

# Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Engagement Strategy

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The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Engagement Strategy is our commitment to delivering the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across Australia.

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The National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) shows our respect and acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who are Traditional Owners and Custodians of this land.

We pay our respects to their Elders both past and present.

We acknowledge the contribution of members of the Rural, Remote and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference and Working Groups, the wisdom of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with disability, and expertise of the First Peoples Disability Network, Synapse, the MJD Foundation, the NPY Women's Council, and Julalikari Council Aboriginal Corporation for their direct contribution to this Plan as translators of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples knowledge, and we respect their cultural intellectual property which resides with them.

### **Cover art by Margaret Smith**

#### **Expressing the need for holistic wrap around care**

Margaret has been a member of a number of boards and committees including the Board of Management of Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park and the Cross-border Reference Group on Volatile Substance Misuse. She has attended a number of governance training sessions for Indigenous corporations during her term on the Board of Management of Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park and as a Director of NPY Women's Council. In 2008 Margaret was elected to the office of Chairperson, a position she held until September 2011.

In 2000 she was one of 330 Aboriginal women who performed in the Sydney 2000 Olympics Opening Ceremony. Margaret says that Women's Council really makes a difference to people's lives and we must never forget our greatest achievement in combating petrol sniffing.

#### **Permission to use artwork**

Permission to use artwork within this document has been sought and provided to the NDIA by the artists.



## What's in this Strategy?

|   |    |
|---|----|
| 1. Introduction .....   | 4  |
| 2. Our Commitment .....   | 6  |
| 3. Key Principles.....  | 8  |
| 4. Engaging in the 'proper way' .....                               | 9  |
| 4.1. What is the 'proper way'? .....                                | 10 |
| 4.2. Importance of cultural competence.....                         | 10 |
| 4.3. Understanding Country, Culture and Community.....              | 11 |
| 4.4. Importance of communication.....                               | 12 |
| 4.5. Importance of language.....                                    | 14 |
| 5. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander engagement approach .....  | 15 |
| 6. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander engagement priorities..... | 17 |
| 6.1 Communication and sharing of information .....                  | 17 |
| 6.2 Cultural competency.....  | 17 |
| 6.3 Sharing best practice.....                                      | 18 |
| 6.4 Local solutions.....  | 18 |
| 6.5 Participant-centric design .....                                | 18 |
| 6.6 Market enablement.....  | 19 |
| 6.7 Leveraging and linking.....                                     | 19 |
| 6.8 Cultural leadership .....                                       | 19 |
| 6.9 Supporting internal infrastructure.....                         | 19 |
| 6.10 Tracking progress.....   | 19 |
| Appendix 1 State and territory – key initiatives .....              | 21 |
| New South Wales .....   | 21 |
| Northern Territory (NT).....  | 23 |
| Queensland .....  | 25 |
| South Australia .....   | 27 |
| Tasmania.....   | 29 |
| Victoria.....   | 30 |
| Western Australia.....  | 31 |
| Australian Capital Territory.....                                   | 32 |

## 1. Introduction



*FIGURE 1: Working Together – painting by Elder, Aunty Robyn Lennox, presented to Anne Skordis at the Strong Women’s Network Gathering, 2015. Aunty Robyn Lennox provided permission for the use of this artwork.*

Through our work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples<sup>1</sup>, their families, carers and communities, we have heard of hope for a different way of working together:

- with wisdom;
- with compassion;
- to develop new ways;
- with understanding and respect for culture;
- to acknowledge the past as a starting point for doing things better in the future;
- with heart; and
- to grow together.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Engagement Strategy (the Strategy) is a statement of the National Disability Insurance Agency’s (NDIA) commitment to walk with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in delivering the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) across Australia.

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<sup>1</sup> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is the collective term for all people who identify and are recognised as descendants of the original inhabitants of Australia, and acknowledges the many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups in Australia.

The Strategy is informed by our ongoing interaction and engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability, their families, carers, communities and supporting organisations to clearly understand and respond to issues affecting access to the NDIS. We aim to develop a collaborative planning and working model to inform practice which can meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with disability, their families, carers and communities.

Achieving these aims provides the basis to collectively build inclusion and positive outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians through the NDIS. This can be achieved through activities which are compatible with both the cultural values of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the long term sustainability of the NDIS. The Strategy also acknowledges the importance of a flexible, community by community approach to meeting the needs of diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This approach will build on the strengths of communities to develop local solutions. It will be supported by a commitment to maximising opportunities for employment, training and economic development in the rollout of the Scheme.

The Strategy describes our engagement approach and reflects the different needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with disability living in urban, rural and remote areas across Australia. It is built on strong collaborative working relationships including with our State and Territory and Commonwealth Government partners. An internal Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan has also been developed to guide the implementation of the Strategy across the Agency.

To ensure the Agency's approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is consistently applied across the nation, the intent of the Strategy and the associated Action Plan are reflected in the jurisdictional Operational Plans. In this way the strategy guides how the Agency does business while the Operational Plans provide for the engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with disability during the transition from current State and Territory systems to the NDIS.

Operational Plans that are agreed between the NDIA, states and territories, and DSS describe the way in which we work together as the NDIS is rolled out across Australia. They provide a detailed guide to describe how this is best achieved in each state/ territory, including in rural and remote areas, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and for culturally and linguistic diverse (CALD) groups.

## 2. Our Commitment

Our commitment is that:

*All National Disability Insurance Agency staff will be trained to understand and engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities in a way that demonstrates respect and support for Aboriginal language, heritage and culture or in the 'proper way'.*

*Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, their families, carers and communities will be provided with culturally appropriate information to help them understand their rights and needs for disability support in preparation for the NDIS.*

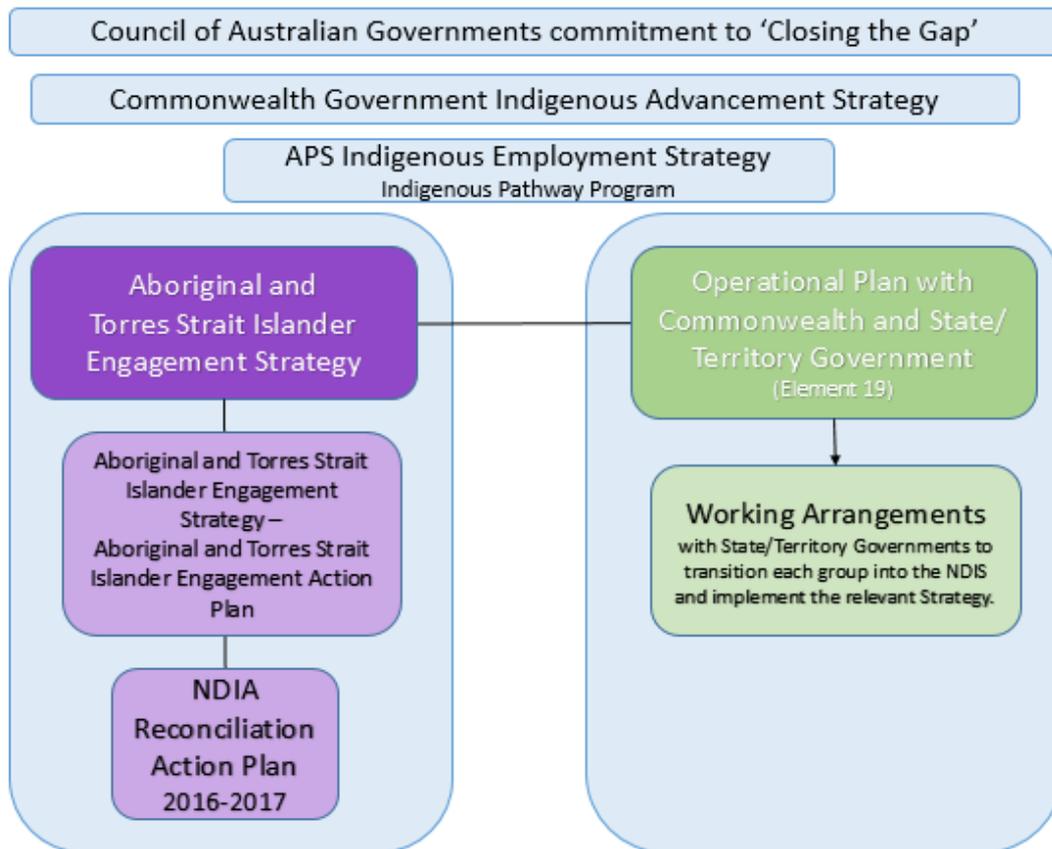
*Our engagement approach will inform the way that we work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and influence the way we appropriately engage and deliver services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with disability and their families; and*

