Participant Service Guarantee and the Tune Review's recommendations.

Key changes to legislation in response to the Tune Review include:

- Implementing the NDIS Participant Service Guarantee.
- Strengthening the focus on recovery for people with psychosocial disability, when considering the permanency of their impairments.
- Streamlining NDIS processes and reducing the amount of administration required, particularly in relation to plan reviews.
- Ensuring the NDIA provides children with disability early intervention supports in a timely manner.
- Making flexibility a key principle so people have more freedom to purchase the supports they need.
- Providing the NDIA with increased flexibility to intervene when participants are not able to access the benefits of their NDIS supports due to market challenges or constraints.
- Removing outdated parts of the legislation that relate to the trial and transition phases of the NDIS, and ensuring it is fit-for-purpose to operate into the future.
- Implementing recommendations of the 2015 Review of the NDIS Act, as agreed by COAG in December 2016, where applicable.

Public consultation on the draft legislation is expected to commence in early 2021. Further information on the process for having your say on the legislation will be available on the [DSS Engage website](https://engage.dss.gov.au) (engage.dss.gov.au).

The Government is working to introduce legislation giving effect to the Tune Review recommendations for passage by 1 July 2021.

Part 2: The Participant Service Guarantee

The Participant Service Guarantee aims to improve the experience participants have when interacting with the NDIS, and the transparency and consistency of NDIA decision-making. During the 2019 Federal election, the Government committed to legislate the Guarantee from 1 July 2020. However, due to the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic this was not possible. The Government is now working to make the Participant Service Guarantee law by 1 July 2021.

Service standards

The Tune Review recommended service standards be included in the Participant Service Guarantee to guide how the NDIA works to deliver the NDIS for people with disability. These include:

- **Transparent** – the NDIA will make it easy to access and understand information and decisions.
- **Responsive** – the NDIA will respond to individual needs and circumstances.
- **Respectful** – the NDIA will recognise a person’s individual experience and acknowledge that people with disability are an expert in their own lives.
- **Empowering** – the NDIA will make it easy to access information and support participants to lead their own lives.
- **Connected** – the NDIA will support people with disability to access the services and supports they need.

Timeframes for decision-making

The Tune Review also recommended the Participant Service Guarantee include timeframes for the NDIA to make decisions about a person’s eligibility for the NDIS and their NDIS plans. Some of the key timeframes for decision-making include:

- access decisions made in 21 days
- plans approved within 56 days of a positive access decision.

The NDIA has already begun measuring against these timeframes and its performance will be available in NDIS Quarterly Reports. Until the Guarantee becomes law, the NDIA is also committing to the service standards through a:

- Participant Service Charter, which sets out what people with disability can expect from the NDIA and contracted organisations by providing service standards, and the

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- Participant Service Improvement Plan, which sets out what the NDIA is going to do over two years to continue improving the participant experience.

The Commonwealth Ombudsman will be responsible for monitoring the NDIA's performance in meeting the timeframes and service standards. The Ombudsman has already started monitoring the NDIA's performance against the standards. Further information is available on the [NDIS website](#).

Part 3: Independent Assessments

Minister Robert first [announced the intention to introduce independent assessments](#) in November 2019 as part of improving the NDIS. Independent assessments were originally recommended in the 2011 Productivity Commission report that led to the creation of the NDIS, and again more recently in the Tune Review.

On 28 August 2020, Minister Robert [announced that independent assessments](#) will be used to provide a consistent, transparent and equitable way to capture information about a person's functional capacity. This will support the NDIA to make fairer decisions about a person's access to the NDIS and their plan funding.

Minister Robert also announced independent assessments will be fully paid for by the NDIA, ensuring cost is not a barrier to access the NDIS, and that assessments will be completed by independent health professionals based on internationally recognised, evidence-based and consistent assessment tools.

The [NDIS website](#) has more information about independent assessments. This will be updated regularly to ensure people have all the information they need before independent assessments start in 2021. Resources available include:

- the [Independent Assessment Framework](#), which explains the basis for the NDIA's move to independent assessments
- [the Independent Assessment Toolkit](#), which outlines the election of the assessment tools to be used and how they align with the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health, approved by the World Health Organisation
- [Evaluation of the First Independent Assessment Pilot](#), which summarises the lessons learned to date from this pilot and planned ongoing evaluation as independent assessments are rolled out.

