

THE NATIONAL DISABILITY INSURANCE SCHEME IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

The announcement three weeks ago about the plan for the roll out of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) in Western Australia has generated a great deal of interest and enthusiasm.

There has been a steady stream of positive feedback from people with disability, families, carers and service providers about the decision to use a locally delivered model and the certainty of knowing how the NDIS will roll out over the next three years. Individuals and families are now aware that they will have access to the NDIS and that it will be delivered locally within their community. They also know when the Scheme will become available in their area.

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with answers to some of the questions that have been raised during the past three weeks about the WA NDIS and to let you know about the information and engagement being used to ensure that individuals, families and organisations are informed about the future of the NDIS in WA.

Comparative evaluation

People have been asking about the independent evaluation of the two NDIS trials in WA and when the findings of this evaluation will be released.

The final evaluation report was completed in September 2016 and copies were provided to the responsible State and Commonwealth Ministers. The State Minister for Disability Services has publicly announced that she approves the release of the report and is now awaiting agreement from the Commonwealth to similarly agree the release. The comparative evaluation concludes very clearly that the WA NDIS is a better fit-for-purpose delivery model for Western Australia than the National Disability Insurance Agency model being trialled in the Perth Hills. I can assure you that the report very much supports the decision for a locally delivered model in WA.

Importantly, the independent evaluation reinforces what we have heard over the past two and a half years from people participating in the WA NDIS trial, their families, carers and service providers. The message has been clear, while the WA NDIS needs to continue to evolve and be refined based on the experiences of those that it supports, flexible local decision-making and relationship based whole-of-life planning should continue to drive how the Scheme rolls out in WA.

Access to Local Coordinators

One of the questions we continue to be asked by people with disability and families is 'Will I be able to stay connected with a Local Coordinator when I join the WA NDIS?' This is often followed by a second question 'Will my Local Coordinator be able to undertake the tasks required in the WA NDIS?' The answer to both of these questions is yes.

The WA NDIS is a local, relationship-based model that enables individuals and families to interact with people based in their local community to the extent they wish – rather than relying on 1800 number phone-contact, over-the-phone planning, or web site information.

The agreement between the State Government and the Commonwealth includes funding to operate regional teams across WA. Each regional team will comprise Local Coordinators, allied health consultants, technical support staff, complex needs coordinators, at a level that will ensure that people with disability, families and carers can get the support they seek when needed.

We are also designing a range of strategies that will ensure a high level of state-wide consistency and comparability in the approach and decision-making of Local Coordinators. This will be critically important for ensuring effective implementation of the Scheme across the State into the future.

ICT system

Questions have been asked about the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) system that will be used to support the WA NDIS, including the cost, 'user-friendliness' and the timeline for development.

WA has learnt a great deal from the development and implementation of the National Disability Insurance Agency ICT system. A system that was built on a platform shared by other Commonwealth agencies such as Centrelink, Medicare and the Australian Taxation Office. This integration with other large service systems has led to significant challenges for those engaging with the NDIS nationally. People have struggled to use the participant portal located on 'MyGov' and provider claiming and payment has suffered.

So as to avoid the same pitfalls, the WA NDIS ICT system will be designed and built specifically to meet the requirements of the people accessing WA NDIS. It will incorporate all of the features required to facilitate ease of use and accessibility by individuals, families and service provider organisations.

The cost of the ICT system will be met primarily by the State Government, however, the Commonwealth will be making a financial contribution to facilitate data sharing to support national consistency across the country. The funding for the ICT system will be completely separate to the support funding for the WA NDIS and will not impact on the funds available for support packages.

We will be taking a partnership approach to ensure that the ICT system meets the needs of individuals, families and service provider organisations. It is likely to take 18 months to design, build, test and activate the new system. In the meantime we will continue to use the existing WA NDIS ICT systems built for the trials, refining them wherever possible based on feedback.

Contracts with service providers

Some commentators have been claiming that the WA NDIS will be inferior to the NDIA because it will operate on the basis of contracts between the WA NDIS and service provider organisations – rather than having a direct contractual relationship between the eligible individual and the service provider. This is not the case. While the WA NDIS will maintain a formal agreement with registered service provider organisations, this is to facilitate quality

assurance, governance requirements and peace of mind for the person with a disability, their family or carer. The 'relationship' still remains between the eligible individual and their chosen service provider.

Block funding

During the past three years we have been working in partnership with disability service organisations to transition the last remaining block funding grants to individualised funding arrangements. This transition will continue during 2017 to position the sector for the full scheme roll out of the WA NDIS.

Complaints and Appeals process

The agreement between the State Government and the Commonwealth requires that people who are eligible for the NDIS in Western Australia will have access to the Commonwealth's Administrative Appeals Tribunal. This is one of many strategies that will foster national consistency.

Self-management

One of the characteristics of the WA NDIS trial has been the relatively high number of people choosing to self-manage or share-manage their own supports. We are committed to building the capacity of people wanting to self-manage, and to providing information and practical assistance to individuals and families who are seeking this option.

The WA NDIS self-management policy and pricing framework is currently being developed. We have asked Western Australia's Individualised Services (WAiS) to facilitate a consultation on the draft and we look forward to finalising the policy upon receipt of this feedback from WAiS.

Information and engagement strategies

Once the State and Commonwealth governments announced the signing of the agreement for the state-wide transition to the NDIS in WA, we immediately took steps to post the Bilateral Agreement on our website.

Since that time we have initiated a comprehensive program of information and engagement to build awareness and knowledge about the WA NDIS, and to answer specific questions about the roll out arrangements. Strategies include:

- Community information sessions across the Perth metropolitan area (These sessions have been extremely well attended and so we are extending a rolling program of information sessions throughout March and April)
- Community information sessions planned in all regional areas – commencing early March
- Forums for Chief Executive Officers of Disability Sector Organisations
- A sector Board forum
- Website materials (regularly updated based on feedback and questions received)
- WA NDIS information packs
- Dissemination of information and materials via the Commission's State-wide Local Coordination network
- Ongoing Presentations to organisations, other government agencies and local groups

We are working in partnership with advocacy organisations to design and plan a major WA NDIS community event in May 2017. People with disability, their families and carers will be supported to participate in this independently facilitated event to further explore the engagement processes needed to ensure that the WA NDIS delivery model continues to evolve to meet the needs of the Western Australian community.

We would also welcome any suggestions that you may have about additional strategies that we could use to disseminate accurate information about the WA NDIS. You can contact us with your suggestions via WANDIS@dsc.wa.gov.au

We look forward to working in partnership with people with disabilities, families, carers and service providers and advocates in delivering the NDIS in the months and years ahead.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'R. Chalmers', is positioned above the typed name.

Dr Ron Chalmers
Director General
Disability Services Commission

1 March 2017