

Q2
2020-2021



NDIS Quarterly Report to disability ministers

31 December 2020

ndis

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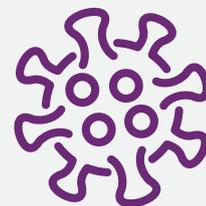
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The COVID-19 pandemic



COVID-19

The National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) continues to prioritise supporting participants, providers, staff and partners during the COVID-19 pandemic as “hot spots” continue to emerge across the country, including in Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland, and South Australia.

Collaboration across governments (including with the Department of Social Services (DSS), the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission (NDIS Commission), Services Australia, and State and Territory governments) has continued to ensure that essential supports are provided to participants. The rate of infection amongst participants is two and a half times lower than the general population (consistent with last quarter).

As of 18 January 2021 there were no known active COVID-19 cases amongst participants and workers. Since the beginning of the pandemic the NDIS Commission had been notified of 183 participants and 219 workers who had returned positive tests for COVID-19. There have been nine participant deaths from COVID-19, as well as the death of one worker. Two of the participant deaths were from infections acquired whilst the participant was in hospital and five were in residential aged care.

Continuing initiatives to support participants, providers, staff and partners

As [announced](#) by the Ministers for Health, Social Services and the NDIS, the Commonwealth government acted swiftly in working with the states and territories to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Australia was one of two earliest nations to have a special, dedicated COVID-19 response plan in place for our disability community. The Management and Operational Plan for COVID-19 for people with disability was completed in April 2020 after consultation through February, March and April.

A number of initiatives have been rolled out to support participants, providers, staff and partners (including to receive PPE). The NDIS website should be consulted for [the latest information about the response to COVID-19](#).

The Agency’s Vulnerable Participant Outbound Call (VPOC) strategy continued in the December 2020 quarter. Approximately 1,500 calls were made to participants in hotspot areas in New South Wales and South Australia during this quarter, building on the more than 73,000 participants contacted in previous quarters.

Staff and partners have continued to work flexibly to support participants through the pandemic by conducting planning meetings according to the preference of the participant (phone, video-conference, or face-to-face).

The NDIA Board would like to thank staff and partners for their continued commitment to participants over this time.

The COVID-19 pandemic



Vaccination

The Australian Government has announced Australia's COVID-19 vaccine national roll-out strategy. Disability care workers and residents are intended to be in the first phase (phase 1a) of the national vaccination roll-out whilst those people with a disability, not living in a shared disability care residence are intended to be included in the phase 1b roll-out. The NDIA is working closely with the Department of Health on the roll-out. The Department of Health website should be consulted for the latest information on the vaccination roll-out, [at this link](#).

Conclusion

Notwithstanding the challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic, including the impacts on individuals and communities, the NDIA remains committed to improving the participant experience, and creating a Scheme that is simpler, easier, and more reliable.

Key highlights in the recent quarter, along with updates on progress against the Participant Service Guarantee and Service Improvement Plan are included in the next section.

31 December 2020 quarter

Key highlights

432,649

people with disability are being supported by the Scheme

21,283

joined the Scheme this quarter

35%

of new participants this quarter were aged 0-6
- **7,437 children**

9,560

children received initial supports in the ECEI gateway, an **11%** increase from last quarter

↓22%

less younger people in residential aged care compared to 2 years ago.



Call centre performance remained strong with **81%** of calls answered within **60 seconds**.



participants who received a plan this quarter identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait islander



participants who received a plan this quarter identify as Culturally and Linguistically Diverse



participants who received a plan this quarter were from remote/very remote regions

Key highlights

The NDIA has introduced a **Participant Service Charter** to explain what participants can expect when they deal with us. Highlights this quarter include:

100%

access decisions made within 21 day timeframe, **consistent across the last year**

92%

of complaints are closed within 21 day timeframe, **compared to 58% a year ago**

98%

first plans approved for participants aged 0-6 within 90 day timeframe, **compared to 85% a year ago**

92%

first plans approved for participants aged 7 and above within 70 day timeframe, **compared to 64% a year ago**

100%

of decisions to undertake a participant requested review made within 21 day timeframe, **compared to 56% a year ago**

72%

of participant requested reviews completed within 42 day timeframe, **compared to 41% a year ago**

98%

of Review of Reviewable Decisions completed within 90 day timeframe, **compared to 60% a year ago**

Participant Service Charter and Participant Service Improvement Plan

Independent assessments

The NDIA is continuing to work towards the promise of a **simpler, faster, fairer** and **more flexible** NDIS for participants, their families and carers.

Simpler

Independent assessments will provide participants with a clear understanding of what's needed and will ensure participants have the right assessments to assist in the planning process.

Faster

Assessments will take around three hours and participants will be able to choose to do the assessment in the way that best suits them. Having the information from an independent assessment will also help planners to focus on assisting participants to get the most out of their NDIS plan.

Fairer

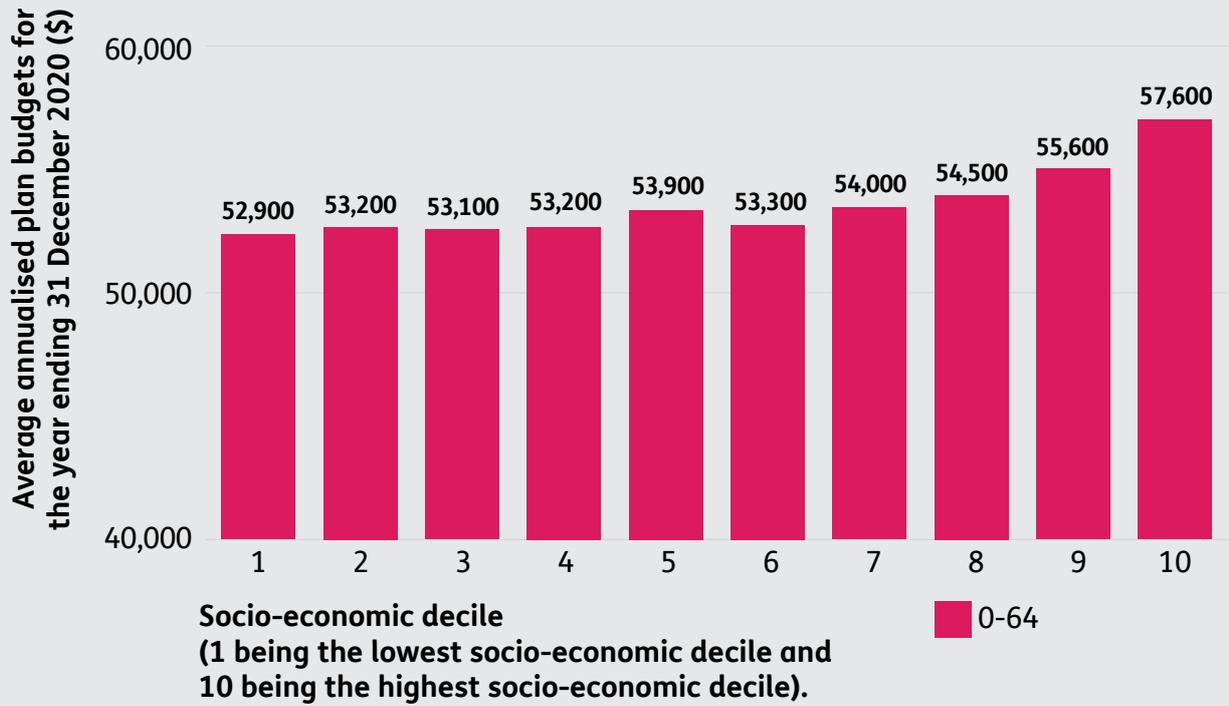
Independent Assessments will be free and will make the process fairer by removing the financial burden on prospective participants to provide the information required. It will also lead to more consistency in decision making when people request access the NDIS and in the planning process. Plan budgets will be fairer regardless of socio-economic area; currently both plan budgets and payments differ depending on where a participant lives, with participants in higher socio-economic areas receiving average plan budgets that are nine per cent higher than participants in the lower socio-economic areas (see Figure 1).

Flexible

Participants will be able to choose to have their assessment done at a place that suits them, or by video call. Independent Assessments will ensure participants get the right funding in their plan based on their functional capacity, support needs and goals. Participants will also have greater flexibility and more choice and control over how they use their personalised plan budget.

Participant Service Charter and Participant Service Improvement Plan

Figure 1: Average annualised plan budgets by the ABS Index of Education and Occupation (IEO) deciles, for non-SIL participants aged 0-64 – 31 December 2020



Participant Service Charter and Participant Service Improvement Plan

General update

The implementation of independent assessments will now commence in 2021. From mid-2021, independent assessments will be mandatory for people applying to access the NDIS.

From late-2021, existing participants will receive a free independent assessment when their circumstances change, such as a life event or material change in their circumstances, to ensure that they continue to get the funding that is right for them.

Over the next six-to-nine months, the NDIA will work closely with people with disability and the disability sector to implement these reforms.

Following the introduction of independent assessments, participants will be provided with longer term plans based on life stages and with greater flexibility and more choice and control over their personalised plan budget. Ongoing independent assessments will only be needed when a participant's needs change, such as a life event or material change in their circumstances, removing the current annual planning process.

In addition, the NDIA is designing how to better support prospective participants connecting with the community and mainstream supports, and apply for entry to the Scheme. It intends to focus the Local Area Coordinator role to provide more support to people with a disability when engaging with the NDIS and using their plan.

The first independent assessment pilot

The first pilot ran from November 2018 to April 2019. Its overarching objective was to demonstrate the potential benefit of independently sourcing standardised functional assessments for NDIS applicants and participants, to improve the consistency, accuracy and reliability of NDIA decisions.