*NDIA staff will listen, learn, build and deliver. They will be supported in their work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through the identification and sharing of previous knowledge, experience and lessons learned through the trial sites, states and territories and throughout transition of the NDIS.*

Engagement that is focused on building and nurturing ongoing relationships between the NDIA and people with disability is critical to the success of the NDIS. These relationships are vital to improve the way we all work together and deliver on our agreed outcomes. It is how we take the journey together.

Engagement provides an exciting opportunity to *listen, learn, build and deliver*. Effective engagement and relationship building takes time and plays a large role in how services connect with people and build trust. Therefore, it is critical that the NDIA engages with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in a way that supports their involvement. This may include early engagement with a community, engagement with community leaders, cultivation of champions and working collaboratively with mainstream and specialist services providers who operate and are trusted in the community, to share information and plan for the delivery and monitoring of the outcomes of the NDIS. Underpinning effective engagement is the recognition that the NDIA's community by community approach will involve building community capability and capacity to develop local solutions and a deliberate focus on options to grow the number of Indigenous registered providers of support. Our statement of commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is also demonstrated through our Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP). The RAP identifies the ways we will work to progress the NDIA's vision for reconciliation by building respectful relationships and creating opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people.

The RAP also links the work of the NDIA to other initiatives such as the Australian Public Service Indigenous Employment Strategy and Indigenous Pathways Programme as depicted in the diagram below.



The NDIA Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Engagement Strategy has been developed from the Council of Australian Government’s commitment to ‘Closing the Gap’ through the development of the Commonwealth Government’s Indigenous Advancement Strategy and the Australian Public Service Indigenous Employment Strategy Indigenous Pathway Program.

The priorities contained within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Engagement Strategy are articulated into activities within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Engagement Action Plan, which includes the development of the NDIA Reconciliation Action Plan 2016-2017 (on page 6).

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Engagement Strategy and Action Plan are reflected within Element 19 of the Operational Plans with Commonwealth and State/Territory Governments. Flowing from the Operational Plans are the Working Arrangements with State/ Territory Governments to transition each group into the NDIS and implement the relevant Strategy.

### 3. Key Principles

The NDIA's commitment is underpinned by the following principles:

- Centrality of Country, Culture and Community – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with disability and their representatives have emphasised that Country, Culture and Community should be central to any policy that affects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with disability.
- Human rights – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and people with disability should be afforded the same rights as other Australians. This includes those rights that Australia has assented to as signatory to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
- Inclusion in mainstream services is as important as specialist disability services – the NDIS will provide an opportunity for specialist providers to cater to the individual specialist support needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with disability, while also providing an opportunity to improve the access of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with disability to disability service providers and to promote service provision that is culturally appropriate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within both the disability sector and other service systems.
- Universal consideration of disability – the impact of disability should be addressed as a matter of course within policy deliberations and governance for all policies affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- Meaningful engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with disability – the views of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with disability are central to the design, delivery and evaluation of policies and services which affect them. There must be respect for the cultural knowledge that exists in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with lived experience of disability. The involvement of Elders and representative organisations is necessary for strengthening trust in government efforts.
- Improving the evidence base on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with disability – Improvements in data collection are needed with respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with disability across a range of portfolio areas, to help build the NDIA's capacity to track and measure outcomes. Greater effort must be made for research to be community-driven (i.e. reflecting the interests of those with lived experience of disability and community members), with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations having a custodial role in assuring the cultural security of research and outcomes on behalf of communities. The NDIA is committed to working with Commonwealth, State and Territory governments to leverage existing capabilities and resources, including data, wherever possible to contribute to this growing evidence base.

## 4. Engaging in the ‘proper way’

The NDIA recognises that when we engage and work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities it begins with a process of establishing trust with the community. We will be judged by the manner of *how* we propose to do business, before the nature of the business is considered by the community.

From feedback, the NDIA is aware that one of the key considerations for engagement is that the level of disability awareness is highly variable across communities. In many traditional languages, there is no word for disability, and the levels of awareness can vary. There are also issues around stigma, or previous negative experiences of discrimination, either as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person and/ or person with disability (sometimes referred to as “double disadvantage”), which affects the self-identification, or identification by family or carers, of disability and hence willingness to access disability supports.

Additionally, the complexity of social and cultural factors can affect awareness and willingness to seek support at the individual level, which makes a set approach to engagement unrealistic to implement. Despite the diverse understandings and awareness of disability amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, we understand that there are different issues applicable to urban, rural, remote and very remote populations that should be taken into account in engagement and service delivery. These include:

- Urban areas - are not always based around family or language groupings therefore, it can be more difficult to locate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability and it is important to make use of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander networks. In urban areas there is generally greater access to disability services than in rural and remote areas, however there may still be a fear of discrimination or issues around stigma.
- Rural areas – long distances between service centres means that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability face an undesirable choice – either move off Country to a regional centre to access services or stay on Country and face limited services, limited opportunities for flexibility in service offerings and a lack of transport. The NDIA also acknowledges that in rural (and remote/very remote) areas family members often take on the care role without training or support.
- Remote/ very remote areas – due to limitations of current research and data collection the true need of disability and potential solutions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in remote and very remote areas is not fully understood. Data collected by the NDIA will help inform the level of demand and characteristics of participants accessing the NDIS, such as whether they have previously been in receipt of disability supports.

