



Queensland Advocacy Incorporated

Our mission is to promote, protect and defend, through advocacy, the fundamental needs and rights and lives of the most vulnerable people with disability in Queensland.

Systems and Individual Advocacy for vulnerable People with Disability

23 August 2019

Email committee secretariat: legcon.sen@aph.gov.au

- [Committee home page](#)

Senate Standing Committees on Legal and Constitutional Affairs

Dear Committee

Thank you for this opportunity to offer this submission to the Inquiry on the impact of changes to service delivery models on the administration and running of Government programs.

Yours sincerely,

Michelle O'Flynn, Director

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QAI endorses the objectives, and promotes the principles, of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Patron: His Excellency The Honorable Paul de Jersey AC

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About QAI

Queensland Advocacy Incorporated (QAI) is a member-driven and non-profit advocacy organization for people with disability. Our mission is to promote, protect and defend, through advocacy, the fundamental needs, rights and lives of the most vulnerable people with disability in Queensland.

Our Human Rights and Mental Health services offer legal advice and representation on guardianship, administration and mental health matters. Our Justice Support and NDIS Appeals programs provide non-legal advice and support to people with disability in the criminal justice system and the NDIS. This individual advocacy informs our campaigns at state and federal levels for changes in attitudes, laws and policies and assists us to understand the challenges, needs and concerns of people with disability.

QAI's constitution holds that every person is unique and valuable and that diversity is intrinsic to community. People with disability comprise the majority of our board and their lived experience of disability is our foundation and guide.

Recommendations

re outsourcing of NDIS call centre to Serco Asia Pacific

- Improve the quality of service by improving recruitment and training of call-centre staff. Focus on knowledge and understanding of the needs of people with disability (NB: Not diagnoses, but understanding of support needs) and the interpersonal skills of call takers.
- Review the gate-keeping function of the service.

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Submission: QAI Serco-run NDIS Call-Centre Satisfaction Survey

QAI addresses the following from the TOR's.

The impact of changes to service delivery models on the administration and running of Government programs, with particular reference to: [..]

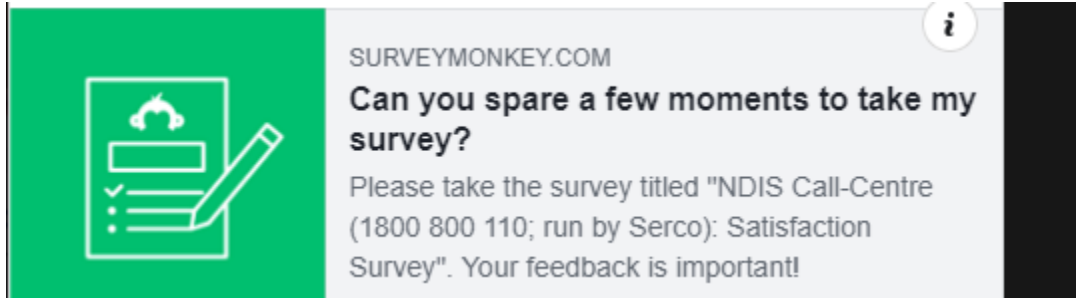
- a. *the broader outsourcing of functions in the Human Services portfolio and at the National Disability Insurance Agency, including: [..]*
 - i. *the impact outsourcing has on service provision.*

We focus particularly on the NDIA's decision, implemented from 1 July 2018, to outsource the operation and staffing of the NDIS call-centre to the private multinational Serco, which has government outsourced contracts here and in the Americas, the Middle East, UK & Europe and in other Asia-Pacific countries, delivering services in justice, immigration detention, defence, transport, health and 'citizen services'. In Australia, Serco Asia-Pacific runs prisons and immigration detention centres, including Christmas Island, and it is building and will run Australia's largest prison, near Grafton in New South Wales . It already operates private prisons in Western Australia and Queensland.

At the time of the awarding of the contract, many people with disability were concerned, and still are, that the Serco contract would be a step away from the vision for 'choice and control,'¹ given that the primary goal of a for-profit enterprise is to satisfy its investors, and of for-profit employees primarily to satisfy their demanding employers. People with disability would be a distant second. They were concerned that Serco, like other third-party providers, would fail to uphold the values, objectives and principles underpinning the NDIS: at the time, Serco Asia-Pacific had no proven expertise in providing services to Australians with disability, yet they were given the 'frontline' NDIS service. Serco the prisons and defence contractor is the wrong fit, message and image for a national program designed to be the jewel in the National Disability Strategy's crown, and to uphold human rights, not restrict them.

