

National Disability

OUTLOOK

2022

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Minister for the National Disability Insurance Scheme

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NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commissioner

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Understanding NDIS Plan Management

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Trelina - Pack Line Assistant



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“ It's so, so fun! I came here after I finished school. It's good here because I get to hang out with people more and I like to learn for fun.

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- ANNABEL



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“ I'm Danielle and I am a proud owner of a forklift license.

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It's amazing what you can achieve. I already have my 5-year forklift certification, now let's see if we can go for 10! It would be wonderful to be here at work in another five years.” - DANIELLE

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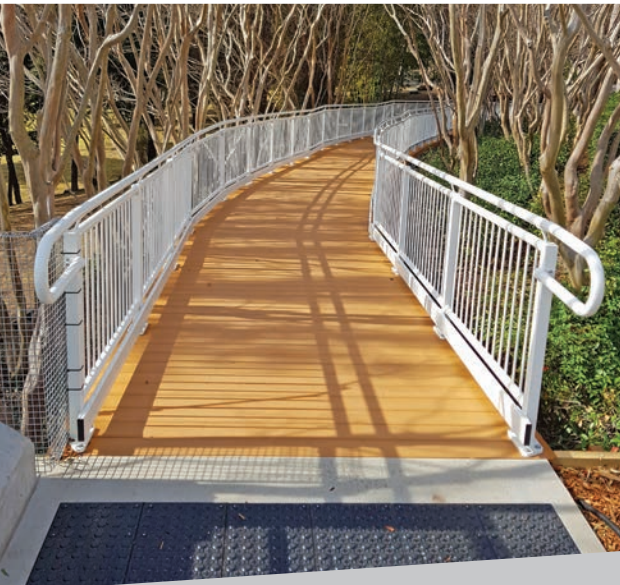




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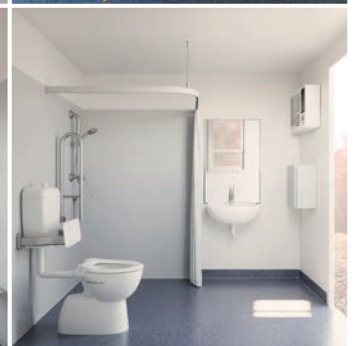
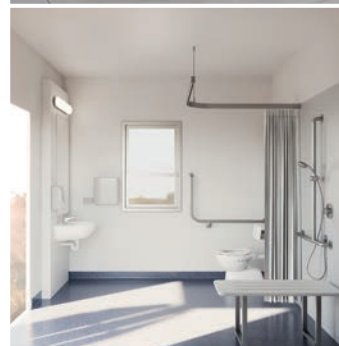


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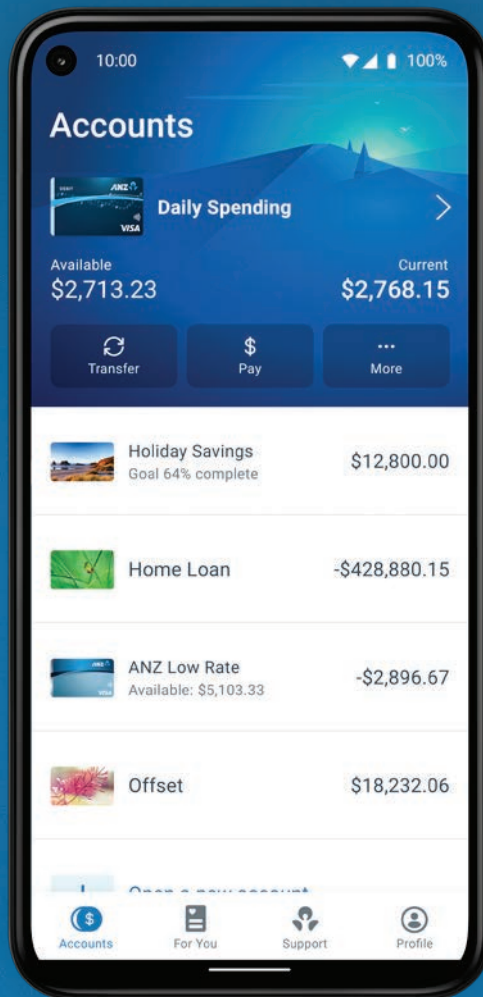


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Hon Bill Shorten MP

MINISTER FOR THE NATIONAL DISABILITY INSURANCE SCHEME

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Today there are more than four million Australians living with disability.

That's a big part of the population that is directly impacted by disability each and every day of their life.

When you consider the number of families and carers, friends, service providers, advocates and the broader disability sector, it's easy to see that all our lives are touched in some way by people living with disability.

Whether disability is acquired at birth, by losing focus for just one second on a country road or diagnosed with a degenerative impairment later in life, disability can be any one of us at any time.

That is why it is so vital that we, as a country, have a system in place to properly support those who need a little extra help to live an ordinary life.

That is also what makes my role, as Minister for the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), such an honour—and so rewarding.

The NDIS is something we should all be proud of. I know I am.

It is truly a world-first reform that is changing the lives of hundreds of thousands of Australians and those closest to them.

At the time of penning this, the NDIS is providing disability-related support to more than 530,000 Aussies. And the Scheme continues to grow.

Those numbers are something that I never dreamed of when conceiving the Scheme more than a decade ago.

I know there is much to be done to renew trust in our NDIS, but I am committed to working to ensure the Scheme delivers on its original vision.

I've been asked to talk about the future of the NDIS.

Before I do this, I want to reflect on our journey and purpose.

Our journey and our purpose

The NDIS was designed to change people's lives by investing and empowering people with disability, something that had been practically non-existent for people who lived with disability before this reform.

In late 2007, as a newly elected MP and a junior minister, I was given the role of the Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities. Nothing had prepared me for the entrenched unfairness I saw for Australians living with disability and the people who loved them.

Working with grassroots disability campaigners and advocates, we championed the rights of people with disability for the NDIS.

While the Scheme eventually received bi-partisan support and was successfully introduced by the Gillard Government, I don't believe it has received wholehearted enthusiastic focus and excitement from subsequent conservative governments.

I dedicated the past three years, as Shadow Minister for the NDIS, to shining a light on the former governments' lack of focus on the power of investing in people with disability.

Now we have an opportunity to return the NDIS to its original promise.

The intent of the NDIS was to value people with disability, not measure their price in a budget.



Fundamentally, it means ensuring every participant receives the support they need—genuine, individualised care for their own personal circumstances, so they can choose to live the life they want.

The intent of the NDIS was to see the whole person not just their impairment.

That early investment improves the lives of participants and their families by increasing their economic and social participation.

Early investment also benefits the broader community, including productivity, participation, and quality of life, and reduces future cost to communities and governments—including health, social security, housing, justice and carer costs.

The original business case for the NDIS estimated a net present value saving because early investment could more than halve the expected future

expenditure of \$680 billion if nothing was done to support people with disability.

My goal for the National Disability Insurance Scheme

Among my key priorities in the coming years is to restore trust in the NDIS, so it can live up to the promise envisioned when it was first created.

We need to ensure that the NDIS is effective and empathetic at achieving its goals and it works with a better, broader National Disability Strategy. And its evolution must be the product of empowered co-design. Otherwise, we're letting down participants, their families, our community.

It's time to start delivering on the original intent of the Scheme.

So, what exactly do I mean?

Fundamentally, it means ensuring every participant receives the support they need—genuine, individualised care for their own personal circumstances, so they can choose to live the life they want.

It means a Scheme that gives choice and control for people with disability, and importantly, peace of mind for the parents and families of people with disability.

It means a Scheme where we invest in participants so they feel included and valued, and not as though they are some kind of burden on the budget bottom line.

The investment is well and truly worth it. All Australians receive return on investment through stronger social and economic connections extended to all people with disability. And reduced reliance on future government spending on health, employment, social security, housing, education ... the list goes on.

And it's also about restoring trust with our participants whom the Scheme supports, their families and carers, the disability sector and the broader community. This is something I know has been lacking in recent times.

The NDIS is a wonderful thing, and the majority of participants speak glowingly of the impact it has on their lives every day.

We should not be content with how the Scheme is currently operating. We know that for some, it is not working. But too many have been hurt by unfair cuts and changes to their plans.

So how do we go about fixing something as big and complex as the NDIS?

The 10 year National Disability Insurance Scheme Review

One of the first things I have done since I became Minister for the NDIS, is to bring the review of the NDIS forward. The NDIS has moved away from the way Labor first introduced it, and the review is an opportunity for the Albanese Government to get the Scheme back on track.

We have committed to working with people with disability on every big decision we make and we will work

with people in the disability sector to determine the terms of the review.

We need to work with participants to identify ways to empower them to find the most effective supports to achieve their agreed goals. We must also ensure providers have the right incentives and support to deliver the goals of participants and the NDIS.

Getting to work

Since becoming Minister, I have met with and listened to advocates, providers, peak bodies, staff at the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) and, most importantly, spoken with many of our wonderful participants.

Many of the experiences I have heard from participants have been of a similar theme.

For some, funding allocated by the NDIS is too little. For others, getting access to the right types of support is too complicated. In essence, the overriding issue is that navigating the Scheme is just too damn hard.

At the forefront of this Government's plan to fix the NDIS, is putting people with disability back at the heart of the Scheme. That means genuine co-design involving people with disability.

People with disability won't merely be told what happens to them. Instead they are invited to steer where we want the Scheme to go. Participants are the experts in their own lives, so we must draw on their experience and expertise to inform how the Scheme supports them.

That means we must work together more closely—participants, providers, the NDIA and the wider disability community.

We must put aside all political persuasions across all levels of government, to have an integrated approach on fixing key issues.

I'm pleased to say my early meetings with the state and territory disability ministers have been very positive and we have collectively reaffirmed our commitment to working together to improve the Scheme.

As a priority, this group is working to ensure participants living in remote regions have access to the support they need. And we are also prioritising getting NDIS participants out of hospital and into appropriate accommodation more quickly. So less red tape, and faster action.

Keeping participants safe

The Government's priority is always the safety and wellbeing of people with

disability, which means ensuring they feel safe receiving their supports.

The COVID-19 pandemic has thrown up its share of challenges for us all, but especially the disability community.

My first action as Minister was to convene a roundtable with key representatives from the disability community on COVID-19 to hear the views of people with disability about COVID strategies and the lessons from earlier mistakes by the previous government.

At my first meeting with state and territory ministers, we agreed to work actively across governments and with people with disability to ensure our response to COVID-19 is best practice to support the disability community through winter, including making sure people have access to RATs, PPE and booster shots.

Given this, one of our first points of business when Labor became Government was to safeguard the sector from potential workforce issues as COVID-19 and flu numbers surge.

The NDIA also established a Winter Relief Workforce program, designed to ensure the continuity of supports for NDIS participants in the event of workforce shortages.



Going forward, it is my aim that participants will receive faster, more consistent decisions when it comes to their NDIS plans.

We know the pandemic is still a great threat and a cause of anxiety for people with disability. I am positive that we have the measures in place to continue supporting our participants. But I'm not complacent in the slightest. The risks are real. The previous mistakes were real.

Plan funding decisions

As both Minister and Shadow Minister for the Scheme, I have heard too many stories from disgruntled participants, frustrated and scared about the outcome following their own plan review process.

This has led to a dramatic rise in the number of participants appealing the outcome of their NDIS plan review. It shouldn't take a court battle at the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT) for someone to receive a modest support package that allows them or their child

access to the life they wish to live.

We are looking to quickly review and reduce the number of cases that are proceeding to the AAT. This process is leading to further delays in people getting the right support and is also wasting taxpayer dollars.

Going forward, it is my aim that participants will receive faster, more consistent decisions when it comes to their NDIS plans.

Speaking of waste ...

The Albanese Government wants to eradicate the waste.

That means cracking down on fraud and noncompliance, to ensure every dollar intended for NDIS participants is used for their disability supports, so that people with disability get value for money when it comes to paying for their supports.

Overall, the disability workforce and our thousands of NDIS providers do a magnificent job ensuring our participants receive their supports.

But there are a few rogue operators among the provider sector.

These bad eggs should expect the NDIA, either through its Fraud Taskforce or compliance team, to be in touch to check on any dodgy payments. Some have already been caught and sentenced through the courts.

Taxpayers back the NDIS but they expect the resources to go to participants, not to be harvested by others on the way.

No one left behind

Many of you will have previously heard my view, that for the NDIS to succeed and deliver on its original intent, it cannot be the only lifeboat in the ocean.

Yes, the NDIS is a central pillar of our National Disability Strategy, which outlines a vision for a more inclusive and accessible society, and where all people with disability can fulfil their



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potential as equal members of the community.

Not all Australians with disability should expect to receive NDIS support. We need to ensure the millions of Australians with disability not on the NDIS are not left behind.

It will take all levels of Government, working together with people with disability and others, to ensure everyone receives an appropriate level of support, whether that is through the NDIS, the health or education system, or other mainstream supports.

We all seek to make the NDIS the best scheme in the world, because only when we have the best deal for people with disability in the world, can we like what we see in the mirror as a nation.

This country shouldn't be just measured by the number of billionaires, the number of gold medals. It should be measured by how we treat the most vulnerable and most powerless in our nation.

The NDIS should be a beacon of hope. Together, let's put the hope back into the NDIS. ●



IMAGE: FatCamera from iStock



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NDIA & NDIS News

New National Disability Insurance Scheme Minister

The Hon Bill Shorten has been appointed as the Minister for the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

He has a strong connection to the scheme as he was an integral part of its establishment under the Gillard government. He has also held the role of Shadow Minister for the NDIS for the past three years.

His other parliamentary roles have included the Parliamentary Secretary

for Disabilities and Children's Services and he is currently the Member for Maribyrnong.

In June, the *Sydney Morning Herald* (*SMH*) reported that Minister Shorten said his focus as the new minister for the NDIS was to improve the effectiveness of the scheme.

"If the NDIS is effective, there's a huge return on our investment in years to come. Not only does this return include stronger meaningful social

and economic connections for people with disabilities, there's also a financial return to governments ... including reducing health, employment, social security, housing and justice costs," he told the publication.

He also told the *SMH* that there was a "significant" opportunity to improve employment outcomes for people with autism, who were eight times more likely to be unemployed than the general population, through early intervention.

Man arrested for alleged \$300,000 NDIS fraud

National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) investigators and Australian Federal Police officers arrested and charged a 36-year-old man on suspicion of defrauding the NDIS scheme.

Over a five month period, it is alleged he received more than \$430,000 in NDIS payments, of which more than \$314,000 was identified as being fraudulently claimed.

He was held at Brisbane International Airport's police precinct and questioned over alleged fraudulent claiming from funding of NDIS participants while acting as a disability service provider.

He has been charged with Obtaining a Financial Gain by Deception.

The man was investigated after authorities received tip-offs he made claims for supports he never provided.

Minister for the National Disability Insurance Scheme, Bill Shorten, said the action taken by the NDIA's fraud team was evidence that this Government would not allow our participants' funding to be the target of any criminal activity.

"I am very concerned there is fraudulent transactions taking place by organised crime and we remain committed to protecting participants and the scheme from criminals."



IMAGE: Kindle Media from Pexels

Rural and regional Services Australia Mobile Service Centres visits

The National Disability Insurance Agency and its Partners in the Community will be hitting the road to visit rural and regional Victoria and New South Wales on board the Services Australia Mobile Service Centres.

The visits will provide an opportunity for people to talk to a National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) representative about topics such as understanding the NDIS including Early Childhood and Local Area Coordination services, applying to access the NDIS for funded supports and updates on support

for the COVID-19 vaccine for people with disability.

Visitors can also gain an understanding of the options for managing funding as well as setting up a service agreement.

Due to COVID-19, NDIS representatives may either be on the bus or available on the phone.

For more information visit www.servicesaustralia.gov.au.

As more dates and locations are confirmed this information will be updated on the Services Australia website.



IMAGE: SHVETS on Unsplash

Workers needed over winter

Qualified disability support workers are being urged to join a register to cover potential workforce shortages and critical shifts during the winter months.

Minister for the National Disability Insurance Scheme, Bill Shorten, said the disability workforce was not immune to the workforce shortages that often happen during winter.

"The National Disability Insurance Agency and IPA Personnel created this register so qualified disability support workers can be deployed locally on a short-term basis," he said.

The Winter Relief Workforce register enables the continuity of supports for NDIS participants in case of workforce shortages.

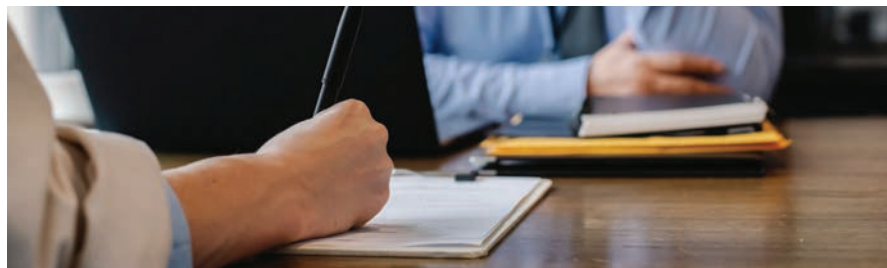
"So if you're a qualified disability support worker, whether you're retired or close to completing your disability qualifications, come forward and help support participants in your local community this winter," Minister Shorten said.

Eligible candidates are required to have a minimum Certificate III in Disability or equivalent qualifications and experience working with people with disability.

Workers will not be expected to be available full time and placements will be local.

They will only be called to help in the event other support arrangements are unavailable.

To register your interest, or for more details, visit winterrelief.com.au.



Annual Pricing Review complete

National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) participants will have better access to safe supports after the conclusion of the Annual Pricing Review.

Price limits for all supports delivered by disability support workers increased by 9% as of July 1 2022.

This also included a 2% temporary loading in 2022 – 23, with all current NDIS plan budgets automatically increased to reflect these price limit changes.

"These improvements will better support participant outcomes and reduce workforce turnover by funding better conditions for NDIS workers," Minister for the NDIS Bill Shorten said.

The increase covered changes to costs to deliver supports as a result of the impact of COVID-19, investment in quality and safeguards, as well as the introduction of a minimum shift and broken shift allowance for workers.

It also included the Fair Work Commission's recent wage decision

and the increase in the Superannuation Guarantee Charge.

Up to an extra \$514 million will be made available to registered providers of activities of daily living and community participant supports to recognise costs of keeping participants safe, particularly during COVID.

This is being contributed by the National Disability Insurance Agency.

Providers, in accepting the payment, will undertake to confirm that the amount received relates to actual costs incurred under a robust audit regime.

Minister Shorten said providers should be commended for improving rostering systems and reforming their business models to prioritise high quality support for participants and retain workers.

"This price review finally recognises the true cost of continuity of support, keeping participants safe and improving systems to drive productivity," he said.

"The Government will continue to work with the sector to ensure the NDIS better supports participants."

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Startup moves to scale up

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Tracy Mackey was appointed as the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commissioner in November 2021 and took up the role in January 2022. She comes to the NDIS after previous regulatory roles, including CEO of the NSW Environment Protection Authority since 2019 and senior executive positions with the Department of Immigration and NSW Department of Education. Here is an edited transcript of her conversation with OUTLOOK's **Lachlan Colquhoun**.

What are the key milestones you see for the Commission and its ongoing challenges?

We've just hit a key milestone in terms of our fourth anniversary, but it's not a real fourth anniversary because we've only had full responsibility for the whole nation for just over a year. The way I've been thinking about it with the team is that the Commission has very much been in startup mode. It's really unusual to find a government entity that hasn't morphed out of another agency. I think the Commission was in a particularly unusual situation in terms of having to walk and run at the same time while finding its feet

as an organisation. I think we've done really well to focus on the core area of safeguarding in the first four years, and establishing regulation across the sector, which didn't exist previously. A big part of that is helping providers understand what it means to be regulated, because that's a new thing for them, but also helping participants to understand that there's someone to go to who's going to carefully look at issues that are raised through a rights lens. I think in terms of where we go to as a Commission, we're moving from startup to scale up with a real focus on rights for participants and quality workers and providers.

Tracy Mackey,
NDIS Quality
and Safeguards
Commissioner



IMAGE: Marcos Elihu Castillo Ramirez from iStock



The whole NDIS project is one of the most ambitious that Australia has undertaken in this sector. Do you think that part of the challenge could be that people thought because the NDIS existed, that all problems could be solved? And there hasn't been an appreciation or understanding of this necessary process of maturity you have outlined?

