

Community Connector Framework

June 2020

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1. Introduction

The National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) aims to achieve equitable access to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) for all people with a disability who meet eligibility requirements. The NDIA recognises that there are additional challenges in engaging with and providing a service to diverse and hard to reach populations. These challenges are often due to social, cultural, economic, or other discriminatory barriers. While the NDIA has undertaken extensive consultation about potential barriers and has put some plans into action, there is more work to be done to address these challenges.

In May 2019 the Morrison Government made a pre-election commitment to invest an additional \$20 million to support the expansion of Community Connectors to support hard-to-reach populations, including diverse groups, and ageing parents and carers of children with disability.

Community Connectors are people employed as trusted resources to improve linkages between people, communities, and services. Under the terms of the National Community Connector Program (NCCP), Community Connectors will be engaged by service partners, contracted to deliver the program.

2. Purpose of this Framework

This framework provides a common understanding of how Community Connectors enhance people's experience with the NDIS and improve efficiencies across access, planning and plan utilisation. The framework contributes to efficient contracting and procurement practice with service partners.

3. Background

The NDIA recognises that people from diverse population groups, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) people, and people with a psychosocial disability often have more difficulty engaging with the NDIS participant pathway.

Community Connectors

NDIS Remote Community Connectors (RCC) have been operating since June 2016 across remote Australia. RCC are focused primarily on supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and remote and very remote communities. They work with communities to support the roll out of the NDIS.

The RCC program has a critical role in connecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants with the Scheme^{1 2}. RCCs function as a conduit between the NDIA and their communities to aid communication and engagement. In addition, they provide the cultural brokerage necessary to understand and effectively engage with the relationships, infrastructure, organisational capacity and networks that exist within communities.

A number of other non-remote Community Connector models have been engaged through Partners in the Community (PITC):

- Bapcare previously engaged Community Connectors in South East and South West Tasmania to meet with participants and their families' face-to-face, providing information and support to access NDIS.
- In the Nepean and Blue Mountains areas (NSW), Uniting previously employed Community Connectors to provide support and information to children and young people with a disability under the age of 18, and their families and carers.

4. The Community Connector Role

4.1 Purpose

Many individuals and communities have additional barriers to accessing the NDIS, including language and cultural differences, and/or disassociation from broader community as a result of discrimination or trauma. Community Connectors support participants, potential participants, carers and families to better understand the NDIS. Community Connectors also support the NDIA and PITC staff and the local service sector to establish trusting relationships and more appropriate engagement.

The purpose of the NCCP is to ensure that, among the target cohorts, people with a disability, and their families and carers have access to the information and support they require to successfully engage with the NDIS. The NCCP supports target cohorts to receive this support from a source that is sensitive and responsive to their individual needs.

Further, Community Connectors must work closely with PITC in the identified locations to support our Partners to build their links with hard to reach communities and to build their capability to more effectively engage with people across the identified cohorts. Our PITC have an important, ongoing role in supporting communities, and the Community Connectors have an important role in supporting their ongoing capability. Transfer of knowledge to the PITC network regarding effective and culturally safe engagement with identified cohorts will be a key indicator of the success for the program.

¹ East Arnhem Participant Pathways Workshop, November 2017

² NDIS East Arnhem Co-design Project Evaluation, April 2018

4.2 Functions

The Community Connector role is defined by the following functions:

Function	
Engage	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improving the awareness and knowledge of participants, potential participants and communities about the NDIS and about disability more broadly.• Reduce barriers to accessing the NDIS by providing assertive outreach to people with a disability and their representatives.• Educating local PITC staff regarding effective ways to identify and engage with target cohorts.
Connect	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Providing information to communities about the NDIS, broader supports and how they can support people with disabilities.• Providing information to the NDIA and to PITC that can improve access, planning and service delivery outcomes.• Support people with a disability and their representatives to connect with the NDIS, PITC and mainstream supports.
Collaborate	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Supporting PITC, NDIA staff and Support Coordinators to assist potential participants to access the NDIS and utilise their plan.• Supporting PITC to effectively engage target cohorts.• Supporting communication between NDIA staff, PITC, community and participants.
Advise	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide guidance and advice to PITC and Support Coordinators to promote equity in access to the Scheme.

The Community Connector role is mapped against the Participant Pathway, Complex Support Needs Pathway, and Early Childhood Pathway at Appendix 1. This provides an overview of how the NCCP supports the Agency, PITC, community, and participants.

4.3 The Individual

Community Connectors do not require specific qualifications or experience. There is, however, a strong rationale for individual Community Connectors to be representative of the target group they are supporting, or have lived experience in the case of Community Connectors for specific disability cohorts.

The key qualities required for this role are:

- Strong connections with, and extensive knowledge of, the communities they will support.
- Strong communication and/or language skills to enable engagement with identified cohorts, NDIA staff, PITC, service providers, and the broader community.