QAI conducted a survey of people's experiences with the SERCO-managed NDIS Call-Centre. Using the 'Survey Monkey' platform, and receiving 67 responses, the survey ran through July 2018 – April 2019 . We include collated responses to eight questions. The responses are self-explanatory, but we ask you to pay close attention to the responses to question six.

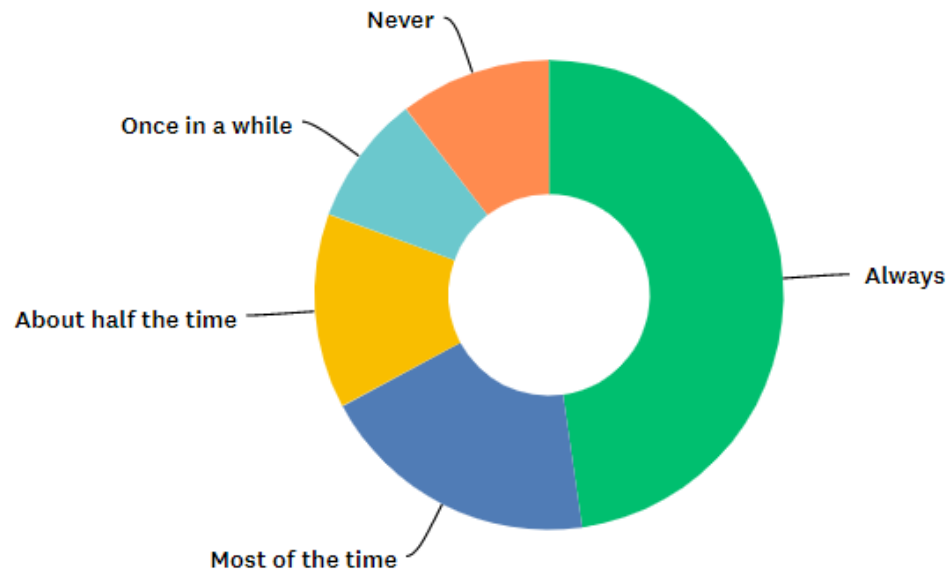
¹ See submissions to the Productivity Commission's Inquiry into disability care and support. (Final report, 2011. *Disability Care and Support*. Commonwealth of Australia).



A banner from SurveyMonkey.com. On the left is a green square with a white icon of a document, a pencil, and a refresh symbol. To the right, the text reads: "SURVEYMONKEY.COM", "Can you spare a few moments to take my survey?", "Please take the survey titled 'NDIS Call-Centre (1800 800 110; run by Serco): Satisfaction Survey'. Your feedback is important!", and an information icon 'i' in a circle.

Q1 How often do you have to wait on hold when calling the 1800 number at NDIA?