Yes and no. It is hard for people to conceptualise the scale of the scheme, because it's all individually based so we can't lose sight of individual choices and circumstances, yet there are more than 500,000 participants. One of the really important parts of the Scheme is to give assurance, integrity and confidence to people that when they choose a provider, they can assume that they will offer supports and services at a level of quality and that they understand what's required of them. There's a lot of work to do in that space, and there's no one simple answer. There's a whole range of levers that we've got to use as the regulator to step into that space. Previously, state and territory governments provided services via funding agreements. It's a very different arrangement and there's a fine balance

between how you consider the interplay between rights with safeguarding and risk, and that's where we're continuing to evolve as a regulator. There's sometimes uncomfortable conversations that need to be had, but they're important conversations so that everyone gets more familiar and comfortable with what the landscape is and we can ensure quality support and services

Tell me about some of these uncomfortable conversations.

People who have been receiving services well before the NDIS haven't always been in a position where they can say to the service provider, "I don't like that. I'm not sure you are listening to me, or that doesn't really meet my expectations." Too often that person felt limited about the choices they could make. So uncomfortable conversations can occur, particularly where a service provider might have been in place for a long time and there is a lengthy history between that person and the service provider. But perhaps the service provider has never really asked that person how they feel about certain things. So there's some uncomfortable conversations because providers assume because the person

has been with them for so long, that things are good when the participant actually has views and expectations that they would like to share.

So is the concept of self-direction, which was an empowering principle of the NDIS, taking some time to really change the mindset of participants and carers and the relationship between them?

I'll give you an example. I've been to a lot of services and met with a lot of people since I've been in the role. I'll mention one service, where I met with a number of participants with really different needs who were receiving accommodation and supports from the same provider. We got to the last person who lived in this villa on her own and she was, not always, but largely bed-bound and quite confined to her bedroom. I chatted with the support worker as we went in, and she clearly indicated that she'd worked with this person for a very long time, for many years. We went in and there were some big photographs on the wall of the participant's nieces and nephews. I was chatting with her and asked her to tell me about the children on the wall. She was really



“Together with the NDIA we have an opportunity to influence the market. We have a range of regulatory levels such as market entry and market exit, and we have a role to play in calling out what good looks like for providers and workers. We want to think about what our role is and what that market design piece might be and we’ll do this work aligned with the broader NDIS Review.

enthusiastic and told me about the first and second children and how old they were, and on the third one she got a little stuck and couldn’t remember their name. Now, I would have thought the support worker would know the names of those three children and talk to the participant about them as part of the daily supports provided. This isn’t about a requirement for that service provider to know that. It does tell you a lot about the person-centred nature of the supports. For support workers, we need to question whether they are going through the motions, ticking off what they need to do, or if they actually take the time to learn about the person they support and what is important to them in their life.

That is a very cultural issue. So do you think it’s possible for a regulator to have an influence on culture?

I think it’s very possible. I think the real benefit of having a regulator in this space is that regulators come with not only powers to use when things go wrong and to follow up, and to guide systemic change. We’ve got levers around education, information, capacity building and influence, and

we’ve got to use those more and more. That’s why one of the things that’s on my mind is how we best position ourselves to provide information to participants so they can confidently make choices about supports and services, knowing that they are choosing a quality provider. There are already some fantastic examples of tools and projects that we’ve funded, or that other governments have funded, to help people in the disability space. Now we need to figure out how to get that out there and scale it and make sure the information is easy to access and as helpful as possible. For me, that requires us to bring the voices of people with disability in much more than we already have. Certainly, in the next few months we’ll have more to say on how we’d like to enliven that within the Commission.

Do you have a “to do” list or an agenda? What would you say your priorities are?

I want to go back to what I mentioned previously about our startup to scale up or ‘maturity mode’. We are so new that we haven’t even had a strategic plan before. That gives you a sense of where we sit as a young organisation—we’ve

still got a lot of growing to do. We’ve just done quite a bit of work on our first Strategic Plan, and input from a range of stakeholders has been really helpful. It’s very short, and plainly sets out three focus areas for us around the rights of people with disability, around the quality of providers and workers, and also about the need to have a thriving and diverse market. So that’s really what the Strategic Plan is about. None of that’s new, but it’s helpful to articulate where we are heading for our own staff and stakeholders. There’s a little bit more obviously to the Strategic Plan than just saying those three things, and that is about the impact that we’d like to have in each of those spaces. Six key streams of work are the focus of implementation under the Strategic Plan. For example, we are working on a quality pathway and we want to map out all the work we are, and will do to improve quality. Another priority is that we want to better understand how we need to influence the design of the market. Together with the NDIA we have an opportunity to influence the market. We have a range of regulatory levels such as market entry and market exit, and we have a role to play in calling out what good looks like for providers and workers. We want to think about what our role is and what that market design piece might be and we’ll do this work aligned with the broader NDIS Review. Then another really important priority is doing our first regulatory strategy. This is about what our posture and approach looks like for us as a regulator.

Are there any areas where you would like to see government legislate or create different regulations to make it easier for you to fulfill your mission?

Early on, the first issue that I really jumped into was the registration of providers. I held a roundtable back in March with some really diverse voices. We put out a discussion paper before and after. We’ve got an outline that the government is considering at the moment in terms of what steps we can take immediately, as well as in the medium term, linked with any review process and with fresh eyes. It’s easy for me, having been a regulator before, to see the kind of changes that we might like, including some powers that would

be helpful for the Commission to have. Some of those are minor while others require more significant consideration, such as changes to legislation. We have already been talking to the new Minister and his team about it and will be feeding it in to the NDIS review.

Do you think you have enough teeth? Do you think that you're using them sharply enough?

I think a good example of that is the work that the Commission did, following a significant and well documented case in South Australia, where we took civil proceedings because that's the strongest regulatory action we can take. Unfortunately, those proceedings have been stayed by the courts as the South Australian Department of Public Prosecutions has taken forward criminal proceedings relating to matters in their remit. Now, that's really disappointing for us in terms of not being able to hold those persons and organisations to account against our regulatory requirements.

I guess there must be people who would say you should do more; however, we are bound by the authority we have in the legislation in terms of what proceedings and action we can take. I am aware that the initial penalty imposed in the same matter was viewed as insufficient, but this was the biggest fine we could impose. We will keep pushing forward with what are the pathways and what are the options open to us as a regulator. I'm certainly used to being a regulator that holds people to account when there are significant noncompliances and incidents. I'm not someone who's going to go soft and not have the fortitude to push forward on those things. In fact, we've got a number of investigations in the pipeline with further legal proceedings anticipated.

When I spoke with your predecessor, he was always talking about trust and one of the Commission's key tasks was to build that trust. What's your assessment of that trust building and where is it and what can you do to build more trust?

I think we're on our way. I don't think trust is something that just happens—you've got to earn it and you've got



to keep earning it. So certainly, I can tell you that one of the five cultural characteristics or principles that we are focused on is about trust. It's the core of who we want to be as an organisation. Depending on the stakeholder and participant's experience, their trust will vary. That's challenging and something that we have to continually work on. I'm conscious that we get a lot of complaints and that's really good from a safeguarding perspective. I'd like

to see complaints continue to grow, because that's a sign that people know who we are and they have the trust or confidence to raise the issue, so that we are able to work with them to resolve the matter. We've just done a review of our complaints process and I hope people will start to see quite an improvement in terms of the timeliness and communication. I think trust is there, but we've got to keep working at it and keep earning it. ●

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Understanding National Disability Insurance Scheme Plan Management

Over the last two years, funding from the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) has grown by 59%¹. In addition, more participants are seeking assistance with managing their plan funding. **By Anthony O'Brien**

According to the latest NDIS Quarterly Report, more participants used plan managers from January to March 2022 instead of choosing to allow the NDIS to manage their plan. In March 2020, 38% of participants used a plan manager, but by March 2022, well over half (54%) used a plan manager.

What is plan management?

According to the website of a leading plan manager, My Plan Manager (MPM), a plan manager is a 'financial intermediary' support. This means that all plan managers are a connection between an NDIS participant, providers such as physiotherapists, speech pathologists, occupational therapists or

audiologists and the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA).

Plan management involves having a third party communicate with service providers and pay invoices on a participant's behalf. According to MPM, a plan manager is expected to receive and pay invoices directly from providers or from a participant. These



Founder, Claire Wittwer-Smith (left) and Chief Executive Officer, Jane Kittel (right)

plans, so they get the most value out of those plans.

My Plan Manager’s client portal is mobile-friendly, fully accessible and gives clients the ability to track their budgets and spending in real time. Clients can also choose to access their information via an app and share portal access with their family members, support coordinators, and other trusted advisers, giving them information to provide effective support.

Service providers do not miss out on solutions either. In 2021, My Plan Manager launched a purpose-built provider portal through which providers can create an invoice just by typing in details, submit it for payment at the click of a button, check its payment status at a glance, and view a full invoice history—anywhere, any time.

Innovation delivers consumer and business returns

My Plan Manager’s forward thinking and innovative approach has not gone unnoticed. In 2020, the business placed second on the Deloitte Technology Fast 50 list and took out the program’s award for Technology Female Leadership.

Ms Kittel says the installation of a new client management system and client feedback channels, coupled with the establishment of strong internal controls and innovative operational structures, enabled My Plan Manager to streamline bill payment processes, while preventing fraudulent claims and safeguarding potentially vulnerable clients.

Kinora—keeping the disability community connected

My Plan Manager has also harnessed the power of technology to facilitate human connection and foster genuine relationships. Last year, it launched Kinora—an online community designed to connect people with disability and their supporters with peers, NDIS experts, disability sector professionals and service providers.

And this year, the company unveiled its latest offering—Kinora Marketplace—putting service providers from across Australia in front of thousands of potential clients, and linking people with disability to the supports and services they need, when they need them!

To find out more visit www.myplanmanager.com.au or call 1800 861 272. ●

Vision, technology and innovation shape sector-leading success story for My Plan Manager

What does it take to become Australia’s largest (leading) plan management service?

A commitment to empowering people with disability? Yes.

Expert knowledge of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)? Definitely.

A dedicated and experienced team? Absolutely.

Ask My Plan Manager’s Chief Executive Officer, Jane Kittel, and she will tell you it also takes vision, technology and innovation.

Turning dreams into reality

When the NDIS first started, Claire Wittwer-Smith recognised it was not enough to provide people with disability with funding. They also needed the tools to bring that funding

to life. So, in 2014, she started My Plan Manager at her kitchen table.

“Claire’s vision was big,” says Ms Kittel. “She wanted a fair and inclusive society—one that embraces the diverse skills and experiences of everyone, and where everyone has the opportunity to reach their full potential.”

With a background in special education, expertise in disability policy and planning, and experience working with the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA), Claire’s insight and vision has driven My Plan Manager’s growth.

Big tick for technological solutions

The company continues to develop technological solutions that make it easier for people to set and spend their budgets and manage their NDIS

“... it is important to point out that there are alternatives to plan managers, including allowing the NDIA to manage invoices and self-management.

payments are completed by claiming money from relevant budget categories on the NDIA portal. Plan managers are also required to send monthly reports at a client's request, including the current outstanding budget totals and where money has been spent.

Different options for managing National Disability Insurance Scheme financials

Yet, it is important to point out that there are alternatives to plan managers, including allowing the NDIA to manage invoices and self-management. In late 2021, self-management was given a nudge when the NDIA launched the 'my NDIS app'—a new mobile phone app to help those participants choose the DIY approach to their funding management.

AGENCY MANAGED

If you choose this option, providers can claim their expenses directly from the

NDIA. By selecting the agency-managed choice, most of the paperwork is handled on your behalf, and the NDIA will manage the bookkeeping and records of your spending.

To keep track of an NDIS funding budget and see the claims that providers have made against a participant's funding, they can access their NDIS account on the 'myplace' portal. The problem with choosing the agency-managed option is that you can only access services from approved NDIA providers.

SELF-MANAGED

Participants can choose to manage their NDIS funds themselves. The NDIA performs a risk assessment, and if the agency is satisfied that the participant has the capability and capacity, it approves them to self-manage.

The NDIS advises that participants must be cognisant of their

responsibilities if they choose to be a self-manager, including purchasing only supports that link to NDIS plan goals and can make clear agreements with providers about their supports, including how providers are paid. The participant must manage the funding and ensure supports do not breach the annual budget. As a self-manager, participants must claim and pay for supports, keep their bookkeeping up-to-date and advise the NDIA of any significant changes in their circumstances that may result in a participant being unable to meet their self-management responsibilitiesⁱⁱ.

When the participant receives an invoice for supports in their plan, they can pay it themselves and are reimbursed by the NDIA direct to their bank account. Alternatively, a self-managed participant can send a claim to the NDIS, which then deposits the money into their bank account so that they can pay the invoice.

Participants directly manage the funds and are responsible for all transactions. They may employ support staff directly and do all the financial transactions or pay a third party to do



IMAGE: Photo by Nicola Barts from Pexels

this on their behalf. This option usually comes with plenty of paperwork but provides the most flexibility.

Participants who choose to self-manage can use their NDIS funds for any support provider they want, whether the provider is on the list of registered NDIS providers or not.

More support for self-managers

In December 2021, the NDIA launched the 'my NDIS' app—a new mobile phone app to support participants who have chosen to self-manage their plans¹¹. Indeed, participants, nominees and child representatives who self-manage their NDIS plan can use the app to view their self-managed budget as well as make and manage claims on the go.

Former Minister for the NDIS, Senator the Hon Linda Reynolds CSC, said the 'my NDIS' app is all about making the NDIS simpler, easier and more flexible. It will provide a better digital NDIS experience for self-managed participants to manage their NDIS plans and claim for the expense of supports.

Feedback for the app was obtained from a pilot, workshops, surveys and one-on-one time with NDIA participants and staff. More than 200 participants, families and carers volunteered to use the app and gave the NDIA over 700 pieces of feedback to ensure it is accessible, user-friendly and meets their needs.

Dr Ellen Skladzien, Chief Executive Officer for Down Syndrome Australia, congratulated the NDIA on the release of the new my NDIS app. "We appreciate the work the Agency did to consult broadly in the development of the app," Dr Skladzien said.

"We have heard from families who have tested the app that it has made it easier to interact with the agency and to lodge payment requests."

The my NDIS app will also be integrated into myGov in the future to provide users with a more streamlined digital experience when managing their government services.

The free app is now available for download to both Apple and Android devices. More information about the app

is available on the my NDIS mobile app page: www.ndis.gov.au/participants/using-your-plan/managing-your-plan/my-ndis-mobile-app

Choosing and switching to a plan manager

Participants will usually pick a plan manager if they believe managing the paperwork involved in their NDIS plan will prove onerous and time-consuming.

If a participant wants to make the switch to being plan managed, he or she must do it before the regular scheduled plan review and should contact the NDIS on **1800 800 110** and request to switch to being plan managed.

When choosing a plan manager, the non-negotiable is that the plan manager is registered with NDIS. Western Australia-based Access Foundation advises that "only a registered NDIS provider can submit claims on your behalf using the online portal".

A plan manager should provide financial expertise to NDIS participants and help them use their NDIS funds



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correctly. These financial supports include paying participant's service providers and advising them on where and how to spend their NDIS funds.

Access Foundation advises that plan managers should be transparent, and this includes offering a plan management platform that participants can log in to see transactions in real time. Likewise, Access Foundation urges NDIS participants to work with plan managers that communicate with participants in an uncomplicated manner.

The NDIS was born from the idea that Australians with disability should have greater choice and control over their own lives. A good plan manager will likewise provide participants with choice and control over their plan and help them become more independent when managing their plans.

How does plan management work?

If participants use a plan manager, their funding is allocated to a third party to manage their plan's financial transactions.

This support gives participants a helping hand with some of the paperwork, but they are still responsible for the administration of their plan.

... a plan manager can help develop a service agreement with providers, pay providers, and prepare monthly reports about how a participant's funding is used.

It is often best to think of a plan manager as a bookkeeping service—although some will provide more than this. However, unlike a local bookkeeper, plan managers must be registered with the NDIA, which pays providers such as an occupational therapist or speech therapist directly for their services.

Once selected, a plan manager can help develop a service agreement

with providers, pay providers, and prepare monthly reports about how a participant's funding is used. Instead of a participant opening a bank account, the NDIS pays the plan manager directly, who reimburses the service provider's invoices.

Benefits of working with a plan manager

Unlike a self-managed participant, someone who selects to work with a plan manager does not have to worry about how to claim invoices, the support categories to select claims from or record keeping. All the participant needs to do is engage with a chosen provider to get the required service. At this point, they should notify the provider to send the invoice to their plan manager, who will take care of the rest, including the paperwork and associated worries.

Another benefit of using a plan manager is that participants have more supplier choices. This is a major benefit for people in regional areas, for example, which might only have a



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- Has your situation changed, or your NDIS plan needs updating?
- Do you want support with your plan review?





What is excellence in Plan Management services?

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It is interesting how plan management services promote their capabilities to prospective participants. All the basics are there. Processing invoices in double quick time, advising about claims, being NDIS experts, supporting participants' choice and control with no cost to participants. Yes, it is about administration of the financial aspects of a participant's NDIS plan. But what does excellence look like from the perspective of participants?

It is about “wrap around” plan management support

Organisations need to individualise their knowledge and experience to wrap around the needs of NDIS participants. It comes from spending time talking to participants. It is about embracing each person's unique situation. The outcome of this approach truly supports an individual to get the most from their NDIS plan.

AIIM Choices has been active in building this approach over the last three years.

James Price, Managing Director of AIIM Choices explains, “We have worked in the NDIS environment since its launch in the border region. What’s

unique about our approach, is how we use the knowledge and experience of our staff to wrap around individuals with a disability to achieve their goals. Our primary focus is to provide a kind and friendly service. For us it’s about people and relationships and providing free advice to genuinely help individuals and their support team!”

But it is more than that...

AIIM Choices does the subtle things participants value to build this wrap around support experience. Anna Yang, plan management team leader at AIIM Choices, puts a more subtle flavour to why this wrap around approach works so well. “We do the standard plan management things, but it’s the simple things together with how we personalise our support for participants that makes such a big difference.”

So, what is the magic Anna is referring to? It is things like taking the time to listen so participants feel like we hear them, and showing respect by ringing back when we say we will. It is regular contact to say hello, to ask how they are going, and the warmth that comes across to participants from having happy, kind, caring staff.

AIIM Choices restructured its work flow so participants feel they have the support of their own personalised expert to help them get the best from their NDIS Plan. This approach is a long way from just processing invoices for payments and being NDIS experts, answering phone calls and emails.

The humanity of this approach allows AIIM Choices staff to individualise their relationship with each participant.

So, what do AIIM Choices participants say?

“The team are very helpful and keep in touch with you and only too happy to answer questions you may have in a professional, courteous and friendly manner” —Ray F

“This is my first time accessing the NDIS and AIIM have made it smooth sailing and answered all questions regarding our plan. Nothing was left unanswered, thanks guys!” —Perna J

“I have been with AIIM for the past two years and I cannot speak highly enough of them. The team are always happy to help with any enquiries professionally and promptly. They really care for their clients, are very friendly and happy to help wherever they can” —Kath J ●

IMAGE: Photo by Kampus Production from Pexels



couple of physios in town. If the local physios do not want to go through the process of signing up to be a registered provider with the NDIA, then they will not be available to agency-managed participants. Whereas, if a participant works with a plan manager, it is more painless. Service providers send the plan manager the bill, who organises the claiming and payment.

Using a plan manager can also smooth the way for participants to access assistive technology (AT) from the likes of JB HiFi. According to My Autonomy Plan Management, a smartwatch, for example, can provide alerts for incontinence issues, trigger an alarm following a fall, or even track vital signs like heart rate. A tablet or laptop can provide immediate access to remote therapy. And noise-cancelling headphones can prove life-changing for those with sensory disabilities.

In March 2022, the government announced improvements to the participant experience for people on the NDIS, with easier access to AT. This included the announcement of an increase in the upper limit for automatic approval of AT purchases. This limit has now increased from \$5,000 to \$15,000.

The changes will also assist many participants who currently have quotable AT under \$15,000 in their plans. The NDIA will automatically

approve the funding for these items so participants can access this AT faster. This new measure is still subject to the necessary checks and balances to maintain the integrity of the scheme.

According to the NDIS, the most purchased AT within the \$15,000 price range includes manual wheelchairs, specialty beds and bathroom chairs/stools^{iv}. To help plan managers get up to speed, the NDIA ran an information session in June to enhance their understanding of the changes to the NDIS AT process. Read about the assistive technology changes at ourguidelines.ndis.gov.au/supports-you-can-access-menu/equipment-and-technology/assistive-technology.

How much does a plan manager cost?

Having a plan manager costs a participant nothing extra, and there are no out-of-pocket expenses. Participants will not have money taken from their NDIS funding either.

How? Because the NDIA supports plan management by adding extra funds to your plan to cover the cost of a plan manager.

