



NDIS Quality
and Safeguards
Commission

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Quality and Consumer
Information - Insights Report:
What We Have Heard

December 2023



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Introduction

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) was introduced in 2013 to provide individualised funding packages directly to people with disability, to exercise choice and control over the supports they receive from a diverse market under the NDIS.

The NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission's (NDIS Commission) regulatory intent is to proactively use all our levers and tools to uphold the rights of NDIS participants, ensuring high quality and safe services and supports, and enabling consumer independence and choice.

The NDIS Commission has a range of legislative instruments to promote quality in services such as the *National Disability Insurance Scheme (Quality Indicators for NDIS Practice Standards) Guidelines 2018* and the *National Disability Insurance Scheme (Code of Conduct) Rules 2018*. The NDIS Quality and Safeguarding Framework (the Framework) sets out the overarching principles that guide the NDIS Commission's approach to setting, monitoring and enforcing rules and regulations. The Framework provides a nationally consistent approach to help empower and support NDIS participants to exercise choice and control, while ensuring appropriate safeguards are in place, and establishes expectations for providers and their staff to deliver high quality supports.

Participants of the NDIS have a right to receive quality supports and services that meet their needs. A core goal of the NDIS is to empower people with disability the flexibility to choose supports that best suit their needs. Accurate, reliable and accessible information about the quality and safety of supports is an important part of helping people with disability exercise that choice.

Maturation of the NDIS and realisation of participants rights to choice and control is likely to create increased market competition. Like with other consumer choices, participants should be able to access reliable information to navigate the market, such as reviews, rating systems and comparison tools. The provision of accessible, comparable and quality information about NDIS providers enables participants to have greater independence and capability to make informed decisions about their NDIS supports.



The NDIS Commission acknowledges that many people in the broader and disability communities, their families and supports are not always aware how the NDIS Commission can support them, about their rights as NDIS participants, or about how to make complaints or raise concerns about their NDIS services or providers. Participants and their supporters have also told us there is a lack of reliable information about providers and services that can help them make informed decisions as consumers of NDIS services and supports.

The NDIS Commission undertook this consultation to understand the views of NDIS participants and their supports, NDIS providers and workers about what makes a service or support safe and good quality. We were interested in learning how useful the current information provided by the NDIS Commission or other organisations is, as well as what might be missing. We wanted to understand what information participants already use, as well as what new information they would like to access. Finally, we wanted to understand how we can increase participant awareness of their rights and how we can make it easier for them to raise concerns with their provider or the NDIS Commission.

Throughout this consultation, we had many conversations with participants, their supporters and other stakeholders. Participants shared their experiences and expertise, taking time out of their busy lives to engage with our consultation. This report speaks to the themes that emerged throughout that engagement and confirms that the provision of quality support in the NDIS is a complex process. There is more work to be done to improve the participant experience and to empower participants to exercise choice and control within both the NDIS Market and in support settings.

Shifts in the NDIS market include an increase in participant utilisation of unregistered providers and participants connecting in different and new ways through the use of online tools and platforms. We have heard that unregistered providers can fill market gaps and provide choice and control (particularly in choice of workers and support times) for NDIS participants. However, we have also heard that participants encounter challenges in ensuring that they receive safe and quality support, including information that helps them understand what quality support should look like.

As mentioned by one participant, quality support

“is not simply transactional - it is delivering an encompassing service that has outcomes in the meaningful inclusion, contribution and participation of the person in community.”

This report highlights feedback in relation to what participants consider a quality service, what a worker should and should not do, what makes participants feel safe, and how participants choose workers or providers. It should be noted that many insights and themes intersected. Where this is the case, insights were presented in the most relevant section and attempts were made not to duplicate information.

Approach to Consultation

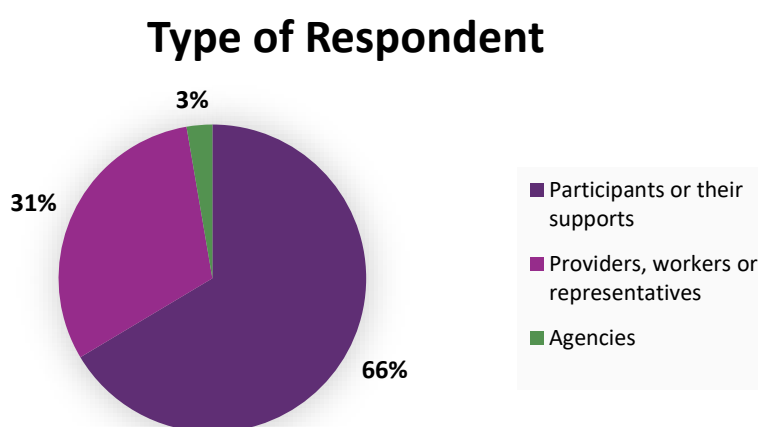
In addition to broader community engagement with participants and their supports, it was important that as part of our consultation approach to actively seek to capture the voices and views of cohorts that are often unheard. This included Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities, First Nations people, children and young people, women and girls, those in remote and regional locations and those with intellectual disability.