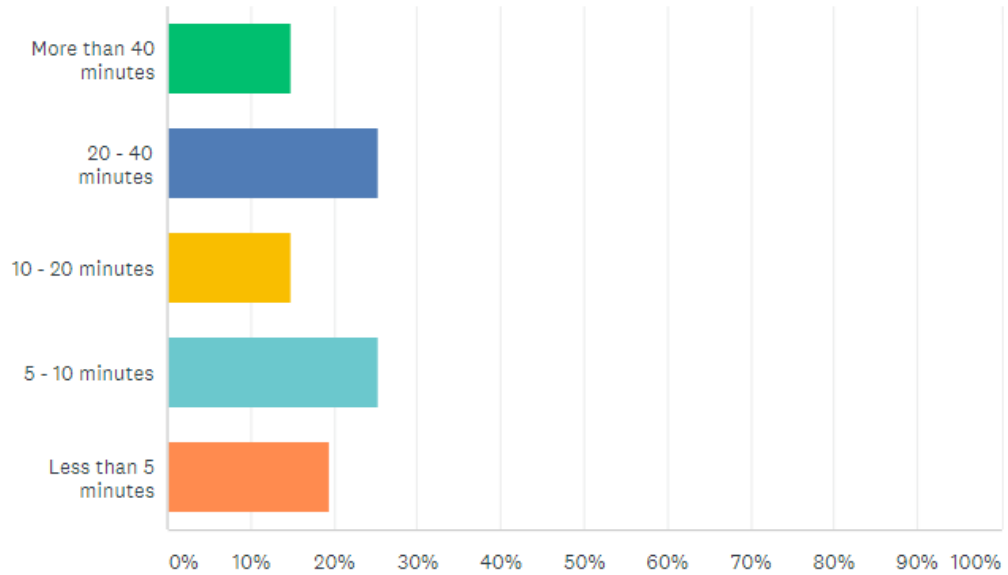
Answered: 67 Skipped: 0



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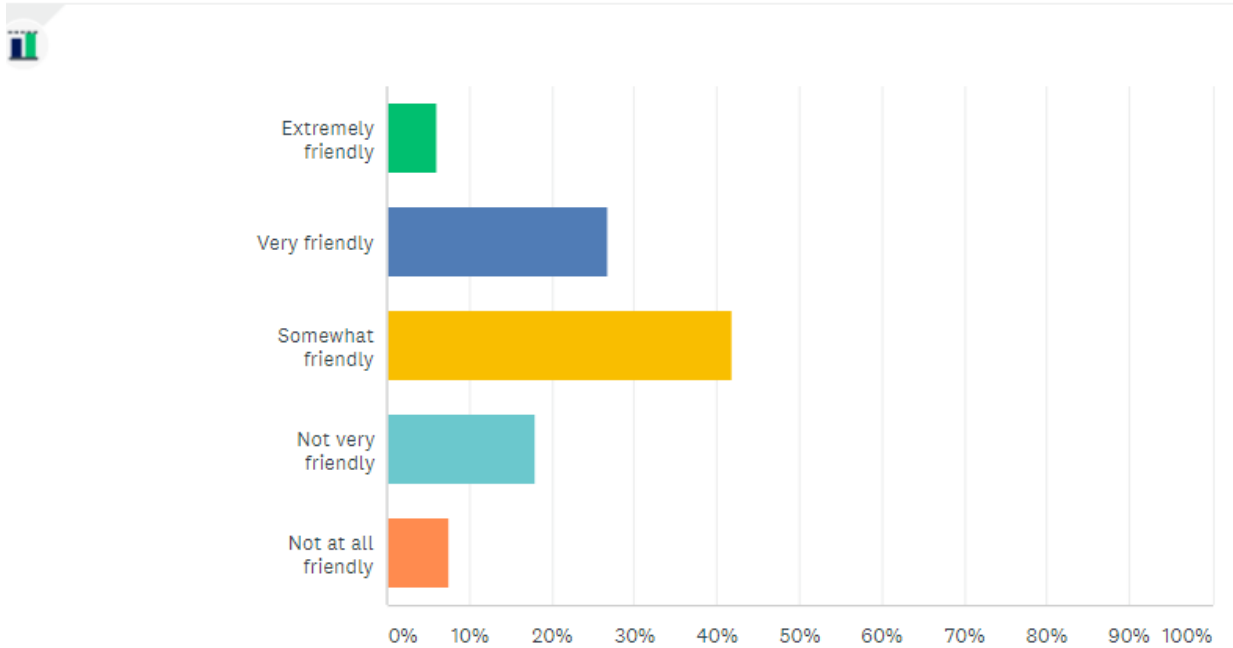
Q2 How long was your wait on hold before speaking with a customer service representative?

Answered: 67 Skipped: 0



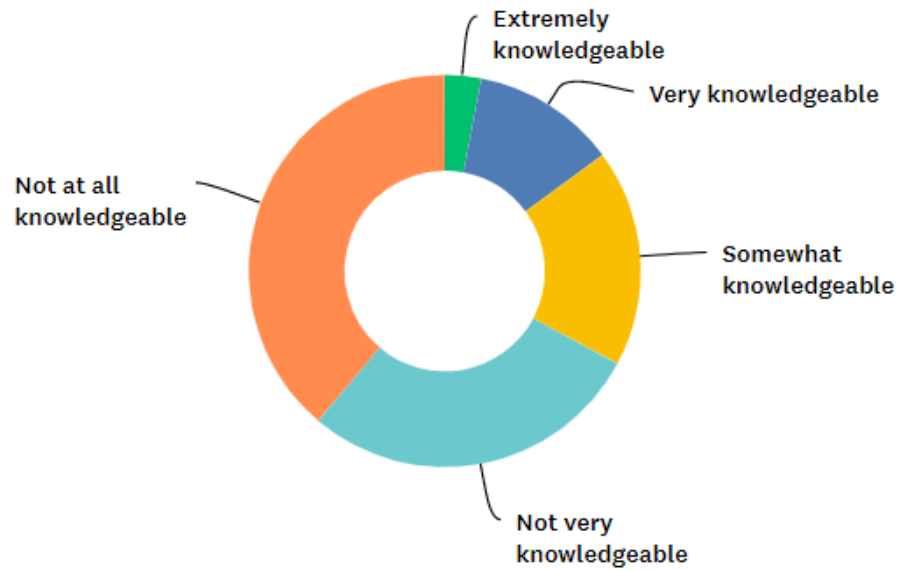
Q3 How friendly was the call-center representative?