According to Assist Plan Managers, the NDIA will allocate extra funding to the 'Improved Life Choices' category of a participant's NDIS plan to cover the costs of engaging a plan manager. So

Managed funding explained

When your plan is managed by the NDIA (sometimes referred to as Agency-managed):

- Choose from a range of NDIS registered providers.
- Providers claim payment electronically from your funding.
- You cannot use unregistered providers.
- You can look on the myplace portal to see what claims providers are making against your NDIS funding and keep track of your budget.
- The NDIA will manage your bookkeeping and records of your spending.

not only is there no out-of-pocket costs, having a plan manager does not dip into a participant's current plan funding.

When a participant first engages with a plan manager, they are paid a setup fee (this is paid only for the first plan and is an additional cost separate from a participant's plan funding). Plan managers receive a monthly fee to manage the financial administration associated with a participant's NDIS plan. The monthly payment is covered separately from the participant's plan.

For participants situated in metropolitan areas, Assist says they can expect a setup fee of \$232.00, followed by a monthly fee of \$104.00 to cover the cost of assisting and supporting participants with their NDIS plan and managing the financial side of things. Participants in more remote areas can expect to pay an increased rate. ●

i <file:///C:/Users/antho/Downloads/QR%20Q4%20201819%20Summary%20Part%20A%20PDF.pdf>

ii <https://www.ndis.gov.au/participants/using-your-plan/self-management#the-benefits-of-self-managing>

iii <https://www.ndis.gov.au/news/7234-my-ndis-mobile-app-launched#:~:text=Since%20July%202020%2C%20the%20NDIA,needs%20of%20people%20with%20disability>

iv <https://www.ndis.gov.au/news/7467-government-providing-quicker-and-easier-access-assistive-technology-ndis-participants>



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Plan management trailblazer secures prestigious tech award and looks to the future

35

Australia's leading NDIS plan manager, Leap in!, has ranked in two categories of the coveted Deloitte Tech Fast 50 Awards, including #17 overall and with special recognition for Robyn Batten, co-founder, lauded at #4 in the female leadership category. **By Anthony O'Brien**

For 21 years, the Tech Fast 50 Australia Awards rank the 50 fastest growing public or private technology companies based on percentage revenue growth over three years (2019 to 2021). This top 20 ranking positions Leap in! alongside some of the biggest tech brands in Australia, including Seek, realestate.com, ninemsn, Afterpay and Menulog, to name a few.

Harnessing tech to enable system navigation and drive social impact

Leap in! was launched in 2018 by co-founders Robyn Batten and Andrew Kiel.

Operating nationally, the plan manager today employs 80 specialists working in customer service and plan management roles, supporting nearly 10,000 members across Australia.

"Leap in! was built on a vision for leveraging technology to help NDIS participants get the support they want, when and where they want them to help them live their best lives," says Leap in! CEO Andrew Kiel.

"The benefits of harnessing technology have been evident from the beginning and now recently recognised with the Tech Fast 50 award. It's enabled significant operational efficiencies,



Leap in! CEO
Andrew Kiel



Sometimes it can all be overwhelming for our members who are new to the NDIS. It's why we regularly connect with them.

scalability and created capacity, all at a time when other plan managers have been under significant pressure.”

Kiel continues, “Most importantly, we’ve been able to develop technology in an integrated way that supports and prioritises what our customers want. Our app and digital platforms uniquely help people with goal setting, plan creation and tracking, budget management and provider connection in one single place. And participants can choose which members of their family and support crew they want to share different information with. When they give us a call to check in, or they meet with their LAC [local area coordinator], all the information they need is in one place.”

Plan management is one of the options NDIS participants can choose to manage their NDIS plan funding. According to the most recent NDIS quarterly report 2021 – 22 Q3, there has been a significant shift in the popularity of plan management, with an increasing number of participants choosing to use a plan manager rather than have the NDIS manage their plan.

Over the past two years, the proportion of participants who use a plan manager has increased from 38% to 54%. Kiel believes that in addition to being a preferable way for people with disabilities to flexibly manage their NDIS funding, it also underscores the importance of an intermediary in the NDIS ecosystem, the role that they play

and the level of support and service they provide.

“Very early on, we recognised the importance of intermediary roles within the NDIS and the integral role plan management plays. The core function of plan management is the claiming and payment of invoices on behalf of NDIS participants. However, we believe it should, and can, be about so much more.

“The NDIS is transformative and at times can be complex. As a start-up our very first conversations with participants uncovered the opportunity for plan management to provide more than bookkeeping functionality; what was missing was system navigation and help to decode the NDIS,” he explains.

“Investing in technology, information and resources combined with the development of a team of plan managers, many with lived experience themselves, has proven to be a unique and powerful combination. It’s a special combination that has driven the growth of our business over the past four and half years. Importantly, our end goal remains unchanged: confident and empowered Leap in! members are getting the support they want on their terms.”

Capacity to help solve other pieces of the puzzle

Leap in!’s technology in the form of an integrated operational platform and bespoke payment rails creates space for complimentary supports

and services to surface and be at the forefront for their customers.

“We see an important role for plan managers to do more. There has been a natural extension for us into member support in the form of helping clients prepare for their NDIS plan meetings. Then, once they’ve got their plan, we set our members up to track and manage their budgets and then regularly touch base with them to see how they are going.

“Sometimes it can all be overwhelming for our members who are new to the NDIS. It’s why we regularly connect with them. Some may not have yet activated their plan and need assistance. It’s here that we provide a tailored service that supports their individual needs and circumstances,” says Kiel.

“Utilisation is also important. If they are off-track with spending—either overspending or spending their NDIS funding over the period of their plan—we proactively provide them with practical strategies to implement. It’s an important and complimentary support to the great work that support coordinators and local area coordinators already do,” he explains.

“Often it can be about understanding how a particular section of funding can be used and then connecting with a local provider who has capacity. Because we’ve built a network of over 20,000 providers around the country, we probably know several relevant providers in a member’s area, because they already support one of our other members and are in our provider network. It’s about being a proponent for our members fully exercising their choice and control within the scheme.”

While Leap in!’s proprietary technology also surfaces information to members through a variety of channels, including their bespoke budgeting app, Budget Health Checks and Provider Near You features. The team of dedicated plan managers also provide individual inbound and proactive outbound support utilising the latest cloud technology.

“This became particularly beneficial during COVID-19 where our teams moved to a full-time work-from-home resourcing model. Our tech set-up enabled us to maintain uninterrupted business continuity during the pandemic

and now supports us for an ongoing hybrid work-from-home model.”

Continuing to invest in technology

Leap in!’s industry-leading technology platform is central to the plan manager’s success. But where to from here?

“We’ve been proactively investing in machine learning and artificial intelligence over the last year and are excited about what we are going to be able to offer next,” says Kiel.

“We aim through artificial intelligence to bring a new level of efficiency to our invoice processing. It’s about the speed and accuracy of getting those invoices into the NDIA assessed and the payments made back to providers. Operational efficiencies in the plan management processing space will continue to provide the additional bandwidth for us to continue to develop new customer features and support.

As a result, Leap in! is also continuing to develop enhancements to its award-winning app. “Our free pre-planning and budgeting tool, co-designed with people with disabilities and their families to make accessing the NDIS easier, is also getting new features,” Kiel says.

“These features will be leveraging machine learning and artificial intelligence to provide more personalised information insight advice for clients,” he continued. “It’s a really exciting space for us.”

In conclusion, Kiel says winning the Deloitte Tech Fast 50 Awards is a fantastic result for a barely four-year-old not-for-profit. “Being up with large consumer-direct brands like Seek, realestate.com, ninemsn, Afterpay and Menulog, for a plan manager, is a wonderful acknowledgement for our sector.

“It’s not often that not-for-profits are more efficient in what they do and how they do it than for-profits. It’s great recognition that will fuel us to push the envelope even harder.” ●

For more information, call
1300 05 78 78 or visit leapin.com.au.

Leap in!

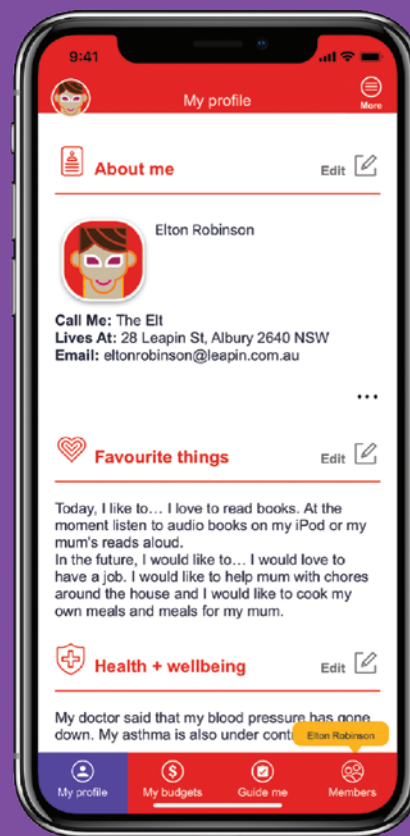


IMAGE: Supplied

Leap in! has a record for winning awards

Even before the Deloitte recognition, Leap in! has already been nationally acknowledged for its work, including the following awards:

- Named as one of Australian Financial Review’s most innovative companies.
- Awarded an Outstanding Achievement in the Australian Charity Awards.
- Recognised for its contribution to Australia’s ICT sector as a finalist in two categories of the Australian Digital Disruptors Awards.

Leap in! was established to help people with a disability to navigate the NDIS with confidence.

As a registered plan manager, Leap in! provides proactive support to help their members get the most

from their NDIS plan. Today Leap in! is Australia’s leading NDIS plan manager, supporting thousands of Australians across the country.

The plan manager specialises in supporting its members at each step of the NDIS process—from preparing for a first NDIS plan, setting and tracking goals, connecting with local supports and services to managing budgets and paying providers.

Leap in!’s free NDIS planning and budgeting app is available via the Google Play Store and App Store on the Leap in! website. The plan manager also readily makes available a comprehensive range of helpful resources for people with disabilities and their families to understand the NDIS, manage their NDIS plans and achieve their goals.



Andrew Thomas – Hireup disability support worker, 45, Sydney and Alistair Lee – Voice-over artist, 41, Sydney

Hireup provides choice and control for clients and workers

What do a journalist and a disability support worker have in common? More than you would think. **By Anthony O'Brien**

Andrew Thomas had been a journalist and an international correspondent. But that did not stop him feeling nervous as he sat down in a small coffee shop waiting to meet voice-over artist Alistair Lee.

When Lee, who is blind, was looking for someone to help him use social media to promote his services, he used Hireup to connect with disability support worker Thomas who has a background in journalism.

By utilising his experience in broadcast journalism and media, Thomas helped Lee build up his social media presence.

Being blind puts Lee at a disadvantage when using social media, which relies heavily on screens to manage content and view reactions.

The pair first met over coffee to discuss the best way forward. They then agreed on an arrangement that would suit them both, with Thomas going on to visit Lee in his studio for a few hours each week to help bring Lee's social media vision to life. He says that one of the great things about Hireup is the level of control that it gives participants.

"Hireup's platform helps people with disabilities to find and manage their own team of support workers. At

its heart are choice and control for both our workers—who can choose their own clients and hours—and our clients, who can choose who works with them and when," says Thomas who is also Director of Communications and Advocacy for Hireup.

The Hireup difference

One of Hireup's key points of difference is that all Hireup workers are Hireup employees. This sets the platform apart in the marketplace and provides a range of benefits to both workers and clients.

"As employers, we treat our workers well—paying them award wages and

“I didn’t understand that anyone who has got something to offer can do it if you can help make their life easier. Your skills, in my case as a journalist, are as valuable as someone else’s skills in nursing, for the right person. We believe in giving anyone the opportunity to be a disability support worker.”

appropriate penalty rates, and giving them entitlements like long service leave. We ensure they’ve got workers compensation insurance, we pay them superannuation, we handle all their financial and other paperwork. An Uber-style company (and there are some in the sector) doesn’t do any of that,” says Thomas.

This means that for clients, a lot of the complexity of engaging with support workers is removed, giving them choice and control over who they engage with.

“But this is no mere ‘matching platform’,” says Thomas.

“We’re not like Uber at all where workers are so-called ‘independent contractors’. We don’t think that model suits the disability care industry.”

Finding the right fit

For Lee, this meant that he could browse the profiles on Hireup and find someone with the unique skills and experience he was looking for. Clients can build a support team that is the right fit for them by first browsing through screened and verified workers. Lee could then access the wide variety of skills and abilities available on offer from the broad range of support worker profiles on the platform.

Seeing that Thomas had a professional career in media, Lee could reach out to connect, and the pair then went on to create posts and videos to build on the social media presence that Lee had started to establish.

Not only that, but they also built a bond.

“There is nothing more personal than sitting and being someone’s eyes for a period of time. It’s turned into a friendship as much as a professional relationship,” says Thomas.

Which is why it is important for clients to rest easy in the knowledge that their support workers are being looked after.

“For clients this all matters too. First, through Hireup, they can be confident their workers are well paid and supported—that matters. But clients can also be confident that they are getting a ‘full-service’ from us. As a registered NDIS provider, we have to fulfil lots of health, quality and compliance obligations. There’s no question of one of our clients being ‘deemed’ a worker’s ‘employer’ either—often a risk with ‘engaging contractors’. All the responsibility is on us,” says Thomas.

A new viewpoint

Thomas’ work as a disability support worker for Lee has been enlightening and fulfilling.

It is a partnership that sees Thomas learning a great deal about the challenges of being blind. But one thing is clear—he can also see that being blind in no way limits creativity and ideas.

Lee also has cerebral palsy and attention deficit disorder and says that a positive mindset helps when it comes to dealing with the challenges of less

visible disabilities. He says he also likes to inspire people to tackle new challenges.

For Thomas, his work as a disability support worker has reframed the traditional ideas of what a support worker can bring to the table, as his media skills are being transferred and used in a new way to help people who might need some extra support to achieve their goals.

“I didn’t understand that anyone who has got something to offer can do it if you can help make their life easier. Your skills, in my case as a journalist, are as valuable as someone else’s skills in nursing, for the right person. We believe in giving anyone the opportunity to be a disability support worker.”

Hireup aims to use the best technology and traditional service values to help bring clients and support workers together. By broadening perspectives on how skills can be transferable, people can identify gifts they might have they may then be able to share in some capacity as disability support workers.

Free to focus on what matters

Lee has been able to work on his social media presence and promote his services. And for clients like Lee, having much of the administration involved with hiring support workers taken care of means he can focus on the things that really matter to him, like his young family and a career he is passionate about. ●



Co-founders of Hireup,
Laura O’Reilly and
Jordan O’Reilly



IMAGE: Antoni Shkraba from Pexels

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Helping those participants who need additional care

Over the last 18 months, funding for support coordination and its role within the broader strategic design of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) has been reviewed. **By Anthony O'Brien**



Stephanie Soans, NSW State Manager for Support Coordination, Adult Community Services and Employment Services at Autism Spectrum Australia (Aspect)

The previous Federal Government, in early 2021, committed to maintaining funding for support coordination. In November 2021, the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) published a paper: *Improving Support Coordination for NDIS Participants*.

The paper outlines the outcomes of reviewing the current support coordination model in the context of both the consultation process and the broader strategic design of the Scheme.

The paper also clearly outlines the role of a support coordinator and the next steps the NDIA will take to improve support coordination for participants.

According to the NDIA, greater clarity on the role of support coordinators will drive more consistent, quality outcomes from support coordination services.

Consultation feedback for the paper broadly agreed on the critical roles of a support coordinator such as to:

1. Help participants connect to the NDIS and other supports.
2. Build a participant's capacity and capability to understand their plan, navigate the NDIS and make their own decisions.
3. Broker supports and services in line with participant wishes and their plan budget.
4. Monitor plan budgets and support effectiveness.

As with all NDIS providers and workers, the safety and wellbeing of participants should underpin everything a support coordinator does.

In its statement on the review findings, the NDIA confirmed, “We will continue to work closely with the sector to drive better support coordination outcomes for participants through several initiatives with the sector, the Australian Government and our Participant Service Improvement and Corporate Plans.”

What is support coordination?

For those new to the NDIS, support coordination is a capacity building support to implement all supports in a participant’s plan, including informal, mainstream, community and funded supports.

Stephanie Soans, NSW State Manager for Support Coordination, Adult Community Services and Employment Services at Autism Spectrum Australia (Aspect), explains support coordination. “Support coordination is funded through a person’s NDIS plan and is there to help a participant or individual understand how to use their funding within their plan, work towards their NDIS goals, and connect participants to providers and supports.

“It’s what the industry terms ‘capacity building support’, meaning it helps a person to maintain their independence and confidence and build their skills to meet their goals.

“Support is also provided to the participant’s family/carer to help them understand what support coordination is and give them information about their family member’s funding.”

Building a network of supports

Support coordinators focus on assisting participants in building and maintaining a resilient network of formal and informal supports. Moreover, it is generally expected that participants will develop their capacity to implement and manage their supports and network more independently over time.

Coordination of supports includes, but is not limited to:

- Understanding the plan
- Connecting with supports and services
- Designing support approaches
- Establishing supports

- Coaching, refining, reflecting
- Targeted support coordination
- Crisis planning, prevention, mitigation and action
- Building capacity and resilience
- Reporting to the NDIA.

Soans says some of the more common assistance support coordinators provide involves addressing participant’s questions such as:

1. What does my plan mean?
2. What are my goals?
3. How do I use my funding to establish those goals and meet those expectations?

4. How do I build a better quality of life by implementing the supports in my plan?

Soans says the answers for participants lie not just in understanding their capacity building, which is not limited to finding the service providers, but in maintaining the relationship between quality of life and achievements.

“If, for example, someone wanted to live independently, a support coordinator works with the individual and their NDIS goals to establish and help find suitable accommodation to meet their needs.





Helping participants engage with local support coordinators

The NDIA continues to improve how it supports participants in implementing their plan and engages with funded NDIS supports and services.

From October 2021, the NDIA updated its processes to enable the local Partner in the Community (partner) to help participants identify and engage with a local support coordinator if this is funded in a plan.

If participants have a preferred support coordinator, the partner can still help participants engage with that service. This change applies only to participants where a local partner has developed their plan and receives funding for a support coordinator.

What does this mean?

Many participants will not notice a change. If participants do not require a support coordinator, there will be no change.

In areas with no partner, the NDIA will continue to help participants engage with local supports.

What is the impact on providers?

As a result of this process change, support coordinators may also receive a service request from an NDIS partner. At the same time, there is no change to the reporting requirements or expectations of support coordinators.

Also, support coordinators will continue to have price limits that apply to their work in line with the latest Price Guide and Support Catalogue (external)ⁱⁱⁱ.

Why did the NDIA make this change?

The NDIA made this change to improve participants' experience with the NDIS as part of the Participant Service Improvement Plan^{iv}.

By accessing the local expertise of their partner, participants will be supported to quickly identify and engage with a support coordinator in their area that most suits their support needs.

This could be through a group home or a home of their own. Support coordinators will also look at other supports, skills and services the individual might need to fulfil that outcome.”

She continues, “It’s about participants being able to look broadly at what kind of assistance they need to take on daily living skills, such as cooking, going to the grocery store or catching transport. And what part of their budget might be allocated to help them look after a household if and when they moved out of the home.”

Different levels of support

The amount of time included in a plan for support coordination depends on the participant’s specific needs.

There are three levels of support coordination available to a participant, according to the NDIS. These are:

- 1. Support connection.** Support connection aims at building a participant’s ability to connect with informal, community and funded supports to achieve the most from a plan and their goals. This support usually involves a minimal service of 6 to 10 hours annually.
- 2. Support coordination.** Support coordination assists participants build the skills required to understand, implement and use the plan. A support coordinator works with the participant to ensure a mix of supports is used to increase their capacity to maintain commercial relationships, manage service delivery tasks, and live more independently in the community.
- 3. Specialist support coordination.** Specialist support coordination is a higher level of support coordination. Once again, the needs of the participant dictate the necessary level of service. Specialist support coordination is for people whose situations are more complex and need specialist support. A specialist support coordinator will assist participants in managing challenges in the support environment and ensure consistent service delivery.

Whether a participant receives these supports will depend on the level of funding in their plans.

Support coordinators work with the plan manager to ensure the participant is getting the best value out of their NDIS plan. And there's no crossover of funding that's being utilised here.

According to Soans, Aspect provides both support coordination and specialist support coordination. "It all depends on the participant's approved level of support coordination NDIS funding.

"Support coordination is more generally for participants requiring additional support in their daily lives to achieve their goals and outcomes. For example, a participant may have funding for social and community participation, so a support coordinator would assist in linking you to a community participation day program. Another example are participants who are seeking employment or therapy services. In this instance a support coordinator has the tools and resources to find and link them to these service providers."

Soans adds, "It's important to note that while support coordinators work for disability organisations, they are independent decision makers and vendor agnostic when providing advice and linking participants to supports and services, so that there is no conflict of interest."