We have been advised that standards and expectations may differ from community to community and these community standards may not be readily disclosed from the outset. Additionally, standards and expectations may be influenced by community members’ previous experiences with governments and mainstream services, including some past experiences which may be historical or generational. For these reasons it is important that staff are well practised in respectful communications and are well informed about the local community. Also, keeping the focus firmly on the need of the individual and providing a quality service to respond to that need, will also assist to avoid unwelcome intrusions into

culture. The NDIA acknowledges the need to demonstrate worth for these communities through offering innovative and flexible responses to issues and will endeavour to build this value over time

#### **4.1. What is the ‘proper way’?**

The NDIA will engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their communities in a manner that is culturally responsive or in the ‘proper way’. The ‘proper way’ is a colloquial phrase used to describe a way of doing business in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in a manner which is compatible with the community’s values and customs. It can be difficult to define in conventional terms, as in addition to observable behaviours, it encompasses an intangible, spiritual aspect.

Like many colloquial phrases it is common but not universal. Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people prefer to use ‘proper way’ rather than terms like ‘cultural competence’ or ‘cultural compatibility’ to distinguish the subtle distinction between exercising respectful behaviours and engaging in a particular customary practice. As a real-life example reported by an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak body, someone might say “research has not been done proper way” if there is research undertaken which doesn’t follow ethical protocols for involving the community in all aspects of the research.

The phrase ‘proper way’ can also be localised to the particular region with reference to the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander nation they are from. For example, someone from Redfern might refer to ‘Gadigal way’, or a Torres Strait Islander might say ‘Wis Wei’. It would be disrespectful for someone from outside Country to speak on someone else’s behalf, so the phrase ‘proper way’ allows someone to speak about the generic principles and behaviours of respectful engagement in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

#### **4.2. Importance of cultural competence**

The NDIA appreciates that there will be many different Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures engaged as the NDIS is implemented across Australia. The aim of the NDIA is to understand the importance of a community’s cultural practices and how these practices may impact on the delivery of the NDIS; and to ensure that our processes, operational procedures and timeframes are culturally responsive.

Previous poor experiences of some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with government and mainstream services may result in those who might benefit from reasonable and necessary supports funded by the NDIS not seeking to access the Scheme. To give effect to the need for the NDIS to be accessible to all who might be eligible, the NDIA will establish and consult with a cultural competence expert reference group on actions required to reduce barriers to service access and participation. The NDIA will apply learnings from research about known cultural barriers and the impact on access to services, work with partners to ensure access to the Scheme is culturally responsive to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and monitor NDIS participation to reduce barriers to Scheme entry. Cultural responsiveness monitoring and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation will be reported annually in the NDIA’s Annual Report.

The NDIA will provide cultural competency training to its staff and partners, informed by the advice of the cultural competence expert reference group. The NDIA will consider

recruitment and retainment of staff to reflect the diversity of our clients and to improve service delivery, productivity, and staff and participant satisfaction. Training will be tailored with localised input to ensure responsiveness and reflect the uniqueness of the many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with disability, their families, carers and communities.

Partners who are sourced by the NDIA to provide local area coordination and early childhood services will be required to employ a workforce that reflects the community they serve, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff. Partners are also required to undertake any training provided by the NDIA.

The NDIA will support the cultural competence expert reference group to develop a framework of cultural competency for use by NDIS funded services that provide reasonable and necessary supports to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Scheme participants. This will be designed to ensure service providers work to a common set of cultural competencies in providing supports to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants. Development of the cultural competence framework will take into account work already done in this area by the NDIA and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

### **4.3. Understanding Country, Culture and Community**

The NDIA recognises that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with disability have a right to live inclusive lives, to feel healthy and safe and connected to their country, community and culture. Community and culture are vital components of the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, which are holistic and embody a spiritual dimension:

*“Aboriginal Health means not just the physical wellbeing of an individual but refers to the social, emotional and cultural wellbeing of the whole Community in which each individual is able to achieve their potential as a human being, thereby bringing about the total wellbeing of their Community” (National Aboriginal Health Strategy, 1989)*

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are situated within their Country emotionally, spiritually and metaphysically<sup>2</sup>. A sense of belonging is vital to an individual’s cultural and spiritual identity. Through music, art, dance, laws/ lore and creation stories, a living culture is maintained. Preservation of culture is the means through which a positive future can be secured.

We understand that the centrality of culture and community for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples creates a layer of cultural complexity that is an overlay to the social complexity faced by people with disability. We understand Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will often ask “who’s your mob?” as a means of identifying with their Country, First Nation or clan group. Moving “off Country” can contribute to disconnect and spiritual loss.

There are over 500 First People and clan groups across Australia, each with varying cultures, community governance and knowledge systems. This has implications for how the NDIA engages with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. In effect, addressing

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<sup>2</sup> Wide Bay Burnett Regional Plan Cultivating a strong, healthy and sustainable future for the Wide Bay Burnett September 2011 [www.statedevelopment.qld.gov.au/.../wide-bay/wbb-regional-plan.pdf](http://www.statedevelopment.qld.gov.au/.../wide-bay/wbb-regional-plan.pdf)

disability in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities requires walking in multiple worlds. There are ways to navigate the cultural and social complexity through engagement processes which demonstrate respect, working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and in doing so building trust over time.

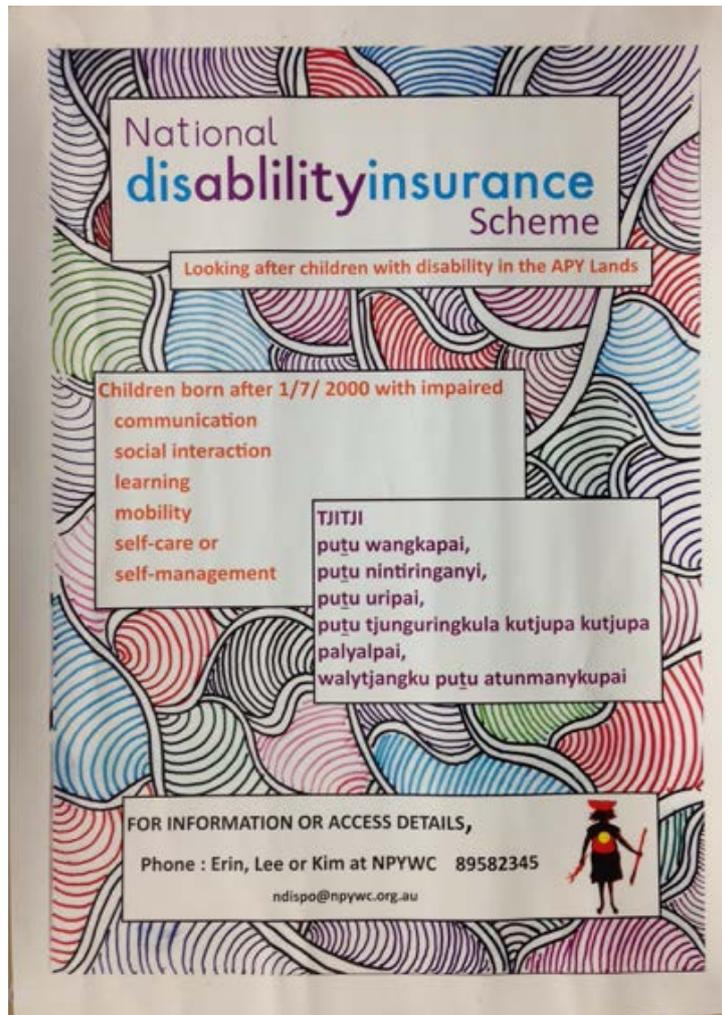
The NDIA recognises that in the important process of establishing a relationship with an individual and their family, we must build a relationship with the relevant community for that person. This is just as important for our staff who are working with participants on a day to day basis as our senior NDIA leaders who are involved in building relationships at a community level. We acknowledge the importance of building the necessary relationships, knowledge, confidence and rapport and that this takes time.