These resources are also available in Easy Read.

The NDIA is taking these steps to ensure people are adequately informed ahead of these changes in 2021.

Why are independent assessments being implemented?

Decision-making about a person's eligibility for the NDIS and their funding should be:

- evidence-based and consistent
- focused on the person
- based on the person's entire life
- likely to give people more and better opportunities to take part in everyday life and pursue their goals.

Experience has shown where a person lives, their access to health professionals and a focus on diagnosis, has led to inconsistencies in how people are assessed for the NDIS, and the funding they receive.

The Government also recognises that current arrangements to gather evidence to support decision-making can be complex and costly. Participants have reported they have spent thousands of dollars chasing assessments to show their functional capacity. Not everyone can afford the same access to professionals and this should not affect people's chances of becoming a participant or receiving appropriate supports.

By making independent assessments free, the Government is removing the financial burden of gathering evidence of functional capacity needed to access the NDIS, and ensure participants have the right assessments to inform access, planning and review decisions. This will ensure all participants, or potential participants, are provided equal opportunity in the NDIS.

Final access and planning decisions, including in relation to a participant's plan budget, will continue to be made by delegates appointed by the CEO under the NDIS Act 2013.

Participants can continue to request a review or appeal decisions made by the NDIA if they feel a decision about them is wrong. This will not change.

Who will conduct independent assessments?

Independent assessments will be completed by health professionals including:

- occupational therapists
- physiotherapists
- speech pathologists

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- clinical and registered psychologists
 - rehabilitation counsellors
 - social workers.

These professionals will be engaged by the NDIA to conduct assessments based on internationally recognised, evidence-based and consistent tools to provide a current and complete assessment of a person's functional capacity, including the impact of their environment. Assessors will not be employees of the NDIA.

For most people with disability, there will be a number of approved assessors across Australia, ensuring that people will be able to access an independent assessor, no matter where they live, including regional and remote areas. This will mean that, as much as possible, people will have choice about who they work with to assess their functional capacity and inform decisions on their access request or development of their plan. The NDIA are considering how independent assessments will be introduced for children under the age of 7 years old. This is being considered as part of a project to expand Early Childhood Early Intervention Implementation supports (see Part 6 of this Information Paper).

People will also have the option to have assessments conducted via telephone or video conference. Assessors will:

- have culturally safe approaches suitable for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and take into account requirements for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- have the right skills, experience and training to support a person's disability needs
- be drawn from an Independent Assessment Panel, which is being established by the NDIA through an open and competitive tender process.

The Independent Assessment Panel will be open, so that the NDIA can bring on more assessors to meet demand or the changing needs of people applying for the NDIS. Contractual agreements between the NDIA and Assessor organisations will set out requirements to preclude assessors undertaking assessments where they have, or could be perceived as having, conflicts of interest.

The NDIA is currently finalising the evaluation of potential providers to be on the Independent Assessment Panel. Further information will shortly be available on the [NDIS website](#).

What tools will the independent assessors use?

The NDIA has identified a suite of tools for independent assessments to gather reliable information on a person's functional capacity across all areas of their life and the environment in which they live. These tools were selected by the NDIA after consultation with academics, allied health professionals and the disability community.

The assessment tools are disability-neutral, and have been chosen to ensure they work for people no matter their disability to build an overall picture of how a person functions in different areas of their life. The tools are tailored to different age groups and focus on functional capacity rather than disability or clinical diagnosis. Depending on a person's age and disability, three or four different assessment tools may be used for new and existing NDIS participants as part of their independent assessment.

Focusing on a person's functioning will ensure the impacts of all disabilities are well understood, rather than focusing on diagnosis or disability type, which may not identify all of the ways that disability affects a person's life.

The NDIA has released information on the independent assessment tools and why they were selected. More information is available on the [NDIS website](#). The NDIA will continue to review the tools to ensure they are working for participants.

How will the outcomes of independent assessments be used for access to the NDIS?