Additionally, Soans says all support coordination services assist clients in understanding how to read their NDIS plan. "For example, support coordinators can help participants understand their NDIS budget and implement their funding and provide those linkages to service providers."

No crossover with plan managers

According to the NDIS, plan managers help participants manage the funds within their plan. Plan managers provide participants with more choice and control over the providers they use and can help teach financial skills to help the participant learn how to self-manage their plan and pay providers.

On the issue of funding, Soans says that support coordinator and plan manager roles are distinct.

"Plan managers establish and pay for bills for participants who manage their own NDIS plan and may or may not be using an NDIS registered provider.

Support coordinators implement the supports and find the service providers to help meet the participant's goals.

"Support coordinators work with the plan manager to ensure the participant is getting the best value out of their NDIS plan. And there's no crossover of funding that's being utilised here."

Soans continues, "Support coordinators ensure that when a participant is linking to service providers, they understand their service agreement, and the charges that are coming out of their NDIS plan. This information is crucial in assisting with establishing and maintaining an individual's supports and providing that capacity for independence.

"Support coordinators at Aspect provide a comprehensive progress report to support participants and planning reviews at 12 months to look for any change of circumstances. It's also essential that participants understand what is in their service agreement."

On the issue of the annual plan review, the support coordinator has a crucial role to play. "If a participant requires additional services for their support coordination, it is being able to provide the progress report and the reporting back to the NDIA where an individual may need a change of circumstances.

"Additionally, by preparing for those unexpected events, a support coordinator always acts in the participant's best interest to provide what supports and achievement goals they want to reach."

What can support coordinators not do for their clients?

Support coordination is often confused with case management. While there are some similarities, they are not the same. Case management

provides direct support such as creating rosters, booking staff, taking people to appointments and personal care, and are more responsible for helping a person with their entire life. Support coordination, as noted above, is responsible for assisting a person in enacting their plan goals only.

Is there a shortage of support coordinators?

The short answer is yes. However, Soans says the employment gaps are industry-wide. "It's the disability sector as a whole. We're talking support workers, therapy staff and more."

According to a recent report from employment marketplace Seekⁱ, until immigration picks up again, there will continue to be worker shortages across many industries apart from the disability sector, including trades and services, hospitality and retail.

To attract workers, Aspect are always looking at new ways to improve training for support coordinators and to support them in their career ambitions. The organisation currently offers support coordination services to autistic participants across NSW, ACT, Victoria and Queensland and has capacity to provide support coordination in Tasmania, South Australia and the Northern Territory.

Soans says, "Support coordination is an incredibly rewarding job for those who want to see the positive impacts and difference the right supports can have in a person's life.

"Being able to provide the information about what support coordination does and the benefit the role provides to others, attracts and influences people to seek that opportunity to work in the role." ●

Information about the registration requirements and steps to become a registered support coordination provider are available in the 'How to register' section on the NDIS website www.ndis.gov.au/providers/becoming-ndis-provider/how-register or by calling the NDIS on **1800 800 110**.

i <https://www.ndis.gov.au/community/we-listened/improving-support-coordination-participants>

ii <https://www.seek.com.au/about/news/employment-dashboard-may-22-aus>

iii <https://www.ndis.gov.au/providers/pricing-arrangements>

iv <https://www.ndis.gov.au/about-us/policies/service-charter/participant-service-improvement-plan>



Delivering on NDIS providers technology needs

COVID-19 has changed how some supports are delivered, with technology enabling support continuity through telehealth, video conferencing and the delivery of game-changing application programming interfaces (APIs). **By Anthony O'Brien**

In recognition, the flexible approach to purchasing low-cost assistive technology will continue and be monitored as participants and providers adapt to COVID normal. Assistive technology is equipment or devices that help individuals do things they cannot do because of their disability.

The flexible approach introduced during the pandemic allowed

participants to spend up to \$1,500 on low-cost assistive technology items, such as smart devices and fitness equipment, in consultation with their existing support providers.

Similarly, National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) providers are increasingly turning to IT solutions to improve efficiency and make their systems more accessible to NDIS

participants. According to John Warner, CEO of eTrack Products, "It is becoming rarer for an NDIS provider to contact us with data only in spreadsheets. Nearly all have either embraced technology by already using a software system or are getting organised right at the start of their business."

Warner continues, "Support coordinators already understand and clearly accept the enormous benefits a software system can bring to reduce time, costs and to guarantee compliance. For example, they know only too well that a key admin cost is sorting out rejections due to bookings made or invoiced to a plan after it has

expired. A direct interface with the NDIS Portal will automatically update plan end dates and create new plans.”

Warner says, “Providers, these days, are more knowledgeable and much more vocal as to what they want. One system to do everything, a holistic view of case notes, tasks, documents, emails, time, budgets and compliance.

“They want budgets updated automatically from the NDIS, a seamless interface to their accounting package, reconciliation of payments and rejections, documents automatically populated and emails automatically filed.”

According to Warner, savvy support coordinators realise they can multitask using the eTrack app while simultaneously using eTrack’s desktop software as calling on a smartphone simply involves the press of a finger, while case notes can be dictated, and a stopwatch used to record the time of a quick call.

Warner recalls that there has also been a noticeable reduction in deployment times and how little training is needed, all signs that providers are embracing technology.

Walter Rienmueller, Director of leading industry software provider iCareSoft concurs, “Technology is vital for the disability sector, and no business will be able to grow without adopting technology. iCareSoft offers a cloud-based solution that integrates all aspects of the service provision, from support coordination, including rostering via mobile and web-based apps, invoicing and claims, payroll and accounting integration.”

Rienmueller continues, “Only cost-efficient operations will be able to provide services under the NDIS guidelines, as there is a large component of administrative cost for service provision. It’s not just the direct care provision but also the reporting to comply with government regulations.”

Paul Brindle, CEO of Health Metrics, agrees that NDIS providers must now be tech-savvy. Health Metrics is a cloud-native, data-driven software solution firm with about 170 clients across Australia and New Zealand. It has achieved record customer growth and recently attracted a significant investor. In April 2021, the diversified alternative asset management firm Tanarra Capital acquired a majority stake in Health Metrics.



John Warner, CEO of eTrack Products

Brindle says, “The NDIS regulations require a high standard of documentation and monitoring. Meeting quality and safeguard standards and complying with legislative requirements is a crucial consideration for NDIS providers. This is where purpose-built NDIS software like eCase can make all the difference in maintaining compliance.

“The NDIS makes annual updates to pricing rules and rates and ad hoc changes throughout the year. Navigating these updates can be complex and time-consuming. eCase manages the update of rate and rule changes on our customers’ behalf. This streamlines the billing process and ensures compliance without added administrative burden.”

In 2020, the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) developed a Digital Partnership Program, which managed, controlled and secured access to some of the NDIA’s data and systems. Access is managed via APIs.

These APIs allow providers and software developers to create new tools, apps and digital marketplaces to improve how participants, providers and the NDIA all connect and work together. The NDIA also expanded the terms and conditions to allow software developers working with registered providers access to its APIs. This means that these software developers can access the NDIA APIs to improve systems for registered providers.

According to Rienmueller, these NDIA-developed APIs, which serve as a kind of communication bridge between different software systems, allow disability service providers to connect



Paul Brindle, CEO of Health Metrics

their ICT systems directly with the NDIA systems, simplifying app development and thus saving time and money.

“The NDIS has put increasing financial pressure on disability providers through its ‘payment in arrears’ funding model and admin heavy claiming process,” Rienmueller says.

“This has resulted in higher administrative costs and cash flow challenges for many providers operating in the NDIS. Late, incorrect, or failed payments have resulted in delayed or even unpaid claims by the NDIA. According to the NDIA, there are hundreds of millions of dollars in unpaid claims to providers in Australia.”

In response to the strain on providers and participants in dealing with NDIS claims, the NDIA has been working with software aggregators, such as LanternPay (part of HICAPS, a NAB company), to enable digital connectivity between NDIA data and systems and software vendors like MyCareSoft. The end goal is to synchronise data, automate transaction processing, streamline administration, and ultimately improve the NDIS experience for both providers and participants.

“Registered providers can now take full advantage of the NDIA API interface to access data and streamline claiming processes for NDIA managed participants,” Rienmueller adds. “NDIA’s API connection is a game-changer to synchronise data, simplify claiming and improve cash flow.

“MyCare is delivering for providers wanting to streamline administration, protect margins and reduce cashflow risk as it relates to NDIA managed



participants. With MyCare, providers can focus on their customers and service delivery.”

eTrack branches out to underpin support workers and plan managers

eTrack was founded in 1999 to provide practice management software to government audit offices and building professionals. Warner says, “We were very fortunate to start working with NDIS support coordinators early on and very focused on making support coordinators more efficient and compliant.

“We are now expanding into plan management systems and will soon offer a low cost, highly functional system for plan managers, complete with all the functionality that support coordinators currently use.”

How eTrack’s cutting-edge software is making a difference

Warner explains that eTrack uses an object architecture that is much more like the real world than traditional software. “You can add any entity and relate them together in any way. For example, a company may be a provider and a plan manager or an individual, entered once, may be a participant and a personal contact of another participant, and a provider and even a staff member.

“When you relate entities, you also get a reverse relationship; for example,

you can allocate a plan manager to participants and, without doing anything, eTrack builds a knowledge base to view all the participants of the plan manager .

“It’s like an infinite family tree where everyone can be related in some way to everyone else. And because it reflects the real world, it is intuitive and hardly any training is needed to navigate,” says Warner.

Thanks to 22 years of development, eTrack modules are feature rich and everything works smoothly together with documents automatically populated and emails automatically filed. Warner says, “This provides a holistic view of emails and case notes eliminating the cut and paste of emails, and the easy creating of ‘to do’ tasks from text you have already written in case notes.

“The time to bulk invoice hundreds of participants is reduced to a few minutes with minimal training and the many checks minimise rejections.”

Warner says eTrack has done away with the unwieldy report gallery altogether thanks to the advanced, yet simple to use, data analysis tools. “Users can choose fields, sort, group, filter, collapse and even colour their own views of the data and save them for fast access.”

Furthermore, eTrack’s cloud-based software and smartphone app mean providers can access information from anywhere. “Thanks to all data being

in Australia on large Microsoft Azure servers, eTrack is fast and secure. Preparing and maintaining accreditation is just part of the job with all information clear and visible to auditors including ‘real-time’ compliance registers.”

On a personal level, Warner says that after developing eTrack for 23 years he has never felt so appreciated as when working with NDIS providers. “I admire their skills and dedication to empowering participants, and it is such a pleasure to hear their enthusiasm for eTrack and to collate their ideas for ongoing development.”

Who is Health Metrics?

Established in 2008, Health Metrics is a proudly Australian-owned and operated software company. Its purpose is to leverage technology to support care providers in delivering sustainable solutions that manage all aspects of recipient care. Brindle says, “We create digital solutions that empower aged care and disability providers and help them operate efficient and profitable businesses, whilst at the same time supporting them to deliver the highest quality care.”

The Health Metrics flagship solution, eCase, supports residential aged care, disability, home care, retirement villages, and primary health care organisations of any size. “We have an active user community of over 170 customers and over 60,000 recipients of care,” Brindle explains. “eCase is fast becoming the preferred choice for providers of care in the Australian and New Zealand markets.”

According to Brindle, the Health Metrics multi-disciplined team strives for excellence and continual innovation, ensuring its software is abreast of the industry’s legislative and regulatory changes and complex care problems.

“We provide implementation, training and support services and have the requisite blend of experience and expertise to support our customers as they transition to digital solutions. In 2021, diversified alternative asset investment firm Tanarra Capital invested in the future of Health Metrics to support the continued growth and development of the business in meeting the rapidly evolving and complex needs of our customers.”



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Hireup: Blazing a tech-based trail for the disability sector

The award-winning online platform, Hireup, is shaking up the NDIS employment space in a way no-one has done before. Co-founder, Jordan O'Reilly, says Hireup uses technology to help people with disability find and manage their own team of support workers who communicate their availability on the platform. At its heart are choice and control for both Hireup workers—who can choose their clients and hours—and its clients, who can decide who works with them and when.

It would be easy to draw comparisons to other platform-based companies, like Menulog and Uber, that have used tech to disrupt the food delivery sector. But O'Reilly says Hireup is in many ways nothing like Uber, especially in regard to its employment model.

"We're not merely a 'matching platform'," says O'Reilly. "We combine the best of new technology with traditional service values. For a start, all Hireup workers are Hireup employees so, in that sense, we're not like Uber where workers are so-called 'independent contractors'."

"We don't think that model suits the disability services sector, which can involve highly personalised, crucial supports. As employees, we treat our workers well—paying them award wages and appropriate penalty rates, as well as paid training.

"We ensure they've got workers compensation insurance and superannuation, and we handle all their financial and other paperwork." O'Reilly adds, "An Uber-style company (and there are some in the sector) doesn't do any of that."

For Hireup's clients, O'Reilly believes his firm's financial support for its workers truly matters to NDIS participants. "First, they can be confident their workers are well paid

and supported—and that matters. But clients can also be confident that they are getting a 'full-service' from us as a registered NDIS provider. This is important as not all our competitors are registered. We are, and it means we must fulfil lots of health, quality and compliance obligations."

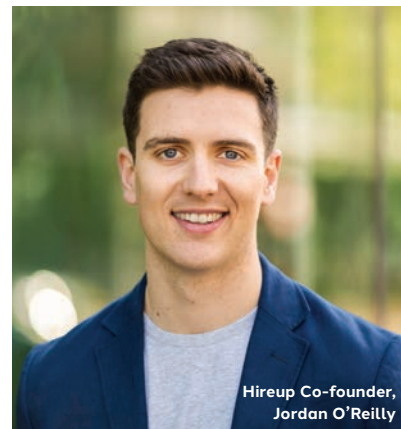
World's best technology drives Hireup

A proprietary Amazon Web Services (AWS) based platform powers Hireup. AWS is the world's most comprehensive and broadly adopted cloud platform, offering over 200 fully-featured services from data centres globally. According to O'Reilly, "We deliver value to our clients and workers via a number of channels including a desktop site as well through native iOS and Android apps.

"The product team places a lot of emphasis on accessibility to ensure Hireup's extremely diverse audience can use the platform. We think our technology offering is absolute best in class so that no matter someone's disability, they can use it all as easily as anyone else."

At the time of writing in late June 2022, the main supports NDIS participants seek via Hireup include personal care, supports for attending work or education, and therapy support. There is also significant demand for support for in-home care routines, out-and-about social support (exercising or shopping), transport, and specialised support such as manual handling or seizure management.

"In essence, people can ask Hireup support workers to help them with almost anything and that means they can achieve their goals and lead a good life. For every person, exactly what that support is will be different," O'Reilly says.



Hireup Co-founder,
Jordan O'Reilly

Moreover, occupational therapists, speech therapists, and clinical psychologists can also be sourced through the Hireup matching platform. O'Reilly confirms, "On the platform, people can use search words to see who they are."

How is the Hireup platform making a difference?

O'Reilly is effusive about how the innovative Hireup platform disrupts the way NDIS support workers are hired. "Hireup is making a difference because it has given the power to people with disabilities to take control of their own lives, empowering them to engage the support workers they want with minimal fuss, little bureaucracy and ultimate control.

"Our innovative platform has also made a difference to support workers—bringing lots of new people into the sector and rewarding them with flexible work that fits in with the rest of their lives, all under the umbrella of a reliable employer."

The response to the platform has been overwhelmingly positive from support workers, O'Reilly affirms. "They love it. Every day people call in to tell our central support team about a wonderful individual or team of workers they've found through Hireup. They tell us how the flexibility, choice and control of Hireup has revolutionised their lives.

"Facebook groups are full of positive comments, and our reviews on the consumer review website Trustpilot have us at a strong 4.6/5, with the overwhelming majority of reviews five stars."



How to save 2x faster with one simple step

Whether you're eyeing-up your first home, planning that long-delayed holiday or just looking for some sweet, sweet security, one thing is safe to assume: if you have a savings account, you probably want more savings in it.

How you actually go about saving that money is the real question. Some swear by being thrifty, others recommend picking up a second (or even a third) job to get more money coming in. But there's an overlooked step on the road to higher savings that is much simpler—and far less time-consuming—than all that.

You may have heard of it ... it's called 'goal setting'. And it's all about putting your target out there and letting your brain take care of the rest.

People with goals save faster. Fact.

Recent research by the team at ANZ suggests the simple act of setting a savings goal can be enough to save

twice as quickly. That means more money, in less time.

Sound too good to be true? Over the two years since 2019, we surveyed over 5 million Aussies' savings journeys and the theory holds up. On average, people with savings goals save two times faster than those without.

All that extra money, just from deciding on a specific future figure? To some this might sound a bit woo-woo—like the financial equivalent of manifesting wealth through positive thought. But there's some good science behind the phenomenon.

It's a psychology thing

According to the American psychologist Dr Edwin Locke, setting a goal helps

your brain draw a mental roadmap¹.

That map outlines where you are, where you're heading, and the steps you need to take to get there.

Setting goals also helps nudge us towards more positive actions because of that sense of fulfilment we feel when we meet them. And if we don't, our brain wants to keep steering us in the right direction.

Of course, not all goals are created equal, and working out which ones are likely to work can be difficult.

Thankfully, there are a few ways to set yourself up for success.

1. Be specific. The clearer the goal, the clearer the roadmap—and the higher your chance of achieving what you set

out to do. For this reason, vague goals are old news. Phrases like “I will try to save more money” are less useful than ones that include specific figures for certain milestones, like “I will save \$3,000 in 12 months for a holiday to Fiji” or “I will put 10% of my earnings into a savings account every month to put towards a home deposit”. This is where our free goal-setter worksheet comes in handy, to set clear, definitive goals you can actually stick to.

2. Challenge yourself. It may sound counterintuitive, but easy goals aren’t motivating. In fact, the harder a goal is to achieve, the harder you’ll work to achieve it. The reason for this is relatively simple: achieving something you’ve worked hard for just feels better. The keyword is challenging, not impossible. Make sure it’s within the realm of possibility—no one wants to set themselves up to fail.

3. Write it down. In 1979, Harvard MBA grads demonstrated that simply writing a goal down on paper increased the likelihood of it being achieved. The study even found that students who put their career goals in writing earned about 10 times as much as what their fellow students made after graduation. So, get your pens out or, better yet, add a picture and set a savings goal (on eligible accounts) within the ANZ App to help visualise your objective. We can’t guarantee that recording your goals will earn you 10 times more money, but science suggests it’ll help.

A final tip?

Some studies² show that humans perform better when someone is watching us. We’re not talking Big Brother-type watching but, essentially, we’re more likely to speed up our savings if there’s someone holding us accountable.

So, try telling a friend or partner about your new goal—or set a joint goal and work towards it together. You might consider mentioning the smaller steps you’re taking to get there too, and watch the extra motivation roll in. Sound easy? Good. It’s one simple step you can take towards better financial wellbeing and bigger savings.

Search ‘ANZ Financial Wellbeings’ ●



Search ‘ANZ Financial Wellbeings’ to discover more ...

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They’re ordinary people who make savvy money decisions and feel extraordinary. From little things like switching off the lights when they leave the room or ditching the nightly food deliveries, to starting a side hustle or popping extra into super.

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The program is designed to help you become a Financial Wellbeing (or a better one). Each step is packed with powerful insights and practical tools to help you unlock greater confidence. You can do them in your own time and at your own pace, no matter who you bank with. And it’s free. A true Financial Wellbeing will love that.

So now that you’ve got the knowledge on what it means to be a Financial Wellbeing, you’re already on the road to becoming a better one! ●

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

The information set out above is general in nature and has been prepared without taking into account your objectives, financial situation or needs. By providing this information ANZ does not intend to provide any financial advice or other advice or recommendations. You should seek independent financial, legal, tax and other relevant advice having regard to your particular circumstances.

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*Compares avg monthly uplift in savings growth for a number of ANZ Progress Saver and/or ANZ Online Saver accounts with a goal vs accounts without for Aug-19 to Jul-21.

1. Locke, E. A. (1968). 'Towards a theory of task motivation and incentives', *Organizational Behaviour and Human Performance*. 3(2), 157-189. Elsevier.

2. Chib, V. S., Adachi R., O’Doherty J.P. (2018) 'Neural substrates of social facilitation effects on incentive-based performance'

From clinical assessments, care plans, alerts and indicators, progress notes and reports, we eliminate paper-based processes and ensure regulatory compliance. Care staff will spend less time on administration and more time delivering care to clients.