Answered: 67 Skipped: 0



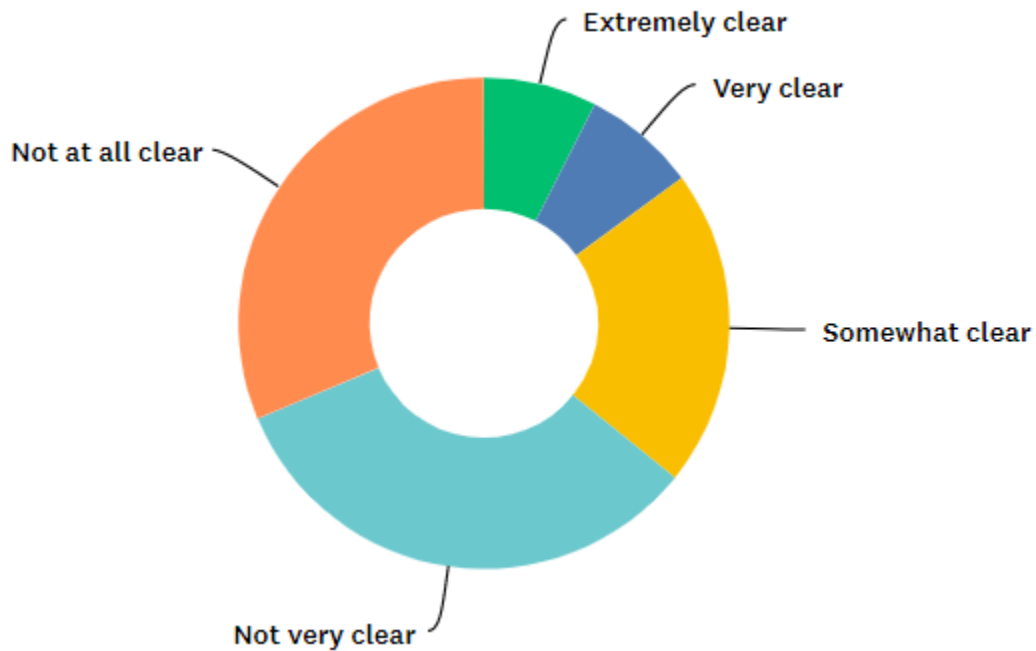
Q4 Did the call center representative have adequate knowledge for your inquiry?

Answered: 67 Skipped: 0



Q5 How clear was the information that the NDIA's customer service representative provided to you?

Answered: 68 Skipped: 0



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Q6 Please describe any problems you encountered in more detail.

Answered: 54 Skipped: 13

Was told something on first call but something entirely different on double checking call.

4/16/2019 9:01 AM

Hard to answer these questions without context. In general though, the quality of engagement with the phone line people is so crap that I tend to not bother calling any more, other than for a handful of specific things I know they generally do well. The lack of knowledge is horrifying when combined with the strength of conviction. No wonder people have no idea what to spend their NDIS funds on!

4/15/2019 2:59 PM

Asked the same question got 3 different answers

4/15/2019 1:09 PM

Male said he couldn't escalate my AT request despite previous person saying it could be escalated after 2 weeks. Phone back next day and got it escalated.

4/14/2019 6:48 PM

Very poor information provided. Staff often provide conflicting answers. Staff couldn't assist with urgent matters.

4/14/2019 6:45 PM

Lack of knowledge , directed to website to try and find

4/14/2019 4:34 PM

They have little understanding of the NDIS and the information they give is normally wrong at the end

4/14/2019 3:19 PM

They do not receive enough training

4/14/2019 11:59 AM

Constantly receiving conflicting information any time I call and ask the same question.

4/14/2019 11:31 AM

Incorrect information provided

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4/14/2019 10:37 AM

No problems

4/14/2019 10:29 AM

Lack of knowledge Lack of ability to help Lack of common sense Absolutely no customer service

4/14/2019 9:10 AM

Put on hold for 20 mins they ask their manager about it. Then the manager says they also dont (sic) know. Or someone googling the answer while on the phone with me, as if I had not already done that.

