

QAMH Summary of the Final Report from the Joint Standing Committee on the NDIS: *Current Scheme Implementation and Forecasting for the NDIS*

On 31 March 2022, the Joint Standing Committee on the NDIS (the Committee) tabled its report ***Current Scheme Implementation and Forecasting for the NDIS***. This followed a broad consultation process including 92 public submissions and three public hearings. QAMH contributed by providing a submission which you can read [here](#).

The report's recommendations are summarised below. Disappointingly, they consist almost entirely of recommendations to the Australian Government to commission independent research for further consideration. When one considers the magnitude of evidence the disability sector has provided since the scheme's inception, including submissions to the NDIS Joint Standing Committee, the Disability Royal Commission, and other consultative processes with the NDIA and the Department of Social Services, this failure to implement any real reform is indeed frustrating. In its defence, the Committee has cited broad ranging terms of reference, the complexity of the issues involved, and the timing of the inquiry in the closing months of the 46th Parliament as justification for not putting forward any tangible solutions. We understand that the wheels of government turn slowly, but we do hope the 47th Parliament will finally enact the necessary reforms to make sure the scheme achieves its original vision.

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, through the NDIA or another appropriate body, commission independent research into:

- **The extent and adequacy of support for people with disability outside the NDIS;**
- **Best practice early intervention, including supports for children not eligible for the scheme**
- **Effective market stewardship; and**
- **Interfaces with mainstream services.**

QAMH was pleased to see the Committee acknowledge the inadequacy of supports available to people with disability outside of the NDIS and the many barriers to accessing existing community supports. This was not only highlighted in the 2020 Productivity Commission's Mental Health Inquiry, but has also featured consistently in QAMH's advocacy work. QAMH supports further exploration of how to provide capacity-building supports for people outside the NDIS to improve their outcomes, and urges the Committee to make implementation of these measures a matter of priority in the next Parliament.

We support the Committee's focus on strengthening market stewardship, especially in relation to thin markets, which we know has been a concern for our members in rural and regional areas.

We also support the acknowledgement of persisting issues around the interface between the NDIS and mainstream services. We have been calling for more cross-sector and cross-jurisdictional

coordination and integration in our submissions. We believe this is not an intractable problem, but simply one that needs the will of governments to enact real reform.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that, as part of its ongoing work to understand NDIS costs, Disability Ministers commission independent research in the following areas:

- **The drivers underpinning growth in participant numbers;**
- **The underlying causes of projected increases of the cost of plans;**
- **The impact of NDIA management approaches; and**
- **The effectiveness of current capacity building supports.**

QAMH supports this recommendation. There has been a lot of commentary about ‘cost blowouts’ and questioning the longterm sustainability of the NDIS, without much detailed analysis of the factors at play. QAMH feels that there is a real need to understand the drivers underpinning this growth (eg. The increasing numbers of children entering and staying in the scheme, the fact that initial projections did not include supports for people over the age of 65 years, and increasing numbers of people with psychosocial disability are having to access the scheme because of the lack of mental health supports outside the NDIS). We look forward to hearing from the next Parliament about their research into the scheme’s cost inputs.

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that all commissioned independent research into the NDIS should, to the greatest extent possible, be published in full.

QAMH strongly supports this recommendation. Concerns have been raised that claims by the NDIA of financial unsustainability of the scheme have been based on actuarial modelling not fully available to the public. Publishing future reports in full will assist broader understanding of the basis for the government's concerns about projected costs and promote transparency in the scheme.

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that the NDIA or other relevant government body commission independent accessible translations or easy-read versions of all published independent research into the NDIS.

QAMH strongly welcomes this recommendation. The NDIA publishes a great deal of data related to the scheme, especially the detailed information contained in its quarterly reports, however there is a need to make this data accessible to both providers and participants. Plain English, easy to read versions will assist with this goal.

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that the NDIA, with the Scheme Actuary and Board, review methods and approaches to managing the financial sustainability of the scheme to ensure appropriate emphasis is placed on measuring the benefits of the scheme and promoting these benefits to the broader Australian community.

QAMH supports the Committee's recommendation to emphasise the benefits of the NDIS as opposed to a narrow focus on the increasing financial costs of supporting participants. The latter approach risks framing both the expenditure and participants themselves as a burden to taxpayers. Instead, in keeping with the spirit of the scheme, expenditure on the NDIS should be viewed as an investment by providing people with disability with the support they need to fully participate in and contribute to the Australian community. Reframing this conversation in terms of cost-benefit analysis will demonstrate the value of investing in people with disability, which actually leads to an offsetting of costs in other areas of government. However such an approach needs to ensure the right kind of data is captured to measure and track the social and economic successes of the scheme – something which the Committee has recommended.

Recommendation 6

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government and Disability Ministers commission independent research into the broader contribution of the NDIS to the Australian economy, including research into measuring the economic benefits of the scheme.

See comments for Recommendation 5.

Trust and Equity

Finally, there was a lot of commentary in the report on the importance of trust, which plays a crucial role in ensuring the effective operation of the NDIS. The attempt to introduce independent assessments and the constant focus on unsustainable cost projections were seen as corroding trust between the NDIA and participants. Ms Jean Cotchin, Campaign Manager from Every Australian Counts, was quoted in the report as saying it has made participants "feel like they are not valued, that they are too expensive, too difficult". QAMH agrees with the Committee's claim of the "paramount importance" of rebuilding trust between the disability community and the NDIA however we would have preferred the Committee to provide tangible solutions to addressing this problem.

The Committee also documented at length evidence from participants and providers that some groups of people with disability are not benefitting equally from the NDIS. In particular there were concerns that payments across the scheme appeared to differ by socio-economic areas and levels of remoteness. Unfortunately, while documenting these concerns, the Committee has failed to provide any recommendations on how to address these inequities.