From mid-2021, the outcomes of an independent assessment will be a primary source of information to help the NDIA determine whether a person with disability is eligible to receive supports under the NDIS.

It will do this by assessing the degree to which a person has substantially reduced functional capacity to undertake activities in the six domains of:

- communication
- social interaction
- learning
- mobility
- self-care
- self-management.

These six domains have always been part of assessing disability requirements for the NDIS. Under the disability requirements, an individual must have demonstrated substantially reduced functional capacity in one or more of the domains. Under the

early intervention requirements, the NDIA must be satisfied that the provision of supports would assist in mitigating the impact of the child's disability in one or more of those domains.

Independent assessment will focus on the individual and their functional capacity rather than their diagnosis, developing a whole picture of an individual's strengths and support needs.

The NDIA will consult on moving away from how access was decided during the trial and transition periods, including ceasing to use Access Lists, to make eligibility decisions more consistent and fair.

It is also important to reinforce that independent assessments do not replace the relationship a person has with their treating medical or allied health professional(s). A person's treating medical or allied health professional will still be required to provide evidence of disability to support their request to access the NDIS. This includes information and clinical judgement that an impairment is permanent, or likely to be permanent.

On 25 November 2020, the NDIA released a consultation paper on access and eligibility policy for independent assessments. This paper is available on the [NDIS website](#) and open for feedback until late February 2021.

How will independent assessments be used for planning?

From mid-2021, the information produced by the independent assessment will be the key input informing the value of a plan budget.

The current approach to creating a participant's budget will change. Currently, a plan budget is made up of individual reasonable and necessary supports. Listing each and every reasonable and necessary support in a person's plan has limited people choosing and changing the supports they buy. Under the new approach, the independent assessment will inform an indicative plan budget.

The amount of funding in a participant's plan will be based on their functional capacity as determined through an independent assessment. It will also reflect any relevant environmental factors, including informal supports available to the participant and other contextual factors such as locality or circumstance. This will ensure a consistent approach to providing funding for people with similar levels of functional capacity and in similar circumstances.

This new approach will also involve supporting participants to have greater flexibility over their NDIS funding and encouraging a genuine planning conversation about how funds can best be used to pursue goals and aspirations. Planning conversations will focus on helping participants to consider how best to use their funds rather than on justifying each individual support in order to gain the associated funding.

Personalised Budget and Plan Flexibility

For most people, a significant part of their funding will be based on the outcomes of their independent assessment. This will provide an assessment of functional capacity, including the impact of environmental factors, with the participant supported to then use that funding flexibly to meet their needs.

Where a participant has extensive and complex support needs, there will be additional consideration of these to ensure they are properly taken into account.

There will also be some kinds of additional supports for which funding will be determined differently. These supports include:

- specialist disability accommodation (SDA)
- high-cost or complex assistive technology
- home modifications
- extensive behavioural support.

Once a plan budget is informed by the independent assessment, and any additions for exceptional/high cost/specialised support needs are considered, the focus of the planning meeting will be to help the participant to determine how they can best use their NDIS funding to meet their needs and pursue their goals and aspirations.

As a result, a participant's personalised budget may have two components:

- **A flexible budget** – This budget is not tied to particular specific supports, so participants will have greater choice and control over which supports and which providers they choose to use (in most cases, this is the plan budget, as informed by the independent assessment).
- **A fixed budget** – The budget for these items will only be able to be spent on specific supports (for example, SDA). This will be a part of an NDIS budget for exceptional/high cost/specialised support needs that are outside the independent assessment process.

This emphasis on flexibility and personalised budgeting follows participant feedback that they find their current plans confusing and difficult to understand, and are frustrated by inconsistent decision-making and an inability to buy a particular support if it is not listed in their plan. Core, capacity building and capital support categories are restrictive and have led to a high volume of plan reviews and delays in people accessing supports. Shifting to a personalised budget will make it simpler for participants to exercise choice and control when purchasing supports.