4/14/2019 9:08 AM

Not informed or trained in NDIS knowledge

4/14/2019 9:02 AM

The staff are hopelessly under trained and most have absolutely NO knowledge of any kind of disability or the state based systems that most people are coming from. To be reading scripts from cards is an absolute joke and an insult. I as a parent have 1000000 times more knowledge than the people on the other end of the phone. Incorrect information is being given out, especially regarding LAC partners in WA. If the people in the call centre cannot answer the question, other than an escalation, there is NOWHERE for the enquiry to go. It seems that each department is secret and no one has access unless you belong to the purple circle. How has this situation been allowed to develop? This current model of call centre is absolute rubbish. Shall I go on?

3/6/2019 2:23 PM

Because I wanted to put my husband on my file the customer service assumed that I could not speak for myself and suggested that I get a speech (sic) pathology report and tell the NDIS person that I have difficulty speaking when my plan is done

2/20/2019 12:02 PM

No case management capacity by staff who have intimate knowledge of the caller and have significant knowledge about their particular disability and their requirements.

2/19/2019 12:02 PM

Difficult to understand, rude and argumentative

2/19/2019 11:28 AM

Inconsistent information, untrained staff

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2/15/2019 6:02 PM

They were great and supportive, even shocked about how appallingly we had been treated by NDIS planners. Informed us we have rights etc. and complained (sic) on our behalf. So caring and wonderful. Problem is that when the actual NDIS planners find out about this, they become hostile and very anti-call centre workers. I wish some of those supportive call centre workers were actual planners with power

2/15/2019 3:52 PM

Called to lodge our new plan , took a little while on the phone to arrange , but the young man seemed nice .

2/15/2019 2:47

- unable to answer questions specifically related to my son's plan and just spouted 'generic' info, which was unhelpful. - didn't know what specific terminology meant, eg AFO, which is in my son's plan, so unable to answer any queries I had - lack of knowledge in general

2/15/2019 2:38 PM

I would constantly have to correct the information they would provide me as it would be incorrect. Information they had available regarding our file was inaccurate

2/15/2019 1:30 PM

One man argued about the definition of a day, some tried to be helpful but as they weren't the ones who'd sent the emails and I had no way of speaking to those that had, neither of us knew what they ment (sic) or why they'd been sent. I was often more informed and needed to tell staff they were incorrect in the info they were giving and provide the NDIA web pages stating the correct info

2/15/2019 12:44 PM

Having to relay a web URL link over the phone to teach them about complex tier pricing when they didn't have any idea that the new pricing policy came into effect 1st February 2019

2/15/2019 12:18 PM

Passing the buck. Not knowing things. Telling me to send an email to the feedback email that never gets an answer instead of wasting their time calling.

2/15/2019 12:02 PM

Was put on hold and never got picked up again. this occurred (sic) twice for one enquiry

2/15/2019 12:00 PM

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The lack of consistency is the main problem I have. I can call up the times and ask the same question and get three different answers. Also the difficulty in grin to speak to the national access team or anyone who can make decisions.

2/14/2019 10:06 PM

The call centre person said they we only admin and could not answer my queries

2/14/2019 7:53 PM

I was told "we can't do anything. Nobody here has any authority to do anything, all we can do is send an email. There's no point sending more emails, that just clogs up the inbox. We are just a call centre, nothing else. We are not connected to anything, we can't do anything, we can't fix anything," So that's that then.

2/13/2019 8:25 PM

The customer service operators were all as helpful as they could be. The issue was they didn't have the information I was after.

2/12/2019 10:32 PM

When calling on behalf of a participant trying to access NDIS it was extremely disappointing that I had more knowledge than then person taking the call. Having to explain the situation several times, over several calls and requesting numerous times to speak to NAT was very frustrating. Each time I was put on hold while they spoke to NAT and I still had no outcome. One call the person accidentally transferred me to NAT rather than themselves and the NAT rep could not have been more rude if they tried, I did however gain a better outcome than speaking with the call centre. On another occasion, regarding the same participant I called the 1800 number to see where access was at after sending an email, requested by NAT. I was rudely told by the call center that I should call after sending an email so they know go upload it, she then proceeded to hang up! Between August 2018 and early January 2019 I made too many calls for the same issue for the same participant. The only outcome happened when I continually raised the issue with our State Government and eventually got to the NDIA State Director for Service Delivery! She escalated this quickly and a few days late I was contacted by a NAT rep directly, the access issues that I had raised for months via the call centre were solved in an afternoon and access was met!! I can't even begin to imagine the experience of someone with a disability trying to deal with the call centre, considering I work in the sector and could not have been more frustrated or angered by my experience! It greatly concerns me about the future of the sector and the outcomes for our participants!