The NDIS is not a one-size-fit all approach, and its services must be responsive and tailored to meet the diverse needs of all participants. By engaging participants in a meaningful dialogue, we aimed to have a more holistic understanding of the issues and needs of participants in the NDIS recognising intersectionality of identities and experiences.

Consultation occurred across three streams:

1. an online survey that all stakeholders could complete;
2. broad and targeted focus groups with participants in diverse cohorts; and
3. the option to have individual interviews.

Throughout July to October 2023, a total of 557 people participated in consultation. Of these, 370 identified as participants or their supporters, 172 identified as providers, workers or representatives of organisations, and 15 of these were from government and non-government agencies.



Focus Groups

Six disability advocacy and representative organisations with established relationships and trust within the disability community were approached to facilitate focus groups:

- Children and Young People with Disability Australia
- Kin Advocacy
- JFA Purple Orange
- Queenslanders with Disability Network
- Disability Advocacy Services

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- Safer Girls Safer Women, Sexual Health and Family Planning ACT

The NDIS Commission worked with each organisation to guide the consultation process as well as the questions to be discussed with the focus groups.

These organisations provided guidance on what works best for their respective community members, including where the sessions were held, the format and timing. To assist with consultation, the NDIS Commission provided a set of questions based around the three main themes of safety, quality and choice. These consultations focused on the views of NDIS participants and their supports, NDIS providers and workers to explore:

- What participants think makes a service or support safe and good quality
- What choice and control looks like
- What information, resources or tools help or will help participants and people with disability better understand quality services and their rights
- Whether participants know how to raise concerns, make suggestions or provide feedback about the quality or safety of supports they are receiving

Some organisations facilitated consultation with their members to develop the questions, while others established co-design groups at the beginning of the project. On the advice of the organisations, the order of the questions was re-arranged, and some questions were re-worded for ease of understanding. Additional clarity regarding the meaning of some phrases was also provided as well as information about the NDIS Commission.

Focus groups included a diverse group of including people with lived experience of intellectual disability, physical disability, visual impairment, hearing impairment, psychosocial disability, and lived experience of caring for people living with disability. The focus groups were representative of a wide range of ages and backgrounds, including people from First Nations and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds.

19 focus groups were held with a total of 145 attendees, and of these focus groups:

- Seven were held online with attendees from across Australia;
- Four were held in the Northern Territory, all four in remote or regional communities;
- Four were held in Western Australia, two in remote or regional communities;
- Two were held in Queensland; and
- Two were held in South Australia.

Through conversations with organisations, the importance of creating safety in sessions was highlighted.

Most of the sessions had NDIS Commission staff in attendance as observers, except where organisations indicated it might have inhibited consultation outcomes if NDIS Commission staff were to attend.

Survey

The survey expanded on the themes and consultation questions and hosted on the NDIS Commission's public-facing website. The survey was in two parts. One was directed to participants and their supports. This section was targeted to participants, those applying to be participants, an advocate submitting on behalf of an NDIS Participant, and support, carer, guardian or a family member of a person who is a NDIS participant. For the purposes of the report, we have grouped these cohorts together and refer to them collectively as 'participants.' This cohort made up 73% of all respondents.

The second section was directed to workers and providers. This section was targeted to providers, sole traders and independent workers, and organisations that do not deliver NDIS services. This cohort made up 27% of all respondents.

The NDIS Commission also engaged the Council for Intellectual Disability to translate the survey into an Easy Read version. Two participants submitted Easy Read versions of the survey.

