

# Submission to Inquiry into the NDIS market in Queensland

Queensland Productivity  
Commission

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**AASW**

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Australian Association  
of Social Workers

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# The Australian Association of Social Workers

The Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) is the professional body representing more than 13,000 social workers throughout Australia. We set the benchmark for professional education and practice in social work, and advocate on matters of human rights, discrimination, and matters that influence people's quality of life.

## The social work profession

Social work is a tertiary qualified profession recognised internationally that pursues social justice and human rights. Social workers aim to enhance the quality of life of every member of society and empower them to develop their full potential. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility, and respect for diversity are central to the profession, and are underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities, and Indigenous knowledges. Professional social workers consider the relationship between biological, psychological, social, and cultural factors and how they influence a person's health, wellbeing and development. Social workers work with individuals, families, groups, and communities. They maintain a dual focus on improving human wellbeing; and identifying and addressing any external issues (known as systemic or structural issues) that detract from wellbeing, such as inequality, injustice, and discrimination.

## Social work and the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)

The AASW has welcomed the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). The values of 'choice and control' that underpin the NDIS are consistent with the values and principles of self-determination and empowerment that have guided the social work profession for many decades. The AASW Code of Ethics aligns closely to the Objectives and Principles of the NDIS Act<sup>1</sup> and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Because social workers focus on

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ndis.gov.au/about-us/operational-guidelines/overview-ndis-operational-guideline/overview-ndis-operational-guideline-about-ndis>

enhancing quality of life and empowering people to full social and economic inclusion, the values, qualifications, and skills that social workers bring are a perfect match with the person-centred approach of the NDIS.

Social workers are present throughout the NDIS in a variety of roles, working as individuals or in organisations. Many of our members have made, or are making, the transition to working within the NDIS. Many who have extensive experience in assessment, planning and case management with people living with multi-faceted disabilities are providing Support Coordination or Specialist Support Coordination. Social workers are also working in other roles within the NDIS including service development, psycho-social support, planning, local area co-ordinators, supervisors, and service co-ordinators.

## Our Submission

The AASW welcomes this inquiry and its broad understanding of the issues related to NDIS markets because social workers observe significant gaps persisting between the support that participants require and the services that participants are actually receiving. In this submission we would like to comment on the following recommendations:

- Recommendation 3.1: the Queensland Government should propose that the NDIA's selection, role description and training for planners and LACs include a 'coaching' role to enable participants to develop their capabilities to increase their independence.
- Recommendation 3.3: the Queensland Government should propose that the NDIA's current consultation process on support coordination be used to clarify the role of support coordination and of the various types of providers engaged in similar roles, to avoid unnecessary overlaps and gaps in services.
- Recommendation 3.4: The NDIA facilitate reallocating participants' plan budgets towards support coordination when it improves plan utilisation and participant outcomes.
- Recommendation 7: The Queensland Government should propose that the NDIA take into account the market development benefits of support coordination when considering the level of funding provided to support coordination.
- Recommendation 8: The Queensland Government should propose that the NDIA review its regulatory arrangements, to identify and remove restrictions (including regulation of pricing) on the ability of intermediary roles to evolve according to the market-driven needs of participants and providers, with appropriate safeguards.
- Recommendation 10: The Queensland Government should propose that the NDIA allow in markets where there are significant and persistent shortfalls in supply:
  - extended service agreements to be offered by participants as an incentive to providers to enter the market and/or expand supply,
  - longer duration participant plans to support the use of extended service agreements.
- Recommendation 29: The Queensland Government should propose that the NDIA's proposed Review of Support Coordination consider:

- the market for support coordination in rural and remote locations, including the availability and quality of support providers and whether there are areas of unmet demand.
- whether the increased inclusion of support coordination in the plans of rural and remote participants would be an effective and efficient means of improving plan utilisation and building capacity in rural and remote locations.
- Recommendation 31: The Queensland Government should propose that the National Disability Insurance Agency's (NDIA's) proposed Review of Support Coordination consider:
  - the market for support coordination in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, including the availability and quality of support providers and whether there are areas of unmet demand.
  - whether increased inclusion of support coordination in the plans of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants would be an effective and efficient means of improving plan utilisation and building capacity.