Resumption of second pilot

The second independent assessment pilot started in November 2019 and was postponed in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The second independent assessment pilot recommenced in October 2020. The data collected during this pilot will help with the implementation of independent assessments in 2021. The Agency is looking to complete 4,000 assessments with existing participants that represent the entire NDIS population of over 400,000 people.

Resuming this pilot will allow the NDIA to gather additional feedback from participants, their families and carers, as well as assessors, to ensure independent assessments can be tailored to meet the needs of the Scheme's diverse participants.

In addition, we will also be using the pilot to assess the training and support needs of the new assessor workforce and NDIA delegates who make access and planning decisions under the NDIS Act.

In parallel with the pilot, we will continue consulting with the disability sector as we prepare to roll out independent assessments in 2021.

Participant Service Charter and Participant Service Improvement Plan

Ongoing consultation

On the 25 November 2020, the NDIA released three consultation papers to support engagement on how these improvements will work for participants, including:

1. Consultation paper: access and eligibility policy for independent assessments
2. Consultation paper: planning policy for personalised budgets and plan flexibility
3. Consultation paper: supporting young children and their families early, to reach their full potential.

These consultation papers explain the proposed changes to NDIS, including what these changes will mean for participants. The consultation papers are available on the NDIS website: <https://www.ndis.gov.au/community/have-your-say>.

Participant Service Improvement Plan – highlights this quarter

In addition to progress with the implementation of independent assessments, the NDIA has made further progress against other initiatives from the Participant Service Improvement Plan.

Highlights for the quarter are listed below, with the detail on progress against the whole plan in Section 3 of this report.

- Changes have been made to **our letters** to include the name of someone at the NDIA who you can contact.
- The NDIS website now includes a **Participant Information Access** site to make it easier for participants to get information – no need to submit a Freedom of Information request.
- A new **‘Light touch plan review’** has now been implemented nationally and delivered earlier than expected – a simple and quick process when you need to make minor changes to your plan.
- A **home and living supports** form is now available on the NDIA website. This form allows NDIS participants who have independent living goals to easily and quickly initiate a request to see how the NDIS may be able to help in supporting them live more independently.
- Provider matching platforms and SDA vacancies are now being promoted via the NDIS website. The **national SDA-matching website** was released on 27 October 2020.
- The NDIA has established a **NDIS carer connect network** for ageing parents of people with a disability.

Introduction

This report is a summary of the performance and operations of the NDIA for the three months from 1 October 2020 to 31 December 2020, as required by Section 174 of the NDIS Act 2013.

Analysis and key insights are presented in the report, with detailed supplementary tables included in the appendices. The national results are contained in Appendix E, followed by individual appendices for each State and Territory (Appendices F–M). Also included in the appendices are:

- A list of key definitions of the terms used in this report (Appendix A)
- A comparison of key metrics across each State and Territory (Appendix N)
- The number of active participants in each region, including the number of active participants in each region receiving core, capacity building and capital supports (Appendix O)
- The number of active participants in each region receiving Special Disability Accommodation and Supported Independent Living, along with data on the number and types of dwellings in each region. Data on the demand for SDA within the NDIS in the Statistical Area 4 (SA4) region is also included (Appendix P)
- A comparison of utilisation by region (Appendix Q)
- Waiting times for access decisions and plan approvals by State/Territory (Appendix R)



Jackie paints a new path during COVID to achieve her dreams

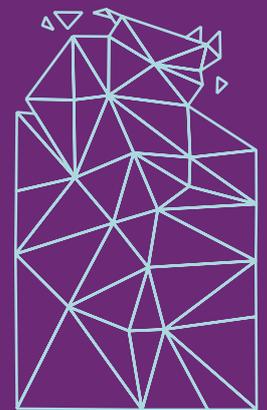
For contemporary Indigenous artist **Jackie**, the year of COVID and physical distancing has turned out to be one of her most creative and productive yet.

Jackie, who describes herself as a ‘strong, proud Aboriginal woman’ and a role model to young Indigenous people for ‘achieving so much in my life’, is presenting her first solo art exhibition after winning the 2020 Dawn Slade-Faull Award.

The award aims to empower emerging South Australian artists with disability, providing financial support and encouragement to help them realise their potential in their chosen medium and it helped Jackie achieve one of her main life goals—a solo exhibition.

Jackie’s career as an artist is supported by the NDIS through training programs funded by her NDIS plan. She attends a Visual Arts program at Tutti Arts, a registered NDIS provider, which helps her with professional career development.

“One of my big dreams is to become a famous Indigenous artist and to teach Aboriginal kids art, so I just want to focus on my art for now and see where it leads me. I’m a role model to young Indigenous people and I want to keep that going and show them if you put your mind to it, you can achieve your dreams.”



Part One: Participants and their plans



Part One:

Participants and their plans

Just over 432,500 participants are receiving supports from the NDIS, with approximately 9,600 children receiving initial supports in the Early Childhood Early Intervention (ECEI) gateway.

1.1 Number of participants in the Scheme

At 31 December 2020, just over 432,500 participants had NDIS plans, of which approximately 21,000 entered the Scheme during the quarter.

At 31 December 2020, 432,649 participants had approved plans.¹ This represents a five per cent increase from last quarter (an additional 21,283 participants). Of the 432,649 participants currently supported by the Scheme, 220,145 previously received support from existing State and Territory or Commonwealth programs. Significantly, 212,504 are receiving support for the first time (49 per cent of participants with approved plans).

In addition, the NDIA undertook 90,933 reviews in the quarter.

Figure 2: Active participants with approved plans and percentage increase over time

	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21 YTD
Active participants	7,285	17,155	29,719	89,610	172,333	286,015	391,999	432,649
Yearly increase ²		9,870	12,564	59,891	82,723	113,682	105,984	40,650
% increase in active participants		135%	73%	202%	92%	66%	37%	10%

¹ 15,459 participants with approved plans had exited the Scheme as at 31 December 2020.

² This is the net increase in the number of participants entering the Scheme each period noting some participants have exited the Scheme.

1.2 Children in the NDIS (aged 0 to 6 years)

At 31 December 2020, there were approximately 69,000 children aged 0 to 6 years with an NDIS plan, and a further 9,600 receiving initial supports in the gateway.

Of the 432,649 participants with approved plans at 31 December 2020, 68,896 were children aged 0-6 (16%), and of the 21,283 new participants with an approved plan this quarter, 7,437 were children aged 0-6 years (35%).

In addition to the 68,896 children aged 0-6 with an approved plan:

- **3,233** children had met the access criteria and were waiting for an approved plan.
- **2,296** were awaiting an access decision from the NDIA (of which **1,597** (66%) were receiving initial supports in the ECEI gateway).
- **8,488** children were in the ECEI gateway (of which **8,030** (95%) had already commenced receiving initial supports). Not all children in the gateway will need to make an access request to the NDIA because some will receive support in the gateway, along with support from mainstream and community services.

The NDIA ECEI approach is intended to be based on best practice, family-centred early intervention with a focus on providing quality information, research and evidence-based advice to families and children with developmental delay or disabilities. In 2020 the NDIA conducted a review of the ECEI approach. The aim of the review was to understand what is currently working well, and what is not. To do this, we consulted families of young children with developmental delay or disability, providers, our Early Childhood Partners, staff, peak bodies and other stakeholders.

The review showed that we need to reset our approach, because it is not being consistently implemented in a way that enables all children to benefit from the best outcomes. This is also consistent with the findings of the Tune Review (2019), and the Independent Advisory Council report (March 2020). At the end of November 2020, we released two public consultation papers: 'Supporting young children and their families early, to reach their full potential' and a detailed report, 'Report on ECEI Implementation Reset'. The papers explain the work we have undertaken so far, what we plan to do as part of the review to the ECEI approach, and why we want feedback from the community and sector. The consultation period is intended to last for three months and will close on 23 February 2021.

In summary, the proposed changes, which we're seeking feedback on, are:

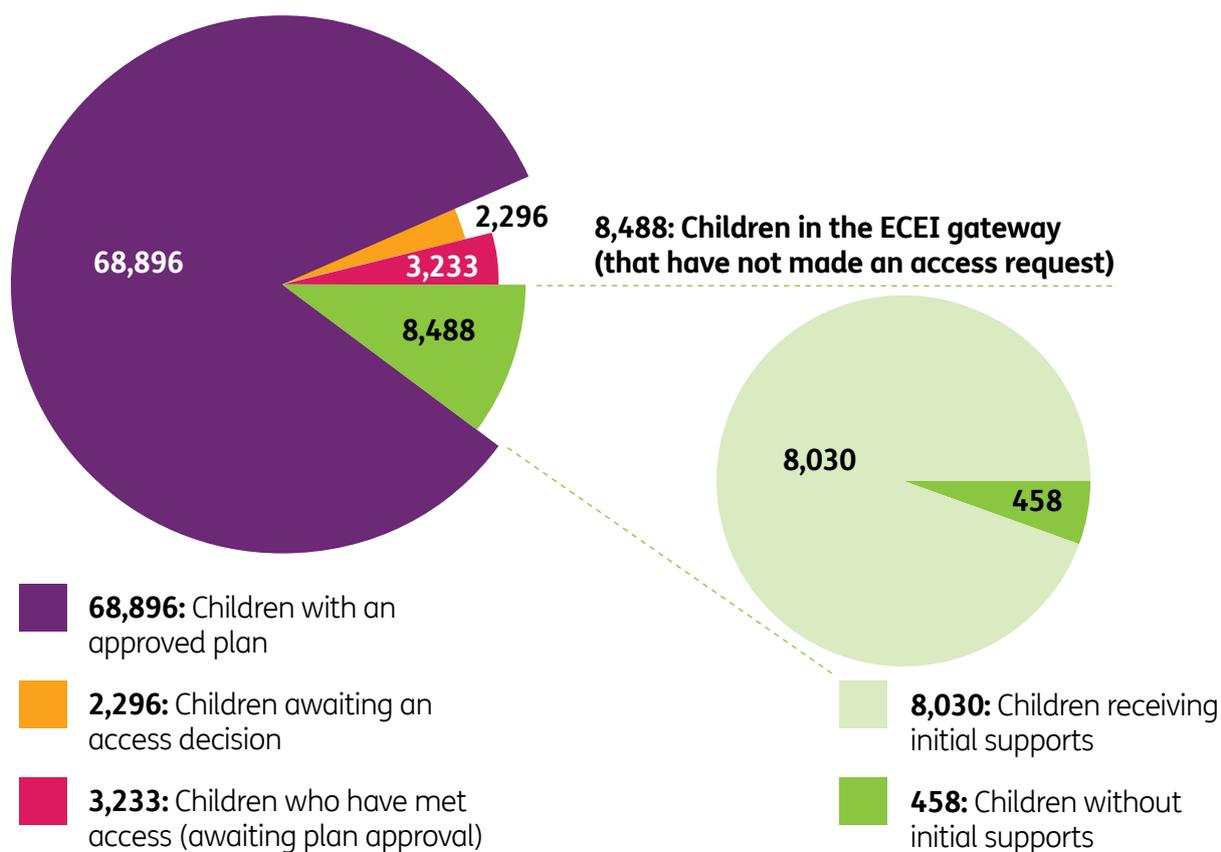
- The age group best suited to receive early childhood services changes from under seven years of age, to under nine years.
- Independent assessments, conducted by our Early Childhood Partners, will be used to determine eligibility and budgets for young children over 12 months of age.

Part One: Participants and their plans

- Enhancing Short Term Early Intervention (STEI), which is the early support that is offered whether or not a child is eligible for an NDIS plan.
- A distinct ECEI implementation model, differentiated from the general Scheme, which enables young children to receive the right level and mix of support for the right period of time, through a family centred approach aligned with best practice.
- Planning and implementation to be more clearly based on best practice supports.
- Further assistance to help young children and families to successfully transition from needing NDIS supports and start the next stage of their life.

The implementation reset of the ECEI Approach and this consultation paper is the first step in how we plan to improve the support that families and young children receive through the NDIS. Starting in late 2021 we aim to gradually build on the existing national approach to ensure we deliver a world leading model that delivers evidence-based, high quality and timely supports to young children and families.

Figure 3: Children in the NDIS



1.3 Participant characteristics

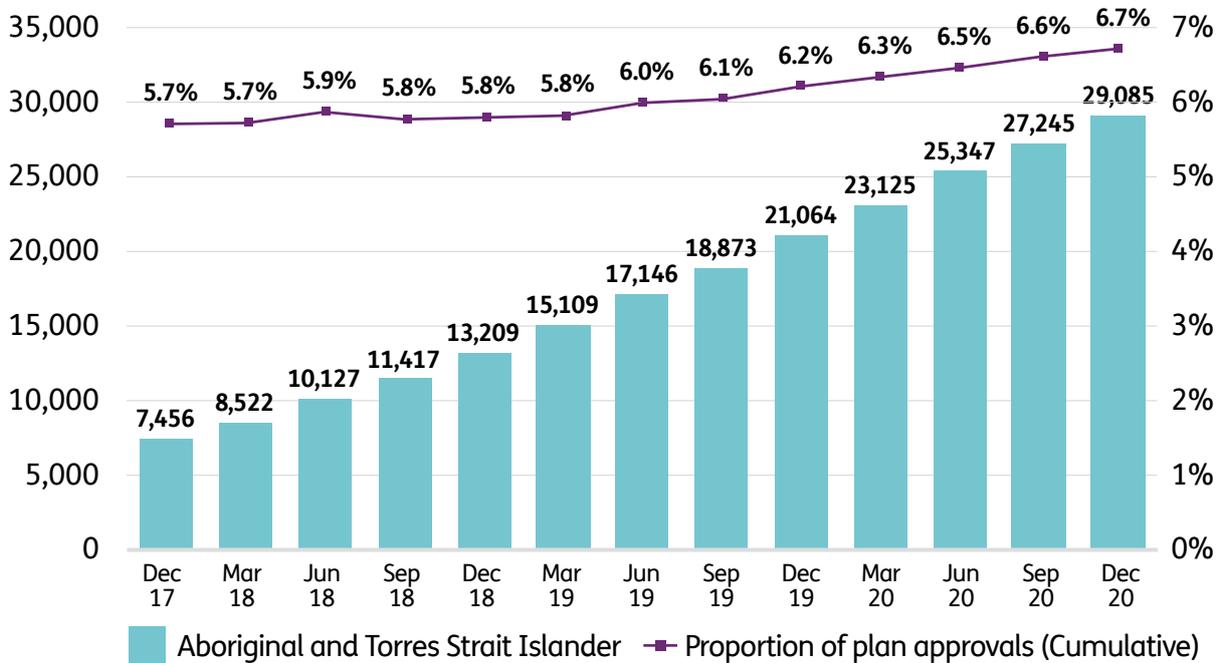
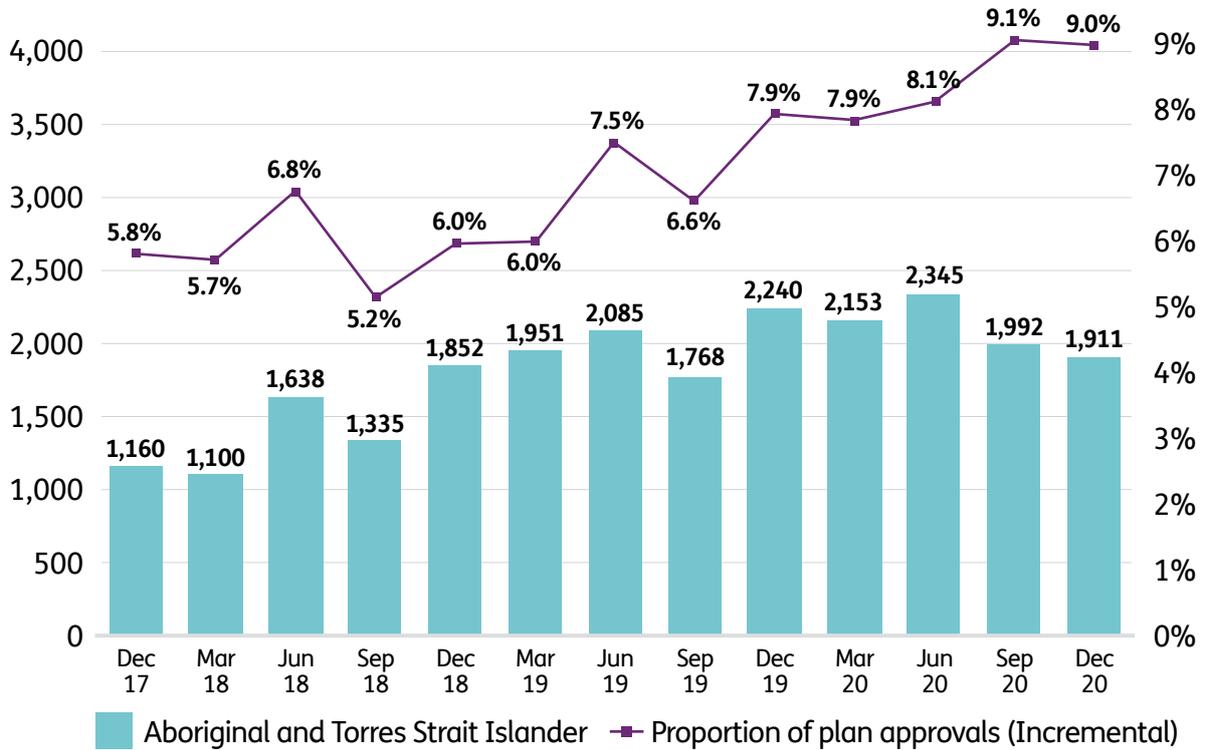
Participant diversity continues with high proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Scheme entrants this quarter.

Of the 21,283 participants entering, there was increased diversity through higher numbers of:

- **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders: 9.0%** of participants who received a plan in the quarter, compared with **6.6%** in previous quarters combined.
- **CALD: 10.5%** of participants who received a plan in the quarter, compared with **9.3%** in previous quarters combined.
- the number of Scheme participants in **remote and very remote areas** this quarter increased to **1.8%** of new entrants, compared with **1.5%** in previous quarters combined.