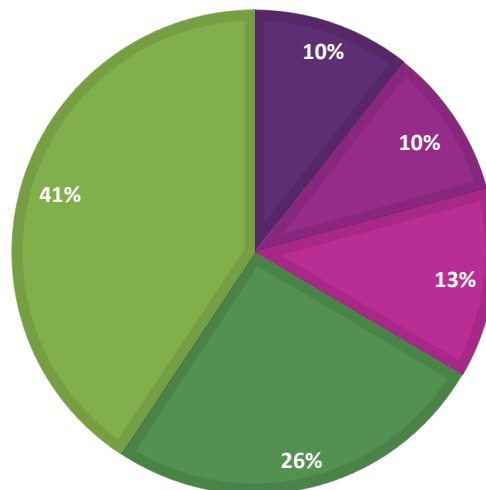
Most respondents (72%) to the online survey were from NDIS participants or their supporters.

Type of Respondent	Number	% Respondents
NDIS Participant	131	36%
Support, Carer for Participant	148	32%
Worker, Sole Trader	60	15%
NDIS Provider	31	8%
Advocate of Participant	15	4%
Government Organisation / NGO	15	4%
Advocate of Organisation	5	1%
Applying to be an NDIS Participant	3	<1%
Grand Total	408	100%

Most participants who completed the survey had five or more providers.

Number of providers participants engage with

■ 1 Provider ■ 2 Provider ■ 3 Provider ■ 4 Provider ■ 5 or more Providers



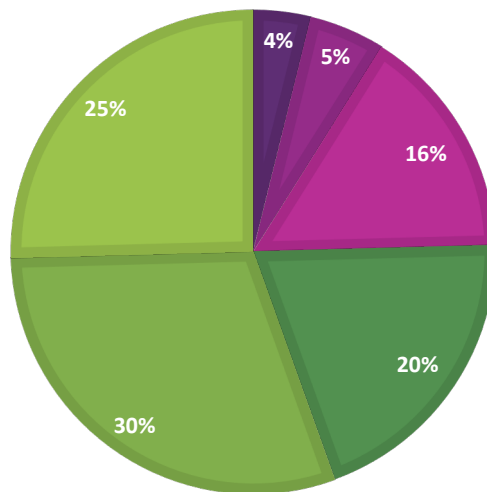
Most participants who completed the survey had plan managed or self-managed plans.

Plan Management Type	Number of Participants respondents	% Participants
Plan Managed	100	42%
Self-Managed	87	37%
Agency Managed	8	3%
Mixed Management	34	14%
Management Type Not Recorded	6	3%

Most participants who completed the survey had received services from their current providers for three or more years.

Length of time participants had received services

■ Less than 6 months ■ 6 months - 1 year ■ 1 - 2 years ■ 2 - 3 years ■ 3 - 5 years ■ 5 years or more



Further demographics and survey responses are provided in our [data report](#).

Interviews

If participants were not comfortable using the survey or were unable to participate in a focus group then they were provided an option to request a one-on-one interview with the NDIS Commission. Two people had in-depth interviews detailing their views and sharing their experiences.

What We Have Heard - Key Insights

The NDIS was designed to enhance the lives of people with disability and amplify their rights in accordance with the UN Convention of the Rights of People with Disability (CRPD). While the NDIS has been in operation for a decade and has enacted a shift to consumer independence and consumer driven markets to elevate quality, there is still work to be done.

Consultations identify that the provision of quality support is a complex process influenced by multiple interrelated factors. These factors included the individualised participant experience and definition of quality; exercising choice and control; and the right to dignity of risk.

Quality Workers: Quality workforces are about the right attitudes, training and reflective practice

Participants shared the importance of worker's behaviours and attitudes in ensuring the right fit. Participants shared with us the skills and qualifications they felt were needed to deliver safe, quality supports and services. Participants told us that they highly value the quality of their relationships with workers.

For many participants and their supports quality meant workers genuinely investing in a participant's goals and approaching participants through a rights based lens, understanding their role properly, and providing participants with the support they need in a reliable and respectful way. Participants shared that having culturally responsive workers was fundamental to quality support, feeling understood and valued.

Participants were clear that workers should be appropriately trained, skilled in a range of communication methods, work as a team in a strong positive culture, respect choice and control, be honest, caring, and empower the participant. Many participants also shared the importance that either previous experience with their disability type or personal lived experience played in uplifting quality.

To read more about what was said about quality workers, read the detailed insight report [here](#).

Quality Providers: Provider quality is about a culture of continuous improvement and values

While participants often expressed a desire for better regulation of NDIS providers and minimum standards that may be provided through a registration and audit process, some participants did not find that the current process was ensuring that registration guaranteed high quality services.

