

MEETING OF THE COAG DISABILITY REFORM COUNCIL

TELEPRESENCE – 18 MARCH 2020

COMMUNIQUÉ

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Disability Reform Council (the Council) met by telepresence today.

The meeting discussed a national response to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, particularly its potential impact on people with disability and the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

The Council acknowledged that COVID-19 presents a significant and unprecedented challenge for people with disability, the people who care for them and the disability sector as a whole.

The Council noted the health and safety of participants, providers, paid and unpaid carers is a key concern. The Council was briefed by Australian Government Department of Health officials on health preparedness. The Council noted it is important that people take steps to protect themselves and others, such as practising good hygiene, early self-isolation and social distancing where practical. Information on what people can do to protect themselves and people they are caring for is available at www.health.gov.au. People can also contact the Coronavirus Health Information Line on 1800 020 080. The line operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The Council also noted it is important that, if someone suspects they or someone they know may have contracted COVID-19, they seek medical help from a doctor or a hospital.

The Council acknowledged that some people with disability are more likely to be vulnerable to the effects associated with COVID-19 and ensuring appropriate planning and preparedness across the sector is a priority issue.

The Council considered the steps being taken jointly by the Department of Social Services, National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) and the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission (NDIS Commission), working with the Department of Health and states and territories, to respond to COVID-19.

The Council agreed on the following priorities:

- Ensure appropriate consideration is given to people with disability and the disability services sector in the health response, including access to telehealth, infection control training and personal protective equipment.
- Ensure the ongoing delivery of core NDIA service delivery as part of the NDIA's Pandemic Plan, including the shift from face-to-face planning to telephone planning, and the redirecting of NDIA staff and partners to priority service delivery roles that support participants in response to COVID-19.
- Ensure the continuation of services to NDIS participants through the extension and increased flexibility of NDIS plans where necessary so that the NDIA can focus on reviewing plans that may require amendment in response to the impact of COVID-19.
- Ensure appropriate plans are in place to respond to any workforce shortages that may arise as a result of COVID-19.
- Ensure providers are supported to remain viable during the period of impact of COVID-19 and beyond.

The Council noted specific measures to respond to these priorities will be finalised in coming days and communicated directly to NDIS participants, their carers and providers.

The Council noted the importance of regular and consistent communication with NDIS participants, their carers and providers. The Council agreed this communication would be led by the NDIA through its website at www.ndis.gov.au and via [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#), and through regular alerts, information and training resources to NDIS providers from the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission through its website at www.ndiscommission.gov.au.

If NDIS participants or their carers have questions or require advice, they can also contact the NDIS Contact Centre on 1800 800 110.

The Council acknowledged the role of states and territories to support people with disability in their own jurisdictions, and reiterated its commitment to continue working collaboratively to ensure appropriate safeguards and supports are in place for people with disability, their carers and the disability sector as a whole.

The Council reiterated the importance of continual engagement with the disability sector to monitor the response to COVID-19 and ensure the needs of people with disability, their carers and providers are being met.

The Council will meet as required, with the next scheduled meeting on 6 April 2020, to further discuss the national response to COVID-19.