

Chapter 1

Introduction

Referral of inquiry and terms of reference

1.1 The Joint Standing Committee on the National Disability Insurance Scheme (the committee) was established on 1 September 2016 following the passing of a resolution in the House of Representatives and the Senate. The committee is comprised of five members and five senators and is tasked with reviewing:

- (a) the implementation, performance and governance of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS or the Scheme);
- (b) the administration and expenditure of the NDIS; and
- (c) such other matters in relation to the NDIS as may be referred to it by either House of the Parliament.¹

1.2 The committee is required to present an annual report to the Parliament on the activities of the committee during the year, in addition to reporting on any other matters it considers relevant.

1.3 The committee is able to inquire into specific aspects of the Scheme. On 21 June 2017, the committee agreed to undertake an inquiry into the provision of services under the NDIS Early Childhood Early Intervention (ECEI) Approach.

1.4 The terms of reference for the inquiry are as follows:

1. That the committee will examine the provision of services under the NDIS ECEI Approach, with particular reference to:
 - (a) the eligibility criteria for determining access to the ECEI pathway;
 - (b) the service needs of NDIS participants receiving support under the ECEI pathway;
 - (c) the timeframe in receiving services under the ECEI pathway;
 - (d) the adequacy of funding for services under the ECEI pathway;
 - (e) the costs associated with ECEI services, including costs in relation to initial diagnosis and testing for potential ECEI participants;
 - (f) the evidence of the effectiveness of the ECEI Approach;
 - (g) the robustness of the data required to identify and deliver services to participants under the ECEI;
 - (h) the adequacy of information for potential ECEI participants and other stakeholders;

¹ House of Representatives, *Votes and Proceedings*, No. 3, 1 September 2016, pp. 78–80.

- (i) the accessibility of the ECEI Approach, including in rural and remote areas;
- (j) the principle of choice of ECEI providers;
- (k) the application of current research and innovation in the identification of conditions covered by the ECEI Approach, and in the delivery of ECEI services; and
- (l) any other related matters.

The committee is to report by 7 December 2017.

Structure of report

1.5 This report is comprised of five chapters, as follows:

- Chapter 1 outlines the context and administration of the inquiry, and provides background information to the NDIS;
- Chapter 2 provides background information about the ECEI Approach, and considers the key issues relating to Early Childhood Partners, eligibility and access to the Scheme, and functional assessment tools;
- Chapter 3 explores key concerns raised by submitters, including delays accessing Early Childhood Partners and approvals from the NDIA, adequacy of Plans, and thin markets;
- Chapter 4 examines the funding and delivery of ECEI services, and reviews issues raised by families, carers and service providers; and
- Chapter 5 explores adequacy of information and accessibility of the Approach.

Conduct of the inquiry

1.6 The committee received 76 submissions to the inquiry from individuals and organisations. These submissions are available on the committee's website and are listed in Appendix 1.

1.7 The committee also held six public hearings:

- 19 September 2017 in Melbourne;
- 26 September 2017 in Brisbane;
- 27 September 2017 in Adelaide;
- 3 October 2017 in Sydney;
- 20 October 2017 in Canberra; and
- 8 November 2017 in Melbourne.

1.8 Transcripts from these hearings, additional information, and answers to questions on notice are available on the committee's website. Witnesses who appeared at the hearings are listed in Appendix 2.

Acknowledgements

1.9 The committee would like to thank the individuals and organisations that made written submissions to the inquiry, as well as those who gave evidence at the public hearings.

Note on terminology and references

1.10 References to submissions in this report are to individual submissions received by the committee. References to page numbers in *Hansard* transcripts may vary between proof and official versions.

Background information

1.11 Following the Productivity Commission's 2011 inquiry into Australia's disability system, all governments agreed to the introduction of the NDIS. In March 2013, the *National Disability Insurance Scheme Act 2013* (NDIS Act) was passed. The NDIS became operational on 1 July 2013 with the commencement of the trial sites. From 1 July 2016, the NDIS commenced transition to full Scheme. The transition from trial to full Scheme is guided by Bilateral Agreements between the Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments.

1.12 As an insurance scheme, the NDIS takes an investment approach in people with disability (under the age of 65), to build skills and improve their outcomes later in life. Eligible people, known as Participants, are given a Plan of reasonable and necessary supports, which is individually tailored to their needs and reviewed every 12 months. By July 2019, the Scheme is expected to support about 460 000 Australians nationwide.