Participants shared that they gravitate to services that align more closely with their individual needs and values. Consultation showed us that providers are eager to improve on the quality of their supports and services, requesting constructive feedback from the NDIS Commission. There are a number of distinctive features of what constitutes a 'quality organisation' that emerged from the consultations. These features directly linked to empowering participants.

Participants told us they consider good providers to:

- Have sound governance processes in place, care about more than money, and create a positive organisation culture. This includes being communicative, transparent with information and decisions, and creating opportunities for meaningful feedback;
- Be action orientated, follow through with what they say, and make sure the participant's needs come first. This included being responsive to individual cultural needs; and

- Be flexible and recognise the need for supporting participants with social activities to promote independence.

To read more about what was said about quality providers, read the detailed insight report [here](#).

Safety and Engaging Services: Safety is about knowing and upholding human rights

Participants let us know that safety meant having a safe home, being heard, feeling comfortable to make complaints, being seen as a whole person, and having needs met and respected. Participants expressed that feeling safe is something that everyone is entitled to, and everyone should feel safe both at home and in the community. Participants also shared that safety is not simply about physical safety but about having a trusting positive relationship with staff.

For participants deciding whether to engage a service was often about the right 'fit'. They described their individual approaches to choosing a provider, encompassing strategies such as meet and greets, first shifts, ongoing assessments, and raising concerns.

Participants told us how not having their rights upheld or being treated unequally by workers led to feeling unsafe. Participants shared that not being informed of their rights and choices can lead to an increased risk of abuse.

Many participants, their families and supporters reported that they didn't know much about the NDIS Commission, their rights as NDIS participants, how to advocate for better quality services and supports and how the NDIS Commission can support them. Participants are clear that they want greater accountability on providers. This includes more transparency about regulatory activities, including audits and meeting standards.

To read more about what was said about safety, read the detailed insight report [here](#).

Safety and the Complaints Process: Knowing how to navigate the system makes me feel safer.

Many participants shared not being aware of their rights or the existence of the NDIS Commission's complaints process. Participants felt complaints processes needed to be more personable, with clearer information on the process and expectations. Participants described complaint processes as not being participant friendly, often quite legalised and requiring a level of specific knowledge, which discouraged them from utilising it.

Participants also wanted greater consultation and feedback on complaints with many detailing experiences of feeling kept in the dark about the process. Participants shared struggling to engage in the process if they could not see positive outcomes or if they were not kept informed about the progress of their complaints.

Participants spoke to us about needing the necessary supports to engage effectively. Whether this was advocacy services, family supports, or a trusted individual who was able to help them navigate the complaints process. For some participants, the act of complaining can be perceived as divisive, potentially straining relationships within support networks or community groups.

To read more about what was said about complaints, read the detailed insight report [here](#).

Consumer Information: The more I know, the more empowered I am.

Participants told us about the need for a deeper understanding of service providers beyond just the services they offer. Participants told us that they did not have enough transparency around the NDIS planning process or enough information to make informed decisions about services when

interacting with providers. Participants shared they had trouble when engaging services and being able to comprehend the information they were given.

Participants told us they do not just want information—they also seek guidance. We learned that participants primarily use recommendations and trusted networks to help inform their choice in providers and workers. Recommendations from people with lived experience and family connections were highly valued. Peer recommendations and experiences of those who work in the sector, including current workers or support coordinators, were highly regarded.

Participants are highly in favour of implementing new systems that recognised the quality and safety of the service to help inform choice. They want access to better online systems to find providers and information about services, including geographic location, services offered, participant reviews, staff qualifications and training/specialty.

Providers also acknowledged their responsibility to provide information to participants as consumers as part of service delivery, although felt they did not always have the right level of information available.

To read more about what was said about information, read the detailed insight report [here](#).

Consumer Information: Exercising choice is important to me

Participants reported that more competition in the market did not automatically translate into more choice and control. Participants felt that the newer providers were often unfamiliar with the nuances of the NDIS market. Participants felt that smaller providers take a more tailored, participant centred approach to service delivery. While independent workers, engaged directly by participants, were not always reliable they can provide participants greater value for money, and more choice and control – particularly in aligning values and experience to the participants' needs.

Some participants identified that there is a noticeable difference in pricing for comparable services when purchasing as an NDIS support and therefore they do not get good value for money. Many participants shared they felt unsafe or uncomfortable with the lack of transparency and communication about the prices providers are charging.

