

Supporting people with complex and high needs

The NDIS challenge

- Alliance20 members have extensive experience supporting people with complex and high needs.
- People with complex and high needs have extremely varied support requirements depending on their individual characteristics and circumstances.
- The requirements of people with complex and high needs and associated supports can change suddenly, presenting an array of additional and/or new significant challenges for their families and service providers.
- A significant number of people with disability with high and complex needs report that they are facing difficulties in having appropriate individual plans developed and are therefore not receiving the services and level of funding they need.
- There is often inadequate pricing for the provision of highly specialised services.
- Many participants with complex behaviours and high support needs who have had numerous interactions with the justice or health systems often do not receive necessary NDIS support and funding.
- A highly skilled workforce is essential to assist people with complex and high needs.
- The NDIS suffers from an inconsistent application and definition of what constitutes and characterises a “complex” or “high support needs” client.
- State governments often provided services for people with extremely high and complex needs through specialised interventions, often as a ‘provider as last resort’. This included coordination of services from different agencies. State governments are largely withdrawing these supports.

Impacts of this NDIS challenge

Impacts on participants and people with disabilities

- Plans and NDIS processes limit the flexibility required to access a range of mainstream and NDIS funded supports, which limits good outcomes and choice and control.
- Assessment tools and planning processes are neither designed nor structured to accurately identify the requirements of complex and high needs clients, therefore participants cannot receive the support they need
- Plans are underfunded and do not address participants’ needs.
- No clear ways to engage with health, justice and other agencies in developing plans.
- No ‘provider of last resort’, which means that if complex or high needs clients situation changes, there is limited support available.
- New staff have insufficient time to build trust and rapport with high support needs clients due to the current limitation of six hours of weekday support for ‘shadow shifts’.

Impacts on Service Providers

- Current funding arrangements do not support providers to establish a skilled workforce.
- Many plans do not adequately provide for the services and hours that participants with complex and high needs require.
- Often when complex clients request a review of their plan and supports, and it is not approved, there is limited reasoning or justification for this.

- Plan reviews can take over six months which, for people with complex and high needs, is unreasonably lengthy.
- When complex and high needs participants' supports sit outside the standard or more generalised pricing structures, it is unclear how to appropriately price these supports
- The current arrangements do not enable providers to bring together different funding line items in a flexible and considered manner.
- Qualified workers for people with complex and high needs are underfunded resulting in service providers covering the 'gap' costs, which reduces resources for other participant supports.
- Current arrangements have an impact on providers that support people who need specialised behaviour supports and the use of restricted practices. These requests for support are often provider led rather than participant led.
- To meet new regulatory requirements introduced by the NDIS Q&S Commission, funding quotes need to include a specialist behaviour support practitioner, funding for staff training and funding to support the restricted practices panels which need to assess and grant permission for the use of the restricted practices.
- It is unrealistic for participants and planners to be able to allocate adequate funding packages to this without a full and holistic picture of the tiered services required to deliver these supports.

Impacts on the service sector and market

- There is a shortage of experienced and qualified support staff being trained and available for people with complex and high needs.
- Areas with few participants and/or service providers, or 'thin markets', are home to a significant number of complex and high support clients.
- There are only limited supportive transition pathways from jail to mainstream society

Alliance20's Proposed Solutions

Consideration to be given to:

- 1) Greater investment in training and upskilling the current and future workforce, including NDIS Planners and Local Area Coordinators.
Increasing 'Shadow Shift' paid hours from six to fifteen.
- 2) Developing and applying a consistent definition of 'complex' and 'high support needs' clients.
- 3) Investing in and developing specialised supports in 'thin markets'.
- 4) Strengthening existing pathways for complex and high support needs clients to access mainstream supports by identifying barriers between NDIS and mainstream supports, especially for clients that interact with the justice system.
- 5) Developing assessment tools and processes that accurately assesses the needs of complex and high support needs clients.
- 6) Reviewing plans of current complex and high support needs clients to ensure they are receiving the right level of funding, supports and access to mainstream supports. Plans and reviews of plans should provide clearly articulated reasons for decisions about supports especially when rejected.
- 7) The NDIA can engage with Alliance20 members and the disability service sector to develop 'provider of last resort' services.