In addition, we also would like to provide further information for the following questions as requested by the draft report:

- the major barriers to entry into the provider market for PBSPs (Positive behaviour support plans), and how those barriers can be addressed.
- what reforms would improve the ability of providers to successfully implement PBSPs.

## Recommendations

- That the Queensland Government propose the development of a rigorous framework that includes a code of conduct to govern and support the role of Support Coordinators, Planners, and LACs.
- That in doing so, the proposed role of 'coaching' be defined, with clear guidelines regarding expectations, including pathways to further protect and strengthen the participants' rights to decision making.
- That recommendation 8 be reviewed, and the Queensland Government propose the strengthening of disclosure arrangements.
- That the Queensland government propose the First People's Disability Network Australia's 10 priorities be implemented to address disability inequity as described in their 10-point-plan.
- That the Queensland Government commence dialogue with the AASW, tertiary education institutions in Queensland, and the NDIA to design fit-for-purpose training and pathways for accreditation in order to unlock the potential of social workers in the provider market for PBSPs.
- That the Queensland Government seek clarification from the NDIA as to how the role of behavioral specialists can be better integrated into plan implementation.

- That the Queensland Government propose the alignment of the hourly rates of plan writing and implementation
- That the Queensland Government propose the establishment of a specialist plan implementation role that is filled by qualified skilled workers and be remunerated as such
- That the Queensland Government propose the increment of funding to PBSPs, in particular for participants with complex psychosocial disabilities.

## Response to the draft report's recommendations

### Recommendation 3.1: The Queensland Government should propose that the NDIA's selection, role description and training for planners and LACs include a 'coaching' role to enable participants to develop their capabilities to increase their independence.

The AASW welcomes this recommendation and further recommends that the Queensland Government propose an introduction of a cohesive code of conduct and framework for support coordinators, planners, and LACs to guide their decision-making and work. AASW members recognise that support coordinators, planners and LACs often have a considerable influence on a participant's decisions with regards to their utilisation of plans. In addition, within the business model of the NDIS there is an inherent conflict of interest that must be recognised. Consequently, the risk of inappropriate influence might arise, since there is an absence of a governing body that regulates these roles. Therefore, we recommend that a comprehensive code of conduct be introduced to the sector to ensure that people undertaking these significant roles work in alignment with the best interest of participants.

While we welcome the inclusion of a 'coaching role' for planners and LACs, the AASW is aware that there has been a lack of information regarding the proposed coaching role's expectations, remuneration, and minimum requirement of qualifications and relevant work experience. Therefore, for example, if an LAC undertakes this coaching role, they need to be allocated necessary time and manageable caseloads to effectively coach participants. We are concerned that introducing an additional role could mean that meeting the needs of the participant can be compromised, given that funding to LACs and planning has already been limited.

Moreover, the time allocation for this role should be flexible and participant-centred depending on their varying circumstances and ability to implement the recommendations from the LAC. Other relevant stakeholders should also be invited to engage in this process if required. With these measures, the coaching role can better support the individual to increase their capability and independence.

## Recommendations

- That the Queensland Government propose the development of a rigorous framework that includes a code of conduct to govern and support the role of Support Coordinators, Planners, and LACs.
- That in doing so, the proposed role of ‘coaching’ be defined, with clear guidelines regarding expectations, including pathways to further protect and strengthen the participants rights to decision making.

**Recommendation 3.3: The Queensland Government should propose that the NDIA's current consultation process on support coordination be used to clarify the role of support coordination and of the various types of providers engaged in similar roles, to avoid unnecessary overlaps and gaps in services.**

The AASW welcomes this recommendation and further proposes that a more thorough role description be developed for Support Coordinators to establish a better understanding of the expectations of the role. There needs to be clarity that ensures that only those registered as support coordinators can undertake this role. As we recommended in our original submission it is the view of the AASW that social workers are best suited to undertake this important role and that more funding hours are needed to perform the role to ensure that professional standards are met.

