

Building a Better NDIS Through Greater Transparency and Communication

Alliance20 believes a dynamic provider market will maximise opportunities for participants to exercise choice and control. A mature market requires bringing participants and providers on the journey to fully establish the NDIS. The NDIA can achieve this with consistent, systematic and transparent engagement and communication processes.

The NDIA's Corporate Plan commits the Agency to engage with participants and providers. However, the communication and engagement to date highlights the need to urgently focus on implementing this commitment.

Alliance20 has identified key initiatives that can significantly contribute to focused and productive engagement and communication that leads to action.

BACKGROUND

The NDIA's *2018 Pathway Review*¹ acknowledged the challenges that service providers face when interacting with the NDIA. These include deficits in:

- notifying the service providers on important changes that occur
- clarity on policies
- communicating and providing the opportunity to service providers to contribute their expertise in critical decision-making.

Alliance20 does acknowledge that the NDIA has made some improvements since this review with the introduction of better communication process when dealing with individual providers on a day to day basis.

Notwithstanding these improvements, in March 2019 the Joint Standing Committee on the NDIS² noted that the NDIA had established sector reference groups, which provide advice and suggestions to the NDIA on a number of topics, including mental health, autism and Special Disability Accommodation. However, the Committee found that these groups appeared to meet far too infrequently to provide a genuine platform for collaboration and developing solutions.

The Committee also found that the NDIA should more systematically utilise the expertise of the sector to inform the development and review of its operations and guidelines to significantly assist in developing initiatives to strengthen the effectiveness of the Scheme.

Similarly, Alliance20 believes that collaboration with the disability sector to date has been extremely limited and significant opportunities remain for more collaborative and dynamic engagement between the NDIA, participants and providers. This could in part be addressed by the NDIA devising a program of communication that is transparent and takes a 'no surprises' approach with regards to important changes and key initiatives.

¹[NDIS Pathway review report released web page](#)

²[Joint Standing Committee on the National Disability Insurance Scheme - Progress Report March 2019](#)

As acknowledged the NDIA is addressing better engagement with providers with the provision of updates and 'Hot Topics' within the Provider Toolkit and the establishment of various stakeholder and reference groups.

It is further acknowledged that the NDIA is addressing the issue in the NDIS Corporate Plan 2019-23. Aspiration 3 of the NDIA is seeking to establish:

“A strong and engaged stakeholder sector that genuinely collaborates and contributes to the delivery of the Scheme, with confidence in the NDIA” (p30)

CURRENT ISSUES

Alliance20 is ready to collaborate with the NDIA and continue this work to address the issues below:

- The NDIA's responsibilities and activities to meet its market stewardship accountabilities are unclear. This causes confusion for stakeholders when attempting to engage with the NDIA.
- There is no published timetable of development or reform activities with clear points and processes whereby stakeholders can provide input and feedback.
- There is a lack of a consistent engagement, information sharing and communication by the NDIA which serves as a barrier for participants and providers.
- Inadequacy of reliable data sets to support investment decisions, is impeding providers to make informed business decisions when planning for market expansion and workforce development. This is accentuated in regional and remote areas.
- Sector knowledge, expertise and on the ground experience is not being utilised by the NDIA to inform the NDIS to its full potential.
- An Alliance20 survey conducted in August 2019 highlighted that over 80 percent of members have concerns with how the NDIA manages relationships with providers.

IMPACT STATEMENT

IMPACT FOR PARTICIPANTS

- Better communication on the part of NDIA is all about providing participants with greater access to reliable information to enable choice and control in their decision-making, especially as the scheme has reaches full national roll out.

IMPACT FOR PROVIDERS

- Currently, providers are severely limited in being able to plan and invest in respect of the provision of additional services or in new service delivery systems and mechanisms.
- There is limited opportunity for the NDIA and the disability service sector to collaboratively devise proactive and sustainable solutions for a variety of pressing issues such as employment, service provider travel and participant transport, and adequate service provision in rural and remote areas.
- Constant communication between the NDIA and the service providers will encourage connectedness, confidence and accountability in the workforce; thereby enabling service providers to retain and increase experts and specialists.
- Providers are often unreasonably required to explain changes to policies and provisions of the NDIS which relate to the direct relationship between the NDIA and Planners/LACs and participants.

IMPACT FOR THE MARKET

- Key bodies such as the Productivity Commission and the Joint Standing Committee on the National Disability Insurance Scheme Public Inquiry have called for a more robust 'market stewardship' process.
- Only by defining the role and activities under a market Stewardship strategy and undertaking those activities with real planning, engagement and collaboration, paired with clear communication with all stakeholders, will a vibrant market be established.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

Consideration could be given to the following ideas:

1. Enhancing the capability of the Agency to provide transparent information, engagement strategies and communication avenues between the NDIA and key sector groups, such as Alliance20. This presents an opportunity to build meaningful engagement to test, scope and shape new initiatives, and for groups to support the agency in key decision-making to ensure a flawless roll-out of the scheme in the next 3-5 years.
2. Partner with Alliance20 as a communication advocate. Alliance20 has expertise and that can significantly contribute to focused and productive engagement and communication with the sector. This could be in the form of a *Consultation Charter* - NDIS and providers could agree on a charter to create a 'no surprises' relationship.
3. The establishment of a simple timetable/project management system that clearly shows the list of projects/issues being addressed, the status of the project, the timeframe allocated and which stakeholders are engaged, together with periodic updates, for example, every three-months.
4. Empowering NDIS Relationship managers with information and support so that they can be more consistent, productive, and informed in their engagement.
5. Utilise the data sets from the NDIA to devise more focused, innovative, feasible and evidence-based solutions to address specific market needs.
6. Formally review the current sector reference groups and engagement processes to ensure they:
 - (a) address all relevant issues needed to fully establish the NDIS
 - (b) are representative of all stakeholders
 - (c) are transparent in their operations
 - (d) specifically support the published timetable and project plans detailed in (2) above
 - (e) ensure that the expertise and experience of all facets of the broad sector contribute to the NDIA's work
7. Underpin these activities with guiding principles that ensure true collaboration with participants and providers.