2/12/2019 5:49 AM

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Not being aware of accurate service providers; as I called from WA it took 3 phone calls to FINALLY get a WA branch - was always diverted to Victoria - only to be emailed paperwork that Victorian office could send

11/2019 4:21 PM

No problems

2/11/2019 3:57 PM

Unable to answer one concern Did not show ANY compassion or concern for serious issues, appeared to be laughing and patronising.

2/11/2019 1:39 PM

I have called 4 times now since November. My son's NDIS plan is not adequate, we are receiving far less than we did which goes against the guarantee the government made. I am contemplating getting lawyers involved at the moment as I can't get past the call centres to even make a complaint. I will also be contacting the state premiers office. It's unacceptable

2/11/2019 1:21 PM

Didn't really help at all, said I'd receive a follow up call, still waiting. Given up trying to call them back.

2/11/2019 1:12 PM

Have been given incorrect and confusing information for WA every time we have phoned.

2/11/2019 1:00 PM

Being given different information by different staff Being referred to a state office then back to the national call line. Being given a new email address to try when the previous two weren't answered

2/11/2019 1:00 PM

The customer service representatives did not have any knowledge about the specific part of the NDIS I was asking about. But the worse thing is they don't even listen. I was explaining the situation as an introduction and then they just asked a question which if they had listened to me in the first place, they realise I had already provided the answer.

2/11/2019 11:22 AM

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Staff clearly had no concept of disability and no actual experience of disability so could not even empathise. Gave me incorrect information regarding LAC service in my area of Western Australia. Was clearly answering from a script. Total crap. I've been navigating the disability world for 15 years and your staff were of no help what so ever. Totally useless service

2/11/2019 10:59 AM

Different answers, different permissions every time I call. People mostly always unable to give me a straight answer.

2/11/2019 8:16 AM

Lack of disability awareness and patience

2/11/2019 8:01 AM

The service is definitely better now

2/8/2019 12:31 PM

None

2/8/2019 12:11 PM

3 phone calls just to get an access Request Form posted out. Given inaccurate information re time frames

2/8/2019 11:45 AM

Not using existing government technology to provide portal codes. Not mail! use text, the way banks do when you make a large deposit. It took 4 letters because 3 times the code had expired by the time the letter arrived at my place!!

9/6/2018 3:02 PM

The person I speak with doesn't understand my questions or cannot give me answers and tells me to call back later or has me on hold for a long time trying to phone someone that might know and then telling me that they cannot provide me an answer to ie: trying to organise an appeal of my funding.

8/2/2018 9:34 AM

When checking why our client did not receive a letter acknowledging her application we were informed that a letter had been sent on 07/06/18 and the they could not provide a copy or resend as the letter is now "obsolete". We were then placed on hold again to check if someone could return our call to explain why the application access was not met. Then advised that we would receive a call back within two days. We checked what number they were calling back on, only to find out that the mobile number they had was NOT the correct phone number and had to provide this repeating it several times.

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8/1/2018 4:58 PM

No problems.w (sic)

7/25/2018 6:46 PM

The staff seemed pressured for time by management and not interested in listening to anything with a modicum of complexity.

7/5/2018 10:43 AM

Making requests, one staff member, will look at the system, and will not know or not understand that you have called before about the same issue.

7/5/2018 5:34 AM

Asked twice for new form to re submit application...was told I couldn't, I had to appeal...I read out the part of legislation that says I can...was then told it was the same...never arrived...this happened on 2 separate (sic) occasions. Local NDIA office would not mail me the form but if I went into the office they would print it out for me.

7/4/2018 6:10 PM

When told that my application for NDIS was unsuccessful, I told them that what I'm going through has me feeling suicidal thoughts as it is, and with being rejected and with nowhere else to get help from it doesn't help those thoughts. I pleaded with them to reconsider and told them what I am saying is information they need to know about. I got hung up on shortly afterward and 10 minutes later 2 policemen knocked at my door telling me I made threats of suicide. I didn't. I only mentioned suicide on the call because the NDIA needed to know what their decision is doing to people in my position with no other avenues to access help for severe mental health issues.

7/3/2018 6:01 PM

Q7: What changes would most improve the NDIS Call-centre?

More staff for less waiting time, standard knowledge base

4/16/2019 9:01 AM

Permanent staff with access to an FAQ of actual answers - and experience with PWD.

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4/15/2019 2:59 PM

More trading and better understanding of the NDIS

4/15/2019 1:09 PM

We need to be able to talk to someone who can make decisions and sort out problems the third person was excellent and even noticed that the quote was out of date and said to get a new one....

