

Submission
No 150

**INQUIRY INTO IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NATIONAL
DISABILITY INSURANCE SCHEME AND THE PROVISION
OF DISABILITY SERVICES IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

Name: Name suppressed
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Partially
Confidential

Submission to Parliamentary Inquiry into NDIS in NSW

Thank you for the opportunity to supply details on our dealings with the NDIS in NSW and some of the issues we face and suggested solutions.

Background

I am the nominee for my son who has cerebral palsy and holds down a fulltime job with the Australian Public Service in Canberra (ACT) and lives alone and independently in Queanbeyan, NSW. He owns his own unit which has been previously been modified internally to make it wheelchair friendly (modified shower and toilet area and benches for cooking etc.). He is age 30. He currently uses a manual wheelchair for transportation but is able to stand and move away from the wheelchair using railings and supports if he needs to. Whilst my son is capable of carrying out the administrative work involved with the NDIS due to the amount of time this takes and I am retired.

We started the first plan in February 2017 and our second plan is now active.

My son has chosen to self manage his services which means he is responsible for payment of all but the capital items which require therapist reports and quotes. The plan was devised by Uniting in Queanbeyan, whom we have dealt with since the start.

Planning Process

When my son signed up for the NDIS in late 2016 we were surprised at how quick we were able to get the plan approved. What didn't work so well was the ability for us to review the plan after our only Planning meeting, we were not aware that we could not review the first draft, which seemed wrong as this was to be the first plan we wanted to review it and comment on it, as there were mistakes, as you would expect but we were told this was not the process.

I would recommend a change in the process to introduce a review process. This would be more efficient as the final plan would be less likely to have errors and result in lost time later especially if a review is triggered because of an incorrect plan.

Plan Implementation

The plan was clear in what actions would be approved. In my son's case this included him learning how to drive, modifications to the access to the back door of the house and garage so that he could get out of the car and down a ramp to the rear of the house and of course provisions to modify a car with hand controls.

On the advice of Uniting we sought quotes for the modifications required as per the plan and these were submitted for approval. Many months passed during which there was no feedback received nor anyone could be contacted to find out what was happening if further information was required. The frustration in the system surfaced very quickly. I assumed that the role of Uniting was to advocate on my son's behalf to follow up on submissions and where things were at. What became apparent was their role was not to do this but could pass on messages, but they had no direct contact with the NDIA to find out where things

were at. I had to develop a system of following up on issues and try and get a response. What I learnt very quickly was a major flaw in the communications system to the NDIA. There was no-one assigned as a "case manager" and my only contact was with the first point of contact officers who made notes on the system and would try and send messages to the planners (or other staff such as the financial section) to get a response. Each time I would speak to the first point of contact officers I would go over my son's situation and background and notes would be added to the system, but I could never talk to a planner. I will address matters related to the IT system separately in budgeting and the finance system as well as IT. In the first plan period it was extremely difficult to get a response from the NDIA staff, either by telephone or Email even though this had been promised on many occasions. When I eventually got a response on the house modifications I was told the rear of house modifications were refused because my son did not need them yet because he did not have his licence nor a modified car. I was somewhat taken aback because the actions were in the plan and Uniting had told me to get the quotes into the system. The plan clearly stated the modifications were required and that doing the work ahead of him getting his licence and a modified car clearly made sense. The plan and policy also supported this sort of work being done as it encourages the applicant to meet the goal of self sufficiency in getting himself around. To myself and my son it appeared that 2 sections within the NDIA were not talking to each other. We were also concerned that at the review of the plan many actions would not be completed because they were not approved! Also during the first plan a new manual wheelchair was to be provided. After an Occupational Therapist was engaged and extensive consultation with my son a case was put through for a new wheelchair. After a lengthy wait of many months we did get notification that it was not approved. The problem was then finding out why and what needed to be resubmitted. We went through Uniting but could not get a clear reason as to what needed to be addressed. Again at no stage could the Occupational Therapist talk directly to the Planner who had refused the application. After many attempts to get clarification an updated application was submitted and eventually successful (in the next plan, supplied in another 5 months). What was so clear was that one discussion between the Occupational Therapist and the Planner could have resolved the issues so quickly.

Recommendation: A planner be assigned as a case manager to each NDIS applicant to be involved in preparation of the plan and issues related to implementation. This would considerably cut down time lost in re explaining the situation each time and give continuity to the applicant as well, and the ability to resolve any issues in reports, assessments and recommendations very quickly by specialists talking directly to decision makers.

Budget and payment system

With my son's opting to self manage this does increase his flexibility for use of services. However the payment system is incredibly "clunky" and not intuitive. The budget as set out in the plan does not match to the lines on the computerised payment system. This means that when you refer to the budget in the plan for man item such as house cleaning, there is no corresponding line in the payment system. The only to resolve this was to ring up and go through the budget and the computer system with staff and write this down. There was a recent change it appeared in the descriptions so we had to sort the items out again.

Furthermore within the system after a payment has been requested there is no way of interrogating the system to find out the status nor is there any way to review what has been paid to a supplier, which is necessary to ensure all periodic payments have been done, such as to a house cleaner.

Definition of the financial rules has been difficult. For the last year I have been trying to determine the rules relating to major and minor repairs of Assistance Items such as a wheelchair and until recently I have had several different responses as to limits between minor and major repairs. This resulted in payments being refused because we had breached rules. Coupled with this is the ability or inability to move money around as the situation arises. The pertinent example is that now my son has a new wheelchair he is unlikely to need major repair funds, but minor repairs are needed to his old wheelchair to make it suitable as spare which from experience is essential. I have sought advice on the ability to shift funds between minor and major repairs, but as yet no response has been forthcoming

Recommendation. Improvements be made to the IT financial system to align approved budgets in plans with the lines on the payment screen. This may be as simple as having one set of terms that cover all areas in the NDIA

Recommendation. NDIA improve flexibility and process in the shifting of funds between similar items, such as major and minor maintenance to meet client needs.

Recommendation. Improvements be made to the payment and receipt sections to allow tracking of payments and storage and retrieval of payments made to creditors.

IT system

The tracking of inquiries and responses through the NDIS is non-existent from the client's view. The client or their nominee cannot see what is on their file, who is actioning our inquiry or whether there has been any response. As a result I spend half a day each week following up on inquiries that have not been responded to. This generally takes the form of a telephone call followed up with Emails. In the last few weeks I was given Email addresses that go directly to the planners. My joy was short-lived however as to date I have had no response to any of the Emails.

Recommendation. The IT system be updated to allow full visibility to client information and files so enhance the efficiency of the IT system and communication between client and NDIA staff.