

Senate Estimates

Community Affairs Committee – Budget Estimates Hearing Opening statement – 06 November 2024

Thank you Chair and committee for inviting us to appear today.

Our CEO Rebecca Falkingham is an apology today due to illness. Ms Falkingham understands the importance of the Agency's appearance before this Committee and she has asked me to act on her behalf and I am supported by members of the senior leadership team today.

I will make some brief opening comments on behalf of Ms Falkingham.

On October 31st, the Agency published its Annual Report for the 2023–2024.

The report shows that for these 12 months, Scheme expenses were \$41.8 billion, which is \$600 million below the expected figures outlined in the May Budget.

During the last financial year, the number of participants in the scheme grew to just over 661,000 participants.

This represents a lower rate of growth during 2023–24 compared with previous years and contributing to this is the increased numbers of participants leaving the scheme, mainly children who have benefited from early intervention as part of the early childhood pathway.

Looking forward, total projected Scheme expenditure are \$210.3 billion for the 4 years to June 2028. This is approximately \$1 billion lower than the estimates in the 2024–25 Budget and \$2.3 billion lower than in the June 2023 projections.

These outcomes and projections underscore the success the Agency has had in supporting more people on the scheme, as well as the impacts of legislative reform - while moderating future expenditure growth.

The Annual Report also shows the Agency met several key performance targets including the very key metric of participant perceptions about having more choice and control over their life.

There are other areas, however, where we need to do better; we have significant work underway to reduce backlogs and deliver more timely and satisfying responses for participants.

I am also very proud that the Agency posts better results each year in number of staff with disability we employ in the Agency including our senior executive staff, we've outperformed both measures and nearly doubled our target for senior executives.

The Agency will also commence publishing monthly reports in addition to quarterly reports later this year and will also be releasing the update of Annual Financial Sustainability Report by the end of the calendar year.

The next quarterly report is not readily available and is being finalised ahead of the Board, ahead of being published by the end to meet legislative date of 14th November to be published.

From Thursday 3rd October, the Agency operationalised new laws passed by the Parliament in August.

These laws represent the biggest change to the Scheme since it was introduced in 2013. We know that for most participants on the scheme this has not led to any significant change, and we remain determined to ensure that all participants continue to receive the Reasonable and Necessary supports they require.

Through the consideration of public consultation conducted by the Department of Social Services, more than 7,000 people shared feedback on the changes to help shape their implementation.

The Agency remains deeply committed to co-designing these activities, and we are hearing from more people with greater diversity.

We've established co-design working groups whose membership is made up of members from disability carer organisations, IAC members and Agency staff .

This engagement has helped shape the development of the NDIS Support Lists, the Replacement lists and a range of guidelines to support all NDIS participants in the changes that are relevant to them.

The Agency is conducting multiple public information sessions about the reforms and these will continue for the remainder of the year and there will be specific sessions dedicated to First Nations stakeholders.

We've also issued extensive information to support these changes including SMS and emails to participants and providers, covering more than 90% of these populations.

And a key piece of work has been to support participants on a 12-month transition period for the NDIS support lists. This is designed to allow participants time to understand and adapt to the changes.

We've also boosted support to disability organisations by providing an extra \$10.7 million dollars to help them in their co-design activities.

And while we know that for some in the community there have been concerns about the changes. We know from our experience and our conversations with participants and the sector, that the vast, vast majority of people in the scheme do the right thing.

And the Agency remains committed to supporting people to do just that.

It is a time of great change for the Agency and considerable work has been achieved to support our staff and participants to help restore the NDIS to its original intent.

I thank you for the committee's appearance today.