



OUR VOICE SA

20th January 2021

To Whom It May Concern,
NDIS Joint Standing Committee
seniorclerk.committees.sen@aph.gov.au

This correspondence is being sent to you from members of Our Voice South Australia (OVSA) in response to the proposed changes to the NDIS.

Background context of Our Voice SA

OVSA is comprised of a group of people living with Intellectual Disability who meet once a month to talk about issues important to them.

The members of OVSA all have different abilities and we believe that difference is good.

People living with an Intellectual Disability are welcome to become members of OVSA. Friends and family of people with Intellectual Disability are welcome to become associate members of OVSA.

OVSA:

- speaks out about matters that impact on people living with Intellectual Disability.
- provides speakers for other groups interested in peer support or self-advocacy.
- provides training in self-advocacy.
- acknowledges the importance of family members as advocates for people living with Intellectual Disability and we work with families for better outcomes for their family member.
- ensures the voices of people living with an Intellectual disability are heard.

OVSA advises, collaborates, and consults on specific topics and community issues; including being involved in policy and project design requiring the input of people with intellectual disability in the process.

OVSA concerns about proposed changes announced by the NDIA

OVSA members have concerns and questions about the decision to make changes to the current NDIS process. The decision to change the process, especially during the current Covid Restrictions, does not sit well with the members of OVSA.

Members have found this time particularly stressful due to being limited with their social outings; many work and day options not being available to individuals; most members do not have access to technology, or they are unable to use technology for online meetings or to access information.

OVSA held a special meeting on January 18th to discuss the changes to the NDIS and to note members responses. The following concerns and questions are direct quotes from members:

Concerns and questions about moving to an Independent Assessment process

“I have just spent a number of years getting my NDIS Plan to meet my needs. I love my latest plan and I want to keep it the way it is. I am very concerned this change will put me back to square one again. “

“Why can’t they focus on what they have built instead of changing it.”

“It is important that participants are given time to digest information that is presented to them. They need information in advance either by email or in writing and they often need someone to sit with them and explain the information. Phone calls do not work for most people; they do not have enough time to think about their answers. Most people I know prefer face to face meetings.”

“This is not good timing for a change due to Covid. Many people are anxious due to Covid and it is not a good time to be introducing a new system when they have only just got their heads around the old system.”

Concerns about NDIS Participants needing to meet with a delegate first prior to seeing a Planner.

“This is just putting another person in the process; first a delegate, then a Planner and then a local area coordinator. NDIS give us the run around now. You phone up and you must leave a message and most of the time no one gets back to you. We need to meet people face to face; we need someone to support us who knows us well. We have to keep telling everyone everything all over again. “

“I need a person I can contact who understands me and someone who can explain things to me in simple terms. I believe everyone needs a Support Co-ordinator, but it needs to be someone who is good at what they do. They also need to be with you at meetings so that if I don’t understand something, they can tell that and then explain it to me in another way”.

“NDIS are not good at getting information to participants. Not everyone is online and not everyone can read and write so they can’t just go on the website and look something up. I need someone to give me information and sit with me and explain it. I want my own information. “

“Service Providers do not provide us with information. We use our advocacy groups to get information. Not everyone is part of an advocacy group. There needs to be more money to help advocacy groups to help the community around disability rights.”

“The Government are not working with us on these changes. Government needs to meet with us and ask us what we think and what we need and then listen to us. The Government want to do things their way, not our way. “

Concerns around removing Goals from each Participants Plan.

“Goals put things in a good perspective. Goals give direction- we need goals, so we know what to do next.”

“When I look at my goals, that is my life.”

“Goals are a word we all understand. We do not want them taken out of our plans- we do not want them replaced with some word we don’t understand. We need it to be worded in simple terms. We understand the word goal and what it means.”

Concerns and questions around the Assessment process: The changes would see the assessment determining the funding for each participant; once participants received their plan they would meet with a Local Area Coordinator who would support the participant to implement their Plan.

“I had to get my own letters from Doctors and Psychiatrist’s to prove my needs to the NDIS. This took a lot of my own time and caused me additional anxiety as I have mental health issues. I am nervous about the changes. NDIS are finally listening to me; Will the changes make it better? Also, why change things now during Covid.” People are already anxious/ bored/ mentally unwell/ not a good time to make these changes.”

“I had a change of support coordinator, but no-one let me know.” I told them what I wanted, and the Planner wrote it up differently. It is still not sorted out.”

“Are they going to do some books about the changes in a way we can understand?”

“Organisations would not do anything anyway to help us”.

“How are they going to assess self-advocacy agencies for capacity building? We need these agencies.”

“I Don’t have enough money left in my plan to have Physio anymore. I need Physio to keep my body strength. “

“A lot of good staff have left due to not getting enough money. We need to keep our good staff. Staff do not get good training anymore and most of the training is online now. “

“I had staff that over protected me to the point that it ended up turning into abuse. I now get my staff through HIGHER UP: I put up a job post and I tell them what I want and I am involved in choosing my own support workers. “

Concerns and questions about only Four Hours being allocated to Assess each participant.

“Four hours is not enough for some people with complex needs or people from aboriginal backgrounds or non -English speaking people. Many participants will need more time to think about what they need and want so they can respond.”

“Some participants may use other forms of communication, like a communication board, and this takes twice as long to answer questions. Everyone communicates in different ways.”

“We need to have someone with us to support us when we are being assessed in case we don’t understand something. “

“Why are they changing it, we just got our heads around the way it is now.”

“I need more money so I can have physio and more money to travel – will this new assessment help me with those things.”

“What happens if something changes, and I have a five year Plan”

“I want more control over my plan. I have had enough of hearing NDIS, NDIS, NDIS, I want to go out more in the community as my family do not take me anywhere. I am not going out enough.”

Concerns and questions about future funding to meet participants travel needs.

“I receive \$100 a fortnight for travel. If I attend one advocacy session that is all my money gone to pay for my taxi. The NDIS want us to be in the community, but how can we if we cannot use public transport and we do not have enough money for taxis. Will the new system fix that.?”

“I get \$68 a fortnight which helps me with my transport, but I can catch public transport a lot of the time but coming here tonight costs a lot of money in a taxi as it is dark and I do not like using public transport when it is dark as I live at Gawler and I have had bad experiences.”

“They have taken away the taxi voucher books; I cannot see how many vouchers I have left, and I have now run out”. I cannot take the taxi money out of my core funding anymore.? Will this new system be different.?” We are relying on advocacy groups to help us with funding now to get to Peer support meetings. Will we get more money for Transport in the new system.?”

As is highlighted from the above quotes, there are many aspects of the proposed changes that are concerning for the members of Our Voice SA. Considering that people living with intellectual disability account for a large proportion of NDIS participants we feel that it is necessary to forward these concerns to the Committee. We look forward to hearing your response and discussing these concerns with you.

Regards

Ian Cummins (Chairperson)

On behalf of members of Our Voice South Australia

Contact via email to Debbie Knowles- Project Leader for Our Voice S.A.