NDIS-ready enterprise solution

The eCase software platform is an innovative NDIS-ready enterprise solution for disability support and community care providers. eCase supports disability providers from single service operations (for example, a speech therapist) to a multi-functional provider offering a range of services such as support coordination, plan management and more. Features include:

- Client management
- Rostering and scheduling
- Registered Nurse level care at home, including clinical assessments, progress notes, care plans, alerts and indicators, and reporting

- Dashboards, reports and analytics engine
- Customer budgets with all funding types (NDIS, HCP, CHSP, private)
- Mobile point-of-care app
- Client portals.

eCase provides a single platform that combines powerful functionality and ease of use. The platform offers rostering, plan management and funding from multiple sources.

The all-in-one software platform also features a single client record architecture which allows client records to move across various modes of care. It enables providers to make better,

data-driven decisions which ultimately lead to significantly better care outcomes for clients cost-effectively. As sectors converge, single client record architecture will become a critical technology for operators that span more than one care offering (for example, aged care and disability care).

The eCase platform has a fully integrated mobile app field workers can use. Staff have secure mobile access to a wealth of information, including:

- Viewing their appointments for the day and maps
- Viewing customer-specific details
- Following set tasks or entering progress notes
- Monitoring clock in and clock out against organisationally defined thresholds.

How is eCase making a difference?

According to Brindle, eCase contains workflows for disability providers to lift their administrative burden. Providers need only input data once, for example,

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“The NDIS will soon be seeking to make real the great promise of recovery, capacity building and wellbeing. All stakeholders will be affected and need to be part of the important discussion of how that happens”

*Bill Gye OAM,
CEO Community Mental Health Australia*



for several forms to be pre-populated.

“With an intuitive roster enhanced with AI and machine learning, the platform can track support plans and funding from multiple funding sources.”

eCase also provides a portal for families and clients to view and effectively own the content within their profile.

Unlike other software systems, eCase provides leading clinical documentation enabling better health outcomes in the disability sector.

Brindle explains, “From clinical assessments, care plans, alerts and indicators, progress notes and reports, we eliminate paper-based processes and ensure regulatory compliance. Care staff will spend less time on administration and more time delivering care to clients.”

Better still, the Health Metrics integration platform, eCoWare, enables providers to have existing systems connected via APIs. “A few other systems that we have seamlessly integrated with

(but not limited to) include Salesforce, Xero, Microsoft Dynamics 365, Procura, Epicor, Workday and many more,” Brindle adds.

However, there remains plenty to do on the technology adoption front. Brindle says many small and large providers are operating with substandard technology while uneconomical processes limit growth.

“NDIS providers will not be viable if they are working with paper-based or spreadsheet-based manual systems or multiple disconnected systems.

“A multi-system approach is not sustainable as it is inefficient and adds considerable costs, not to mention the challenge of resourcing and retaining skilled people to manage complex and disparate systems.

“We understand the issue of financial feasibility plays an unavoidable role in the level of technology adoption by some providers, and we are working with our customers to deliver digital solutions in an effective and achievable way.”

Brindle says, “Providers absolutely appreciate that technology can make their lives easier, and digital solutions are the way forward.”

Jordan O’Reilly, Co-founder and CEO of employment matching platform Hireup, says the adoption of new technologies across the NDIS is “a bit of a mixed bag”.

“Some organisations are investing in tech as a way to differentiate, but most seem slow to adopt new and smart technologies, likely because of the cost and complexities involved.”

O’Reilly says, “Many providers see partnership as the way of the future, and at Hireup we agree. We recently launched a new product called Hireup for Providers, where service providers use our platform to find and hire great staff. It’s been a real hit.

“We have providers, many of whom are struggling to find great new workers, that are now able to connect quickly and directly with potential staff. For staff, they are finding new work opportunities beyond the initial Hireup platform. It’s been a real win-win.” ●

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Jeff Clark - Keystones Counselling & Coordination

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Addressing the NDIS employment gap

In the recent federal election, Labor promised a rigorous review of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), focused on spending and administration, should it win office. **By Anthony O'Brien**

Last year, the previous government released the NDIS National Workforce Plan: 2021 – 2025. This plan outlines the Australian Government's commitment to work with NDIS participants, industry, and other stakeholders to grow a responsive and capable workforce for the NDIS. The aim is to ensure the care and support market and workforce can help participants meet their needs and achieve their goals.

The trouble is that workforce shortages present a danger to NDIS participants now. An industry report last year found there is a shortfall of 83,000 full-time workers and, as such, Labor's proposed review must also focus on the pressing workforce issues.

What are the core challenges?

Matching platform Hireup's co-founder, Jordan O'Reilly, says there are not enough disability support workers in Australia. "The NDIS predicts that there needs to be an additional 83,000 workers by 2025." Hireup's platform helps people with disabilities to find and manage their team of support workers. "At our platform's heart are choice and control for our workers—who can choose their clients and hours—and our clients, who can decide who works with them and when."

Hireup, as the employer, is responsible for work, health and safety and other statutory duties to protect workers. Moreover, Hireup employs its support workers, unlike other job matching platforms like Uber,

where workers are contractors, not employees. This means Hireup's support workers are paid award wages and are entitled to all the benefits associated with employment, including workers' compensation and superannuation, and support to return to work in the event of an injury or incident. Hireup also offers its workers training and career development pathways.

Additionally, Hireup employs both casual and permanent disability support workers. The benefit of working as a casual is the level of flexibility in hours worked. O'Reilly says, "Casual employees can make their own hours as best suits their schedules and vary them week to week.

"But they still receive employment benefits, like guaranteed wages, superannuation, training and development opportunities, and work health and safety protections—whereas independent contractors may have similar flexibility, but none of those guarantees or protections."

O'Reilly adds, "We think our platform helps—giving people a straightforward way to come into the sector. But in a low unemployment environment, the need for more good people will never go away. People often think that support workers need special qualifications. That's not true. Most of the time, character, enthusiasm, empathy and a willingness to learn about clients' needs and respond to them are what our clients are after."

Interestingly, not all parts of the NDIS are scrambling for workers. Andrew

Kiel of plan management trailblazer Leap in! says his firm is doing well in the changing environment.

"Over the last 18 months we've had COVID, and while that was a very challenging time for so many travel-based companies, it proved to be a wonderful opportunity for us. The upheaval meant that a large group of people with great problem-solving, relational and service backgrounds came onto the market. We've been so fortunate we have been able to connect with them."

Leap in! also looked at ways it could attract a far more representative group of people with lived experience in disability. These recruits could be participants or direct family members. "We looked at COVID and the changes that came with it as an opportunity to tap into a workforce that opened up once increased flexibility became available and access a group of people who previously had restricted employment opportunities," Kiel says.

"Working from home, flexible working hours with part-time and casual employment particularly suit our crew. As a result, now over 60% of our team have lived experience.

"The benefits have been wide-ranging and enriching for our members and our teams. Having a workforce with this experience means they already have a high degree of knowledge and experience of the NDIS. There's an incredible ability to understand and relate to the participants and customers they're talking to daily."

CONT. PAGE 60



Manoah Baker, Business Development Manager of independent NDIS plan manager, First2Care



#WeThe15 another driver for disability employment

Organisations in the disability sector are not only delivering services to people living with disabilities, they are also increasingly eyeing off opportunities to be seen as employing them too.

Several organisations have signed up to the commitments of the #WeThe15 movement, launched at the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games, and have targeted ambitions for 15% of their staff to be comprised of people living with disabilities.

The #WeThe15 movement is based on the figure that 15% of the world's population—or 1.2 billion people—live with a disability, and that people living with disabilities do not see themselves as 'special' but rather as normal and that organisations need to reflect this in the composition of their staff, just as they are now doing by gender balancing their workforce.

Manoah Baker, Business Development Manager of independent National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) plan manager, First2Care, says his organisation had grown its percentage

from 5% to 14% in less than two years after embracing the campaign.

"We spread the news through our team and said we want to employ more people with disabilities," says Baker.

"The advantage for us was that we were already employing some people with disabilities and tapping into their lived experience to better understand the needs and desires of our clients.

"So we put it out to our staff and got a bunch of referrals and since then the percentage has started to climb sharply."

For some of these people, their employment at First2Care is significant because it is their first paid job and has a major positive impact on all aspects of their lives. With a paid job, comes the opportunity to buy one's first car, go on road trips to major disability sporting events and to see the sights of other major cities.

Baker says it has all been very positive for First2Care, because the lived experience of the new staff members is informing the organisation's culture and helping to improve its core mission, which is service delivery.

"Instead of making assumptions or guessing, we can get immediate honest answers and feedback on critical issues from our own staff," says Baker.

He says First2Care has become a strong advocate for the #WeThe15 global movement, and senior management often lobby other organisations they deal with to also embrace the initiative.

It has also led to a First2Care staff member identifying a highly inclusive sport (Powerchair Football) that other likeminded providers can also rally behind.

With their financial assistance, the leveraging of their social media and creation of a social club, it has been able to shine a light on the benefits of such an inclusive disability sport for community engagement and participant wellbeing. These likeminded providers include Able Anglers, AidaCare, Get Going Support, Inclusive Support Services, Hireup and First2Care

Hireup has a community of around 10,000 support workers and a similar number of people with disabilities who use the platform to find each other.

Andrew Thomas, Director of Advocacy and Communications at Hireup, says his organisation is now at around 12% against the 15% target.

"That there are decision makers who are people with disabilities at the heart of companies like ours is really important," says Thomas.

"We go out of our way to find the best people, and we've got some fantastic people right across the company who live with disabilities and, therefore, they have the experience of navigating the NDIS, which is not necessarily the easiest thing in the world."

Thomas says Hireup has also moved to create an advisory role for the organisation's board, appointing a person with a disability in a non-voting role who is there to "give a voice" at the board level.

Feedback from people with disabilities, both inside and outside the organisation, has also led to changes in several features of the Hireup platform.

"We also have a community advisory group which tests the product and identifies where we need to improve," says Thomas.



Sister act confirm long-term employment benefits

If anyone ever doubted people with disability could find and maintain long-term jobs, think again. Sisters Jolleen and Catherine are proof people with Down's syndrome can find great jobs and positively contribute to their local community through the support of programs such as Disability Employment Services (DES).

Through DES, people with disability, injury or a health condition may be able to receive assistance to prepare for, find and keep a job. Providers of DES such as EPIC Assist (EPIC) are called DES providers.

EPIC helped Jolleen and Catherine find jobs at Woolworths Narangba where the girls have now been working for 16 and 15 years, respectively.

During that period, the sisters have been involved in many different aspects of the business, from preparing biscuits to restocking shelves.

Over the last 16 years, Jolleen and Catherine have become stars at the store, with many customers seeking out their friendly smiles to say hello. Even more, they have become a model for people with Down's syndrome, proving to local businesses how much employees with Down's syndrome have to offer.

During every shift, one of EPIC's support workers is onsite to assist Jolleen and Catherine to complete their tasks.

EPIC's Maureen Winton has been supporting both sisters for 13 years and has witnessed great changes and developments.

"Over the years, the girls have continued to build independence in the workplace, which has been great to see," says Winton.

"They can transition between tasks with minimal assistance and are confident and comfortable in approaching managers and staff. They are also great at helping customers."

EPIC's Ryan Vogler says the job has transformed Jolleen's independence in both the workplace and life.

"It's been amazing to see Jolleen's confidence and independence continue to build. She's always happy to be there, and that happiness is contagious."

Vogler says it is her loyalty, kindness, and commitment to excellent customer service that keeps her working at the store.

"She's an incredibly valued member of the Woolworths family. Sixteen years is no small feat, and her dedication to the job always shines through."

Winton says Catherine has also become more independent and is engaging more with her colleagues and customers.

"Catherine enjoys the social aspect of working and feeling part of the Woolworths team."

That team has seen several managers over the years, all of whom have been supportive of the sisters' journey.

Woolworths Assistant Manager, Karrissa, says Jolleen and Catherine are valuable members of their workforce.

"Jolleen and Catherine get along amazingly with the team and they love having them onboard. They are part of the family," Karrissa says.

"We love the girls being part of our team and it wouldn't be the same without them. They are an asset to our team."

EPIC stays on the journey with its participants for as long as needed, whether it be a month, a year or ongoing.

"I love making a difference to a participant's life and watching them become more independent," Winton says.

"Observing participants smiling and feeling good about their achievements, that's what makes it worthwhile for me."

This ongoing support means people like Jolleen and Catherine can maintain meaningful work and make a positive contribution to their community, all while building their confidence and independence.

For more information about EPIC's disability employment services, visit epicassist.org.

Offering fair pay

O'Reilly agrees that the new government should make sure disability support workers are offered fair pay and conditions to guarantee quality services to NDIS participants and the long-term future of the support workforce.

Hireup's platform employment model demonstrates best practices in both these areas, offering choice and control for clients and optimal employment conditions for workers.

In addition, keeping those workers as arms-length contractors means workers and clients become liable for service quality and safety, and any problems or incidents that occur, with almost no oversight from the provider."

Addressing the employment gap

To some extent, more promotion of the benefits of working in the disability sector cannot hurt, O'Reilly reasons.

"It means giving workers in the sector the respect they deserve. That means treating them well, as employees who are integral to their company and the sector."

Why do we think that sharing the workforce is important? Many workers in the disability sector want more hours than they can predictably get with their employer. Inflexible rostering practices, changing schedules, and unpredictable client demand in the competitive NDIS market mean workers often miss out.

Hireup also prioritises bringing workers into areas with significant employment gaps. "We can respond to increased demand for support workers in different parts of Australia in real time," says O'Reilly. "We're always keen to get support workers through our pre-employment checks to the areas where they are most needed."

Given that the government aims to have 30% of the 460,000 NDIS participants gainfully employed by 2023, Hireup also has support workers who are NDIS participants themselves, which is one way of addressing the employment gap. For example, Julian Annison is a member of the Hireup team and an NDIS participant. Annison has a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder (Asperger's Syndrome) which means that he has many areas in which he's highly skilled, but also has some largely underdeveloped areas. Annison says, "My Asperger's Syndrome has given me a strong memory and interest in learning about public transport.

"This interest has enabled me to work as a Hireup support worker to share



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my knowledge on public transport, particularly as I can relate extremely well to my clients who have gone through many of the same struggles as I previously have.”

Annisson continues, “My Asperger’s Syndrome has presented itself with difficulties around cooking due to my sensory integration challenges. I receive some NDIS funding to learn how to cook, once a fortnight, that is tailored to managing to cook a meal whilst overcoming the challenges that sensory integration can present for me.”

Supporting providers

Hireup for Providers is a relatively new part of the Hireup operation, and it has been well received by other professionals in the sector.

In essence, Hireup for Providers is how other providers can access Hireup workers as and when they need them. O’Reilly explains, “That might mean using a worker to ‘fill a gap’ when their regular workers are off—something that COVID has made more regular.

“This allows the provider to more regularly book our workers, or teams of workers, knowing we will handle all the bureaucracy of being the workers’ employer while the provider focuses on their specialisation.”

Head of Hireup for Providers, Peter Willis, confirms that the disability sector needs workers. “Advocates say that we are tens of thousands of workers short.” For those working in the sector, burnout and turnover are high, while a recent union survey suggested that up to one in three current workers in the sector plan to quit.

So, what can be done? Willis recommends that policymakers and practitioners attract more workers through subsidising training or increasing wages. “Another approach involves retaining the workers we have in the sector through measures such as providing career progression for frontline workers.”

Both ideas have merit. However, Willis argues there is also a third approach. “Share the workers in the sector more effectively across organisational

boundaries to meet the needs of people with disability.

“Why do we think that sharing the workforce is important? Many workers in the disability sector want more hours than they can predictably get with their employer. Inflexible rostering practices, changing schedules, and unpredictable client demand in the competitive NDIS market mean workers often miss out.

“This is lost capacity that slips through our fingers every week—hours of support that people with disability need and that workers want to provide.”

Willis continues, “If we can create efficient ways for organisations in their sector to share their workforces, we can unlock this capacity and reduce the workforce crisis we face as a sector.

“At its essence, this is what Hireup for Providers does. It provides workers on Hireup with more hours and disability organisations with flexible capacity and the means to better guarantee continuity of support to their clients, especially in the face of COVID outbreaks.” ●



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Carol Taylor, award-winning Gold Coast lawyer, artist, designer and disability advocate, and co-owner and lead designer of Christina Stephens adaptive fashion label



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Adaptive Clothing Collective making history at Afterpay Australian Fashion Week

Award-winning Gold Coast lawyer, artist, designer and disability advocate, and co-owner and lead designer of Christina Stephens adaptive fashion label, Carol Taylor knows firsthand the power of fashion to change a person's life. **By Anthony O'Brien**

I might be on wheels, but fashion moves me forward. That moment I started to wear colour and find, create and make clothing to feel like the person I was pre-injury, it was cathartic. It changed me—and put me on the road to good mental health. That's how powerful clothing is."

For Carol, who is quadriplegic following a car accident, accessible and beautiful clothing is not just a personal necessity, but a passion that has led her to a flourishing new career.

Supported by the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), which provides Carol with support workers at home and work, Carol is on a mission to shake up the Australian and global fashion industries to become more inclusive.

"People with disabilities want to feel like everybody else. They don't want to be singled out or made to feel like they're excluded," she says. "I want to be able to go out for lunch with a friend and then pop into a department store and find something I like that I can actually wear."

Carol believes she is Australia's—and the world's—first quadriplegic designer.

She is also the first quadriplegic to co-design a collection showcased at the country's premier fashion event, Afterpay Australian Fashion Week (AAFW).

Carol's designs are part of the new Christina Stephens collection and debut runway show from the Adaptive Clothing Collective. A group of three adaptive fashion labels, which aims to provide a "unified voice for inclusive and adaptive clothing labels in Australia and abroad".

This year is the first ever adaptive clothing runway in Australian Fashion Week history.

"I don't think I've ever worked so hard in my life, but it's exhilarating, and I

wouldn't be doing this—none of this would be possible—without the support of the NDIS,” Carol says.

“I've got paralysed hands. I'm paralysed from the chest down. If I want to look at a piece of fabric, I need someone to pass it to me. If I'm having trouble navigating something on the computer, I need assistance. I need a pair of hands and I've got them because of the NDIS.

“The NDIS has changed my life and enabled me to be the best me I can be.”

A born problem-solver, Carol began designing clothes after she found there was nothing in the shops that fitted her altered shape following the car accident, which left her a quadriplegic at 34.

“I couldn't go to the shops and buy what I wanted because there are all these terrible things that happen to your body when you become a quadriplegic; your shape changes, your muscles atrophy,” Carol says.

“Shopping became such a sad experience. I always loved fashion, becoming a quadriplegic didn't change that. I looked at the situation and thought, ‘Okay, well how do I get around that problem?’ and so I designed my own clothes.”

Forging a new career while also caring for her son and running her own law firm, Carol was invited to showcase a collection at the Mercedes Benz Fashion Festival in Brisbane in 2019.

Now, she has joined forces with fellow Queenslander, Jessie Sadler, as lead designer and co-owner for successful adaptive clothing label, Christina Stephens.

Together, Carol and Jessie hope their work will help bring adaptive clothing into ‘mainstream’ fashion.

“The real issue here is the way you dress not only affects your core sense of identity and your level of confidence, but it directly affects the way the world perceives you,” Carol says.

Carol says her new designs are eye-opening, unexpected and provocative—with one special made-to-order piece.

“There's something very special that has been designed for the girl that can't stand up,” Carol says. “I always say to my son—nothing ever changes if everything stays the same, so be that change maker. I hope that's what this collection will do.” ●



Afterpay Australian Fashion Week

Once a year, Australia's preeminent designers come together to showcase their latest designs at AAFW, Australia's only international fashion trade event. The 2022 event was held in May at the Carriageworks in Sydney, and featured runway shows, panel talks and immersive experiences.

“The 2022 schedule of designer shows, programming and special events features some of the industry's most noteworthy names, all gearing up to showcase their creativity and hard work against the vivid backdrop of Sydney, the resort wear capital of the Asia Pacific region,” stated Natalie Xenita, Vice President Managing Director of IMG Fashion Events and Properties, Asia Pacific. “As the cornerstone for growth and recognition, AAFW celebrates the ingenuity of Australia's top designers and creators, providing them with the opportunity to showcase their creativity and innovation across Australia and around the globe.”¹

Minister for Enterprise, Investment and Trade and Minister for Tourism, Stuart Ayres, said, “The NSW Government is proud to support Afterpay Australian Fashion Week, which not only contributes to the cultural offering of Sydney but also helps ignite growth in our state's creative and retail industries by providing opportunities for designers to showcase their creativity and forge new pathways to market. This year's schedule of events illustrates why Sydney is recognised globally as a hub of inspiration and innovation in the fashion world. Fashion Week also underscores the importance of retail tourism, which is a key pillar in achieving our goal of making NSW the premier visitor economy of the Asia Pacific.”²

For the first time in Australian Fashion Week's history, in 2022 the Adaptive Clothing Collective shone the spotlight on clothes for people with different ability requirements. The Adaptive Clothing Collective was founded by three of Australia's leading and homegrown adaptive and inclusive fashion labels: JAM the label, The Shapes United and Christina Stephens. The collection sought to raise the profile and awareness of clothing for a large and underrepresented market.