Community Connectors will be supported by service partners to carry out their role, and will be provided with necessary training, including knowledge of the NDIS, the participant pathway, the ECEI approach, and the disability sector. Changes to NDIA processes will be communicated regularly to ensure currency of information. Service partners will work with the NDIA to determine how training, mentoring, and ongoing support will be delivered.

5. Planned Outcomes

The Community Connector Framework provides a consistent approach to implementing Community Connectors nationally. Community Connectors will support diverse communities, particularly to engage with PITC.

Further, Community Connectors will support PITC to connect with target cohorts and to grow their knowledge and capacity to ensure culturally appropriate engagement with participants along the participant pathway.

The NCCP will be deployed in areas identified as having a need for localised and targeted engagement activity.

5.1 Outcomes for Participants and Carers

- Participants and potential participants will better understand the NDIS.
- Communities will better understand the NDIS and how to engage with the NDIA or PITC.
- Identification of, and access to the NDIS for, people who may not otherwise have engaged with the NDIS due to differing cultural norms, a lack of understanding of the NDIS, or an unwillingness to engage with NDIS due to underlying cultural reasons.
- Participants will receive higher quality plans through enhanced cultural understanding in the planning process by the NDIA and PITC.
- Participants will better understand how to use their plans.
- Participants will receive improved supports that meet their cultural and social needs.
- Participants will enjoy improved access to and inclusion in community and mainstream services.
- Participants will express greater satisfaction with their NDIS experience.

5.2 Outcomes for Communities

- Greater community knowledge of the NDIS.
- Greater understanding of the impacts of disability.
- Improved relationships with NDIA staff, PITC, and support services.
- Increased understanding of the NDIS.
- Greater community inclusion and employment outcomes for people with a disability.
- Increased cultural awareness among providers and mainstream supports.

5.3 Outcomes for NDIA and PITC

- Increased and more culturally aware engagement with target populations.
- Increased cultural understanding of target populations.
- Increased understanding of how to identify, connect with, plan for and support diverse populations.
- Increased trust from target communities.
- Greater understanding how to design and deliver resources and services for diverse populations.

6. Strategic Overview

6.1 Framework Principles

The Framework is built on the following principles:

1. Trust

Trust occurs when parties feels valued, heard, understood, and treated with honesty and respect. Community Connectors will engender trust by providing a service that is:

- **Culturally appropriate:** The NCCP is being delivered by service partners who have established trusted relationships with target cohorts, have place-based knowledge regarding their needs, and possess the requisite cultural competence to engage effectively with identified communities. Further, service partners have the expertise to support PITC to enhance their connectedness with and capabilities to engage effectively with target cohorts.
- **Person-centred:** The NDIA recognises the diversity within different population groups. Service partners will engage Community Connectors to deliver tailored approaches for connecting with existing and potential participants individuals, whilst recognising the broader role of families and communities in culturally appropriate ways.
- **Strength based:** Community Connectors will value the strengths of individuals and organisations (including the NDIA and PITC). They will work, in culturally appropriate ways to develop the strengths, skills, personal attributes, of participants when engaging with the NDIS. Community Connectors will recognise and leverage the strengths of individuals, as well as local community groups, networks and cultural-specific organisations to improve outcomes for participants, target cohorts and the NDIS.
- **Trauma informed:** Many individuals and communities have experienced marginalisation and discrimination due to race, culture, sexuality, gender, or disability, from individuals and/or systems. People working closely with diverse communities must possess an understanding of both individual and inter-generational trauma.

2. Building knowledge and capacity

The building of knowledge and capacity is important for our participants, NDIA staff, PITC staff, and communities:

- **Individuals and communities:**

- Recognising the skills, knowledge and connections of individuals, and enabling personal growth and development.
- Building community capacity to access and achieve outcomes through the NDIS.
- Building on the strengths of existing community networks and organisations to better support people with disabilities in culturally appropriate ways.
- Promoting inclusive employment of people with a disability and recognition of specific knowledge of their own community.

- **NDIA and PITC:**

- Building on the strong basis of existing within PITC, such that they can better service their communities.
- Informing NDIA of the changing needs of diverse groups, so the Agency can improve on the way our staff and PITC engage in a culturally effective manner with target communities.
- Building NDIA and PITC workforce capacity by accessing local resources and knowledge.

3. Sustainable delivery of the NDIS

Community Connectors will support improved efficiency in implementing the NDIS, through investment at the pre-access stage of the participant pathway. Community Connectors must ensure that individuals and communities have access to important information regarding accessing the NDIS. Better understanding by NDIA and PITC of target cohort needs can lead to better outcomes for participants and communities in relation to access, planning, and plan utilization.

6.2 Supporting the Corporate Plan

These NCCP complements the NDIA Values:

- **We value people**
- **We aim higher**
- **We grow together**
- **We take care**

The NCCP supports the delivery of the NDIA Corporate plan by:

- Building confidence and trust amongst participants, by enabling greater transparency, clarity and consistency in communication (Aspiration 1: A quality experience and outcomes for participants).