**Recommendation 3.4: The NDIA facilitate reallocating participants’ plan budgets towards support coordination when it improves plan utilisation and participant outcomes.**

As per the original AASW submission, we maintain that the level at which the Support Coordination and Specialist Support Coordination is currently allocated, resourced, and priced be reviewed to ensure that participants receive the professional support they need to build their capacity and achieve their optimum outcomes. It is important that the Queensland government propose stringent measures to clearly identify professional requirements of a Support Coordinator and Specialist Support Coordinator when funding the level of coordination of supports.

**Recommendation 7: The Queensland Government should propose that the NDIA take into account the market development benefits of support coordination when considering the level of funding provided to support coordination.**

The AASW welcomes the recognition of support coordination in the NDIS market. Our members recognise a growing market in independent support coordinators. While it is important to have adequate funding to those services, it is essential to implement clear professional requirements of

both support and specialist support coordinators, qualifications, and mechanisms to monitor the integrity of service delivery. This can ensure the quality delivery of services to participants.

**Recommendation 8: The Queensland Government should propose that the NDIA review its regulatory arrangements, to identify and remove restrictions (including regulation of pricing) on the ability of intermediary roles to evolve according to the market-driven needs of participants and providers, with appropriate safeguards.**

The AASW refers to our original recommendation that the NDIA commence dialogue with the AASW to streamline the process of registration for social workers to provide services within the NDIS, in recognition of their qualifications, continuing professional development requirements, higher level credentialing, and compliance with the AASW Code of Ethics.

The AASW is concerned with any move to remove safeguarding and regulatory frameworks that could result in unintended consequences such as increase in costs to participants, or reduced choice. If technology and participant preferences evolve the Planning Manager and Support Coordinator roles, then the NDIA may need to strengthen disclosure arrangements to address risks from the integration of advisory roles with providers who deliver supports. Instead of removing safeguarding frameworks, the AASW supports the strengthening of disclosure arrangements to enable more person-centred service delivery.

#### **Recommendation**

- That recommendation 8 be reviewed, and the Queensland Government propose the strengthening of disclosure arrangements.

**Recommendation 10: The Queensland Government should propose that the NDIA allow in markets where there are significant and persistent shortfalls in supply, including extended service agreements to be offered by participants as an incentive to providers to enter the market and/or expand supply, and longer duration participant plans to support the use of extended service agreements.**

While the AASW welcomes the QPC's recommendation with regards to the extension of service agreements, it is vital to ensure quality of the delivery of services that have persistent shortfalls in regional and remote areas, in particular, Specialist Support Coordination. Improving service delivery does not only require the system to be more flexible, it also requires the NDIA to develop transparent criteria regarding timeframes and supporting participants to understand their rights and entitlements to be able to make informed choices through access to education and advocacy. This could be achieved through ongoing education and information provision. AASW members told us that not all participants understand the extent of their funding, and therefore, plan under utilisation is

a common occurrence. Without inclusive strategies that focus on educating, empowering, and supporting participants to access the full extent of possible services, there will be persistent shortfalls in such services.

The AASW also recognises that there needs to be a focus on quality not quantity in relation to the funding for LACs and Support Coordinators, who can be managing, as suggested by some members, up to 100 participants. In such a situation, fully meeting the needs of the participant can be compromised as has been our members' collective experiences.

**Recommendation 29: The Queensland Government should propose that the NDIA's proposed Review of Support Coordination consider: the market for support coordination in rural and remote locations, including the availability and quality of support providers and whether there are areas of unmet demand; whether the increased inclusion of support coordination in the plans of rural and remote participants would be an effective and efficient means of improving plan utilisation and building capacity in rural and remote locations.**

As per our original submission, the AASW recommends that this could be further strengthened by engaging with the Federal Parliament Inquiry into Rural and Regional Australia to identify ways of improving the operations of the NDIS in these areas. We also encourage the Queensland Government to consider how to strengthen competition in regional and rural areas, and in the absence of competition, consider what additional safeguards may be required to ensure quality of service. The role of the Support Coordinator would be key in this.

