

What is Co-Design

Additional Information for Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs
(Legislation Committee)

Inquiry into the National Disability Insurance Scheme Amendment (Getting the NDIS Back on Track No. 1) Bill 2024 [Provisions]

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The purpose of thisThe term “co-design” has featured strongly in political and bureaucratic rhetoric associated with the implementation of the NDIS Review (2023) Recommendations and the Draft NDIS Amendments Bill (2024). Ironically, neither of these documents came into being through a co-design process. The NDIS Review featured limited consultation with people with disabilities. The Draft NDIS Amendments featured no discernible consultation with people with disabilities.

Given the profound lack of co-design method or practice in the development either of these documents it is worth taking some time out to review precisely what we should expect if promises of co-design of the next iteration of the NDIS were to occur. Anything less than these co-design principles and practices being in place would mean that the extensive use of the term would have been nothing more than a marketing tool to convince the disability community that the open ended powers being granted to politicians and bureaucrats and the erosion of disability rights were reasonable, nothing to be concerned about and acceptable: We’ve all heard this phrase thousands of times: “There’s nothing to worry about. Don’t get anxious about the Review Recommendations. Support the Draft Legislation. No changes will be made without thorough co-design.”

When developing social policies in collaboration with people with disabilities, co-design principles ensure that the process is inclusive, respectful, and effective. Key co-design principles include:

- 1. Equality and Empowerment:** Ensure that people with disabilities have equal power and influence in the policy development process, fostering an environment where their voices are heard and valued.
- 2. Accessibility:** Provide accessible materials, venues, and communication methods to accommodate people with various disabilities to ensure full participation.
- 3. Inclusion:** Actively involve a diverse range of people with disabilities to capture a broad spectrum of experiences and needs.
- 4. Respect and Dignity:** Treat all participants with respect, recognising their expertise in their own lived experiences and value their contributions.
- 5. Transparency:** Maintain clear and open communication about the process, goals, and how feedback will be used, to build trust among participants.
- 6. Collaboration:** Foster a collaborative environment where stakeholders, including people with disabilities, policymakers, and service providers, work together towards common goals. This can also mean that the voice of people with disabilities is privileged beyond other stakeholders because it is they who are the focus.

7. **Flexibility:** Be adaptable in methods and approaches to accommodate different needs and preferences of participants.
8. **Capacity Building:** Provide resources, training, and support to empower people with disabilities to effectively participate in the policy development process.
9. **Contextual Sensitivity:** Understand and incorporate the social, cultural, and economic contexts in which people with disabilities live, ensuring that processes and policy responses are relevant and effective.
10. **Sustainability:** Aim for long-term impact by designing policies that are sustainable and adaptable, ensuring continued benefit to people with disabilities.

These principles ensure that the co-design process is genuinely participatory and leads to policies that better meet the needs and aspirations of people with disabilities.

Co-design and consultation are both approaches to involving stakeholders in decision-making processes, but they differ significantly in terms of depth of engagement, power dynamics, and outcomes. Here are the key differences:

Process Feature	Co-Design	Consultation
Depth of Engagement:	<p>Collaborative Process: Co-design involves stakeholders, including end-users, in every stage of the design and decision-making process.</p> <p>Active Participation: Stakeholders are active participants, co-creators, and partners throughout the process.</p>	<p>Advisory Process: Consultation seeks input and feedback from stakeholders at specific points, but does not involve them in the entire process.</p> <p>Limited Participation: Stakeholders provide opinions and feedback but are not deeply involved in decision-making.</p>
Power Dynamics:	<p>Shared Power: Power and decision-making authority are shared among all participants, ensuring that everyone has an equal voice, and the focus remains on outcomes for the end-user.</p> <p>Empowerment: The process empowers stakeholders by valuing their input and giving them real influence over outcomes.</p>	<p>Limited Influence: The final decision-making power remains with the organisers, policymakers, or designers, who may or may not incorporate the feedback received.</p> <p>Informative: The process is often more about informing stakeholders and gathering their views rather than true collaboration.</p>
Outcomes:	<p>User-Centred Solutions: The results are typically more aligned with the actual needs and preferences of the stakeholders involved.</p>	<p>Informative Feedback: The primary outcome is the collection of feedback and opinions that may inform the decision-making process.</p>

	Innovation: Collaborative creativity often leads to more innovative and effective solutions.	Varied Implementation: The extent to which feedback is incorporated can vary, and it may not always lead to substantial changes or improvements.
Process:	<p>Iterative and Continuous: Co-design is iterative, involving multiple cycles of feedback and refinement.</p> <p>Holistic Involvement: It considers the broader context and experiences of stakeholders, leading to more comprehensive solutions.</p>	<p>One-Time or Periodic Consultation: Typically occurs at specific stages rather than being a continuous process.</p> <p>Focused Scope: It usually focuses on specific issues or questions rather than the holistic experience of stakeholders.</p>
Summary:	Co-design is a deeply collaborative approach where stakeholders are partners throughout the entire process, sharing power and actively shaping outcomes together.	Consultation is a more limited engagement where stakeholders provide input at specific points, with decision-making power largely retained by the organisers.

It is clear consultation is not co-design.

The time has come to be clear about how the co-design of the next phase of the NDIS will occur. Of course the only way to do that is through..... Co-design.