#### **4.4. Importance of communication**

The NDIA will consider the ways it communicates to ensure that respectful engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples can occur. NDIA staff will acknowledge and demonstrate understanding that local language is a means through which culture is practised. The NDIA will utilise translators to assist people to engage in meetings with our staff. Where there are no qualified interpreters for creoles or dialects of Aboriginal English, staff will be supported and trained in cross-cultural communication and communicating with people who are learning Standard Australian English as an additional language or dialect.

The NDIA will have the right balance in style and tone in its communications and importantly consider the right balance of humility. From feedback received we know that even well-intentioned people who have little experience in engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples can risk inadvertent offence through inappropriate style and tone. We need to ensure that we consider this in our engagement and reduce the risk that an important discussion does not take place out of fear of offending someone. This is particularly heightened during the early stages of establishing a relationship, in written communications and where there is no opportunity to explain any miscommunication or provide additional context.

The NDIA will need to consider different communication styles (including face to face and written communication formats) when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. For example: talking posters in language and plain/ easy English fact sheets. Non-verbal communication and body language should also be considered particularly the types of messages staff are sending and how this could be received and interpreted, for example: posture, clothing, gestures and use of eye contact, silence, touch and personal space.



**FIGURE 2: an example of talking posters in language and plain/ easy english fact sheet. The artwork featured within the talking poster is: Expressing the Need for Holistic Wrap Around Care by Margaret Smith. Margaret Smith has provided permission for the use of the art work.**

The NDIA will implement a plain/ easy English approach to the development of communication materials which will be guided through co-design with local communities including identification of barriers to effective communication and options to address. We will also ensure that practices and processes are developed and include Interpreters or local cultural advisors for successful engagement. The NDIA will consider different communication styles (including face to face and written communication formats) when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

## 4.5. Importance of language

The NDIA is aware that language is critical.

The following data in relation to languages are derived from the 2011 Census:

- About 61,000 people speak an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language. Of these, approximately 19% speak an Australian creole;
- A significant number of people speak an Australian creole including Torres Strait Creole (5,369 speakers) and Kriol (6,781 speakers). 575 people indicated that they speak Aboriginal English;
- Other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages with large numbers of speakers are Arrernte cluster (5,362 speakers), Djambarrpuyngu (2,974), Pitantjatjara (3,486) and Walpiri (2,554).
- The most common Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages differ between states and territories reflecting the origins of particular Aboriginal groups and their continuity with their traditional lands;
- Over half (60%) of the Northern Territory's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population speak an Indigenous language, by far the greatest proportion of any state or territory. 13.5% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Western Australia and 11.5% in South Australia speak an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language; and
- The Northern Territory has over half (56.1%) of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language speakers, with most of the remainder in Queensland (19.8%), Western Australia (15.6%) and South Australia (5.9%).<sup>3</sup>

With over 250 language groups it would be a resource intensive activity to translate all NDIA materials into each of the 250 languages. There is, however, an opportunity to guide and support identified community members to undertake a process of community led translation that would create a sense of community ownership of the information. Within this option, the NDIA could provide generic content and support to local community members to translate into the local languages, through which they could incorporate stories, metaphors and other aspects of oral histories to communicate information in a way that is understood within their communities.

The NDIA will establish regular communications during the implementation of the NDIS to ensure communities are informed of progress. Issues of concern which have been raised by the community will be acknowledged and feedback and reports provided. This process of feedback and review will reinforce the principle of two-way learning in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

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Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census 2011 data  
<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/2076.0main+features902011>

## 5. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander engagement approach

The NDIA recognises that in the important process of establishing a relationship with an individual and their family, we must also build a relationship with the relevant community for that person. The NDIA understands that this is just as important for our staff, who are working with participants on a day to day basis as our senior NDIA leaders who are involved in building relationships at a community level. We acknowledge the importance of building the necessary relationships, knowledge, confidence and rapport and that this takes time.

The Agency is adopting an 'I' model phased approach for initiating a sustainable relationship with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The three phases of the 'I' model are:

- PHASE 1: *Introduction* by a trusted local community member. This phase involves the community leaders getting to know the NDIA and staff, during which the purpose and aims can be introduced;
- PHASE 2: *Initiate* follow up contact to demonstrate commitment in the longer term benefit of the community. This will enable the community to ask specific questions about the NDIS and how it will be conducted, once they have had time to reflect on the purpose and aims during the introduction phase; and
- PHASE 3: *Invitation* to return by the community – this is a sign that trust is being established sufficient to progress a two-way engagement and meeting with participants to collect the narratives.

Relationship-based engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples requires staff to have strong social skills and to be adaptable and responsive to individual Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' preferences for communication. In preparing our staff the Agency has received a number of communication pointers:

- (i) *Prepare to be adaptive:*  
There is great diversity in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, so tread with caution until you know your way around in a new community. Don't make assumptions.
- (ii) *Practise the skill of sitting down and listening:*  
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples can take objection if they feel that they are being spoken at, or if someone has come to "save" them. This is particularly important when in the presence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders.
- (iii) *Avoid bureaucratic language and direct forms of questioning:*  
At a minimum, bureaucratic language is alienating, and in the worst case can be taken as confrontational and leads to mistrust. More respectful ways of seeking information such as "I wonder if you can tell me about...", as well as sharing information about oneself, mindful listening, and providing wait time are also important. Similarly, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have a tendency to avoid direct questioning as it can be confrontational. Asking someone open questions (e.g. "what is your story") will have a greater response

than direct questions (e.g. do you have a disability?“). Additionally, there may be cultural protocols about information sharing that govern how people communicate.

(iv) *Respect local ways and know your limits*

Understand that there may be cultural obligations which will take priority over the NDIA’s plans. For example: sorry business. It is not the job of the NDIA or its staff to become experts in culture; instead allow local ways and culture to exist without interference. Spiritual health and community connectedness are important attributes of a person’s and a community’s overall wellbeing. This will lead to better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with disability and the NDIS as a whole.

(v) *Check in with someone who has experience.*

Consult with people who have prior experience in working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples before engaging or initiating engagement in a community. These may include Commonwealth, State or Local Government, not-for-profits and non-government organisations. This will reduce the risk of inadvertently offending people through poorly executed communication strategies.

## 6. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander engagement priorities

The NDIA has identified ten key priority areas for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with disability, these are

- Communication and sharing of information
- Cultural competency
- Sharing Best Practice
- Local solutions
- Participant-centric design
- Market enablement
- Leveraging and linking
- Cultural Leadership
- Supporting internal infrastructure
- Tracking progress

### 6.1 Communication and sharing of information

Communication and information sharing refers to ensuring the key messages about the NDIS are developed and delivered in the 'proper way'.

Effective communication and information sharing directly educates and informs participants, the community, and stakeholders about how to access the NDIS and the supports and services available. It also builds trust through participation in and support of community events and activities.

