Government of Western Australia
Department of Communities

Communique

NDIS WA Community Advisory Council

16 September 2026

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) WA Community Advisory Council met in Narrogin on 16 September 2026 to discuss NDIS participants' experiences, regional service delivery challenges and current NDIS reforms. The meeting provided an important opportunity for Council members to hear directly from local NDIS participants, families, service providers and community representatives about the challenges and realities of accessing disability supports in the Wheatbelt, Western Australia (WA).



NDIS WA Community Advisory Council members with NDIA CEO Graeme Head during the Narrogin Council meeting. *Left to right:* Stuart Jenkinson, Melanie Boulton, Barbie Lundgren, Melissa Northcott, Graeme Head, Dr. Mhairi Cowden, Clare Gibellini, Stuart Schonell, Melissa Evans and Lauren McFarlane. *Council members online:* Jacquie Thomson, Ellie Moir, Shazzy Tharby, Terrence Winner and Alisa Chambers.

Minister for Disability Services Address

- The Hon Hannah Beazley MLA, Minister for Disability Services welcomed the opportunity to address Council members in Narrogin and highlighted the importance of hearing directly from rural participants, families and service providers about their experiences of accessing and delivering disability supports.
- The Minister noted that the Wheatbelt continues to experience lower NDIS plan utilisation compared with WA and national averages and emphasised the importance of understanding the factors contributing to participant experiences in regional communities.

More information on the Council is available here. If you would like to register for the Council's mailing list or have general enquiries, please email the Council Secretariat at CommunityAdvisoryCouncil@communities.wa.gov.au.

- The Minister emphasised:
  - the significance of current NDIS reforms and reinforced the importance of ensuring the voices of people with lived experience of disability continue to inform the design and implementation of future changes; and
  - the Council's role in providing advice on participant experiences and opportunities for NDIS improvement, recognising it is an important part of strengthening NDIS governance and supporting positive outcomes for Western Australians with disability.

Director General, Department of Communities Address

- Mike Rowe, Director General (DG), Department of Communities (Communities), emphasised the value of engaging directly with regional areas to better understand local experiences and priorities.
- The DG reaffirmed Communities' commitment to working alongside people with disability and recognised the important role of the Council in providing advice that helps shape disability policy, services and reform initiatives across WA.

Chief Executive Officer, National Disability Insurance Agency Address

- Graeme Head, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA), provided an update on current NDIS reforms and implementation activities.
- Key updates and discussions included:
  - New Framework Planning is expected to commence from April 2027, following further testing and refinement of Support Needs Assessments.
  - Extensive testing is underway to ensure assessments are reliable, participant-centred and effective across a range of settings, including regional communities.
  - Ongoing work to improve participant experiences through clearer communication, strengthened service design and greater use of participant feedback and complaints data to inform continuous improvement.
  - The importance of ensuring regional circumstances are reflected in assessment and planning processes.
- Council members reinforced the importance of the NDIA providing accessible and understandable information, understanding the reasons behind lower plan utilisation in rural areas, and ensuring local circumstances are appropriately reflected in assessment and planning processes.

Local Provider Perspectives

- Council heard from two regional service providers, Heather Waters, CEO at Accessability WA and Tristan Payne, Managing Director, Included Solutions, about the realities of delivering disability supports across the Wheatbelt and the challenges faced by participants seeking to access services close to home.
- Both providers highlighted the impact of limited transport options, long travel distances and additional travel costs, noting many participants rely on support workers for transport and frequently travel long distances to access basic supports and appointments. Travel costs associated with accessing services more than two hours away reduces the amount of therapy participants ultimately receive.
- Members noted that access to allied health and advocacy services remains a significant challenge, with workforce shortages, waitlists and limited local availability affecting participant choice and outcomes.

- Discussions highlighted ongoing concerns that current NDIS planning and funding arrangements do not always reflect the realities of living in regional, rural and remote communities. Improved education for NDIS planners on local service availability, transport limitations, travel costs and regional market conditions, was identified as a practical, immediate action to support better-informed funding decisions and participant outcomes.
- Providers emphasised the need for greater recognition of travel costs, stronger consideration of regional circumstances during planning, sustainable transport arrangements and improved market stewardship by the NDIA to support regional service delivery. The NDIA CEO acknowledged the persistent nature of these challenges and highlighted market stewardship as a key NDIA focus to address ongoing service gaps and market failure in regional and remote communities.



Heather Waters, CEO, Accessability WA, Narrogin presenting to NDIS WA Community Advisory Council members.

Local participant and representatives panel discussion

- Council members heard directly from local participants and family representatives about their experiences navigating the NDIS in regional WA. The panel included NDIS participants and family representatives, reflecting a range of perspectives, including complex support needs, First Nations experiences, and the perspective of a person with disability who is also a parent of a child with disability. The panel members were highly engaged and passionate about their region, sharing their experiences of the unique challenges of living in rural WA.
- Panel members described ongoing challenges accessing therapists, specialists and transport, with workforce shortages and long travel distances often limiting access to funded supports.
- Members noted that NDIS information and processes can be difficult to understand, particularly for participants with intellectual disability, lower literacy or limited support networks, and that face-to-face assistance is highly valued when navigating the Scheme.
- Participants highlighted the important role that supports coordinators and advocacy services play in helping people understand the NDIS, navigate processes and access supports. Concern was raised about the lack of NDIS Local Area Coordination services across the Wheatbelt and the very limited local presence of NDIA Remote Community Connectors allocated to the region, leaving participants and families with limited to no access to local, face-to-face assistance to navigate the NDIS and use their plans. These concerns may be exacerbated by upcoming changes to support coordination.
- Discussion also focused on the importance of continuity of support. Participants and families shared experiences of frequent changes in workers and therapists and described the value of trusted relationships in achieving positive outcomes.

- Members heard examples of plans not reflecting local circumstances and discussed the importance of ensuring planning decisions are informed by participant evidence and an in-depth understanding of regional contexts.
- The Council identified several priority actions and is calling on the Commonwealth and State Governments to prioritise the following actions to:
    - establish a dedicated Local Area Coordinator presence and strengthen accessibility of Regional Community Connector services in the Southern Wheatbelt;
    - improve communication with participants and families through plain English, clearer information and simpler processes;
    - improve NDIS planner understanding of regional, rural and remote circumstances to support more appropriate funding decisions;
    - review transport funding and support arrangements for regional, rural and remote participants;
    - ensure advocacy programs are adequately resourced to meet rural demand, accessibility and service delivery needs; and
    - strengthen market stewardship to support a sustainable regional and rural disability workforce and service market.

NDIA Joint Work Program update

- The Council received an update on the NDIA's delivery of the Joint Work Program and regional service delivery initiatives being delivered across WA. Members heard about the expansion of regional engagement activities, including access clinics and community connection initiatives designed to improve participant access to services and supports.
- The update highlighted positive outcomes achieved in several regional communities through place-based approaches that bring government, service providers and communities together to address local barriers.
- Council called upon the NDIA to build on the positive work underway by implementing targeted monitoring of access, utilisation and outcomes in regional areas, including disaggregated reporting; and to develop place-based responses where gaps are identified to improve participant access, service availability and outcomes.

Looking Ahead and Next Meeting

- The Council will continue to provide advice on participant experiences, regional challenges and opportunities to strengthen access to disability supports and services across WA.
- The next meeting is scheduled for 2 December 2026 in Walyalup (Fremantle).