Participants shared their experiences of limited availability of service providers for specific complex needs. In areas with thin markets, such as remote and regional locations, critical workforce shortages often meant participants knew they were not receiving quality supports but felt they did not have other options and therefore had limited choice.

To read more about what was said about choice, read the detailed insight report [here](#).

Terms and Definitions

Agency-managed participant: A participant whose NDIS funding is managed by the NDIA. Participants who choose to be Agency-Managed can only access supports and services from registered NDIS providers.

CALD: Refers to any person or group of people that are culturally and linguistically diverse.

Choice and control: A participant has the right to make their own decisions about what is important to them and to decide how they would like to receive their supports and who from.

Complaint: telling the NDIS Commission if you are unhappy with or have a concern about your current NDIS supports or services.

Confidence: a high level of trust. For example, you are confident your provider gives you correct information.

Consumer: see “participant”

Demographic information: Data about the features or characteristics that define an individual or group. For the purpose of the Own Motion Inquiry, this includes data such as location, age and disability type.

Dignity of Risk: is the right to make decisions about yourself and your supports including choosing to take risks.

Empowered: people having power and control over their own lives and confidence to make a decision.

Information: Knowledge provided to you or that you look for in relation to NDIS Supports.

Informed decision-making: have all the information and facts available related to the decision topic

Knowledge: Facts, truths, information provided to you or that you look for.

LGBTQIA+: Refers to a person’s sexual orientation and/or gender identity and is an abbreviation for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (or questioning), intersex, and asexual (or allies), and more.

Market: A collection of providers offering products and services to NDIS participants. Also known as NDIS Market.

Misinformation: False or wrong information about the NDIS or NDIS services that is spread by accident or on purpose.

NDIS Market: The NDIS Market is the collective term for all Providers and Services available to NDIS Participants to purchase using their NDIS Plan funding.

NDIS participants: People with disability who receive NDIS funding to access services and supports from registered and unregistered NDIS providers.

Participant: A person who meets the NDIS access requirements.

Peak body: An organisation which represents organisations and members of the community in the disability sector.

Plan-managed participant: A participant whose NDIS Plan is managed by a provider who is registered with the NDIS Commission to deliver Plan Management. Participants who choose a plan management provider can access supports and services from both registered and non-registered providers for most supports.

Registered NDIS provider: A registered NDIS provider is a person or organisation that is registered with the NDIS Commission in accordance with section 73E of the National Disability Insurance Scheme Act 2013. NDIS providers must be registered to deliver some kinds of supports (e.g. implementing regulated restrictive practices in a behaviour support plan). NDIS Providers must be registered to deliver NDIS funded supports and services to participants in the NDIS whose NDIS plan is managed by the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA), See “Agency-Managed Participants”.

Registration Process: Registration of NDIS providers is a process that aims to ensure the provision of safe and quality services by requiring providers meet quality and competency standards and engage in additional safeguarding practices such as reportable incidents. These standards are proportionate to the risk associated with the type of service delivery and the scale of the provider.

Registration status: Indicates if an NDIS provider is registered or unregistered. See also: ‘Registered NDIS provider’ and ‘Unregistered NDIS provider’.

Safeguards: An appropriate measure or measures taken to protect participants from unnecessary risks or harm.

Self-managed participant: A participant that manages their own NDIS funding either fully or in part. Participants who choose self-management can access supports and services from both registered and non-registered providers for most supports.

Service types: Refers to groupings by type of services and supports delivered to participants. These are:

- Support at home: such as personal care, meal preparation assistance, medication and/or skill development to increase independence with daily life activities
- Household tasks: such as lawn/yard maintenance, gardening and/or cleaning
- Community access activities: such as travel/transport, appointments, shopping, social activities
- Therapeutic support: such as Occupational Therapy, Speech Therapy, Psychology etc.
- Behaviour Support: such as implementing behaviour support strategies"

Sharp practices: a range of practices involving unfair treatment or taking advantage of people.

Unregistered NDIS provider: A provider of NDIS supports and services that has not been registered with the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission.

Worker screening: The NDIS Worker Screening Check is an assessment of whether a person who works, or seeks to work, with people with disability poses a risk to them.

Worker/Support Worker: An individual who deliver’s NDIS funded supports or services to an NDIS participant. A worker may be a NDIS Provider or employed or engaged by a NDIS Provider (registered or unregistered). ‘Workers’ includes but is not limited to employees, sub-contractors, independent contractors and sole traders.