All effective communication recognises and reflects the diversity that exists within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and across Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

### 6.2 Cultural competency

Cultural competency refers to the ability to identify and understand, and incorporate into policy development and service delivery, the different cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants and communities.

Being a culturally competent organisation requires an understanding that the belief systems, experiences, cultures and histories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are diverse. These differences can affect their participation in, and experience of, the NDIS. It also applies to understanding how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff often operate between multiple worlds – the world of their employer and the world of their community and family.

Cultural competency is an on-going process that aims to be demonstrated by all NDIA staff, NDIA partners (including LACs), suppliers, providers and contractors.

### 6.3 Sharing best practice

Sharing best practices refers to approaches to capturing, sharing and incorporating best practices that are implementing the 'proper way'.

Mechanisms for sharing best practice can include:

- internal processes for identifying lessons learnt from the participant experience, service delivery and policies,
- ensuring participants and providers have the ability to provide ongoing feedback on service quality,
- encouraging circles of feedback from staff and participants,
- looking to other sectors for guidance on best practice approaches, and
- an acknowledgement that, and consistent with the community by community approach being taken by the NDIA, what might be best practice in one community may not be appropriate in another.

### 6.4 Local solutions

Local solutions refers to the mechanisms by which place-based approaches are identified, developed and supported. Local solutions relate to participants, providers, employees and partnerships.

Local solutions recognise that the NDIS cannot be successfully delivered through a one-size fits all approach. Rather a *listen, learn, build and deliver* process to build relationships and enable access to the NDIS for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is required.

Underlying the local solutions approach is the NDIA's role as a connector, enabler and facilitator rather than as a doer. Often the most potent act the NDIA can take is to support local communities to build and implement their own solutions.

In developing local solutions, the NDIA will seek to maximise opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment, training and economic participation in the rollout of the Scheme.

### 6.5 Participant-centric design

Participant-centric design refers to how the experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants, their carers and communities can inform the implementation of the NDIS.

This is particularly relevant to participants' experience at access, planning and supports. Participant-centric design provides a customised approach to meet the needs of individuals based on their experiences. Participant-centric design includes:

- flexible service delivery which enables mobile Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants to continue engagement in the NDIS,
- culturally inclusive physical environments that make Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders feel welcomed and connected,
- recognition that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants have broader family and cultural responsibilities that may require a larger number of people to be involved in their care, and

- plans, materials and resources are visually appealing in a culturally inclusive and appropriate language way.

## **6.6 Market enablement**

Market enablement refers to supporting providers to provide the right services in the right locations in the 'proper way'.

The NDIA has an opportunity to be a leader in the communities in which it works by understanding, supporting and in some case developing the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suppliers and their capabilities and utilising them through the supply chain. This also requires fully implementing the Commonwealth Indigenous Procurement Policy to drive direct and indirect procurement.

## **6.7 Leveraging and linking**

Leveraging and linking refers to identifying existing approaches, knowledge and infrastructure that can be leveraged to support the 'proper way'.

Leveraging and linking may involve partnering with other Commonwealth agencies, working with state / territory or local governments and partnering with community organisations.

## **6.8 Cultural leadership**

Cultural leadership refers to how the NDIA leadership and partners can demonstrate the values and expected behaviours of the 'proper way' engagement.

Cultural leadership also provides clear expectations of teams and provides them with the license to conduct themselves differently and in the 'proper way' when the situation requires it. Cultural Leadership is:

- leading the 'proper way' through demonstrated cultural competency,
- being accountable for effective Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander engagement
- development of performance metrics, and
- supporting others to work in a manner that best works for each community

## **6.9 Supporting internal infrastructure**

Supporting internal infrastructure refers to the infrastructure required within and across the NDIA to embed 'proper way' practices, such as organisational policies, procedures, systems and practice guidance.

Policies can provide standardised minimums and guidance for delivery and operation or give the parameters to which flexibility can be applied to processes. Systems and tools can create efficiencies in processes that can increase effectiveness and participant satisfaction.

## **6.10 Tracking progress**

Tracking progress refers to how the NDIA will define and measure successes in engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants and communities.

Tracking progress through monitoring and reporting is critical to understanding how the NDIS is performing and areas requiring improvement.

Tracking progress also involves identifying the specific benefits the proposed approach and prioritised activities are anticipated to create and capturing data to measure such progress.

## Appendix 1 State and Territory – key initiatives

*Please note that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Engagement Strategy has been through an extensive endorsement process. Commencing in early 2016 and finalised in December 2016 with noting by the Council of Australian Governments. The below information reflects work completed by the Agency and State and Territory Government's at the time of writing in 2016.*

State and territory governments have delivered supports and services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability and their communities. The NDIA seeks to build on the lessons learned from this experience and recognises that approaches to Scheme implementation will reflect the different circumstances and needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their communities in each state or territory. The NDIA further acknowledges that for some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities their Country does not recognise state/ territory boundaries and cultural practices may mean that communities may move from one region to another in changing seasons or weather. The NDIA's regional structure has been designed to reflect participant's normal travel patterns which may cross state and territory boundaries.

### **New South Wales**

#### Services Our Way

Services Our Way (SOW) is a holistic packaged support program specifically designed to meet the needs of Aboriginal people with disability, their families and carers. SOW provides a range of supports and services through individualised funding packages on a short term basis to Aboriginal clients only in the New England, Illawarra/Shoalhaven, Western Sydney, Nepean Blue Mountains and Northern Sydney areas.

#### Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat

Funding has been provided to the Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat (AbSec) in 2014 to help Aboriginal NGOs get ready to provide appropriate, targeted services under the NDIS. The fund will help build the number and capacity of Aboriginal NGOs providing disability and community services to Aboriginal people.

#### Yarnin' about Disability

In June and July 2013, the NSW Government went to 11 Aboriginal communities across NSW to talk with Aboriginal people with disability, their families, carers and communities about the transition to the NDIS and how they need to be supported to be ready for it. These Yarn Ups are guiding how Government supports Aboriginal people in NSW prepare for the NDIS.

#### Living Life My Way Ambassadors and Champions

Five Aboriginal people have been appointed as Ambassadors and/ or Champions to inspire and encourage other people about the possibilities for themselves and to raise community awareness about person-centred approaches in NSW. Each has first-hand experience of living with disability.

## The Aboriginal Disability Network NSW

The Aboriginal Disability Network NSW has been funded to prepare Aboriginal communities, Aboriginal people with disability, families and carers in NSW for the expansion of individualised funding and the roll out of the NDIS.

## NSW Aboriginal Ability Links Program

- The NSW Aboriginal Ability Links Program demonstrates how the Aboriginal community sector can be actively engaged to improve the lives of Aboriginal people with disability, their families and communities.
- Ability Links NSW Coordinators, or “Linkers” as they are known, work with people with disability who are aged 9 to 64 years, their families and carers to help them plan for their future, build on their strengths and skills, and develop networks in their own communities so they can do what they want with their lives – outside of the traditional disability service system.
- Ability Links NSW launched in the Hunter area in July 2013 to align with the NDIS trial. Ability Links NSW has now expanded so that families in every part of NSW have access to a Linker. As part of the expansion ADHC met with Aboriginal community members and non-government organisations to spread the word about Ability Links and to encourage Aboriginal non-government organisations to participate in the tender process.
- There are now 16 providers and joint working arrangements in place across NSW. Of these, 12 are Aboriginal non-government organisations and joint working arrangements who have Aboriginal identified Linker positions. This means there are now 268 Linkers, of which 47 are Aboriginal identified positions, for people to connect with.

## Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility, Empowerment (OCHRE): The NSW Government Plan for Aboriginal Affairs

In 2012, the NSW Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs Taskforce hosted two rounds of community consultation which included 27 community and industry workshops and meetings and was attended by some 2,700 people. It also received 207 written submissions from a wide variety of contributors including Aboriginal community organisations, land councils, and NGOs.

Aboriginal communities and other key stakeholders expressed a strong desire for change and the need for effective co-ordination to prevent the duplication of government and non-government services and a strengthened focus on education and employment. These were identified as keys to overcoming Aboriginal disadvantage.

As a result, six aims were developed to inform the OCHRE Plan, released in April 2013:

- Teach more Aboriginal language and culture to build people’s pride and identity;
- Keep more Aboriginal students at school;
- Support more Aboriginal young people to get jobs that are fulfilling and sustainable;
- Grow local Aboriginal leaders’ and communities’ capacity to drive their own solutions;
- Focus on creating opportunities for economic empowerment; and
- Make Government and communities more accountable for the money they spend.

The NSW Government has implemented a number of initiatives to achieve these aims. Key achievements to date include:

- Legislation to amend the Ombudsman Act 1974 passed through Parliament, creating a Deputy Ombudsman for Aboriginal Programs to provide independent monitoring and assessment of OCHRE initiatives;
- The Cultural and Indigenous Research Centre of Australia (CIRCA) was selected to prepare a five-year Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Improvement (MERI) Framework for OCHRE;
- Five Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests identified and launched to support the revitalisation of language and culture and to increase the number of speakers and teachers;
- Non-government providers appointed to operate Opportunity Hubs in the Upper Hunter, Dubbo, Tamworth and Campbelltown regions to support Aboriginal students to stay at school and successfully transition from school into further study, training or employment; and
- The Connected Communities strategy has been established in 15 schools to drive educational outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people through linking school education to other related services, such as health, wellbeing, early childhood education and care, and vocational education and training.

## **Northern Territory (NT)**

### Local Advisory Group:

The Agency has established a Local Advisory Group (LAG) with broad representation from local stakeholders, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and consumer representatives.

The group has a role in providing cultural, local and consumer advice to ensure the NDIS is responsive to the local environment, including advice about engagement and how we explain the NDIS.

It is intended that the LAG will contribute to the NDIS to achieving the best outcomes for all people with disabilities in the Barkly region trial site which includes their families and carers.

### Recruitment:

- The Agency has placed a strong priority on recruiting Aboriginal staff to work at the Tennant Creek office.
- The Agency has worked with the local community to promote awareness and interest in the NDIA as an employer of choice.
- The Agency has used both the Special Measures provision for recruiting Aboriginal staff; and has utilised the Identified Positions/ Criteria provision for recruiting staff with specialist knowledge and understanding for roles with a strong involvement in work relating to Indigenous Australians and/ or communities.
- To date the Agency has been able to achieve a very high rate of 44% of Aboriginal employees at the Tennant Creek office.

### Tennant Creek Community Forums:

The Agency hosted two public forums in Tennant Creek on 14 July 2015, with the main purpose being to receive feedback and questions about how the NDIS is progressing across the Barkly, and to hear local suggestions and ideas about priorities and/or enhancements to the NDIS for the second year of the trial. Forum participants have been provided with some feedback about the sessions and have been advised about the further work to be done focussing on the five themes, i.e. participants/ community; communication and engagement; understanding the NDIS; employment and training; and carers and families.

### Remote community engagement activities:

Following on from a community meeting in 2015 hosted by the NDIA, the Agency have been working with a remote community with the aim to establish an ongoing forum of local stakeholders who can lead the development of strategies to support the needs of local people with disability.

### Partnership approach with Barkly Regional Arts (BRA):

- The NDIA have used arts based approaches to support engaging 'right way' with communities across the Barkly region.
- Building on the relationship that BRA has with artists and community through art practices, and with NDIA, yarned about disability, the NDIS and how it can help their community.
- The Story Plates project used ceramics as the art medium. NDIA and BRA staff spent time at several communities, 'yarning' about issues to do with disability with local community members and on the back of the issues, concepts and stories arising from those yarns, local people were encouraged to convey their thoughts in visual way through drawing and painting – using ceramic plates as the art medium. The artwork also had quite unique qualities - reflecting the uniqueness of different local communities - Canteen Creek, Epenarra, Elliott, Tennant Creek and Mungkarta. The project provided a two-way learning opportunity in which to understand issues that communities are facing around those with disability and the supports they need. Contextual ideas of these discussions were used in the design of the ceramic story plates, that tell a story about disability from their or the community perspective.
- The Story Plates have been exhibited at the National Rural Health Conference in Darwin in 2015, and at the recent Desert Harmony Festival. It is hoped that the exhibition will travel to other parts of Australia later this year.
- It is also proposed to progress other art based projects in other Barkly communities to further assist in promoting local discussion and awareness of what disability means to local people.

## 2015 Desert Harmony Festival

- The NDIS was a major sponsor of the 2015 Desert Harmony festival.
- The theme of this year's festival was 'let NDIS be light' and many of the events were disability themed.
- Two days of the events at Peko Park – the NDIS 'Disability Platform' brought together providers, participants, families and carers in a relaxed environment.
- The 'Disability Football Round' event held during the Festival was a very public profile event designed to promote disability awareness and the NDIS, and as an opportunity to offer a special event to our local NDIS participants who were invited to attend as our VIP guests. Footballers played in purple socks and several participants also had specific hosting and/or support roles on the day. The match was also webcast across the Barkly and also broadcast live across most of northern Australia – on CAAMA radio – with strong messaging throughout about disability and the NDIS. Several thousand people also attended on the day.

## **Queensland**

The Queensland Government Cultural Capability Framework underpins all Queensland Government actions aimed at ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders enjoy the same opportunities as non-Indigenous Queenslanders. The strategic vision of the Framework is "Culturally capable government agencies and funded organisations that provide efficient, effective and responsive services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives are an inherent part of core business for all agencies". In 2015, all Queensland Government departments developed a cultural capability action plan to document and track progress in implementing the Framework.

### Consultation

Local Area Coordination (LAC) workshops were held in Townsville and Ipswich in July and August 2015. These workshops were the first joint consultations undertaken between the Queensland Government Department of Communities and the NDIA in the area of rural, remote and Indigenous service delivery and engagement approaches.

Findings affirmed those from previous research and experience at trial sites.

- Many Indigenous languages do not have a specific word for disability.
- Many Indigenous people who have a disability do not recognise themselves as having a disability.
- Under the current model there are limited funded services available to people with a disability living in rural and remote Queensland and much of the LAC support is provided to people who do not have funding for formal support.
- Geographical distance, weather events (some communities are inaccessible by road for up to six months in the wet season), low population density, limited infrastructure, and workforce issues increase the cost and the challenges of providing services to people living in rural and remote localities.
- In order to be effective LAC needs to become a credible part of the community and this often takes time and creative strategies to achieve.
- In order to be effective, communication and engagement must be tailored to the needs of the community and take into account macro and micro cultural needs.