4/14/2019 6:48 PM

Better training for staff, so that questions can be answered correctly or answered. Better escalation process so staff can assist during urgent reviews etc

4/14/2019 6:45 PM

Training and consistent understanding of guidelines- give their name so feedback can be given re specific staff and lack of understanding

4/14/2019 4:34 PM

Experienced staff is needed

4/14/2019 3:19 PM

That they understand the plans and general knowledge and better training

4/14/2019 11:59 AM

More knowledge of plans. More training

4/14/2019 11:31 AM

Local call centre in WA where they are trained in understanding the context of what has been the participants journey

4/14/2019 10:37 AM

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Staff that are actually aware of guidelines, NDIS act and procedures

4/14/2019 9:10 AM

Having detailed knowledge about the NDIS. Having clear standard procedure amongst all calls, so that one person doesn't give a different answer to another.

4/14/2019 9:08 AM

More training

4/14/2019 9:02 AM

Have staff with knowledge of disability and the disability systems that people have come from. People need to speak with a call centre/people who are local. I was told to go into my local office to sort something out. That's rather hard when my local office is 200 kms away. No common sense and no answers from the call centre

3/6/2019 2:23 PM

More education for the call takers regarding the impact of a person's disability on their communication style. Just because I may speak a little more slowly doesn't mean that I am stupid and are incapable of knowing what my needs are. They don't have to speak slowly back to me I am more than capable of understanding!

2/20/2019 12:02 PM

People who know about disability. People who can speak English clearly. Less wait time

2/19/2019 11:28 AM

Train staff adequately. Increase staff numbers.

2/15/2019 6:02 PM

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Give the call centre workers more rights to make decisions

2/15/2019 3:52 PM

More people skills , sometimes it feels like my daughter is just a number with Down Syndrome ..

2/15/2019 2:47 PM

- people who know what they are talking about - tailoring answers to you personally, not spouting generic answers - ability to look at plans and answer specific questions

2/15/2019 2:38 PM

Accurate and current information available on individual profiles. More disability and sector knowledge of call centre staff

2/15/2019 1:30 PM

More training, ability to have a call log number so if you were calling about the same thing it could be quickly be found

2/15/2019 12:44 PM

1/Call Center staff with lived experience and certified in the Disability sector. 2/ Staff with the autonomy to make decisions and not just be glorified paging systems. 3/ Able to give direct phone numbers of planners and LACS. 4/ training in Human rights and Disability rights. 5/ unbiased opinions 6/ Lift the staff caps 7/ No KPI in phone support so staff can give undivided attention to participants without checking the clock and giving the wrong information. 8/ Consistent updated pricing and clear information for all staff to be in the same page when giving participants information.

2/15/2019 12:18 PM

People that know what they're talking about and being able to ask questions.

2/15/2019 12:02 PM

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To get answers

2/15/2019 12:00 PM

Consistency and more knowledge and a chance to speak to people who are able to make decisions

2/14/2019 10:06 PM

Not to be affiliated with a company such as Serco. People with lived experience and appropriate training need to be the person I talk to when making a call to the NDIA

2/14/2019 7:53 PM

Let us speak to the actual people who have access to do anything.

2/13/2019 8:25 PM

If they had more information and / or were local.

2/12/2019 10:32 PM

More training, some have no idea what you are calling about. I had one call centre rep not understand Continuity of Support! Also if they don't understand or know how to assist it would be much easier for them to transfer to NAT rather than them relaying what the call is about, this is very frustrating.

2/12/2019 5:49 AM

knowing the correct information; call receipt numbers; telling caller which state they have contacted as time differences and state differences matter

2/11/2019 4:21 PM

Grow up! PPL with Disabilities on NDIS Plans can have serious life threatening situations, you have to learn to LISTEN, talk to ppl with respect, and take us SERIOUSLY

2/11/2019 1:39 PM

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Not have a call centre...

2/11/2019 1:21 PM

Get properly trained staff, like the staff at Centrelink and Medicare.

2/11/2019 1:12 PM

The call centre needs to be managed entirely by NDIA - absolutely NOT outsourced to a private company. As the systems are a little different for each state, we need call-centres specific to each state. All managed directly by NDIA, not outsourced.

2/11/2019 1:00 PM

Local offices instead of just a call centre

2/11/2019 1:00 PM

Staff who are trained and can listen properly to queries

2/11/2019 11:22 AM

Employ staff with lived experience of disability

2/11/2019 10:59 AM

Take it out of private contractors and return it to public run....

2/11/2019 10:20 AM

Faster computer systems. Better training for staff.