[1] <https://media.destinationnsw.com.au/media-releases/img-announces-schedule-afterpay-australian-fashion-week>

[2] *ibid*



IMAGE: Supplied

Resilience Queen has no time to procrastinate

If anyone has earned the title the 'Resilience Queen', it is Justine Martin. **By Lachlan Colquhoun**

In her 51 years, Martin has lived with multiple sclerosis for more than a decade, had ongoing battles with several types of cancer and a heart condition, in addition to dealing with other debilitating and related health conditions.

Despite this, she has won weightlifting competitions, developed a career as an artist and a writer, and is now a sought-after motivational speaker.

"I tell people not to give up, just modify what they do," says Martin.

"Don't get stuck in the past, because if you do, you'll stay in the past.

"For sure, grieve for your former life, that is important and even as the Queen of Resilience I do get angry and have the odd bad day, but I just keep positive."

After caring for a disabled single mother who was then diagnosed with MS and died of cancer, Martin was herself diagnosed with MS at the age of 40 after suffering from migraines for more than a year.

This prompted a breakup with her fiancé, who walked out saying that living with a partner with MS would be "too hard on him".

"He knew what he was capable of doing and what he wasn't and he said to me that having MS would affect his dreams in life," says Martin.

"So I got off my pity party then and there and haven't looked back."

Martin was living in Western Australia at the time of her diagnosis and moved back to Victoria to be closer to her family, largely because she realised her daughter would need support if she was unable to look after her.

Soon after, Martin developed heart problems as her resting heart rate soared to around 165 beats per minute, against a healthy rate of 60 to 100,

which necessitated three operations.

From there she was diagnosed with melanoma and leukemia, treatment for which required her coming off the MS drug treatment as she prepared for chemotherapy.

At this point, as she went into the Christmas period pondering that it might be her last, Martin recalled advice from a neurologist in Perth.

"When he told me I couldn't work anymore and do the job I was doing he said I better find a hobby," she says.

"So I've always wanted to paint, but it took me four months to walk through that studio door because all of a sudden I developed anxiety, and even though my house was my safe haven it was also my jail."

Ultimately, she overcame this and started to paint, and was encouraged when one of the first pieces of work she entered in an exhibition sold for \$300.

"When I sold it for \$300 it could have been for \$3 million," says Martin.

"I found a purpose again, which was to make other people happy through looking at my art and I went on a roll with it.

"I just started painting up a storm and it's gone from there."

A key motivation for Martin is a desire to support herself and create residual income, so that if she has a bad day or bad week she knows she still has some income coming in.

To achieve that, she has created income streams from her writing, her art, as a public speaker and a support worker for people with disabilities.

At the same time, she keeps fit through gym sessions and this has led to an interest in competitive body building.

It might be painful, she says, but it is "good pain" which is good both for her mind and body.

"There isn't an adversity I haven't faced," says Martin.

"Whether that has been death, divorce, being fired from a job, re-inventing yourself in the face of terminal illness, you name it, I've faced it and now I have all this knowledge about how to find a way through it and I want to help people by sharing it."

Key to Martin's philosophy is a mantra of no procrastination because procrastinating wastes time.

"Time is the most precious commodity on the planet, because it's something we cannot buy, borrow, reuse or sell," she says.

"So I tell people to be careful who they spend their time with and what they spend it on.

"People say to me 'you get so much done, do you have more than 24 hours in the day', but it's because I don't procrastinate anymore."

In Martin's experience, people spend more time procrastinating than they spend on doing the things they procrastinate about, and this is to their detriment.

"Procrastinating actually causes more stress and creates a mountain out of a molehill, when really you should just go ahead and do whatever it is," she says.

Martin's health is still fragile, and she has her good days and bad days and is often exhausted at the end of a period of intense work. This does not stop her from moving forward and taking on new projects all the time, such as podcasting, a new publishing project through her own company, or a writing group to help others write their stories.

"My life didn't stop when I became disabled," she says.

"It just took on a whole new meaning. I was in a conversation with my neurologist the other day and I realised that, despite all my health issues, I think I'm the happiest and the healthiest I've been in my life." ●



A home not a facility

The specialist disability accommodation (SDA) program was conceived as a way of creating an attractive new asset class for investors, while providing significant new housing stock for people with a disability. **By Lachlan Colquhoun**

Several years in and the program has had some success, but despite its potential there are still alarming shortages in accommodation and housing, particularly in rural areas.

While the sector deals with these ongoing shortages, progress has been made and SDA projects continue to win the backing of major institutional investors, suggesting that even if the program is behind schedule it has created some positive momentum.

The SDA sits alongside the supported independent living (SIL) program, which manages the support services that residents need in their homes and offers help doing tasks such as shopping, cooking and cleaning, as well as managing carer appointments.

In terms of SDA investments, for example, Melbourne based Lighthouse Infrastructure closed its second specialist SDA fund in July 2022, raising \$300 million from traditional

real estate investors looking for an alternative to residential property.

This is expected to scale up to \$500 million, a sufficient investment to provide accommodation for up to 1000 people.

The first Lighthouse Fund, called ADAPT, has invested around \$250 million in 136 homes across 73 locations and provided accommodation for 400 NDIS participants.

Interest in SDA has also spread outside of Australia. In July, pan-Asian investor

OCP Asia announced a \$200 million investment in projects to be delivered by disability housing providers NDISP and Social Impact Funds Management.

Those funds will be used to develop a portfolio of more than 40 sites over four years, with a focus on Queensland and the regional hubs of Townsville and Rockhampton.

The Queensland outback is one regional area where there is a lack of disability housing and while the OCP investment will not be the solution to the entire problem, it will go some way.

Nationally, government funding for SDA is expected to grow from \$230 million to \$700 million each year over the next five years, with the NDIS expecting more than \$5 billion in new capital will be invested to deliver 13,000 new accommodation places by 2027.

Other leading private sector institutions to become involved include US investment bank Goldman Sachs, which invested \$137 million in the sector last year, and Macquarie Bank and Arena REIT, a real estate investment trust listed on the Australian Securities Exchange.

So far, SDA has grown to a \$2.5 billion asset class since it was launched six years ago, with forecasts it could grow to provide homes for up to 30,000 people.

While institutional investors are providing much of the funding, it is mission led organisations around Australia which are doing much of the planning and delivery of this next generation of disability housing.

Improving design

One such organisation is Queensland-based Youngcare, which has its origins in Brisbane.

Youngcare began when a young Queensland woman—Shevaune Conry—was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis and family and friends, including music legend Bernard Fanning from Powderfinger, banded together to find a solution not only for Shevaune, but for other people with disabilities.

The organisation currently has a number of SDA locations established in Queensland and is set to open more by the end of the year, delivering a variety of accommodation types from single person apartments to three and four bedroom share houses.

Youngcare's General Manager of Development, Tim Lambert, says the organisation is on track to deliver accommodation for 43 residents by the end of the year.

Lambert acknowledges that Youngcare is a "cautious mover" and wants to minimise issues as it moves up to scale, but says the other side of that approach is that it has "client driven outcomes".

Youngcare is committed to providing high quality accommodation and has developed its own design guidelines which deliver above SDA standards, an approach which results in happier residents and longer term tenancies.

We want to give people the opportunity to live in a home they can call their own, and that is important because in the past facilities were really clinical and cold and didn't carry that feeling of being part of a wider community with them.

"We certainly have learned lots of lessons from buildings and homes that we've constructed before, and we like to think that we're always improving the design elements," says Lambert.

"We run regular surveys with our existing residents and try to improve on that outcome, and we're also very cognisant of trying to keep pace with the market as there's so much new technology and automation.

"While that can be a challenge in terms of cost, it's important that we strive for that best in class design."

Key to this design approach, says Lambert, is having the client involved at an early point in the process of any project.

"Success to us is about making an impact on people's lives, and that means supporting the families as well as the residents," he says.

"Giving the residents choice is a really important part of that, and I think that

element hasn't been there so much in the past in this sector.

"So we're really focused on doing that, and on delivering outcomes."

Key to the Youngcare approach is delivering a home, and 'not a facility'.

"We want to give people the opportunity to live in a home they can call their own, and that is important because in the past facilities were really clinical and cold and didn't carry that feeling of being part of a wider community with them," says Lambert.

"Having a safe and functional home is so important, but it is also a base for engaging with so many other things such as community, education, recreation, hobbies, work and friendship."

Youngcare does not receive any recurring government funding but has a number of key sponsors, such as Suncorp and Tradelink—which also helps out in kind, and also runs successful fundraising events such as a major walk across the Simpson Desert.

In addition to providing SDA, the organisation also has a grants program which offers up to 70 grants each year for people to fund the upgrade or installation of a device or a piece of equipment which the NDIS will not cover.

"This year, we'll be giving out grants close to \$1 million, and that can make a significant difference to people," says Lambert.

For Lambert, who has also worked in the for-profit sector, there is a great sense of satisfaction in seeing the impact that Youngcare can have on people's lives.

"When you go out to see the residents and their families first hand, you can see the benefits of what Youngcare delivers," he says.

"It's really powerful to see the difference it makes to people, and that is a big justification for everything we do."

Wellness and independence

On the other side of Australia, in Western Australia, Rocky Bay is a well-known provider of support for children and people with disability which is also embracing SDA.

Rocky Bay was founded in 1933 as an organisation to provide support for children with polio, and accommodation support was one of its earliest service areas.

Today, Rocky Bay has a broad offering delivering services to around 3500 people in WA through 1200 staff in areas such as short and medium-term accommodation, respite care, holiday options, employment, transport, training and even a technology arm working with robotics and 'eye gaze' technology from gaming.

"Our purpose as an entity is to offer services which improve people's wellness and independence," says Chief Executive Officer Michael Tait.

Rocky Bay has embraced the SDA program with enthusiasm, creating a specialist company called SHIFT to deliver the projects and hired a full-time architect, project manager and draughtsman to drive new projects.

Homes are built in full consultation with families and residents to reflect their needs, and "bring them along on the journey".

"We are moving away from the old group home model and setting out on Stage One of our program to build 200 new bedrooms across new one and two bedroom homes," says Tait.

Rocky Bay has been seeking to deliver Stage One of an ambitious program, and while the timeline has been challenged by the pandemic lockdowns is set to deliver around 100 beds from a \$40 million investment.

The organisation has around a dozen sites currently under construction and some major projects will be opened this year, with other openings staggered over the next 12 to 18 months.

Its Girrawheen project was the recipient of an architectural design award from the WA Institute of Architects for "enabling architecture", which is validation for its approach.

Michael Tait said Rocky Bay recently had a forum for stakeholders and posed some questions, and got some surprising answers.

"Some were as you expected, around living independently and using new technology, but some things we hadn't anticipated," he said.

"These were around liking some of the design features but also being concerned with the geographic locations of the

projects, so that they were close to parks and facilities, and also had features like pavements for access.

"We spend a lot of time looking at the right land for developments, and you'd be surprised how many blocks of land in Perth don't have pavements near them."

Marcus Deshon, Development Manager for SHIFT, the Rocky Bay subsidiary, said the forum also brought out a desire from many residents to live together with their friends.

This was a far cry from days past, when people with disability were living in hostel accommodation, in aged care with older people, or were in group homes with people they did not know who were selected at random.

"Yes they wanted independence and wanted to move out from mum and dad, but they didn't necessarily want to live by themselves to start with," says Deshon.

"They wanted to be able to share a space at least initially with a group, and live with their friends, so this is something for us to take on board."



So what we need to do as a sector is understand the benefits that technology can deliver and become a technology provider as well...

New technologies are also a factor, and beyond basic internet connections the idea of the 'connected house' can include many features and apps which can be of benefit to people with disability.

"There are also things like power for windows and doors, and if you think about it there's hardly anything including light fittings which don't have an IP address," says Tait.

"So what we need to do as a sector is understand the benefits that technology can deliver and become a technology provider as well, and that means being able to put in Google Home and that sort of technology to ensure that people have maximum independence and convenience in their homes."

This also extended to 'low tech' items such as tables. SHIFT looked into pricing tables and kitchens and decided it could

do things better and cheaper, and is now saving around \$500,000 a year by manufacturing these items using German technology.

While Rocky Bay has had a challenging 18 months due to the supply chain issues brought on by the pandemic, Tait is grateful for the support of his bank and calls out the NAB for their strong support.

As a result, Stage Two of SHIFT's program is "on the drawing board" and is set to go to the Board, costed at just under \$140 million.

"I'm hoping we'll have secured Board approval for Stage Two by September," says Tait.

"Stage Two will need some good partnerships with all our stakeholders and with the sector and we, being a 'for purpose' organisation, need to give

them confidence and take them on the journey with us."

Another initiative is a research project with Curtin University to look at the impact on residents' wellbeing, and compare how that may have improved as a result of moving into new SDA homes.

Tait says that while there was much anecdotal evidence around this, it was important that an academic study be completed to help chart the way forward for the sector.

"As a not for profit we believe in giving something back, and as one of the largest and strongest organisations in our sector in WA it is incumbent on us to contribute as thought leaders," he says.

"So SDA is one of those areas where we can help in the creation of evidence-based research which will improve all aspects of the sector, such as standards for minor things like the size of doorways.

"In that way, too, our work can have a lasting impact not only for our residents, but for the wider SDA program." ●



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There are disability service providers and then there's Aruma



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Want to know more about the services Aruma offers?

Aruma is one of Australia's leading NDIS service providers. They are the trusted partner and mentor to over 5000 adults and children with a disability throughout the east coast of Australia.

So, the first question to ask yourself is, "what is it that you're after?"

Maybe you want to find a new home or get a job? How about learning to cook or giving surfing a go?

The staff at Aruma are all ears. The services they offer include:

- **Home and living.** Everybody wants to find a place to call home, and Aruma has a range of services such as SIL to help you with that.

- **School leaver employment supports.**

If you are about to finish school or have just left school, Aruma can help you get 'job ready' and learn heaps of new skills!

- **Supported employment.** Would you like to become a part of the Aruma team? The organisation owns and runs eight businesses that employ people with a disability so there might be a job with your name on it!

- **Behavioural support.** Aruma can help you to understand why an adult or a child with a disability may engage in inappropriate, challenging or unsafe behaviours, and work together with you to find a solution.

- **Support coordination.** Aruma's Support Coordinators are the local experts and can help you find disability services that are right for you.
- **Children's services.** These range from early childhood intervention, short-term accommodation (respite) and behavioural support, to name a few.
- **Daily living skills.** Daily living skills are the skills we use in everyday life. Like cooking, cleaning, using money, catching public transport, the list goes on! Aruma can help you here, too.
- **Social and community participation.** Under the NDIS, social and community services are about supporting people with a disability to take part in their community. Aruma can help you try new things and meet new people.
- **Short-term accommodation (respite).** Aruma has a number of welcoming short-term accommodation properties for people with a disability across New South Wales, Victoria and the ACT, for when you need a break.
- **Therapeutic Supports.** We offer supports for children and adults including speech pathology to help improve communication skills and relate to others, and occupational therapy to help build confidence and independence

Let's take a deeper dive in to their home and living services...

SUPPORTED INDEPENDENT LIVING

Aruma can help people with a disability find a home to call their own. They call this supported independent living. All Aruma properties provide customers with a comfortable, secure home. The team will also support customers with day-to-day tasks like:

- Cleaning and laundry
- Nutrition and cooking
- Personal care such as showering and dressing
- Going to appointments
- Taking medication
- Taking up a hobby
- Learning to catch public transport.

SPECIALIST DISABILITY ACCOMMODATION

Aruma also offers a wide range of specialist disability accommodation (SDA) properties.

All SDA homes have been carefully designed with a range of accessibility, comfort and care requirements in mind.

This includes accessible features to help someone live more independently and have better access to supports in their own home.

In some cases, customers can even use their SDA funding to purchase a new home!

INDIVIDUALISED LIVING OPTIONS

Aruma offers both exploration, and design and implementation supports as part of individualised living options (ILOs). Their ILO services are currently available in NSW, ACT, Victoria and Queensland.

As a first step, this means the Aruma team will work with a customer, their family and friends to really understand where and how they want to live, their strengths, and what supports are right for them in their home.

Then, Aruma will work with the customer to design their unique plan, using both paid and unpaid supports, and recommend the best living options for them.

With ILOs, a customer has complete control of who they live with. They can share a home with friends, housemates or live on their own.

Now, have a look at their short-term accommodation offer.

Change is as good as a holiday. Sometimes it is nice to take a break, make some new friends, try new things and recharge.

And that is where Aruma comes in. They offer their customers a home away from home through a range of short-term accommodation (STA) options.

STA means families or carers can get some time to unwind too. It is a win-win for everyone!

Our STA services can give you the chance to meet new people and do some fun activities.

This can be seeing the latest movie, going out for a meal, going to the beach, checking out a local attraction or playing a favourite sport.

No matter how old our customer is or their tastes—there is something for them.

Hungry for more?

We don't blame you. Reach out to the Aruma team on **1300 538 746** or **enquiries@aruma.com.au**.

You can also head to Aruma's website at www.aruma.com.au.

Did you hear about Aruma's brand awards?

You know them as Aruma now, but it was only a few years ago that this organisation found its name (they were previously known as House with No Steps and The Tipping Foundation).

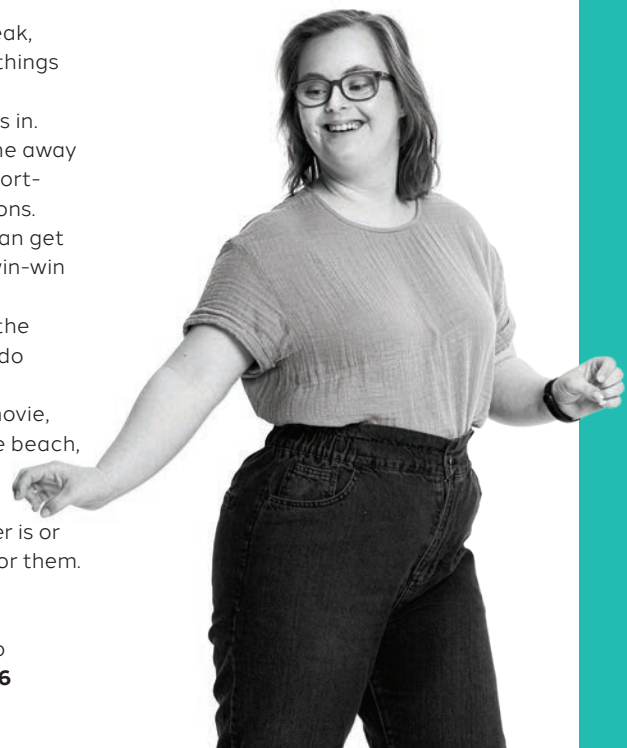
Their work to rebrand Aruma reaped gold, silver and bronze awards in the Transform ANZ brand awards.

In 2021, they won not one but FOUR accolades in the only awards program that celebrates the best brand work in Australia and New Zealand.

HERE IS A RUNDOWN:

- **GOLD** for "Best internal engagement during a brand development and research project".
- **GOLD** for "Best Naming strategy".
- **SILVER** for "Best corporate rebrand strategy following a merger or acquisition".
- **BRONZE** for "Best strategic or creative development for new brand".

They were in the company of some big players, including Westpac, Ernst & Young and McCain Foods. ●





Homecare challenged by demand

There are many opinions on the issue of homecare in the disability sector, but one common point of agreement is that there is a major skills shortage and homecare providers are struggling to meet demand.

By Lachlan Colquhoun

IMAGE: Supplied

The COVID pandemic has been a major factor in disrupting care in the home, with around one third of the workforce in lockdowns, but beyond that there are pure demographics. There are simply too many people who need care and not enough people to care for them.

In April this year, Laurie Leigh, Chief Executive Officer of National Disability Services, told the ABC that the staffing situation was “pretty dire at the moment”.

“There are long-term staffing issues within the sector which certainly have not been resolved recently,” said Leigh, whose organisation is the peak body for non-government disability providers.

Beyond the pandemic, which also slashed the availability of international workers, there were other factors such as award wages in the sector, a casualised workforce and competition with aged care for workers.



The number of people receiving services through the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is also increasing, with many accessing the supported independent living (SIL) program.

According to the NDIS third quarter report for the 2021 financial year, 450,000 participants are receiving support, more than 50% of them for the first time, increasing the number of clients for disability services organisations.

According to a parliamentary report on the NDIS, an extra 83,000 additional workers will be needed in the sector to meet demand by 2025 as the service continues to be rolled out.