### Networks

Queensland recognises the importance and value of already developed and trusted networks across the state and has been working collaboratively with well-established community leaders. It is critical to have sufficient time to build key relationships with the communities and key stakeholders. Building community participation to increase awareness of disability services and the rights of people with a disability in rural and remote Queensland requires the involvement and contribution of Local Indigenous Councils, Traditional Owners and Custodians and non-government services such as local Aboriginal Medical Services.

Engagement activities have been undertaken at Indigenous specific events and fora to increase the exposure of the NDIS.

### Mainstream

The NDIA will establish and sustain collaborative relationships with mainstream departments including the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships, Queensland Health and Hospital Services, Housing, Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations and the Queensland Department of Education.

The Queensland Engagement Team have been able to provide awareness and education for a number of primary health outlets with a view to building knowledge and improved access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders. In September 2015, the Queensland Engagement Team presented to over 100 Allied Health professionals at Cairns & Hinterland Hospital and Health Service (Cairns HHHS) that provides services to a large number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, this included the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Stroke Team.

### Participants

NDIA QLD attended the Laura Aboriginal Dance Festival. The Festival is a biennial event celebrating and showcasing the culture of the Aboriginal peoples of Cape York Peninsula through song, dance ceremony and performance. The town of Laura is 330kms north of Cairns. The event provides an opportunity for stallholders to promote and share information with the 7,000 people that attend and perform at the festival. NDIA shared a stall with Queensland Aged & Disability Advocacy (QADA) which now administers the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Disability Network. The event also provided the opportunity to connect with many services and organisations that operate throughout Cape York, and to discuss service delivery in remote areas.

NDIA QLD continues to work with QADA and to support culturally appropriate readiness conversations in preparing for the NDIS. The Indigenous NDIS planning work book using photographs and stories of Indigenous Australians continues to be distributed at events and emerging NDIS networks as a welcomed resource for families, carers and providers that assists in raising awareness and contributes to readiness.

### Provider support

The Queensland Engagement Team and the North Queensland Implementation Team have committed to supporting local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander run organisations in awareness and education on Scheme not only in terms of business transition to the NDIS but to support and prepare existing clients and community members who would be interested in seeking to participate in the Scheme.

### Research and Readiness

The Queensland Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services commissioned Price Waterhouse Cooper (PwC) Australia to undertake Community Capacity Building Projects in discrete and remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Communities in Queensland.

Six sites were visited: Roma, Barcaldine, Normanton, Cherbourg, Aurukun and Thursday Island. PwC released the final report of its findings in December 2014. The findings of the project included:

- Effective communication requires specific strategies for Indigenous people and for people living in remote locations.
- The NDIS should integrate with other mainstream systems and not be built as an 'extra' system.
- System fragility and fragmentation is a problem and more evident in small and more remote locations. Often a single organisation delivers multiple services and this carries significant risk.
- There is no substitute for people. People are needed to drive community support and engagement.
- Workforce development and retention. Long standing staff will be fundamental to engage the community and ensure robust foundations for the future sustainability of the NDIS.
- Using what works. It is essential that the NDIA provides an environment where learnings can be captured and used.
- Innovation/ technology. Technology enablers could be used to increase engagement with the NDIA. Collaborative consumption applications could be effective.

The Queensland Government has funded the organisation Synapse to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders with disabilities and their families to understand the opportunities presented by the NDIS and be ready to engage with the NDIA.

## **South Australia**

South Australian Government has developed the *Cultural Inclusion Framework* which is intended to assist all South Australian Government agencies to develop services that are culturally inclusive and competent in order to make them more accessible and appropriate for Aboriginal people.

The Department for Communities and Social Inclusion (DCSI) is committed to closing the gap for Aboriginal people, including through the development and delivery of high-quality programs that make a real difference to the lives of Aboriginal children, young people, families and communities including Aboriginal people with disability.

To achieve this, DCSI has developed an *Aboriginal Cultural Inclusion Framework* and an Aboriginal Priorities Plan 2015-18.

The employment of Aboriginal people assists DCSI to deliver culturally appropriate programs and policies. DCSI has developed and implemented the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands (APY Lands) Workforce Strategy. The APY Lands Workforce Strategy was developed to specifically address the high turnover of staff on the Lands. This Strategy has included a partnership between DCSI and TAFE SA Regional to pilot a new model of training based on mentoring and a specific induction program for the APY Lands. Other initiatives the department has developed include:

- Aboriginal Services Directors Working Group – is responsible for overseeing the development of a policy establishing a consistent approach to support the most effective way of working with Aboriginal clients and communities.
- DCSI Aboriginal Senior Leadership Group (ASLG) provides culturally specific advice on Aboriginal related matters across the department.
- Anangu Retention Pilot arose as an intergovernmental and inter-agency contribution to address related issues around client service in Home and Community Care (HACC) delivery in the APY Lands, and the retention and career progression of Anangu staff employed as HACC workers.
- Aboriginal Cultural Sensitivity and Respect Training Program focuses on developing a general Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultural competence and aims to equip participants with useful information in regards to Aboriginal affairs and non-Aboriginal privileges in order for staff to work more effectively with Aboriginal people.

LACs have been recruited to and are working within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and remote communities. These roles have been outsourced to local Aboriginal controlled organisations, Tullawon Health Service for the Maralinga Tjaruta Lands, Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (NPY) Women's Council for the APY Lands. The report from APY Lands year one of project with recommendations report available on the NDIS website.

First Peoples Disability Network (FPDN) have employed two LACs who have commenced assisting Aboriginal people in rural and metropolitan areas to access the NDIS.

A smoking ceremony by Ngarrindjeri elder Major Sumner was held as part of the opening ceremony for the Murray Bridge Office.

Ninti One research project will be funded through Community Inclusion and Capacity Development (CICD). This project will engage Anangu living on the APY lands in the development of a service and support model which will be locally relevant, inclusive and beneficial for people with disability. The project will gain an understanding of perceptions and attitudes to disability held by Anangu living on the APY Lands and a report will be produced, providing advice on the practical application of disability supports guided by the ideas, needs and attitudes of Anangu, for use in designing effective service delivery model(s) on the APY lands.

Two projects in Maralinga Tjaruta Lands:

- Funding was provided for the cost of accessible modifications to an existing commuter bus for Yalata community members with special mobility needs. This will provide people with disability in a remote Aboriginal community increased opportunities for participation in social, community and cultural activities.
- Funding was provided to Oak Valley (Maralinga) Inc. for the purchase of resources for the Oak Valley Mothers and Babies Group to create an inclusive space for families.

#### CICD engagement resources in APY Lands communities

Workshops with a group of senior women from the APY Lands of South Australia to build the capacity of Anangu (Aboriginal people from the remote APY Lands), and through them, of remote communities in the Lands to utilise the NDIS will be held. The workshops will build a common understanding of concepts such as that of disability and the idea of planning. Visual resources will be generated to assist in building a shared understanding of disability, and these resources will be distributed for use by community members and service providers.

