

People with disability, their families and the organisations that represent them are all worried about changes the Australian Government wants to make to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).



Plain language version

We are worried the changes will stop people getting support from the NDIS. We're also worried people will have their NDIS funding cut.

The Australian Government want to set up like the NDIS like Workcover and Centrelink. They want to make it compulsory for people who want to access the scheme to be looked at by "independent" assessors.

If people say no to the assessment, they won't be able to access the scheme.

The government also wants to make people who are already NDIS participants have the same assessments.

If NDIS participants say no to an assessment, they won't get their next NDIS plan or funding.

The National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) will use these new compulsory assessments to decide who will be given access to the NDIS, and how much funding and support they will receive.

The government is pressuring the Parliament to rush through laws to make these assessments compulsory. They also want the Parliament to make other changes to the NDIS.

We are united in our opposition to the government's changes.

These changes will take away the individualised and personalised nature of our NDIS. We don't want that.

We want the NDIS to be fair and consistent. But we are concerned these changes will make things worse not better. We are concerned that the new process for assessment and planning won't consider the individual needs and circumstances of people with disability.

This is not the NDIS we fought for.

The NDIS has had a positive impact on many people's lives. But we also know there's also room for improvement.

Right now, the NDIS is complex and difficult to navigate. There are problems with fairness and consistency. While the scheme works well for some, others miss out.

We want to work with the Australian Government and the NDIA to change this picture. We want to look at the problems and come up with solutions that we think will work together. We want positive changes for people who rely on the NDIS.

We want to make sure the NDIS is the world-leading scheme we believe it can and should be. After all it's our NDIS. It belongs to our community.

Unfortunately, we have not seen evidence the government's changes will actually fix the problems with the scheme.

If these compulsory assessments are introduced, it will be the biggest change to the NDIS since it started.

But despite the huge scale and cost of introducing compulsory assessments, their impact has not been rigorously tested or independently evaluated.

The government is rushing through these changes. We have questions and concerns but we haven't got the answers we need.

The government and the NDIA say they are making these changes to make sure the scheme is fair for everyone. But looking at the information that has been released, we are worried that a desire to cut costs is the main reason for their rushed introduction.

We want the NDIS to succeed. But we can't support legislative or operational changes that undermine the original aims of the scheme. We can't back changes that will leave people worse off and without the support they need.

We urge the Australian Government to:

- 1 Stop the rollout of compulsory assessments as they are currently planned
- 2 Undertake an evaluation. We think this evaluation should be
 - Independent of the NDIA
 - Shared with everyone
 - Led by experts
 - Co-designed with people with disability
- 3 Undertake trials of other ways to improve access and planning consistency. (For example another way to do this would be to let people's own health professionals do the assessments.)
- 4 Look at all the evidence
- 5 Then co-design a new access and planning process with people with disability, their families, supporters and the organisations who represent them.

Why are we so worried?

These changes aren't the NDIS we fought for. They aren't the NDIS we have now.

We agree that the scheme should be fair and consistent. But we're worried compulsory assessments won't get us there.

We want to be treated like individuals, not numbers. We're worried the changes take a one-size-fits-all approach to the NDIS.

Here are just some of the things we are worried about:

We're worried about how assessments will be carried out

- Assessments will be carried out by contractors using standardised tools.
- The tools were designed to assess the functional impact of someone's disability. They were not designed to decide how much support or funding a person needs.

- The assessor will only spend a short time with the person. And they won't know the person they're assessing.
- Because assessors won't know a person, they may not take into account people's complicated lives and situations. They may even be judgemental about them.
- It will be hard for assessors to get a comprehensive or accurate picture of people's needs and circumstances in a short period of time.
- Working with someone they don't know might be difficult or damaging for some people with disability.
- People who have been abused in the past or who have other kinds of trauma could be further harmed by doing the assessments with someone they don't know.
- Even people who do not have trauma in their background may be harmed by the assessment. And we won't know if this is a problem until the assessment has already begun.
- We are worried people won't get the support they need afterwards.
- Some people might get an exemption from doing the assessment - but not everybody that might need one.
- The assessment relies on other people taking part, like a family member or carer. That's not always appropriate - many people are able to speak for themselves.
- We are also worried about people who don't have anyone else in their lives who can give accurate, reliable or independent back-up information.
- Assessors might not have all the skills they need to judge people's functional capacity.
- They might not have the skills or tools to communicate effectively and respectfully with people with disability.
- People with "invisible" or complex disabilities need assessors with specialised experience and skills. We are worried the assessors won't have the right experience, skills or training.

- People from culturally or linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, First Nations people, or LGBTIQ+ people also need assessors with specialised skills, experienced and training. Again we are worried assessors will not do the assessments in a culturally safe way.
- The results of the assessment cannot be challenged or appealed. We think this is unfair.
- People will only be given a summary of their assessment. They will only get the full assessment report if they apply to see it. We think this is unfair.
- Independent assessments won't really be independent because they will be done by contractors who will be paid by the NDIA.
- We are worried that we don't know very much about what the contractors will be asked to do. For example we don't know what their instructions from the NDIA will be or what their Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) will be.

We're worried about how assessments will be used to work out plans and funding

- If the legislation passes Parliament, independent assessments will become the main tool for calculating the budget for a person's NDIS plan.
- We don't understand how assessment results will be used to work out a person's budget. We haven't been given much information about that.
- The tools are supposed to be used for screening or assessing functional capacity. The tools are untested and untried for working out budgets and support levels.
- We think this is one of the first times in the world that assessment results will be used determine how much funding should be allocated to a person.
- The NDIA has not released any testing or modelling which shows how people's plans and budgets will be determined. They also haven't released any modelling which shows what impact the changes will have on people's plans and budgets. Are people's budgets likely to go up or down or stay the same with this new process? We don't know.

- We think there needs to be strong research and evaluation of proposed methods. Up until now there has been none. We don't think that is a good way to make big changes.
- For most people their NDIS plan and budget will not change after the assessment is finished.
- That means budgets and plans will be set before people have a chance to talk about their goals and what they would like to achieve. That doesn't make sense.
- As a result we are really worried people's budgets will be cut and they won't have enough funds and support to meet their needs and achieve their goals.

We're worried about the impact of these assessments on the availability of support

- The assessors who are contracted to do these assessments may not be able to offer other services to NDIS participants.
- We're worried this will reduce the number of qualified professionals who can support people with disability and their families.
- This will make things particularly difficult for people with disability and their families who live in regional, rural or remote areas.

We want the NDIS to be consistent and fair. But we also want to make sure the scheme gives people with disability the support they need.

We have too many concerns with the government's independent assessments proposal for it to continue the way it looks now. It can't go ahead the way it is now.



AUSTRALIAN
Autism Alliance



Australian Federation of
Disability Organisations



Children and Young People
with Disability Australia



Disability Advocacy
Network Australia



First Peoples
Disability Network
Australia



Inclusion Australia



National Ethnic Disability Alliance



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With
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Deafblind Australia

