



## THE NATIONAL MENTAL HEALTH SECTOR REFERENCE GROUP

### JUNE 2020 COMMUNIQUE

**The National Mental Health Sector Reference Group** met on Thursday June 11 2020 by video conference. This is the second meeting of this Reference Group for the year. Key highlights and issues:

#### Disability Reform Council Update

- Sarah Hawke from the Department of Social Services (DSS), reported that the Disability Reform Council (DRC) Action Plan on psychosocial disability is continuing in spite of the corona virus. Some of the timelines for deliverables have had to be put back.

#### Psychosocial Recovery Coach Update

- The Reference Group received an update on the commencement of the new support item, Psychosocial Recovery Coaches from 1 July 2020. Members welcomed this initiative and commented that this was an important milestone in improving Scheme responsiveness for people with psychosocial disability.
- They welcomed the inclusion of lived experience in the Recovery Coach support item. Some participants expressed the opinion that the price settings were low and need further adjustment.
- They recommended that further market information and development work be undertaken to ensure that the new support items were well understood by participants and supply of Recovery Coaches is expanded.

#### Psychosocial Sector Response to COVID-19 Update

- The meeting received a briefing on themes from regular catch-ups the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) has organised with national psychosocial disability stakeholders on the impacts of corona virus on participants with psychosocial disability and their families and carers in the NDIS. These included:
  - Changes to how supports are delivered and the impacts this has on the workforce and participants
  - Increased incidence of suicidal ideation, including suicidal ideation of carers.
  - Homeless people's difficulty in providing evidence for access continues
  - The move to tele-link approaches for service delivery and the issues this raises for people with a psychosocial disability
  - Difficulties faced by people regarding access to IT to participate in online services
  - Confusion around use of flexible funding within plans



- Advice required as to when Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) is warranted
- Impacts for families and carers, including consideration of how we support them as an informal workforce and provide respite
- The need for data, both quantitative and qualitative, to drive some of the lessons we might learn from this situation
- Rebuilding after COVID-19 ends
- Clarify the role and purpose of support coordination and clarify acceptable billing practices for the support coordination function to ensure consistency

The Reference Group acknowledged the flexibility in plans that the NDIA had approved as part of the pandemic response and the Agency's low-cost Assistive Technology (AT) initiative to assist people to connect to web-based services. It also recognised the adaptability and responsiveness of participants and service providers in their personal and provider responses to the virus.

The meeting discussed that some participants have reported having really liked the one-on-one focus of supports during the social distancing period while others had found this very difficult.

The meeting agreed that it is important to consider the strengths and weaknesses of the psychosocial disability responses to the corona virus and consider possible on-going implications for service delivery arrangements. The meeting agreed to put this issue on its September meeting agenda.

### **Office of the Scheme Actuary Update**

- The Office of the Scheme Actuary made a presentation on a comprehensive data report on participants with primary psychosocial disability for the period 1 July 2019 to December 2019. The Reference Group thanked the Scheme Actuary and her staff for the comprehensiveness of the data reports and their presentation.
- Questions were raised by some members in relation to the levels of support coordination within plans for people with primary psychosocial disability and the need for some analysis around plan utilisation rates.

### **Functional Assessment Update**

- Agency staff provided an update on the roll out of functional assessments in the Scheme. They advised that voluntary functional assessments would commence in October 2020 on a limited basis while the final scope of functional assessments was determined. Members highlighted the importance of more informed and consistent assessment of need and the need to improve the reliability of assessment. Some members raised the need for a deeper



consultation process in relation to implementing the Independent Functional Assessment program and in particular the proposed compulsory nature of assessments.

### Members Reports

- The Members' Report section provided feedback from the broad range of stakeholders involved on developments and issues in regard to psychosocial disability and mental health services.
- Members of the Reference Group offered their warm congratulations to Michael Burge who received an Order of Australia in the recent announcements on the Queens' Birthday Weekend. They noted that Janet Meagher will be standing down from her position on the NDIS Independent Advisory Council on 30 June 2020 and will be continuing on the Reference Group.

### Next Meeting

- Next meeting September 3, 2020

### Meeting Close

Gerry Naughtin NMHSRG Chair said, "This was a busy and vibrant meeting. The corona virus and its impacts on NDIS participants with psychosocial disability and their families was a strong theme of the meeting. The way people have adapted has been amazing but there are consistent reports of heightened levels of psychological distress and anxiety. The Commonwealth Governments' mental health and disability supports initiatives will assist people in dealing with these challenges".

### Attendees

#### Chairperson

Dr Gerry Naughtin, Strategic Advisor (Mental Health)

#### Members

Ms Janet Meagher AM, Independent Advisory Council  
Mr Michael Burge OAM, Consumer Representative  
Mr Evan Bichara, Consumer Representative  
Mr Patrick Hardwick, Carer Representative  
Ms Teena Balgi, Mental Health Principal Committee (for Ms Amy Wyndham)  
Ms Julie Skilbeck, Mental Health Principal Committee (for Ms Megan Boland)  
Mr Ivan Frkovic, State and Territory Mental Health Commissions  
Ms Sandra Ofei-Ferri, National Mental Health Commission  
Mr Bill Gye OAM, Community Mental Health Australia  
Ms Harry Lovelock, Mental Health Australia



Ms Anthea Raven, Commonwealth Department of Health  
Ms Nicola Wright, Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (for Mr Peter Jenkins)  
Ms Sarah Hawke, Department of Social Services  
Ms Jen Rollins, Branch Manager, NDIA Complex Support Needs Branch

### **Project Managers**

Mr Mark Rosser, Director, NDIA Mental Health and Hard to Reach  
Mr Malitha Perera, NDIA Strategic Advice, Research and Inclusion Division  
Ms Erandathie Jayakody, NDIA Strategic Advice, Research and Inclusion Division  
Ms Belinda Wilson, NDIA Mental Health Section  
Ms Joanne Llewellyn, Department of Social Services  
Mr Simon De Sousa, Department of Social Services  
Ms Nikki Roach, Commonwealth Department of Health  
Ms Leanne Beagley, Mental Health Australia

### **Invited Guests**

Mr James Bishop, Branch Manager, NDIA Service Design and Outcomes  
Ms Lani Wandell, NDIA  
Ms Marika Thompson, NDIA  
Ms Kelly Stein, NDIA  
Ms Belinda Krause, NDIA Scheme Actuary  
Ms Fiona Walsh, NDIA Scheme Actuary  
Ms Nicole Stransky, NDIA Scheme Actuary  
Ms Felicia Aurnyn, NDIA Scheme Actuary

### **Apologies**

Mr Sam Bennett, General Manager, NDIA Strategic Advice, Research and Inclusion Division  
Ms Kathy McEwan, Branch Manager, NDIA Communities of Practice  
Dr Peter Jenkins, RANZCP  
Ms Megan Boland, Mental Health Principal Committee  
Ms Amy Wyndham, Mental Health Principal Committee