Specifying supports

During a planning meeting, and guided by conversations between the participant and their planner or local area coordinator, it may be determined that a portion of the flexible budget should also be allocated to specific supports. This may be in order to support a person to use their funding effectively to access the best opportunities to improve their long-term outcomes. In choosing to fix another part of a participant's budget, the NDIA delegate will work with the participant to consider factors such as:

- the expected benefit to the participant, or return or saving in costs from providing the support
- where there is evidence the achievement of other goals in the plan or the effectiveness of other supports is contingent on a particular support being purchased
- whether the participant's disability requires a specialist, evidence-informed support to be provided by a particular provider or in a particular manner
- where the participant's need can best be addressed by a specified support, for example, in relation to family-centred best practice
- the need to exclude provision of support by a particular provider (for example, to address potential conflicts of interest)
- supporting the delivery of supports in locations where there are limited options available to the participant.

If no such supports are specified in the participant's budget, the participant will not be restricted in their choice of supports or providers, within the overall boundaries of what is appropriately funded by the Scheme.

On 25 November 2020, the NDIA released a consultation papers on the planning policy for personalised budgets and plan flexibility. This paper is available on the [NDIS website](#) and open for feedback until late February 2021.

Who will be required to undergo an independent assessment?

The use of independent assessments in access and planning processes will apply to all participants and prospective participants (excluding those under the age of 7 until the NDIA has finalised how independent assessments will apply to this cohort) with limited exceptions. These exceptions include:

- **Risk and safety:** where the process is likely to do more harm than benefit to the individual, and may pose a safety risk to the individual or assessor.

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- **Assessment is inaccessible or invalid:** where there may be concerns about the process producing valid information and other sources and/or forms of information are better suited.

In these instances, the NDIA will support a participant, or prospective participant, to work with an appropriately qualified health or allied health professional to obtain the information or assessment that would have otherwise been gathered through the independent assessment.

This means all access and planning decisions will still be based on the same kind and level of information, produced by the same assessment tools, regardless of whether a participant, or prospective participant, was required to undertake the independent assessment.

The NDIA will also be looking at how best to implement independent assessments for children under 7 years. Because young children grow and change rapidly, the NDIA is considering how to best use the independent assessment process to inform the services and supports young children need in their NDIS plan.

This consideration will occur within the [Early Childhood Early Intervention \(ECEI\) Implementation Reset Project](#). An overview of the ECEI Implementation Reset Project is provided in Part 6 of this Paper.

The NDIA has released a consultation paper about supporting young children and their families early, to reach their full potential and a project consultation report on the ECEI Implementation Reset. This consultation paper and associated project consultation report are available on the [NDIS website](#).

Part 4: Supporting participants to use their NDIS funding

NDIS participants will have greater flexibility to use their funding to purchase disability-related supports that meet their needs and pursue their goals. They will no longer be bound by a list of individual supports, or a distinction between 'core' and 'capacity' building line items.

To ensure participants understand how NDIS funding can be used, changes will be made to the legislation that make it clearer what is appropriately paid for with NDIS funds. The NDIA will also provide further guidance in operational guidelines. This builds on what is already included in the legislation, and confirms that participants should not use their NDIS funding to purchase a support if it is:

- likely to cause harm to the participant or pose a risk to others
- not related to the participant's disability
- contrary with a law of the Commonwealth, state or territory
- a support that consists of income replacement.

When supports should be funded by other service systems

The NDIS was never intended to duplicate or replace supports that are the responsibility of other service systems. For example:

- diagnosis and treatment of health conditions, including ongoing or chronic health conditions
- treatment of mental health conditions
- specialised health services
- child protection
- reasonable adjustment in education settings.

NDIS participants will be supported to ensure their plan funding is not eroded through being charged for supports better provided by other service systems.

The Government and the NDIA will provide additional detailed guidance, to be read alongside the legislation, to prevent participants paying or being charged for services where they should not be charged. This guidance will be in line with the [Applied Principles and Tables of Support \(APTOS\)](#), which sets out the roles and responsibilities of the NDIS and other services provided by the Commonwealth and state and territory governments. The APTOS was agreed by all Australian governments in 2015 and is outlined in the National Disability Strategy

When supports should be purchased using personal income or government income support

NDIS funds are not intended to pay for goods and services that are not related to a participant's disability and that people generally pay for out of their ordinary income or government income support. For example:

- rent (other than specialist disability accommodation)
- groceries
- clothing
- utility fees.

