

## IMPROVING NDIS THERAPY SERVICES

Therapy supports for people with disability is fundamental to promoting independence and quality of life. For many participants they are a central element in ensuring successful NDIS outcomes. Inadequate expertise in assessing the therapy needs of participants, no functional instruments in use, pricing limitations, lack of investment in higher skills development for therapists and little or no clarity on health versus NDIS responsibilities remains to be the most critical issues pertaining to therapy related services.

Alliance20 wants to ensure that the benefits from effective therapy services can be fully utilised to achieve long term life improvements for participants. Alliance20 has suggested solutions ranging from addressing the interface with health responsibilities through to changes to pricing and planning arrangements.

### BACKGROUND

The provision of therapy supports for people with disability is fundamental to promoting independence and quality of life. Many people with disability have complex needs that require specialist interventions and supports. Therapy will often be a central element in successful NDIS outcomes. These services can unlock the potential of participants and be an investment in long term life improvements.

Certain therapy related support requests are often not approved on the grounds that they are considered health/medical related supports, rather than disability needs. However, this issue was given due notice by the COAG Disability Reform Council when they held their first meeting for this year on 28th June 2019. As a result, NDIA and the department of health services have devised an initiative to provide integrated support for people with disability though the funding of disability-related health supports beginning from 1st of October 2019. This effort is expected to address major gaps that people with complex disabilities experience when trying to access essential supports including the specialised therapy services.

### CURRENT ISSUES

- There is an apparent lack of expertise and technical capacity in assessing therapy needs by planners and Local Area Coordinators (LACs). No functional instruments are in use and results in uncertainty and lack of clarity of reasonable and necessary.
- Participants with complex specialised therapy needs residing in regional, remote and rural areas do not have access to therapy specialists due to the lack of specialised service providers available in the areas.
- The disability therapy workforce needs further post graduate investment, through training and clinical supervision, to respond safely to a range of very complex care needs or issues, such as:
  - specialised assistive technology and equipment,
  - dysphagia and saliva management,

- pain management,
  - sleep management,
  - spasticity management and mobility issues,
  - cognition and learning,
  - complex communication needs,
  - complex mealtime management,
  - behaviour management,
  - emotional wellbeing and mental health issues,
  - child protection and/or family violence issues,
  - abuse and assault issues, and
  - Transdisciplinary early childhood intervention.
- Current policy is that maintenance therapy is to be carried out by personnel other than therapists. There are no agreed guidelines on this approach.
  - Various issues pertaining to accessing, funding and receiving the essential assistive technology cause participants not to benefit fully from the specialised therapy service supports included in their plans because therapy and AT is part and parcel of the overall wellbeing of the participants.

## **IMPACT STATEMENT**

### **IMPACT FOR PARTICIPANTS**

- Limited access to specialist planning and support services.
- NDIS plans that do not adequately reflect support needs.
- Confusion about what is considered health related therapy services and what is available through an individual NDIS plan.
- Deterioration of function, independence and/or health.
- Increased potential for increased caring responsibilities' on to parents or carers if needs are not addressed adequately or in a timely manner.

### **IMPACT FOR PROVIDERS**

- Inability to remain viable under this funding model.
- Despite a large number of therapy providers registered to deliver services, a high percentage are sole traders that have limited capacity for scale and/or have limited specialist knowledge in disability support.
- These negative impacts are magnified in rural and remote regions.

### **IMPACT FOR THE MARKET**

- Specialist providers are exiting the market due to funding constraints.
- Increased costs to scheme over time if therapy supports are not adequately identified or funded.

## PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

Consideration could be given to:

- Integrated care plans for people with complex needs (e.g. people living in shared supporting living) – explore opportunities for people to have funding parcels or bundles supported by health services and NDIS.
- Appoint specialist intermediaries to support LACs and Early Childhood Early Intervention (ECEI) Access partners with planning for complex cohorts.
- Set up a panel of specialist registered providers for independent functional assessments, using an functional instrument