- Building participant and community capacity to engage with NDIA (Aspiration 1: A quality experience and outcomes for participants, Aspiration 5: A high-performing NDIA).
- Improving efficiency of the NDIS through more appropriate systems and processes for participants and community (Aspiration 4: A financially sustainable Scheme).

7. Monitoring and Evaluation

The NCCP will be monitored on a regular basis through program and contract governance and reporting throughout the duration of the program to 30 June 2021. Reporting requirements are included in the funding agreements.

NDIA will undertake internal evaluation of the NCCP at regular intervals throughout the program. This will be informed through direct engagement with participants, service partners, individual Community Connectors, and PITC.

8. Summary

The Community Connector framework guides the work undertaken by service partners and the Community Connectors they engage. The framework acknowledges that different locations and target population groups will require different approaches to the identification of potential participants, the engagement with target populations and the deployment of Community Connectors, dependent on the needs of target cohorts and communities, and the availability of other support services. Partnership and strong integration with existing PITC will be fundamental to the success of the NCCP.

The role of Community Connectors is further detailed in the position description.

The NCCP is a targeted program, delivering surge capacity in support of PITC, in order to identify, engage with and support hard to reach cohorts to gain access to the NDIS, where appropriate. Effective transition to our PITC network over the duration of the program is instrumental to its success. Transfer of knowledge to the PITC network regarding effective and culturally safe engagement with identified cohorts will be a key indicator of the success of the program.

Acronym List

Acronym or Term	Description
ARF	Access Request Form
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
CME	Community and Mainstream Engagement
ECEI	Early Childhood Early Intervention
ILC	Information Linkages and Capacity Building
LAC	Local Area Coordinator
NDIA	National Disability Insurance Agency
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme
PITC	Partners in the Community

Appendix 1: Community Connectors and the NDIS Pathways

	PHASE 1: ENGAGING WITH THE NDIS		
Standard Pathway	Learn about the NDIS and its fit in the broader system of supports	Decide to proceed to access	Receive access decision
ECEI Pathway	Learn about the ECEI Approach and the interface with broader service system	Access an Early Childhood Partner who will determine the right supports for the child	Receive access short term intervention by the partner or where required Access to the scheme
Complex Pathway	Pre access local engagement and liaison		Access, detailed handovers and connections
Community and participant supports	<p>Engage potential participants about the scheme through assertive outreach</p> <p>Engage potential participants about NDIS, the process, how disability is defined, what supports may be available</p> <p>Connect potential participant to PITC or NDIA to assist with completing Access Request (ARF) forms and evidence of disability forms</p>		<p>Connect participant or potential participant with feedback and follow up</p> <p>Connect potential participant to PITC or NDIA when awaiting access decision</p>
Agency supports	<p>Advise Agency on engagement activities</p> <p>Connect Agency to identify any local potential participants</p>		<p>Advise Agency on planning activities</p> <p>Advise Agency about specific needs of community</p>

PHASE 2: PLANNING TO ACHIEVE GOALS and OUTCOMES			
Standard Pathway	Understand current supports and prepare for planning	Create a plan to achieve goals and outcomes	Receive approved plan
ECEI Pathway	Understand current supports and prepare planning in both short term and longer term scenarios	Plan is developed to achieve functional outcomes for the child	NDIS plan is approved where relevant
Complex Pathway	Specialised planning and complex support		Skilled Support Coordination
Community and participant supports	<p>Engage in informing the planning process by working with participant to gain clear picture of person within their community and help them communicate this with the Agency</p> <p>Connect participant to PITC or NDIA to be educated about “goal-setting”</p> <p>Connect participant to PITC of NDIA to be supported to define goals, long term and short term and in planning meetings</p>		<p>Connect participant to PITC to get information about participant outcomes, what is in the plan and how supports can be implemented/what options are for service providers</p> <p>Connect participant to providers and ongoing liaison with NDIS Planner</p>
Agency supports	Advise Agency about specific needs of community		Collaborate on linkages between Agency, participants, and local health, education, and community organisations.

	PHASE 3: ACHIEVING GOALS and OUTCOMES			
Standard Pathway	Activate and implement plan	Use plan to achieve outcomes	Get support using plan	Review outcomes and progress
ECEI Pathway	Activate and implement plan	Capacity building supports achieve outcomes	Receive short term EI support or Get support using NDIS plan	Review outcomes and progress
Complex Pathway	Activate and implement plan		Review outcomes and progress	
Community and participant supports	<p>Connect on how to use plan and access service providers</p> <p>Connect participant to providers and ongoing liaison with NDIS Planner</p>	<p>Connect participant to providers and ongoing liaison with NDIS Planner</p> <p>Check-in with participant that they are accessing supports and their plan is meeting their needs</p>	Assist participant at plan review and process	
Agency supports	Collaborate on linkages between Agency, participants, and local health, education, and community organisations			Provide assistance on review process