Other research underlines the gap in demand and availability. According to the Australian Council of Trade Unions, one third of workers plan to leave the sector.

Melbourne University's Centre of Research Excellence in Disability and

Health found that four out of 10 people with a disability have unmet needs for assistance in areas such as household chores, property maintenance, meal preparation and private transport.

Among those who received assistance with core activities from organised services, 39% needed more assistance.

Paul Godden is the Operations Manager for Simply Helping, a care provider founded in regional Victoria in 1998, which is now a franchised business throughout Australia with around 6000 clients.

The franchise model has compliance requirements for both the franchisor and franchisee. Simply Helping requires that all franchisees be registered with the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission, meaning they must all be fully compliant with the quality and safety standards of the Commission.

Standards are maintained through external audits and Simply Helping's own internal audits covering operational and quality requirements, and support workers undergo regular in-service training and information sessions.

Godden says there is an "overwhelming need out there" and while this is driving growth for Simply Helping, there is still more demand.

"We've actually tripled in size over the last three years, and we could put between 100 and 150 new support workers on our books every month," he says.

"There's an absolute shortage in labour resourcing and everyone is experiencing it and there's no doubt it is a challenging environment.

"We are always looking for more quality people, and we've added four new franchises in the 2022 financial year."

Simply Helping's philosophy is that being able to remain living as

CONT. PAGE 76



Lisa Cox
Author, speaker, disability advocate
Lite n' Easy NDIS Ambassador



**Jenny, NDIS Customer
& Bailey, Jenny's son**

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Making it easy to eat well

While Lite n' Easy is best known for its calorie-controlled meal plans, its individual meals and meal plans are suitable for people with a range of needs. Made from high quality ingredients and produce, Lite n' Easy offers plenty of variety and choice with over 235 meals to choose from and all delivered to your door.

Lite n' Easy's dedicated team of dietitians is central to the meal development process and work collaboratively with their chefs to ensure meals are as healthy as they are tasty.

Lite n' Easy Senior Dietitian Ashleigh Jones shares, "The single most important dietary change anyone can make to be healthier is to eat five serves of veggies and two serves of fruit each day.

"But it can be hard, so at Lite n' Easy we make sure you can enjoy the right foods, in the right portions throughout the day and that you get your daily 5+2 with our complete meal solution."

Lite n' Easy meals are based on the Australian Dietary Guidelines, with particular attention paid to protein, fibre, saturated fat and sodium, making them suitable for anyone who can benefit from a generally healthy diet.

As a trusted, award winning meal provider, Lite n' Easy can assist approved NDIS participants with their daily food requirements, delivering meals directly to their door. If eligible, NDIS participants can claim up to 70% of the cost of their Lite n' Easy meal delivery service back from the NDIS.

Lisa Cox, Lite n' Easy's NDIS Ambassador, told us, "I could not be more delighted by the quality, range and freshness of Lite n' Easy meals that arrive at my door each week.

"My particular disabilities are visible and invisible so sometimes food preparation is difficult.

"I need to keep my body and mind well to stay on top of my busy life, and that's what Lite n' Easy does for me."

Jenny, a Lite n' Easy customer says, "I am very fortunate to have had the NDIS

subsidise my weekly orders, making this a long-term lifestyle change that I can maintain, not just a fad diet.

"The fact there is no preparation required is a big win for me. Having healthy, nutritious meals ready to eat with no effort needed is essential for me."

Lite n' Easy supports and promotes real independence. Participants have complete choice over what to order, when to order and at what frequency to order. No more waiting for a support person to arrive at the home to prepare each meal. There are no contracts or joining fees. Online ordering is straightforward and can be done 24/7 by visiting **liteneasy.com.au** once an account is set up.

Payment is by secure credit card only. Lite n' Easy's goal is to make eating well easy, so email **ndis@liteneasy.com.au** or call **13 15 12** if you have any questions! ●

Helping all Australians to eat well

Developed by dietitians and prepared by chefs, Lite n' Easy offers more than just a weight loss solution. We also offer delicious, nutritious meals, designed to promote healthy eating, well-being and a better quality of life for all Australians.

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independently as possible in their own home has many benefits for people with a disability.

It is easier for them to be socially connected with family and friends, while an understanding of the neighbourhood means better access to the local community.

Godden is a strong supporter of the NDIS, but says there is often a “grey area” in terms of the services which Simply Helping is able to deliver.

“It’s been very complex, and there is often a gap between what the participant wants and the allowable services we can provide,” he says.

“That being said, we do have a very robust policy and framework around this ourselves, but there’s no doubt that there has been something of a disconnect with the NDIS in regards to the administration required, and this takes up a lot of the time of support workers who are actually trying to provision the services.”

Godden is optimistic that the fresh focus of the new Commonwealth

Government on the NDIS might reduce some of the complexity, increase levels of clarity around interpreting service auditing criteria and also boost resourcing levels.

With its origins in regional Australia, Simply Helping is acutely aware of the challenges of service delivery across what Godden calls the “travesty of distance” which is often compounded by red tape with the NDIS and slows down and complicates service delivery.

There are also often major differences in what carers are asked to do in regional situations compared with in the cities. Godden gives the example of care workers who were asked to milk cows for a client as a case in point.

“It’s a challenging environment, for sure, and we are hoping that the new government might help improve the situation at least a little,” he says.

The NDIS has pointed out that it has a network of around 260 remote community connectors supporting more than 300 remote communities helping people connect to the scheme, but it

would appear that even at this level of resourcing the scheme is under pressure.

In 2021, research by Dr George Disney at the University of Melbourne found that NDIS participants in regional and remote Victoria received smaller NDIS plans than people in urban areas, and those with smaller plans were less able to spend the funds they were allocated due to a lack of services.

Compounding the issue of homecare is the fact that more than 1000 NDIS patients have been stranded in hospitals during the pandemic, and away from support and rehabilitation services.

NDIS Minister, Bill Shorten, struck an agreement with state disability ministers in June to move these patients into suitable care, but the consequence of that is these people will also require services from the under resourced homecare sector.

The Minister has also acknowledged the challenges faced by NDIS participants in regional Australia, saying their access to the scheme had been “neglected”, and addressing regional



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access was one of six key measures outlined in the Labor Party's platform taken to the May 2022 election.

Shorten said the government would task a "senior officer" to address NDIS issues in regional and rural Australia.

While the government considers concrete action, care providers continue to cry out for homecare workers.

Queensland based Five Good Friends, for example, announced in July that it is on the hunt for around 750 new workers as it expands nationally.

"Homecare has never been in such demand, and the need for helpers is not expected to slow anytime soon," according to the organisation's Co-founder and Chief Executive Officer, Simon Lockyer.

"We think there are many people in the community that would be excellent care and support workers but they just haven't considered it as an option.

"Lived experience is a good skill to have to enter the industry."

Another issue challenging the homecare sector is disability among

The aged care issue adds to the complexity of the challenge, showing that there is no "one size fits all" solution to the issue of homecare.

older Australians. A national campaign called Disability Doesn't Discriminate has been fighting to have people over the age of 65 eligible for the NDIS, which campaigners say delivers a higher level of support than aged care services.

David Margan, the National Campaign Manager, says that the top homecare package in aged care is worth \$52,000 a year, which was not enough to cope with costs such as a new wheelchair—at around \$40,000—or "proper care" which could be up to \$300,000 a year.

"Who among us have that sort of money?" Margan asks.

He estimated that 45,000 Australians with a Level 4 disability now "languish" in the aged care system, "unable to get the help and support they need to not only cope with their disability but have the opportunity to live a reasonable life."

"Disabled people in aged care get five times less support than people with comparable needs in the NDIS," says Margan.

The aged care issue adds to the complexity of the challenge, showing that there is no "one size fits all" solution to the issue of homecare.

There are so many varied needs among people with disability, who live in a range of situations. Some live independently and require minimal home care or live with family members but require specialist home care, while others may need live-in assistance and almost 24/7 care.

As the NDIS looks for a reset, improving homecare presents as one of its greatest challenges as the sector looks to ramp up supply to meet not just overwhelming current demand, but increasing demands in the future. ●



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A revolutionary way to employ people you already know as support workers

When looking to bring on support workers for yourself or a family member, ability and availability are key, but just as important is finding someone you really connect with and trust.

Sadly, the impact of COVID-19 over the past few years has meant so many people are pushed into making a call between settling for less, going without, or calling in favours from family and friends.

Mum of five, Katrina, knows all too well just how challenging the juggle of sourcing and managing support workers can be. Not only that, it is also difficult trying to find people who genuinely connect and engage with her three young children, each living with multiple disabilities, as well as her husband John, who has early onset dementia. They all require ongoing, round the clock support.

Katrina needed a solution that enabled her to be in charge of who her support workers are, and when they are rostered on, without the headache of becoming a mini support worker agency. For years she relied on agencies to find support workers for her, but it wasn't working out for a number of reasons.

Enter Carer Solutions

Carer Solutions offer a unique Direct Employ service, assisting families to set themselves up as formal employers and their chosen support workers as formal employees. They take care of all the tricky stuff, guiding families like Katrina's through the process, and providing them with the information and tools they need to set up their support team.

Once everything is formalised, support workers simply submit timesheets, the family approves them and Carer Solutions takes care of all employer obligations including payroll, WorkCover insurance, Superannuation and PAYG tax.

Katrina, who has been a Carer Solutions Partner (client) for three years now, says it is a "game changer" for her and her family. The Carer Solutions Direct Employ model means parents like Katrina can formalise arrangements with people they already know and trust.

"That's the joy of working with Carer Solutions, I have the flexibility to pick and choose the best team for my family," Katrina explains.

Jane Morrell, Founder and CEO of Carer Solutions says she loves hearing from partners who tell her just how much their world has changed since joining Carer Solutions.

"Over the past two years we've had a number of families take up our service because they simply had no support due to industry shortages during the pandemic. But once they are up and running, the peace of mind of having a familiar face, someone they already know and trust in their home and supporting their loved one, changes so much for them," Jane says.

You can learn more about this unique service by visiting Carer Solutions or giving the friendly team a call on **1300 729 839**. ●



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It's time to act

Addressing the gap in psychosocial supports. **By Hayley Abell and Tony Stevenson**

Mental Illness Fellowship Australia (MIFA) is leading an advocacy alliance of lived experience organisations, national and State and Territory peak bodies, and community mental health organisations to address the gap in psychosocial supports in Australia for people living with severe and complex mental illness.

One in four of us will experience a period of being mentally unwell in our lifetime. Some people also experience disabilities arising from their mental health issues—known as psychosocial disabilities—which affect their ability

to manage day-to-day life in the community. Every year, 300,000 Australians experience severe and complex mental health conditions and need support to help them get through periods of being unwell and to build on their strengths when they are well. Psychosocial supports facilitate recovery and help people address the issues that significantly impact their mental health and wellbeing.

More than 150,000 Australians who need psychosocial support are currently missing out. They fall outside of existing government supports

(including the National Disability Insurance Scheme [NDIS]) and need support to help their recovery.

To drive real change and address this gap, MIFA joined with 34 other organisations to form an advocacy alliance to engage with and influence governments across all jurisdictions. By uniting on this important issue, we commit to reforming our current system of psychosocial supports so that every Australian with severe and complex mental illness has the support they need to live well in their communities.

Unfinished business

Governments decided to close psychiatric institutions for people with severe and complex mental health conditions over 40 years ago. Despite the promise of institutional reform, there is unfinished business. Of the 300,000 Australians with the most severe mental health conditions, the NDIS expects to cater for 65,000 people, and existing Commonwealth, State and Territory programs cater for another 75,000 people. According to these numbers, a significant proportion of people with the most severe and complex mental illness are missing out entirely on supports in their local communities.

This unfinished business of closing psychiatric institutions condemned thousands of people to social isolation, the risk of homelessness, poor mental and physical health, and reduced life expectancy. These are members of our community missing out on community-based psychosocial supports that they and their families and carers so desperately need to improve their quality of life and be equally valued and respected. With the right support, people with complex mental illness can recover their place in their community and live contributing lives. This is ultimately what we need to strive for.

Why are psychosocial supports so important?

People living with severe mental health conditions and related complexities experience poorer life outcomes. Their mental ill health can severely impact their ability to function in daily life. Psychosocial supports are an incredibly important, yet overlooked and misunderstood, component of the mental health ecosystem in Australia. These can help people manage the impact of their mental health conditions.

Psychosocial supports help people to manage daily activities, rebuild and maintain connections, build social skills, and participate in education and employment. Importantly, they help people build capacity to address and overcome the issues that lead to poorer outcomes. This helps them to build a better future and achieve their goals in life. When applied early, they can reduce the risk of enduring illness and disability.ⁱⁱ

Without adequate psychosocial supports, people with severe and complex mental illness will continue to experience:

- **Shorter lives.** On average, people with severe mental illness die up to 23 years earlier than the general population.
- **Attempts to take their own lives.** Approximately 50% of people with

the most severe mental illness attempt suicide, compared to 3.7% of the general population.

- **Lesser quality of life.** Relationship breakdowns, loss of employment, homelessness, marginalisation and stigma, long stays in hospital, increased dependence on income support, loss of educational opportunities, and intersections with police and the justice system.

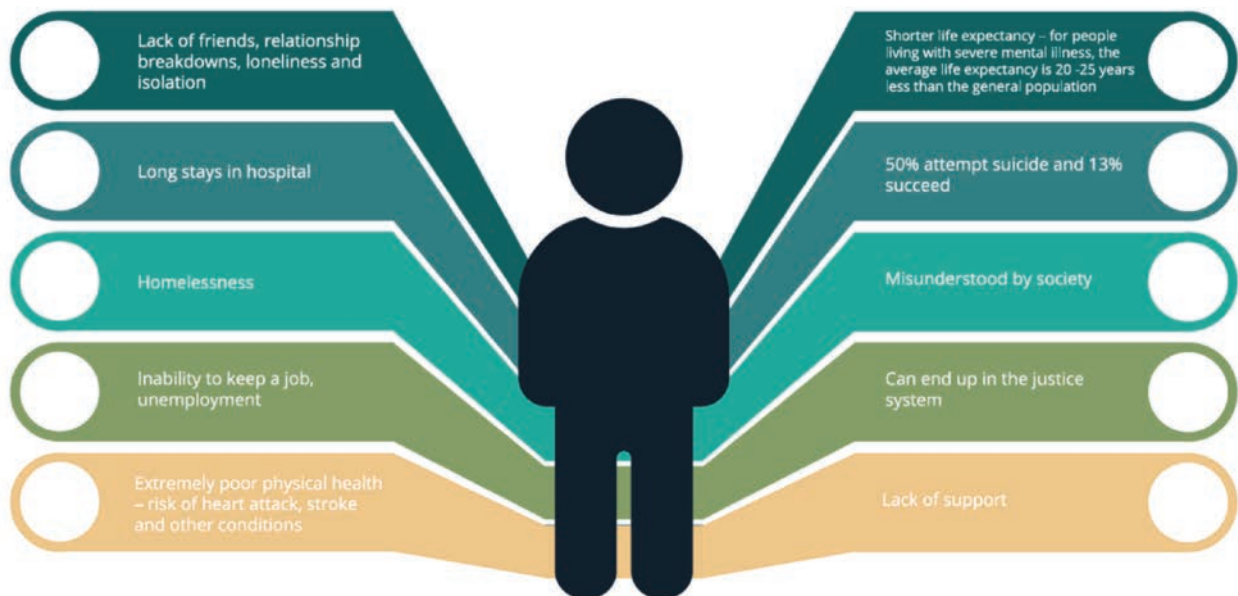
Every Australian who needs psychosocial support has the right to access what they need so they can live well and pursue their goals in life.

Why are so many people missing out?

Professor Bruce Bonyhady, the first NDIS chairperson, recently described the NDIS as an oasis in the desert. Australians with psychosocial disability who qualify to receive supports under the NDIS gain significant supports, with the average annual payment for someone with primary psychosocial disability equating to \$78,800.ⁱⁱⁱ This has been life changing for so many people. But for those that do not qualify, the options are slim.

According to the Productivity Commission, over half of the people with the most severe and complex mental health conditions—more than 150,000 Australians—do not receive

IMAGE: Supplied



The impacts of living with severe and complex mental health conditionⁱ



Working together at the MIFA Roundtable: Time To Act in Brisbane on 1 June 2022

Committed to seeing real change, in mid-2021, MIFA invited mental health leaders to come together to form a National Psychosocial Support Advocacy Alliance to address the gap.

any psychosocial supports to support their recovery.¹⁹ These Australians do not meet the eligibility criteria for the NDIS and, despite over 40 years of advocacy, we still do not have enough services in the community to support the mental health needs of some of our most vulnerable Australians.

There has been a drastic decrease in funding for psychosocial supports since the introduction of the NDIS, and what remains is fragmented, inadequate and inequitable. The system channels people into emergency and hospital services, adding extra pressure to that system. Hospitals should not be the only and last resort for people in distress, which is sadly the case in many communities. We need a greater focus on prevention and recovery supports in the community as a genuine alternative to hospitals.

We did have world class recovery-oriented programs to support people with complex mental health conditions. Legacy programs like Partners in Recovery, the Personal Helpers and

Mentors Program and the Day to Day Living Program were created under a previous Labor Government. These programs pioneered person-centred, recovery-oriented and integrated service delivery on a larger scale, supporting approximately 100,000 Australians with the most severe and complex mental health conditions every year. However, these programs were gradually disbanded after the introduction of the NDIS, leaving a huge gap in services. What remains is a much smaller group of programs under the banner of the Commonwealth Psychosocial Support Program, providing low intensity supports to approximately 10,000 people a year.

In December 2021, governments in Australia agreed to a National Plan for Mental Health and Suicide Prevention. We hoped this National Plan would have something concrete included to provide ongoing and additional supports to people experiencing psychosocial disability.

Unfortunately, the Plan is short on solutions for people with severe and complex mental illness, merely agreeing to a one-to-two-year plan to further investigate the level of need across the country. There is no mention of the current Commonwealth funding commitments that cease on 30 June 2023, which could have been included in the National Plan and bilateral agreements as a minimum, with guaranteed future funding commitments beyond 2023.

The solution

Committed to seeing real change, in mid-2021, MIFA invited mental health leaders to come together to form a National Psychosocial Support Advocacy Alliance to address the gap. This alliance is made up of some of the nation's largest community mental health providers, national mental health peak bodies, State and Territory mental health peak bodies and lived experience organisations.

For many years now, MIFA has been advocating the need to address the gap in psychosocial supports by developing a National Psychosocial Support Program for people with severe and complex mental health conditions who do not meet the NDIS criteria. Now the sector

has come together to support the need for this national program too.

The advocacy alliance proposes creating a national program for psychosocial supports to sit alongside the NDIS. This will enable governments to implement an affordable and sustainable strategy for all Australians with severe and complex mental health conditions both within and outside of the NDIS. Over time, the National Psychosocial Support Program can take the pressure off the NDIS by offering an alternative support program, with a more flexible, recovery-oriented, low-barrier entry and cost-effective approach. This will make it easier for people to receive the psychosocial supports they need.

As a priority, the Productivity Commission recommended that governments ensure all people with psychosocial needs arising from mental illness receive adequate supports. To achieve this, the Federal Government must increase the quantum of funding currently allocated to meet the estimated shortfall and negotiate shared costs with the States and Territories. The Federal Government currently spends approximately \$100 million per annum for psychosocial supports outside the NDIS. The Productivity Commission estimates that expanding these supports to about 150,000 people who currently miss out on services could cost approximately \$610 million per year and result in significant improvements in the quality of life of people accessing them.^v This requires an annual investment of \$710 million through a fully operational National Psychosocial Support Program.

Taking action

On 1 June 2022, MIFA convened a national roundtable in Brisbane to bring together members of the advocacy alliance, key mental health sector leaders and government representatives to work towards the solution of a National Psychosocial Support Program. The workshop discussions focused on how we map the current level of need, identify the service gaps, and what key principles must be embedded in a national program to ensure the best outcomes for people.

While there is a long way to go, MIFA and the advocacy alliance are committed to working with all governments to ensure we can co-create a national program that addresses the gap in psychosocial supports. We are looking for strong leadership in this area and for governments to work together and with the sector to address the shortfall.

We have the building blocks already in the previous legacy programs. We also have the tools and the commitment to improve the previous models to support best practice. With dedicated new funding, we can co-design and co-develop a national program with people with lived experience of severe and complex mental health conditions to support world class recovery-oriented services that lead to better outcomes for people. Now is the time to act and to work collaboratively across all jurisdictions to create a national program that we can be proud of.