The Government and the NDIA will provide detailed guidance around supports relating to ordinary living expenses or day-to-day living costs.

This will assist participants to make informed choices about how they should use their NDIS funding and what is more appropriately purchased with personal income or government payments.

Changes to the legislation will also make it clear that NDIS funds should not be used to purchase the services of a sex worker or devices solely intended for sexual stimulation and arousal.

Part 5: Streamlining payments for supports

The NDIA is introducing a range of improvements to claims and payments processing. This will help participants manage their funding and help providers manage their payments.

Currently, most claims are made using manual processes. Participants receive supports from providers, then participants, providers or plan managers must claim for payment through the NDIS 'myplace' portals. This current process has a number of challenges, including:

- high levels of administrative work and manual processes, which are prone to error
- wait times between supports being provided and payments being received
- incorrect payments and fraud
- lack of visibility of supports being provided to participants.

The NDIA is working to provide participants and providers with more streamlined payment options. This includes being able to complete payments or claims through the NDIS mobile application, which is currently in development, improvements to the participant and provider 'myplace' portals, and introducing new systems to support real time claiming at the point of service.

These solutions have benefits for participants and providers including:

- no more manual processing or managing paperwork
- reduced wait times for payments
- reduced complexity for participants with self-managed plan funding
- removing the need for participants who self-manage to pay up front from their own funds and then seek reimbursement from the NDIS
- more time for participants to focus on using their funding to meet their needs and pursue their goals and aspirations
- more time for providers to focus on delivering high quality supports.

These solutions will also capture data to help deliver the NDIS by:

- enabling insights into what supports participants choose
- identifying and addressing market gaps

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- analysing and publishing where particular supports are associated with better outcomes
 - identifying where participants may need more support to maximise the benefits of their NDIS funding.

Changes to how NDIS payments are made will allow participants to focus on how they can best use their funding to meet their needs and pursue their goals and aspirations, rather than managing paperwork. It will also enable providers to focus more on delivering high quality supports, and spend less effort on administrative overheads.

Amendments to the NDIS Act 2013 will enable the NDIA to make payments directly to providers. Changes to how payments are processed will not be introduced immediately, but will be progressively introduced over the coming years.

This work is part of the NDIA's Payments Program and forms part of a wider strategy that will improve the overall digital experience for NDIS participants and providers.

Part 6: Improving the delivery of Early Childhood Early Intervention supports

It was understood from the beginning of the NDIS that a different approach was required to support young children with developmental delay or disability, and their families. This led to the establishment in 2016 of the Early Childhood Early Intervention (ECEI) Approach for children under the age of seven.

The ECEI Approach is based on principles of prevention, early intervention and a family-centred model of care.

As at 30 September 2020, the Scheme was supporting over 60,000 young children and their families throughout Australia, many of whom are receiving assistance for the very first time.

The Tune Review, the Independent Advisory Council 2020 report Promoting best practice in early childhood early intervention and other reports have highlighted challenges in the implementation of the ECEI Approach.

The Government is committed to improving the ECEI Approach to ensure it works better for the children and families involved.

To achieve this, the NDIA launched the ECEI Implementation Reset Project in May 2020 to:

- improve long-term outcomes for young children and their families/carers, regardless of whether they are NDIS participants or not
- promote the delivery of best-practice prevention and early intervention support
- ensure the right children receive the best support at the right time.

The NDIA has and will continue to consult with families, early childhood experts, peak bodies and advisory groups on the ECEI Approach. The NDIA has also released a public survey to support the identification of important issues for the ECEI Implementation Reset Project to address.

Engagements to date have already identified a number areas for improvement:

- **Overarching**
 - The ECEI approach needs to reconnect with and better communicate the original clear vision of how children should be supported, and should be adequately differentiated from the general, more adult-focused NDIS.
 - There needs to be a clearer position on what constitutes best practices in ECEI.