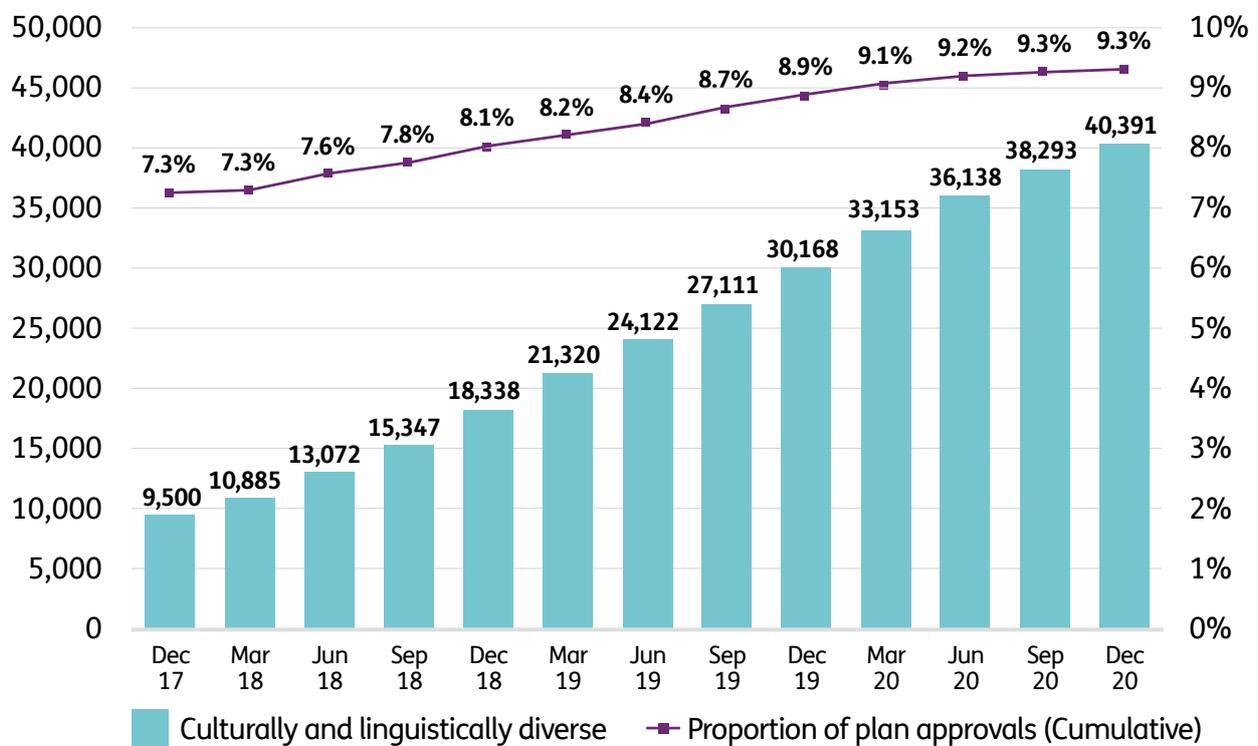
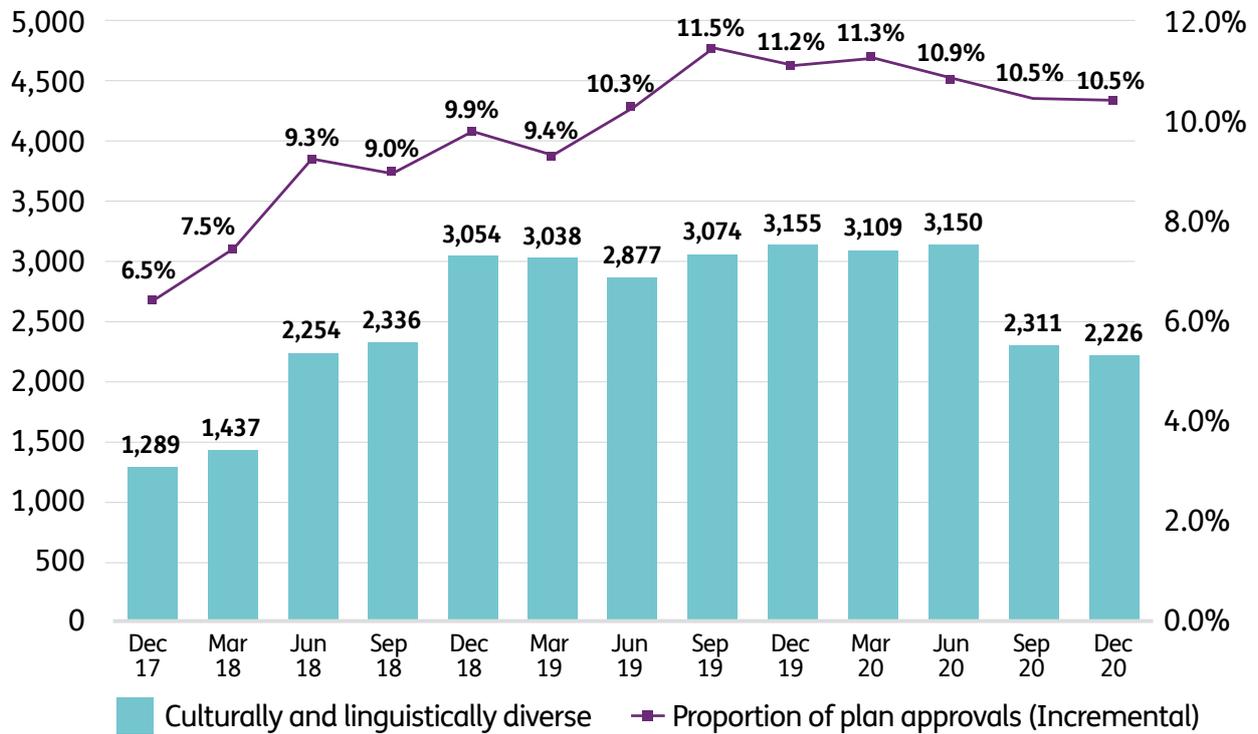
Part One: Participants and their plans

Figure 4: Number and proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants over time incrementally (top) and cumulatively (bottom)³



³ The incremental chart shows the distribution of new participants that have entered in each quarter. The cumulative chart shows the distribution of active participants as at each quarter over time. Quarterly results are reported based on a rolling 3 year period.

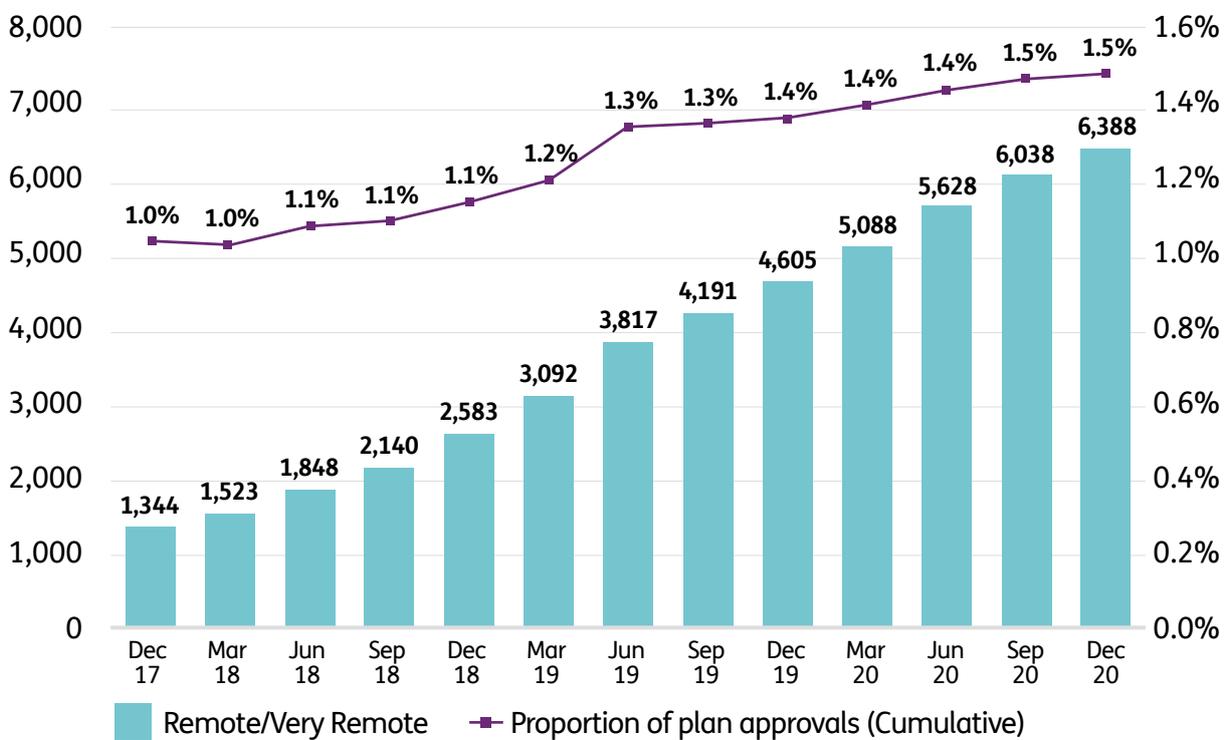
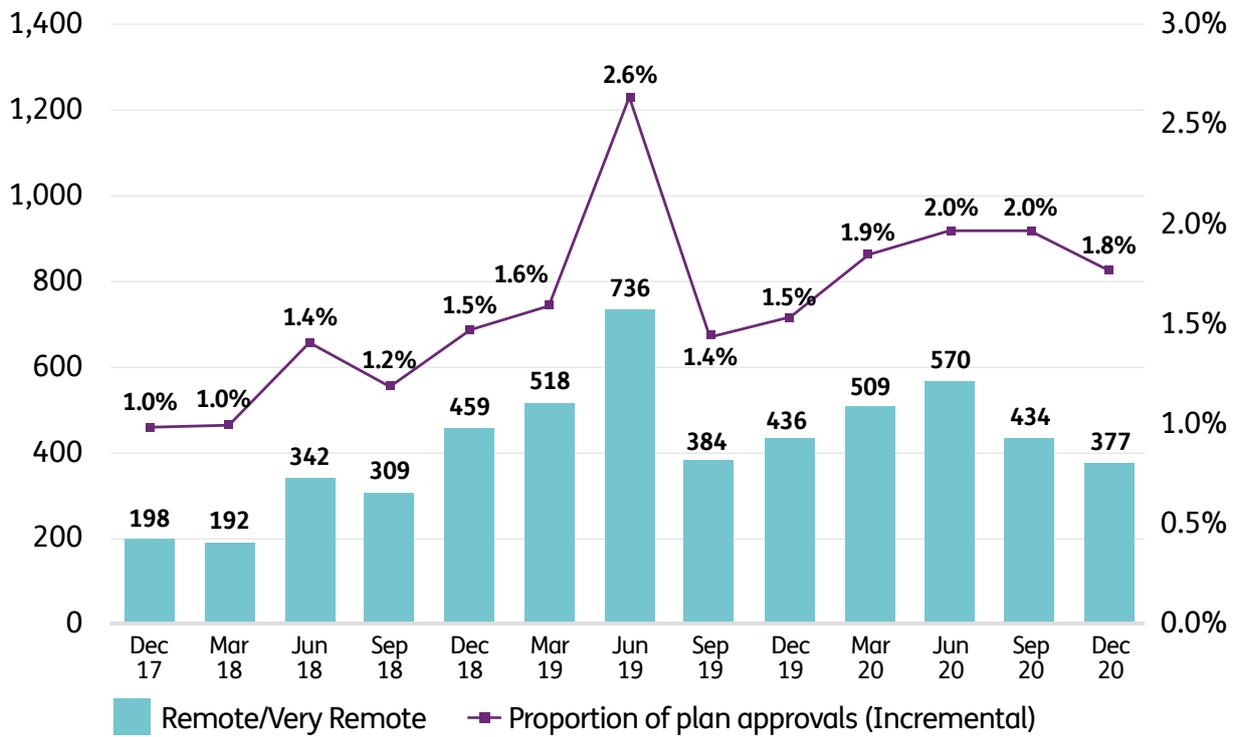
Figure 5: Number and proportion of CALD participants over time incrementally (top) and cumulatively (bottom)⁴