2/11/2019 8:16 AM

Australian bass (sic) company with people with disabilities running the centre

2/11/2019 8:01 AM

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Add in other services so you just have to call one number, combine LAC work into this service

2/8/2019 12:31 PM

The operator being able to do more. A on stop shop rather than transferring.

2/8/2019 12:11 PM

More knowledgeable staff - they need to know more about support needs

9/6/2018 3:02 PM

very knowledgeable staff that answer phones that can be patient and very customer focused and support you with all the right information and call you back that day with the correct information if they cannot obtain it immediately.

8/2/2018 9:34 AM

Understand that returning a call to the person with an intellectual disability may further confuse the issue as they may be unable to understand the issues to be clarified or the language used by the NDIS officer eg: the term obsolete?

8/1/2018 4:58 PM

Higher level of staff education and professional skills and I do not mean CBT

7/5/2018 10:43 AM

An easier way for NDIA staff to no(sic) you have phoned before about the same issue and for you not to explain yourself over and over again! And easier way, for NDIA staff, to understand, you are a blind person, for your information to be received in an alternative format!

7/5/2018 5:34 AM

Ability to speak to someone who does actually understands and is concerned with helping you to get the best help you can

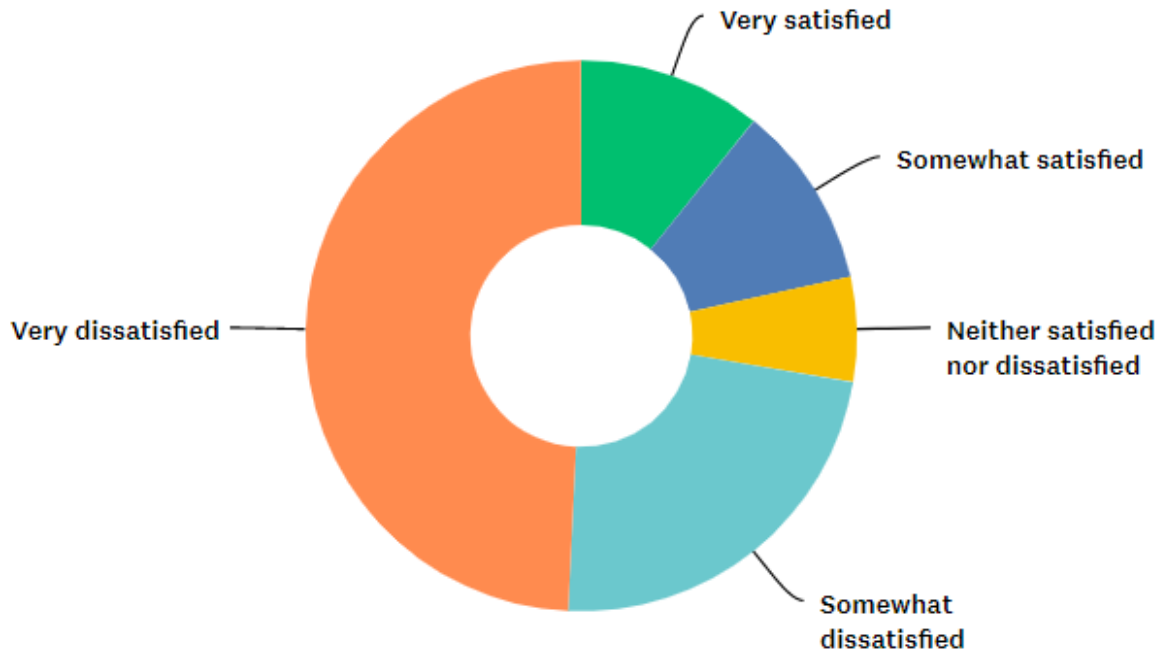
7/4/2018 6:10 PM

Brand new IT system with absolutely no ties to Centrelink. Staff trained in disability AND mental health

7/3/2018 6:01 PM

Q8 Overall, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the NDIS 1800 call centre?

Answered: 65 Skipped: 2



Conclusion

QAI acknowledges the limited reach of our survey advertising, and that respondent self-selection can lead to biased data.² The respondents who chose to participate likely do not well represent the entire population of NDIS callers. However, the results here suggest that a significant proportion if not a majority of callers to the Serco-run service are not satisfied with the understanding, knowledge or interpersonal skills of call takers, or the gate-keeping function of the service.

.....

² Jelke Bethlehem. 2010. "Selection Bias in Web Surveys" in *International Statistical Review / Revue Internationale de Statistique*. Vol. 78, No. 2 (August 2010), pp. 161-188.