The NPY Women's Council has translated some of the key principles of the NDIS into language, and art work, depicting where the NDIS is at the moment in South Australia (focused on children). These translations highlight that the Scheme is a wrap-around service and that it is for people with a range of disabilities and also what appropriate and inappropriate use of NDIS funding is. This art work has been displayed in the South Australian NDIS offices and provides a point of reference for our Indigenous participants and their parents/carers. Posters in language are also now displayed in all communities on the APY Lands.

## **Tasmania**

During trial, NDIA staff have visited both Tasmanian Aboriginal peak bodies; Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre (TAC) and Circular Head Aboriginal Corporation (CHAC). This has supported both organisation's awareness of the NDIS, with feedback that the NDIA is working well with Aboriginal participants and their families and Carers in Tasmania.

The NDIA has offered through the local Aboriginal peak bodies' opportunities to engage with Aboriginal communities since launch. The peak bodies have acknowledged that they will contact the NDIA when they feel the need or are ready for these.

The NDIA has been gifted planning tools designed by the Torres Strait Islander Consultancy in partnering with Connection Inc., as a supplementary worksheet that staff can use in planning conversations. It is a visual tool which can guide and aid conversations around supports, goals and aspirations, particularly those sensitive to any language and location barriers.

## Victoria

The Victorian Government is committed to a sustained and strategic effort to improve the quality of life of Aboriginal Victorians. The *Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework (VAAF) 2013–2018* is underpinned by seven key access criteria for effective service design: cultural safety, affordability, convenience, awareness, empowerment, availability and respect. It continues a whole-of-government outcomes framework for driving policy, service system and programmatic responses across all levels of government and Victorian communities.

Victoria's 39 Local Indigenous Networks (LINs) provide a voice for Aboriginal Victorians. LINs are bringing Aboriginal people together to identify their aspirations and priorities and develop community plans for practical action at the local level.

Barwon trial site has funded two CICD projects targeted at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

### “Getting it Right” project

The project “Getting it Right” provides culturally appropriate expertise and supports to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability in the trial site as they participate in the NDIS. The project aims to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals and families to be:

- Comfortable with the NDIS
- Informed about the benefits of the NDIS
- Supported to engage with the NDIA’s access and eligibility processes
- Encouraged to participate in the planning and implementation of their NDIS package.

The “Getting it Right” project utilises the expertise and experience of leading Aboriginal disability consultant Jody Barney (Saxton) to commence work with families within the trial site who are yet to participate in the NDIS. The consultant has extensive experience, networks and knowledge of the communities within the region, as well excellent knowledge of the relevant NDIS processes.

The “Getting It Right” project also provides the NDIA with valuable feedback on the unmet needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability, appropriate data collection, evidence and processes undertaken to engage participants in the trial site.

### “Wathaurong” Project

The goals of this project are:

- To develop, test and document a flexible model for effective engagement and communication between the NDIA and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in the greater Geelong area. This will result in the development of a template for NDIA engagement processes with these communities in other jurisdictions.
- To support improved knowledge and understanding of the NDIS for community members.
- To enhance the capacity of NDIA and mainstream providers of disability services to provide and enable culturally safe services for Aboriginal people who interact with them.

The site has also funded cultural safety training for 45 staff provided at Wathaurong through Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO).

The trial site has also developed a small group of staff who have begun attending significant cultural events in the community to help build some presence and trust with the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders and community.

#### Lessons learnt:

- “Getting it Right” project – feedback from community members shows that Jody has been able to access families that would never have considered entering the NDIS on their own. She is well-known across many Aboriginal communities both locally and nationally, and as a person with disability she has been able to identify and work with a number of families to provide assistance for them to access the NDIS. Jody is in the process of developing her report using data from the local community and feedback from families she has been working with.
- The ability to have consistency in the faces representing the site at cultural events helps build trust and a feeling of safety in the local community. Planning at site level still occurs in the relevant teams. There is not a dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander planner or LAC. Feedback from community is that ideally this would include staff with an Aboriginal and/ or Torres Strait Islander background. There are none identified in the trial site.
- The trial site has identified a large number of potential participants (96) that need understanding of their disability, the NDIS, what it offers and how to access it before they will attempt to make contact.

## **Western Australia**

The Perth Hills trial site activities are focusing on local engagement including:

- The trial site regularly engaging with Aboriginal staff from various agencies and key Aboriginal leaders to discuss the merit of appointing an Aboriginal reference group to advise the trial site on engaging with local Aboriginal people, the terms of reference and who may be included.
- The trial site working closely with Peedac as they register to support young people in transition from high school to employment; and
- The trial site actively engaging with Derbyl Yerrigan, an Aboriginal Health Agency, to discuss the interface between NDIA and Aboriginal Health.

## Australian Capital Territory

This service delivered by Gugan Gulwan commenced as a six month project in July 2014. Funding was increased to employ additional staff and to extend the program to March 2017.

The service provides outreach to promote understanding and awareness about the NDIS among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) community, including:

- The local communities have heard about and have a general understanding of what the NDIS is;
- Community members with disability and their families are enabled and/or assisted to find out whether they may be eligible for NDIS and what types of supports and services the NDIS might provide them;
- Eligible people are supported to consider their whole of life needs and make a participant plan that outlines their goals and their disability related needs;
- Eligible community members are supported to meet and engage with the NDIA to get the best package of supports and services to achieve the goals in the participant plan; and
- The benefits and successes of the NDIS for local communities' members are promoted.

Additionally, Gugan Gulwan hosted gatherings in partnership with other community providers who engaged with local community by recruiting family leaders who talked to other families about their NDIS /NDIA experience.

### Building Culturally Sensitive Disability Services in the ACT

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members to genuinely exercise choice and control and get the best from the NDIS, community members need the option to access culturally sensitive disability supports and services. Community members should be able to choose from Aboriginal managed disability services as well as from other mainstream culturally sensitive disability services. Community members should be provided with the option of having their support needs met by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disability service workers, both male and female. Currently there are two Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander human service providers in the ACT; at this time neither provides disability services. A small number of mainstream disability providers have good connections and are working well for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the local community. However, in general, community members have expressed concern and frustration about the lack of culturally sensitive support services to choose from. Anecdotally this has resulted in some people with high needs not accessing any formal supports or services related to their disability. In December 2015 a program called Opening Doors Project, funded by the Commonwealth Sector Development Fund, commenced to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members get real choice and control around disability supports. The program will operate until December 2016 and will:

- work with Aboriginal organisations to build their capacity to deliver disability services through the NDIS
- work with mainstream organisations to build their capacity to deliver culturally sensitive services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- work to build the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce for the disability sector in the ACT.

## For more information, please contact:

### National Disability Insurance Agency



1800 800 110



[www.ndis.gov.au](http://www.ndis.gov.au)



[www.nt.gov.au/community/interpreting-and-translating-services](http://www.nt.gov.au/community/interpreting-and-translating-services)

### For people with hearing or speech loss



TTY: 1800 555 677



Speak and Listen: 1800 555 727

### Indigenous Interpreting Services



Alice Springs region: 08 8951 5576



Darwin region: 1800 994 944



Kimberley region: 08 9192 3981



Queensland: 131 450



South Australia: 1800 334 944

### For people who need help with English



TIS: 131 450

This report can be accessed online at [www.ndis.gov.au](http://www.ndis.gov.au)



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