⁴ The incremental chart shows the distribution of new participants that have entered in each quarter. The cumulative chart shows the distribution of active participants as at each quarter over time. Quarterly results are reported based on a rolling 3 year period.

Part One: Participants and their plans

Figure 6: Number and proportion of remote/very remote participants over time incrementally (top) and cumulatively (bottom)⁵



⁵ The incremental chart shows the distribution of new participants that have entered in each quarter. The cumulative chart shows the distribution of active participants as at each quarter over time. Quarterly results are reported based on a rolling 3 year period.

Part One: Participants and their plans

Age and disability

The breakdown of participants by **age** and **disability** this quarter indicates:

- continuation of a high proportion of children **aged 0-6 years** entering the Scheme (**35%** this quarter and **37%** in the September 2020 quarter). This compares with **16%** in the previous quarters through to 30 June 2020 combined.
- consistent with the high numbers of children, a relatively higher proportion of participants with **Developmental Delay** entered the Scheme again this quarter (**21.6%** this quarter and **22.8%** in the September 2020 quarter compared with **6.8%** in previous quarters through to 30 June 2020 combined).
- **Psychosocial Disability: 14.1%** of participants who received a plan in the quarter, compared to **9.8%** in the previous quarters combined.

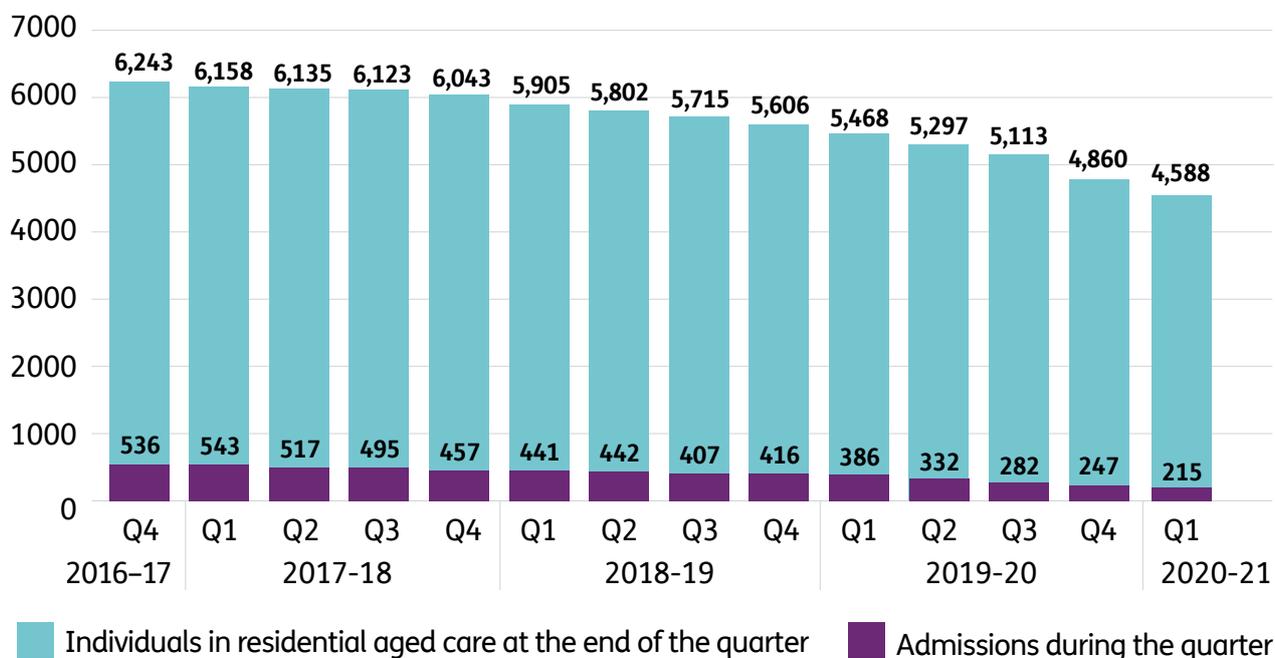
Younger People in Residential Aged Care (YPIRAC)

The number of people in residential aged care under the age of 65 years has decreased in recent quarters from 6,243 at 30 June 2017 to 4,588 at 30 September 2020 (a 27% decrease).

Also, fewer people under the age of 65 years are entering residential aged care – 536 people under the age of 65 years entered in the June 2017 quarter, compared with 215 in the September 2020 quarter (a 60% decrease).

The NDIA, with the Department of Health, is continuing to investigate the reasons why individuals under the age of 65 continue to enter residential aged care.

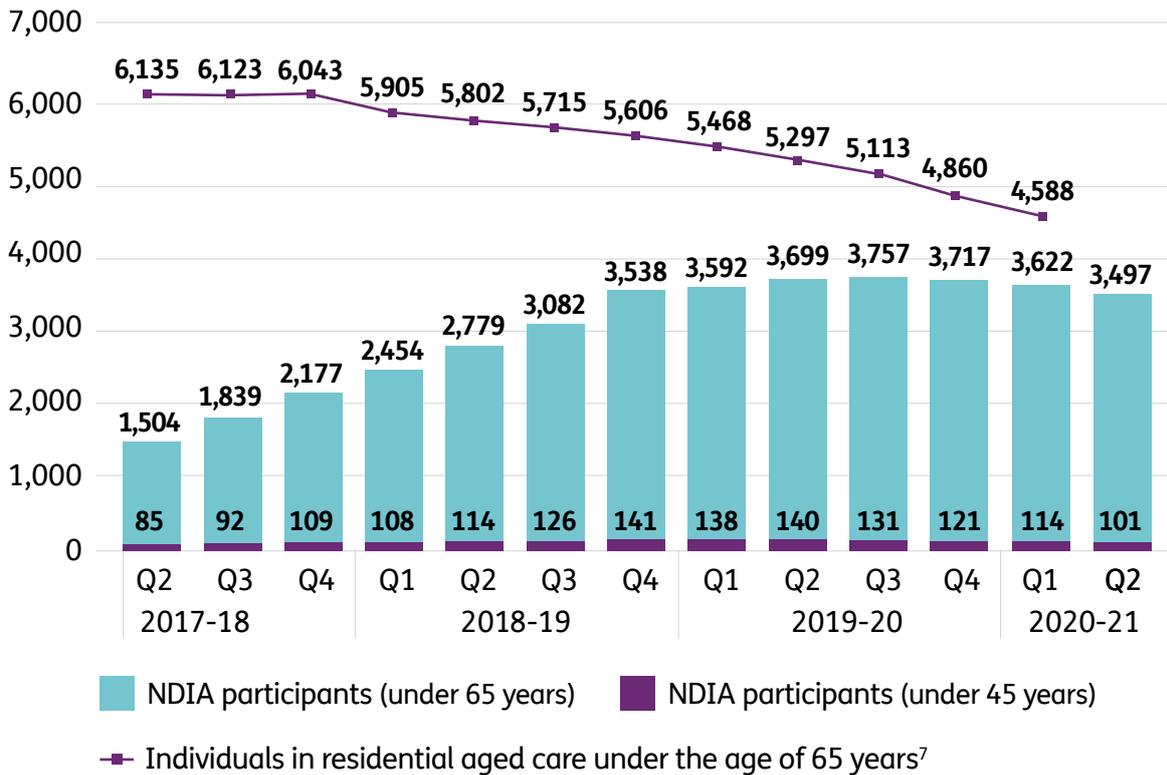
Figure 7: Number of individuals in residential aged care and admissions to residential aged care (under 65 years), by quarter



Part One: Participants and their plans

There were 3,497 participants in residential aged care with an approved plan at 31 December 2020 aged under 65 years. In addition to this, 545 participants who entered the Scheme and have been in residential aged care have exited since 1 July 2016 to a more appropriate accommodation setting.⁶ Of the 3,497 participants in residential aged care aged under 65 years, 101 are aged under 45 years (2.9%).