**Recommendation 31: The Queensland Government should propose that the National Disability Insurance Agency's (NDIA's) proposed Review of Support Coordination consider: the market for support coordination in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, including the availability and quality of support providers and whether there are areas of unmet demand; whether increased inclusion of support coordination in the plans of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants would be an effective and efficient means of improving plan utilisation and building capacity.**

As per our original submission, the AASW insists that it is imperative that any decisions regarding Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people involves proper and meaningful dialogue with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. We recommend the Queensland Government to revisit the the First People's Disability Network Australia 10 priorities and adopt their recommendations accordingly.

#### **Recommendation**

- That the Queensland government propose the First People's Disability Network Australia 10 priorities be implemented to address disability inequity as described in their 10-point-plan.<sup>2</sup>

## Response to additional questions

### The major barriers to entry into the provider market for PBSPs (Positive behaviour support plans), and how those barriers can be addressed.

The AASW recognises that PBSPs is a market that has yet to fully embrace the contribution of the social work profession. There are key overlaps in terms of the human rights and person-centred approach adopted by social workers. The empowering nature of the work is highly required in all aspects of PBSPs. However, the potential of social workers to excel in this space is underexplored and our members find it challenging to enter this area of work, in particular, in regional areas where the demand for this service is high. Currently, PBSPs are not included in the core curriculum of pre-service social work education, and there is a lack of experienced professionals who can provide supervision for graduates and people who transition from other areas of social work practice. Therefore, we recommend that the Queensland Government collaborates with the AASW and tertiary education institutions in Queensland to design fit-for-purpose training and pathways for accreditation for practitioners who do not hold the relevant qualification under the NDIA but have considerable practical experience in the area.

### Recommendation

- That the Queensland Government collaborate with the AASW, tertiary education institutions in Queensland, and the NDIA to design fit-for-purpose training and pathways for accreditation in order to unlock the potential of social workers in the provider market for PBSPs.

### What reforms would improve the ability of providers to successfully implement PBSPs?

AASW members are concerned about the segregation between the implementation and the writing of PBSPs which can impede the quality of service delivery. Currently, the structure of NDIS funding suggests that plan-writing and implementation are separate and discrete practices. Since the former is remunerated at a higher level, quality practitioners are less likely to undertake the roles that implement the plans, resulting in a lack of consistency in terms of plan implementation and an incorrect assumption that the skillset required to implement a PBSP is somehow less than that required to develop them. Our members suggest that positive behavior support is a collaborative

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<sup>2</sup> <https://fpdn.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/FPDN-ten-priorities-2018.pdf>

approach where implementation is ongoing assessment and assessment is informed by implementation. It is particularly critical to participants who experience psychosocial disabilities, as their PBSPs require a high level of flexibility to meet their recovery needs. We recommend that the Queensland Government seek clarification with the NDIA in terms of how the role of behavioral specialists can assist in the implementation of PBSPs and to propose the establishment of a specialist roles to implement PBSPs for participants who experience complex psychosocial disabilities. This role must be filled by candidates who have completed relevant qualifications and have experience working with people experiencing complex diagnosis and should be remunerated as such. In addition, the experiences of AASW members suggest that people with complex psychosocial disabilities are underrepresented in funding for behaviour support programs and services. Therefore, we also recommend that the Queensland government recognise the need of people with complex psychosocial disabilities by proposing increases to funding for PBSPs.

### **Recommendations**

- That the Queensland Government seek clarification from NDIA as to how the role of behavioral specialists can be better integrated into plan implementation.
- That the Queensland Government recommend that the NDIA align the hourly rates of plan writing and implementation
- That the Queensland Government propose the establishment of a specialist plan implementation role for people with complex psycho-social disabilities, that is filled by qualified skilled workers and be remunerated as such
- That the Queensland Government propose the increment of funding to PBSPs for participants with complex psychosocial disabilities.



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