About MIFA

MIFA is a federation of long-standing mental health member organisations. Since 1986, MIFA has been providing mental health sector leadership to represent the needs and interests of people living with severe mental illness, and their loved ones and carers. We

work in partnership with our member organisations to understand the needs and issues for people affected by severe mental illness. MIFA prioritises influencing policy makers, funders, politicians, researchers and sponsors to invest in services that make a real difference in people's lives. We believe that the needs and experiences of those with a lived experience of mental illness must be reflected in mental health policy, commissioning of services, and broader social structures and attitudes.

Tony Stevenson is the National Chief Executive Officer of MIFA. For more than 35 years, Stevenson has been committed to a viable and proactive health and community services sector which works alongside families and individuals to inspire self-confidence and hope.

Hayley Abell is the Director of Strategy and Advocacy of MIFA. She has been working in the mental health sector for more than 14 years to support quality service delivery and Australian mental health care reforms that make a real difference in people's lives. ●

For more information, visit www.mifa.org.au.

To become a part of the advocacy alliance, email mifa@mifa.org.au.



Members of the National Psychosocial Support Advocacy Alliance Campaign

IMAGE: Supplied

i This information has been extracted from Morgan, V.A., Waterreus, A., Jablensky, A., Mackinnon, A., McGrath, J., Carr, V., Bush, R., Castle, D., Cohen, M., Harvey, C., Galletly, C., Stain, H., Neil, A., McGorry, P., Hocking, B., Shah, S. and Saw, S., 2011. *People living with psychotic illness 2010. Report on the second Australian national survey*. Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing: Canberra.

ii McGorry PD, Killackey E and Yung A, 2008. Early intervention in psychosis: concepts, evidence and future directions. *World Psychiatry* 7, pp. 148–156.

iii National Disability Insurance Agency, 2022. *NDIS Quarterly Report to Disability Ministers: 31 March 2022*. Available at Quarterly Reports | NDIS.

iv Productivity Commission 2020, Mental Health, Report no. 95, Canberra at pp. 827 and 844.

v *Ibid*.



With more than 100 Finding North Network members across Australia, and growing daily, join the lived experience movement which aims to improve the future of mental health in Australia.

At Finding North Network you will find a vibrant, growing community of smart, enthusiastic people. Our goal is to foster conversations and assist people to make helpful, informative, fun connections. We want to make it easy for you to connect with peers, share information and discover opportunities to use your expertise.

About Finding North Network

As a safe, secure online environment, Finding North Network is for the exclusive use of those who understand mental conditions firsthand. The Network is a forum for people to share their experiences, discuss ideas and develop their voice in speaking to the issues surrounding mental health in Australia.

For those who have had to tread carefully about how they describe their mental health story, this is an opportunity to find freedom and empowerment to speak, listen and build a collective voice with others who understand the complex reality of mental illness.

Linking people from diverse backgrounds, roles and skills, the Network can provide pathways for those with lived experience to not only share their stories but utilise their unique insight to create lasting change for others.

Finding North Network is hosted by Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia (MIFA), a policy and advocacy organisation. MIFA formed this Network to enhance connection and amplify the voice of lived experience leadership.

We believe that bringing people together enhances the opportunities for people to connect, learn, survive, heal, thrive and lead.

What the Network is and is not FINDING NORTH NETWORK IS:

- A safe space.
- For people with firsthand experience of mental health conditions who are 18 years and over.
- A shared space for members to connect and communicate on topics related to lived experience leadership.

Finding North Network

Have you lived or are you living with mental health conditions?

Are you wondering how you can use this lived experience to help others?

Are you looking to connect with other peers?

Are you a lived experience leader looking to help others realise their full potential?



- An online network to meet, connect and learn with likeminded lived experience members.
- A forum for members to ask questions and start conversations which may be difficult to do in other environments.
- A way for members to learn and develop their own lived experience leadership as well as support others to do the same.
- A space for networking and sharing ideas and opportunities across Australia.

FINDING NORTH NETWORK IS NOT:

- A support service of any kind
- A crisis, referral or helpline service
- A therapeutic group
- A forum for carers.

We asked members how Finding North Network has helped them

This is what they said.

“I have been able to share my story and knowledge without being judged for who I am.”

“One place to find Australia wide lived experience opportunities.”

“Finding North Network has given me confidence in stating my opinion and knowing that I am listened to.”

“Finding resources useful for my role.”

“It’s helped me to see more of what’s possible and has helped me connect with peers.”

“Expressing myself has received validation.”

“To be heard in a safe space, to speak in a safe space, knowing that you’re

not alone and understood can’t be measured. Conversations about mental health still require a lot of bravery and sometimes we don’t feel brave.”

“I am much more confident in discussing issues with the Network’s members and other peer groups. My self-confidence has improved, and I know I am now being listened to.”

What does the name Finding North mean?

The name Finding North is a play on the analogy of the North Star. The story of the North Star transcends culture and time. It is seen as a landmark that helps those who follow it determine direction. There is also a symbolic meaning. The North Star depicts a beacon of inspiration and hope to many. If you cannot yet see your North, it is there and perhaps it is waiting to be discovered. ●

To join the Network, visit <https://findingnorthnetwork.com.au/> and click on Join Finding North.

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FINDING NORTH NETWORK

Finding North Network Annual E-Symposium!

ABOUT PERSPECTIVES 2022

Held virtually over two half-days, Perspectives 2022 will feature a line-up of lived experience speakers, leaders, and advocates including Fay Jackson, the Deputy Commissioner of the Mental Health Commission of NSW and General Manager of Inclusion at Flourish Australia.

At Perspectives 2022, attendees will:

- Hear lived experience reflections and stories of hope, mental health recovery, advocacy and leadership.
- Explore lived experience leadership, meet people who are leading the way as well as upcoming leaders.
- Discover how to make an impact using their lived experience voice as well as the opportunities available.
- Uncover diverse lived experience approaches, communities and organisations.
- Examine why the inclusion of lived and living experience perspectives are important, and learn how to become an ally to people who identify as having a lived experience
- Hear from a panel of mental health thought leaders, individuals and allies who will share their insights and firsthand experiences in recovery, wellbeing, peer work and leadership
- Learn about and meet Finding North Network members in an online platform for those with firsthand experience with mental health conditions.

We will record each session and make them available for viewing on-demand. Everyone who registers to attend will receive emailed links to the recordings after the event.

You can learn more about Perspectives 2022 and register at <https://findingnorthnetwork.com.au/page/perspectives-2022>.



More than a holiday

When the COVID pandemic put a halt to interstate and international travel, it appeared the lockdowns would bring activities at Holiday Explorers to a standstill. **By Lachlan Colquhoun**

For more than three decades, the Adelaide-based inclusive travel and respite organisation has provided several hundred people with a disability with more than 100 travel options each year, such as interstate trips to AFL games in Melbourne and even more ambitious tours to Europe.

In the year prior to COVID, Holiday Explorers provided over 101 holidays,

which saw the participation of 301 of its 403 member clients with the help of a network of 77 volunteers.

Chief executive Kelley Russo says that while those opportunities were blocked during the pandemic, Holiday Explorers found an exciting alternative much closer to home. It partnered with the adventure activity group Operation Flinders to offer challenging outback

and outdoor experiences to people with a disability.

The initiative was consistent with the Holiday Explorers vision to “provide more than a holiday”, which developed after it was initially seen as a provider of respite services to carers, rather than a provider of fulfilling experiences for clients. Reflecting this philosophy, the organisation’s purpose is “to enrich

the lives of people with intellectual disability and their carers”.

“I am very proud to say that we’ve made some amazing leaps and bounds in the last two years, and it’s been a privilege to partner with Operation Flinders,” says Russo.

“They have made a fantastic reputation from their work with disadvantaged and troubled young people, taking them up into the Flinders Ranges for their adventure camping program, and now they are providing similar opportunities for our guys to do a modified version of the program.

“And during the pandemic that’s been a blessing for us, and offered a different kind of trip to what we had done in the past.”

Not only did the partnership mean that Holiday Explorers could continue to offer travel experiences, but it was able to offer something entirely different to its other experiences.

In addition to its trips into the Flinders Ranges, Operation Flinders also offers experiences at other South Australian locations, such as in the Kuitpo Forest in the Adelaide Hills.

“So we were able to offer things like kayaking and camping, where the group would make a campfire. So under all the stress and the cloud of COVID they had access to nature, had the ability to connect with each other and learn skills that they possibly would never have experienced in their lifetimes,” says Russo.

“Not everyone gets the chance to light a fire in a forest in the middle of the week and they really enjoyed it.

“We’ve also just bought some electronic trikes so we can offer biking, and these bikes have better balance and have a bit more push so they are perfect for our guys.”

The growth in some of the clients has been amazing to watch, says Russo.

“Parents are dropping them off and saying ‘no, they will not abseil down a mountain’ but they are doing it, and coming back proudly with their pictures to show what they have done,” she says.

“They come back with massive smiles on their faces, and the confidence and the eagerness to do it again.

“I had the same experience because I never thought I would abseil, but I

amazed myself and did it when I went on an Operation Flinders camp and it was such a great feeling.”

Russo speaks with pride about feedback from the mother of a client, who had noticed a big difference in her daughter as a result of her outback experiences.

“Previously, her daughter wasn’t really one for initiating things, such as packing for the trip and organising her life,” says Russo.

“But now that has all changed, and this is a girl in her 30s, so it’s creating miracles as far as I’m concerned and brings people out of their shell to do

Not only did the partnership mean that Holiday Explorers could continue to offer travel experiences, but it was able to offer something entirely different to its other experiences.



things many of them had been told previously they couldn't do.

"So those changes for this girl's mother was like her daughter had climbed a mountain."

Another local activity was a 10-day cruise visiting islands off the coast of South Australia, where Holiday Explorers' clients mixed with other members of the public.

"We got so much feedback from the cruise company that everyone said the cruise wouldn't have been half as much fun without our guys there," says Russo.

"They were up dancing every night after mucking around on the islands during the day, swimming and what have you.

"I think that just getting the message about how much our guys are embracing the experience and their lives is really great for other people to see, and is really positive for the whole idea of inclusivity."

The new outdoor activities have been such a success that they will continue to be offered, even after Holiday Explorers returns to interstate and international tourism later in 2022 and into 2023.

"I've been here for two years and we haven't had any international trips at all in that time," says Russo.

"That's something we might do towards the end of next year, but before that we'll definitely be offering interstate trips because they are in such demand from our clients, and we need to deliver."

Russo says she is looking forward to Holiday Explorers "spreading its wings" and continuing to grow, not just in its travel offerings but also as it moves into training and employment services for people with disabilities.

She said the organisation wanted to develop programs which also gave clients opportunities for work skills and mainstream employment, extending on some of the life skills they were learning from their travels.

"I hear all the time from clients that they want to work in a bank, in jobs that are just the same as everyone's," says Russo.

"So I'm really passionate about that and it will be a natural extension of what we do with our travel, and that's helping move the dial on inclusivity." ●



The journey towards inclusive travel

The inclusive tourism sector is one of the fastest growing segments of the travel market, and the momentum comes not just from positive changes in society but also from economics.

Around one in six Australians have a disability, or around 4.4 million people, and at least 44% of them travel for pleasure.

A 2018 study by the Australian Trade and Investment Commission estimated that the inclusive travel market could be worth up to \$8 billion a year.

The last significant national report on the economic impact of inclusive tourism in Australia was completed in 2017 by the University of Technology Sydney and the Institute of Public Policy and Governance. The report found that people with disabilities account for 17% of all tourism expenditure, and that on average people with disability spend \$111 per day on trips, \$5 a day more than the general population.

"Addressing barriers faced by people with disability will have a flow-on effect and reduce barriers for these other population groups," the report said.

According to Holiday Explorer's Kelley Russo, Australia still has some way to go in making tourism and travel more inclusive.

"I think that people are aware now and that's the first step. But there are a few things which need to change, and that will be pushed by regulations and also by people's attitudes," she says.

"The inclusion of disability toilets with outward opening doors in all hotels, for example, this will happen

over time and is happening with new builds.

"These features, and building inclusivity features into all hotel rooms will one day become normality."

Sometimes, Russo says, venue operators do not realise that the small things they do are contrary to the spirit of inclusivity and are undermining the dignity of people with disabilities.

This was reflected in the Trade and Investment Commission research, which suggested tourism operators should be changing their businesses to be more inclusive.

The research showed that 23% of people with disabilities who did not travel did so because the experience was "so stressful it's not worth it" while 22% said it was "just too hard".

Russo cites a recent Holiday Explorers trip which included dining in a regional restaurant where the staff, when told it was group of people with disabilities, put them in the middle of the dining room apart from other diners.

"It might have been easier for the staff to access customers doing it this way, but to our group it made them feel a little odd," says Russo.

"It made them uncomfortable, as if they were being pointed out, so to speak.

"So one of our volunteers ended up talking to the management and our group did get moved, and that was a good result, but I think that example shows the importance of education, particularly in smaller regional towns where they might not have thought so much about these kinds of issues."



Powering up for Powerchair Football

Mark Warren has been involved in playing powerchair football for many years now, and still has not given up on aspirations of representing Australia as a Poweroo playing in the national team. **By Lachlan Colquhoun**

While he admits that making the national team might be a stretch for him, that does not mean that Warren has abandoned the dream.

While he ponders a national call up, not making the team will not stop him from turning out in the sport he loves for his local team in the Queensland Powerchair Football League. He has been a board member for the association, one of many volunteer roles he has taken on within the disability sector.

Warren's determination characterises many in the powerchair football community, who became involved in the sport as a social and fitness activity, but fell in love with what is a fast paced and highly tactical game at the top level.

"I didn't originally have aspirations to play for Australia, but you just never know," says Warren, who plays for one of four teams in the Queensland league under the umbrella of the Australian Powerchair Football Association (APFA). For his local team, Warren has enjoyed significant success.

In 2016, he was a member of the Brisbane Roar's National Championship winning powerchair team, which won the national title against teams from five other A-League aligned teams. His team was undefeated in the qualifying rounds, and achieved a comprehensive 8-0 victory in the final against the team from the Central Coast.

Warren also has an important administrative role in the Queensland league as President, and in his professional life works in a business development role with First2Care, which is a key sponsor of the Queensland Powerchair Football Association (QPFA).

It was First2Care which helped bring on another six sponsors to support the QPFA in the Australian National Championships.

While the APFA is the peak national body, the strength of powerchair football comes from the local member associations in all states and territories which are the lifeblood of the sport. They are the ones responsible for the day to day running of the sport and develop the players who go on to represent Australia as Poweroos.

This is an exciting time for the sport as Australia gets ready to host the next Powerchair Football World Cup in 2023, postponed from 2022 due to the COVID pandemic.

Already, a squad of players has been selected following the APFA Club Championships early in 2022, and the final Poweroos squad will be selected from this group.

One of the players training for 2023 is Brisbane-based Tristram Peters, who represented Australia as a Poweroo in the 2017 World Cup.

"I was lucky enough to go to an exhibition of powerchair in 2011, when some Japanese and French players came to showcase the sport," says Peters.

"I just fell in love with it, and I've been playing it ever since and to do so for my country has been such a wonderful part of my life.

"For me to understand that I have been given the opportunity to play sport is something I have gripped with both hands, and something that is really satisfying and also proves the doctors and other people wrong about what I could achieve."

Powerchair football originated in France, in the late 1970s, when teachers invented the sport as a way for students to play football even with physical disabilities.

This quickly developed into a national league and while the game was developing in France, the Canadians were developing a similar game called power soccer which eventually spread to Japan. Meanwhile, San Francisco's Bay Area and Massachusetts were also early adopters of the sport.

In 2012, the first power wheelchair specifically designed for powerchair football was introduced. Named the Strikeforce, it has a longer foot guard and wheels that are set further apart. It is also far more responsive than the older powerchairs previously used.

The players use the foot guard to kick and block, and play with an oversized football which is 33 cm in diameter.

Warren says powerchair football has become the most popular sport for people with disability, and he puts that down to the fact that it is the most inclusive of all sports.

Within that, there is a system of classification which is the cornerstone of the sport with the aim of keeping the game fair and equal. International administrators have made it a priority to establish universal guidelines for classification, and they encourage coaches to learn about classification so they can make optimal team selections.

Classification is done through a bench test. Classifiers get athletes to do a range of movements to check their muscle strength, coordination and how they operate the powerchair. From the bench test they group athletes into one of two classes, PF1 and PF2.

These classifications create a level playing field, and make sure that powerchair is a game that can be played

by people of all ages, genders and people with a wide range of disabilities. If anyone can drive a powerchair for everyday mobility, they can play.

"We used to play a number of other sports but we slowly transitioned to powerchair football and it's become our dominant sport," he says.

"Many of our people couldn't contest the other sports as a level playing field, but the beauty of powerchair is that everyone can play and certain disabilities are not a disadvantage to being a good or top player."

Powerchair, says Warren, is also a community of like-minded people with shared experiences as well as a competitive sport.

"We're all very friendly and have similar interests," he says. "And when we come together and talk with everyone we have similar experiences to share and it really creates bonds between us." ●

Rules of the game

A goal is scored when the ball fully enters the opposition's goal area. The game is won by the team who scores the most goals.

There are four players on each team, including the goalkeeper. The 40 minute game is split into 20 minute halves, with a 10 minute half-time break.

The game is similar to able-bodied soccer. However, powerchair football has two distinguishing rules:

- 1. Two-on-one.** Only one player from each team is allowed within 3 metres of the ball on the court (except in the goal area). This means teammates have to spread out which enables better game flow.
- 2. 3-in-the-goal-area.** The defending team is only allowed two players in their own goal area.

The penalty for infracting either of these rules is loss of possession and/or a free kick-in from the sideline for the opposition. Able-bodied soccer has penalty 'throw-ins'. However, 'kick-ins' are used in powerchair football because many players have impaired upper body function.



Powerchair World Cup in Sydney 2023

The eyes of the world powerchair community will be on Sydney in October 2023 as the city hosts the FIPFA Powerchair World Cup.

The event will feature teams from 10 nations playing 58 matches across 10 days. Around 80 athletes from across the world will participate.

The World Cup was originally planned for October 2022, but the decision was made in February to postpone the event until 2023 due to the COVID pandemic.

The Sydney event will be the fourth Powerchair World Cup, with the last one held in Florida, USA. France took out the championship after defeating the host nation, USA, in the final 4-2.

The Australian Poweroos ranked fourth after their defeat by third placed England in the playoff. The team highlight from that event was coming back from a goal down to defeat Japan 2-1 in the quarter finals.

While they finished fourth, the team did have the distinction of having the tournament's most valuable player in Abdullah Karim.

"Very surprised. You don't go to a World Cup and expect to be the world's best," Karim told ABC iView's The Ticket.

Australia's Poweroos are still ranked fourth in the world, and are the current Asia Pacific Oceania (APO)

Zone Champions. This makes them Australia's highest ranked football team in world terms.

The Poweroos made their debut on the international stage at the 2011 FIPFA World Cup, held in Paris. Australia placed seventh in that event after defeating Portugal in their classification match.

In 2013, Australia hosted Japan in Sydney for the inaugural APO Cup. Both nations fielded two teams, with the Australian Poweroos Green side being named runners-up after an overtime loss to Team Japan in the cup final.

The Poweroos then accepted an invitation to the inaugural PFCA Copa Americas tournament held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 2014. The team won the silver medal, going down to then World champions, the USA.

Announcing the World Cup postponement until 2023, Ricky Stevenson, FIPFA President, said, "This will be disappointing news for our players and all involved, but ensuring everyone is safe and well before, during, and after the event is the key reason for making this difficult decision."

Poweroo Tristram Peters is in training for the event, and hopes to make the team for 2023.

"I was fortunate enough to be in the 2017 squad where we placed fourth and

that was such an amazing achievement for the team which was still relatively new to the sport," says Peters.

"Having the World Cup here, and to be able to play in front of family and friends I think is the biggest thing we do in front of the many people who have supported us to this point.

"The other thing will be to build the profile of the sport. Having the World Cup will allow us to have a platform where we can showcase it to Australia and hopefully get even more players involved, so it's fantastic."

The disappointment of the delay is not likely to dim the enthusiasm of athletes all around the world who are busy preparing and raising money in their local communities, so they can compete in Sydney.

In Ireland, for example, the local community is getting right behind the national team with major fundraising efforts continuing, as some players will require both parents with them to help as they travel and compete.

The local press has showcased the campaign of 20-year-old Naglis Montvilas, who is combining training with Team Ireland with his computing studies at the National College of Ireland.

"It was very frustrating not being able to train or play during the lockdown," Naglis told local newspaper the *Fingal Independent*.

"It's great that things are getting back to normal now and I can see all my team mates again. They are my lifelong friends and we are all very close."

Naglis has spinal muscular atrophy, and was first introduced to powerchair at the age of nine, although he wasn't too impressed with the sport at first.

"Then, when I started to play at a more competitive level, I really started to enjoy it," he said.

"I can't stop playing powerchair football now. It's the best thing that has ever happened to me." ●



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