Figure 8: Number of NDIA participants in residential aged care (under 65 and under 45), and total number of individuals under age 65 in residential aged care



⁶ There were a further 1,638 participants with an approved plan aged 65 years or over who are currently in residential aged care.

⁷ Data provided by the Department of Health is at 30 September 2020. 31 December 2020 data will be reported next quarter.

Part One: Participants and their plans

The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety released its interim report on 31 October 2019. The Commissioners are required to provide a final report by 26 February 2021. The government response to the interim report included the formation of a Joint Agency Taskforce (JATF) between the DSS, Department of Health, and the NDIA. The JATF was established to develop a new strategy that builds on the Younger People in Residential Aged Care Action Plan. The Government response to the interim report included revised YPIRAC targets, which are:

– no people under the age of 65 entering residential aged care by 2022.

– no people under the age of 45 living in residential aged care by 2022.

– no people under the age of 65 living in residential aged care by 2025.

The NDIA has worked with the JATF on the new strategy that provides a roadmap to meet the revised targets. Building on the previous YPIRAC Action Plan, the Strategy and Implementation plan describes concrete actions to reduce the number of younger people entering residential aged care, and to support those already living in aged care to move into more age-appropriate accommodation, where this is their genuine choice. The NDIA has increased its number of dedicated planners to support younger people in aged care to find alternative accommodation.

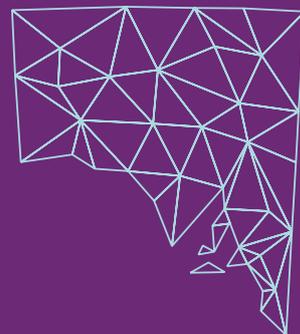
The [YPIRAC Strategy 2020-25 \(the Strategy\)](#) was released on 30 September 2020. The Strategy covers all younger people under the age of 65 living in, or at risk of entering, residential aged care, including providing choice to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people between 50 and 64 years of age who are eligible for the aged care system.

The NDIA has also improved the way it collects data to strengthen its understanding of the goals and support needs of younger people living in aged care.

In September 2020 the NDIA published a new Operational Guideline for YPIRAC, providing greater transparency on how the NDIA supports younger people in residential aged care. The NDIA is completing streamlined assessments of housing supports for YPIRAC participants so they can access alternative accommodation sooner.



Ben's vibrant new fashion brand blooms with NDIS support



Ask **Ben** how he came to name his new clothing retail business and he'll gladly demonstrate.

"I'm a happy person and when I'm happy, well, it's just Hazzah!" said Ben, 20, who lives with Down syndrome and is supported by the NDIS, laughing and swinging both arms up high. So, he says, it was an obvious choice for the name of his new micro-enterprise.

"It was my dream to start an apparel business, to meet new people and build a community where people can be themselves and have fun," said Ben.

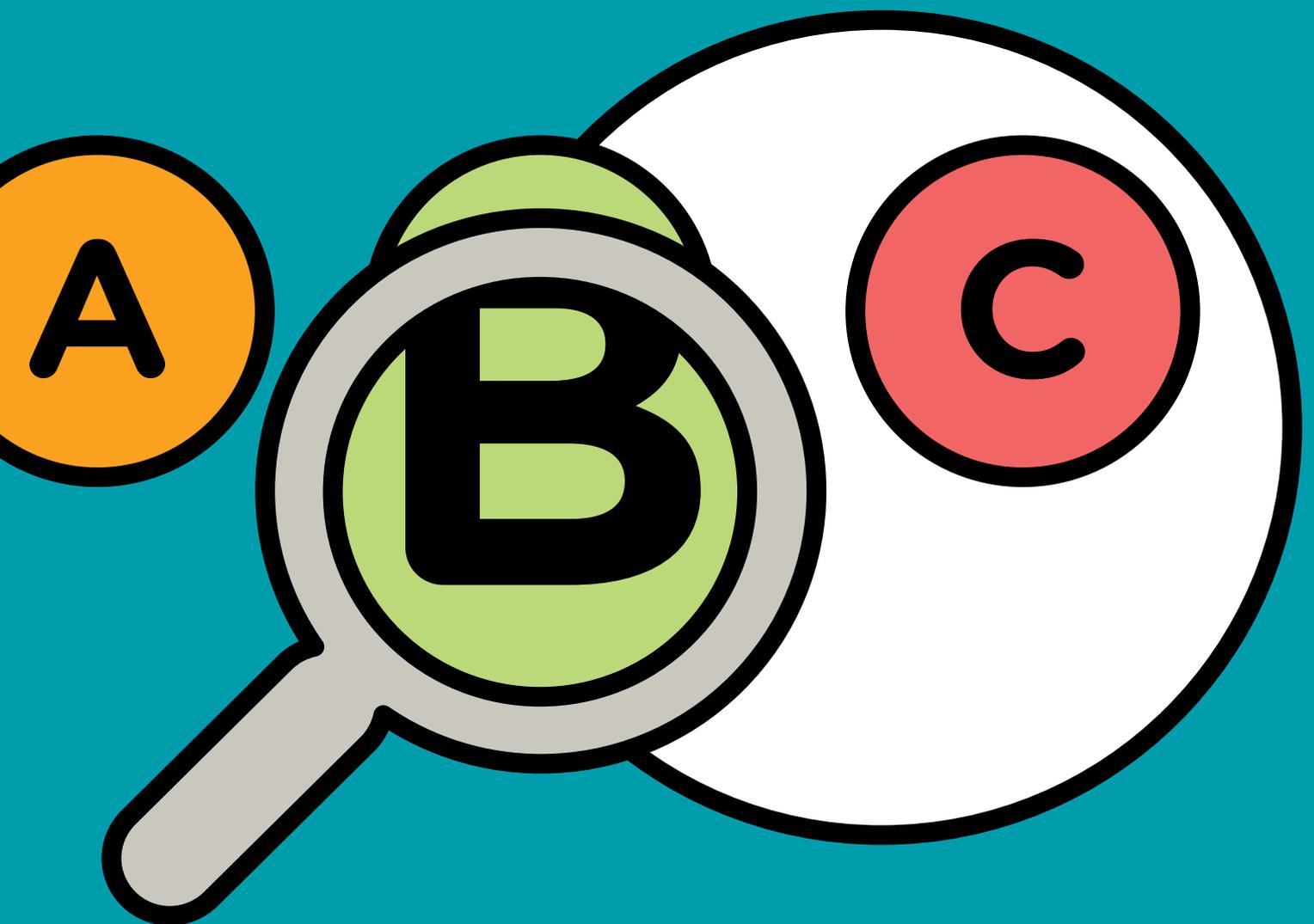
Ben creates original designs for t-shirts and caps, inspired by the things he loves, including DJing, music, surf culture, and sport. He manages the micro-business himself and has NDIS-funded support workers helping him to learn to cook, do housework, use gym equipment, and use public transport independently.

Since launching Hazzah in June, Ben has been successfully growing a steady crowd of buyers and supporters for his new brand. Ben says the NDIS has made a big difference to his life and his goal is to run a successful business and buy his own home to live independently.

For Ben, Hazzah is more than a clothing business. Ben says it's about acceptance and embracing each person's unique self, and having fun.

Part Two:

Participant
experience and
outcomes



Part Two:

Participant experience and outcomes

Outcomes continue to improve the longer participants are in the Scheme.

2.1 Participant safety and contact

The NDIA is cooperating with all relevant inquiries in response to the tragic cases of participant deaths reported in the media in 2020.

The NDIA continues to review and improve its business operating processes to ensure participants get the support they need. The Vulnerable Participant Check-in process continues to be used in response to COVID-19 outbreaks. In addition, the recently implemented Participant Check-in process will continue to be embedded and enhanced in 2021 to support all participants, including vulnerable participants.

2.2 Participation in work and community and social activities

Despite COVID-19, participation rates in both community and social participation and participation in work remain relatively stable.

Participation in community and social activities

For participants who have been in the Scheme for at least two years, their community and social participation has increased since they first entered⁸. There was a:

- **ten** percentage increase from **34%** to **44%** for participants aged 15–24 years.
- **ten** percentage increase from **36%** to **46%** for participants aged 25+ years.
- **ten** percentage increase from **36%** to **46%** for participants aged 15+ years.

Participation in work

The rate of participation in work for those in the Scheme continues to be stable. However, for those who have been in the Scheme for at least two years there have only been marginal increases in employment. There was a:

- **eight** percentage increase from **13%** to **21%** for participants aged 15–24 years.⁹
- **two** percentage decrease from **25%** to **23%** for participants aged 25+ years.
- **one** percentage increase from **22%** to **23%** for participants aged 15+ years.

⁸ This section compares Baseline indicator results when participants entered the Scheme, with results measured at the most recent participant plan review for each respondent. Trial participants are excluded.

⁹ Some of the increase is due to participants leaving school and starting work. As the Scheme matures it will be possible to analyse the extent to which the percentage gap increases.

NDIS Participant Employment Strategy

The NDIA continues to work towards the goal of thirty percent of NDIS working age participants having paid work by 2023 through the implementation of the NDIS Participant Employment Strategy 2019-2022 (the Strategy).