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- The NDIA needs improved decision making and tools to ensure more consistent, fair and equitable decision making around access and planning.
 - **Early support (including access to Scheme)**
 - Children and families need to be more consistently supported through the right pathway.
 - Children and families need to receive more consistent support at the right time.
 - **Planning and implementation**
 - Children and families need to receive the right level of supports more consistently.
 - Children and families should be offered greater assistance to understand and select a best-practice mix of supports.
 - Young children and families that are vulnerable or disadvantaged are currently under-represented and need to receive equity in plan budgets and engagement with supports.
 - **Transitions out**
 - More children should be achieving better outcomes and successfully transitioning to the next phase of their life which may or may not require NDIS funded supports.
 - The ECEI Reset project recognises the provision of effective early intervention supports will also mean that children are supported to engage in mainstream and community supports.

ECEI Reset Next Steps and Proposed Recommendations

The overarching intent of the ECEI Reset is to:

Create a distinct ECEI implementation model, differentiated from the general Scheme, which enables young children to receive the right level and mix of support for the right period of time (including more pre-access assistance and transition support) through a family centred approach aligned with best practice.

The NDIA has identified proposed recommendations for further consultation, which are expected to significantly improve the NDIS experience for all children with developmental delay or disability.

Further information on consultation for the ECEI Implementation Reset project is available on the [NDIS website](#).

The NDIA has released a [consultation paper](#) and will continue to engage with the sector to improve the experience and outcomes of young children and their families engaging with the NDIS.

Part 7: Further Considerations and Next Steps

The Government and NDIA acknowledge the reforms outlined in this paper represent big changes for participants and people with disability interacting with the NDIS.

That is why the Government has announced these reforms early, to inform and consult with people with disability about how these reforms are implemented.

There is still work to do to design and implement the changes to independent assessments, personalised plan budgets, plan flexibility and the delivery of early intervention for children with developmental delay or disability. The Government and NDIA are committed to working with participants and the disability community to get these changes right.

Some specific areas for further development and consultation will include:

- how the NDIA should monitor and assure the quality of independent assessments
- how to provide assessment results to participants
- how to present flexible plans to participants and what information will help participants to use their flexible budgets
- which supports should and should not be included in the fixed part of a participant plan budget
- how the NDIA can encourage and support participants to make and manage their own plans
- how often participant check-ins and plan reassessments should occur
- the expansion of the ECEI Approach for children and identification of short, medium and long-term solutions through the ECEI Reset project.

Consultation approach

To assist participants, carers, families, providers and the disability community in their understanding, information will continue to be released ahead of the implementation of the package of reforms in 2021.

The NDIA will work with individuals and their families, representatives and advocacy groups, state and territory governments, providers and the Department of Social Services, to ensure there are opportunities to provide feedback through workshops and forums.

The NDIA has released consultation papers on access and eligibility using independent assessments, planning for personalised budgets and plan flexibility, and

supporting young children early (including information on the ECEI Reset). These papers are available on the [NDIS website](#) and open for feedback until late February 2020. The Government encourages people to have their say and make a submission in response.

The NDIA will also update frequently asked questions and other documentation to inform and respond to community and expert feedback.

The NDIA has also commenced a second pilot of independent assessments. The pilot will assist the NDIA to:

- understand the experiences of different participant cohorts, including people with complex and psychosocial disabilities, and participants who are of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander or culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- inform how assessments will deliver NDIS plans that are equitable and consistent, and provide participants with reasonable and necessary funding for the supports they need
- assess the training and support needs of the new assessor workforce and NDIA delegates who make access and planning decisions
- build evidence-based decisions that will enable participants to have flexibility within their plans to purchase the supports they need for everyday life.

NDIS participants will have the opportunity to participate and provide feedback on the pilot to inform the future implementation of independent assessments. Further information on the pilot is available on the [NDIS website](#).

Where can I find out more information?

As referenced throughout this paper, the NDIA has already released a wide range of information and papers on some of the reforms summarised in this paper. This includes the [Independent Assessment Framework](#), [information on the independent assessment toolkit](#) and an [Evaluation of the First Independent Assessment Pilot](#).

These resources are also available in an Easy Read format. The NDIA has also developed a [webpage with information about the implementation of independent assessments](#), including frequently asked questions.

The [NDIS website](#) also provides further information about the work being undertaken to review the delivery of ECEI supports under the NDIS. The webpage includes a summary of what the review is looking to address, and a survey where you can have your say about the delivery of supports to young children.