December 2020 marked the end of the first year of the Strategy, and notwithstanding the challenges of 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the NDIA has continued to deliver against key commitments to pursue improved social and economic participation for NDIS participants.

Between October and December 2020 the NDIA continued to focus on building participant aspirations and goals related to employment, and supporting choice and control over the employment pathway. To support this the NDIA:

- made it easier for participants to understand how the NDIA makes decisions about funding employment related supports, and the types of supports available under the NDIS, by publishing a revised Operational Guideline about work and study supports;
- enhanced and expanded the information available to participants in a new participant handbook about the role of School Leaver Employment Supports to help participants choose the right provider to meet their needs;
- equipped frontline planning and LAC staff with information and training resources based on the Let's Talk About Work employment booklet in order to promote better conversations with participants about employment;
- engaged extensively with providers and Support Coordinators to ensure the new pricing framework for supports in employment that commenced in July 2020 was understood, and how these changes increase flexibility and choice around where a participant works, how they are supported and who supports them; and
- commenced a qualitative research project to better understand participants' barriers and enablers to employment for people with Intellectual Disability, autism and psychosocial disability.

The disruption caused to the employment sector by the COVID-19 pandemic has been significant. The NDIA and Department Social Service (DSS) have formed a joint Executive Steering Group who will meet on a quarterly basis to work to oversee the development and alignment of employment strategies. An initial output of this forum will be an updated action plan for the NDIS Participant Employment Strategy.

The NDIA remains committed to the participant focussed vision, goals and focus areas of the Participant Employment Strategy. The revised action plan will strengthen some initiatives, re-think others and promote new ideas to improve the employment outcomes for participants.

2.3 Analysis of participant outcomes

Participants continue to report positive outcomes.

Participants who entered the Scheme since 1 July 2016 were asked ‘Has the NDIS helped?’ at each participant plan review, allowing the NDIA to gain valuable longitudinal insights.

Participants who have been in the Scheme for at least two years

From 1 July 2016 to 31 December 2020, for participants who have been in the Scheme for at least two years¹⁰, the following outcomes have been recorded:

For children aged 0 to before starting school:

- **95%** of parents and carers thought the NDIS improved their child’s development at their most recent plan review, compared to **92%** at their first review.
- **94%** felt the NDIS improved their child’s access to specialist services at their latest plan review, compared to **90%** at their first review.

For children starting school to 14 years:

- **68%** of parents and carers felt their child had become more independent as a result of the NDIS at their most recent plan review, compared to **58%** at their first review.
- **55%** of parents and carers felt the NDIS had improved their child’s relationship with family and friends at their most recent plan review, compared with **46%** at their first review.

For young adults aged 15 to 24 years:

- **68%** of participants felt the NDIS had helped them have choice and control over their life at their most recent plan review, compared to **60%** at their first review.
- **69%** of participants said the NDIS had helped them with daily living activities at their most recent plan review, compared to **59%** at their first review.

For adults aged 25 and over:

- **77%** of participants believed the NDIS helped them have more choice and control over their lives at their most recent plan review, compared to **67%** at their first review.
- **81%** of participants said the NDIS had helped them with daily living activities at their most recent plan review, compared to **70%** at their first review.

¹⁰ This section is based on responses provided at the first participant plan review, compared with those from the most recent plan review for participants who have been in the Scheme for at least two years. Trial participants are excluded.

Part Two: Participant experience and outcomes

Significant improvements in outcomes are evident the longer a participant has been in the scheme. Highlights, for participants who have been in the scheme for at least four years, include:

Figure 9: For children aged 0 to before starting school

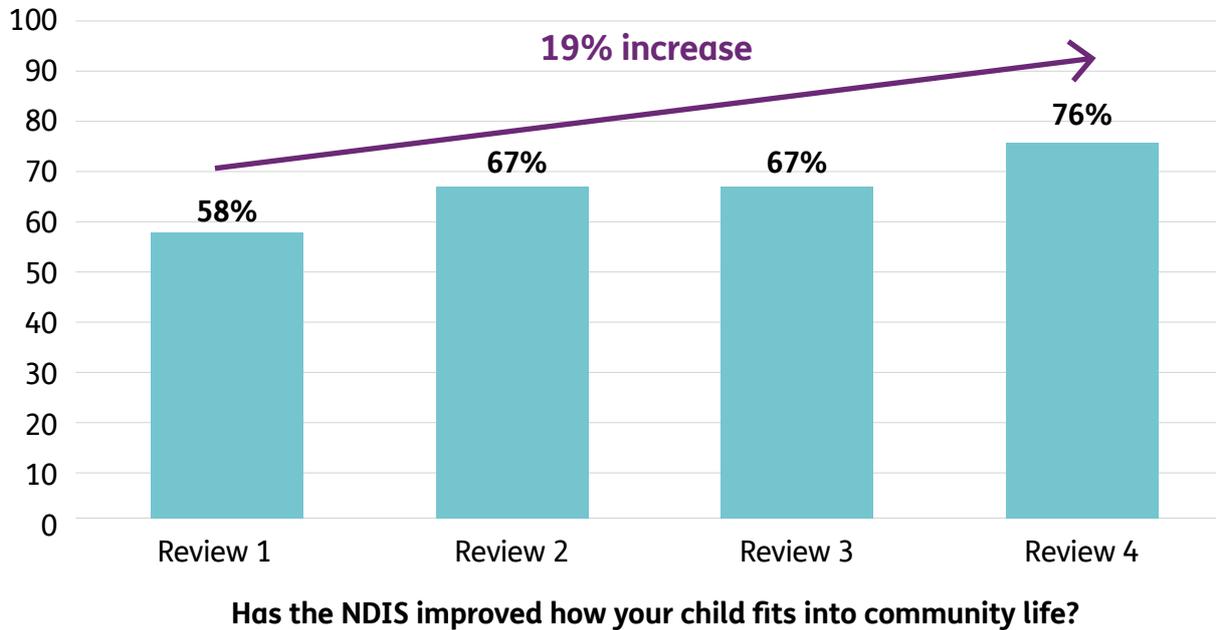


Figure 10: For children starting school to 14 years

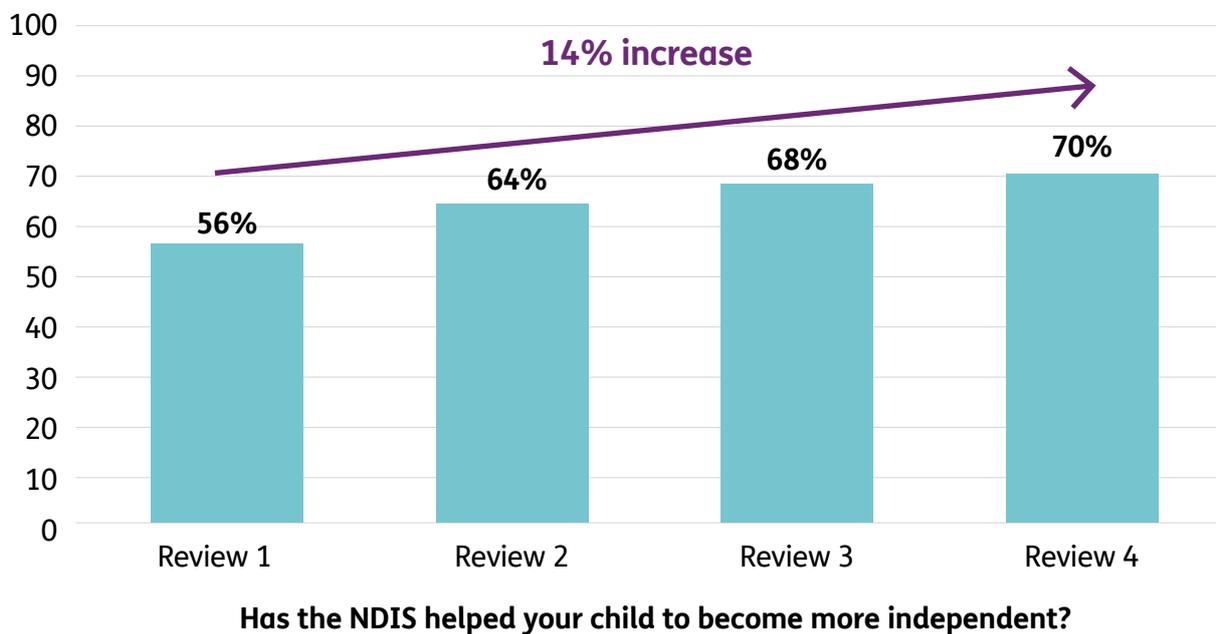


Figure 11: For young adults aged 15 to 24

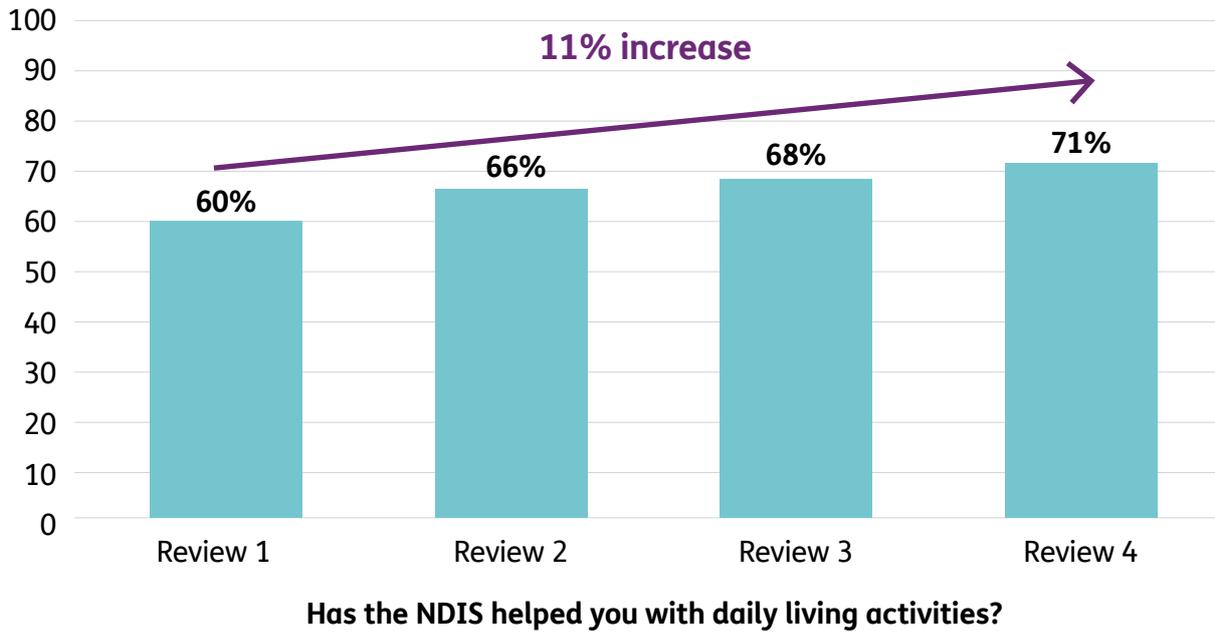
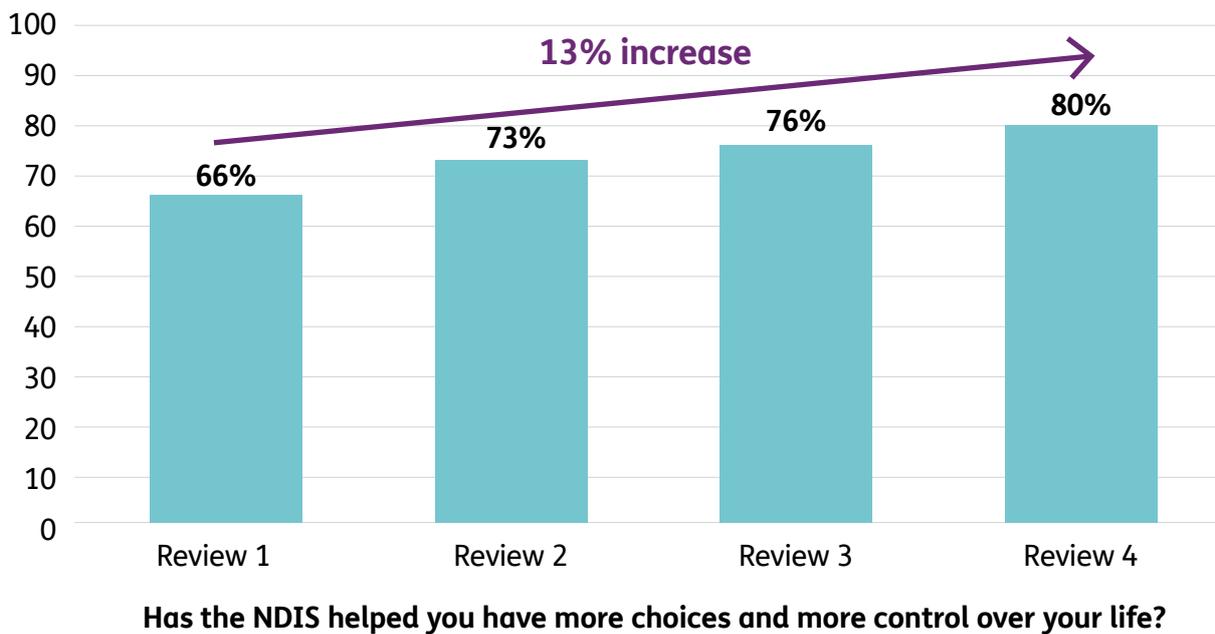


Figure 12: For adults aged 25 and over



While the above results are encouraging, the analysis also indicates that there are areas where outcomes could be improved. For example, after at least two years in the Scheme, only 16 per cent of participants aged 15 to 24 at their most recent plan review agreed that being in the NDIS had helped them find a suitable job, compared to 18 per cent at their first plan review. Similarly for participants aged 25 and over, after at least two years in the Scheme, only 18 per cent agreed that being in the NDIS had helped them find a suitable job, compared to 19 per cent at their first plan review. The NDIA is actively working to improve participation in work, as discussed earlier in this section.

2.4 Participant satisfaction

The NDIA has undertaken improvements to the way satisfaction is measured.

In September 2018, the NDIA expanded on the original participant satisfaction survey (conducted since the start of trial) to allow for a comprehensive understanding of the participant experience at each stage in the pathway. The NDIA gathers responses at the four primary stages of the participant pathway – access, pre-planning, planning and plan review.

In the December 2020 quarter, the NDIA transferred the administration of the survey away from the National Contact Centre to another third party supplier, Australian Healthcare Associates. This was in response to the Tune review, which recommended the survey be undertaken as independently as possible from the NDIA. This change in administrator has resulted in a “break” in the time series, meaning the previous quarterly results do not compare with this quarter’s result. Future quarterly results will be compared with the December 2020 quarter results to understand change over time.¹¹

Also, in line with the Tune review, the NDIA is working with the Independent Advisory Council (IAC) to build on this survey to develop a more comprehensive picture of participant satisfaction. This includes input regarding the current approach, suggested improvements to current questions, the inclusion of extra modules, and input into questions for future modules.

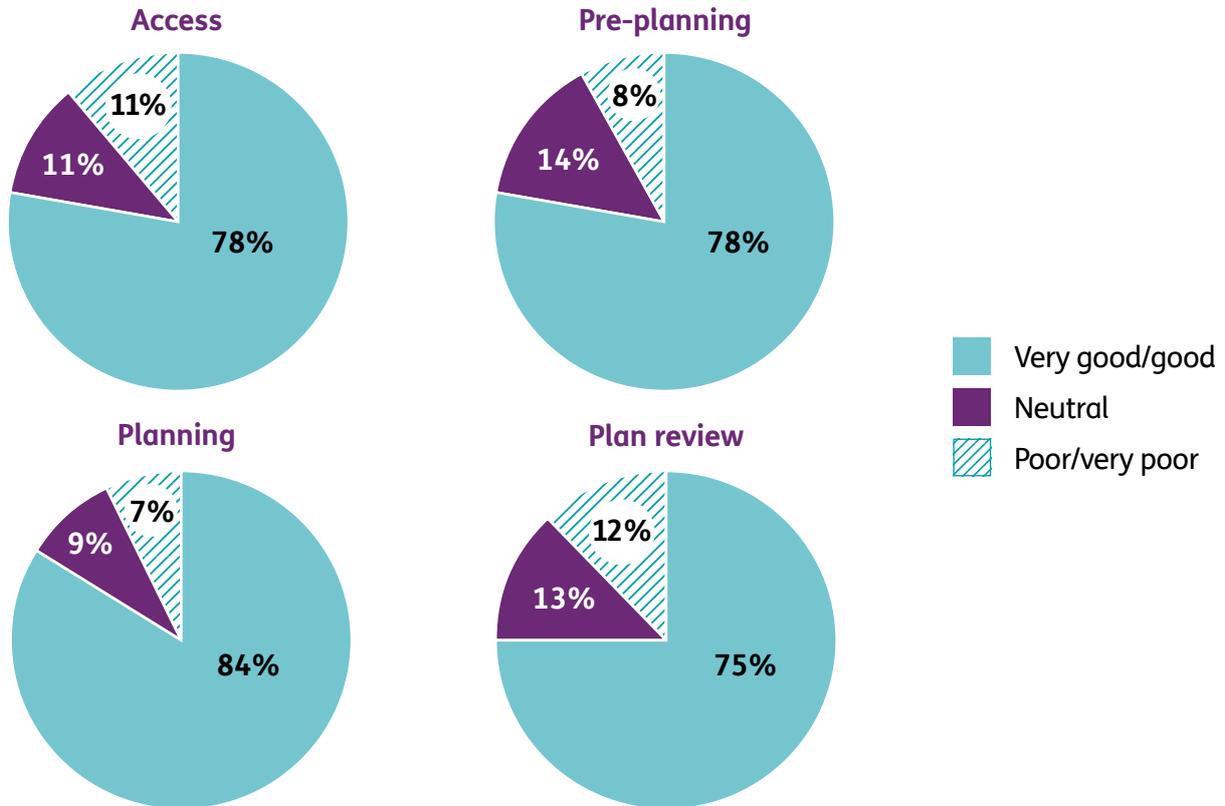
The NDIA engaged the Council for Intellectual Disability to undertake consultation on making the surveys more accessible, including for people with complex communication needs. The NDIA has reviewed the existing questions and is in the process of making the recommended changes to make the surveys more accessible.

In the December 2020 quarter, 84 per cent of participants rated the planning process as either good or very good, with a further 9 per cent rating the experience as neutral. Seventy-eight (78) per cent of the participants in the quarter rated the access process as either good or very good, 78 per cent rated the pre-planning process as either good or very good, and 75 per cent of participants rated the plan review process as either good or very good.

¹¹ Recommendation 24 in the Tune review, available at this link: www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/01_2020/ndis-act-review-final-accessibility-and-prepared-publishing1.pdf

Figure 13: Rating of experience with the NDIS (1 October 2020 to 31 December 2020)

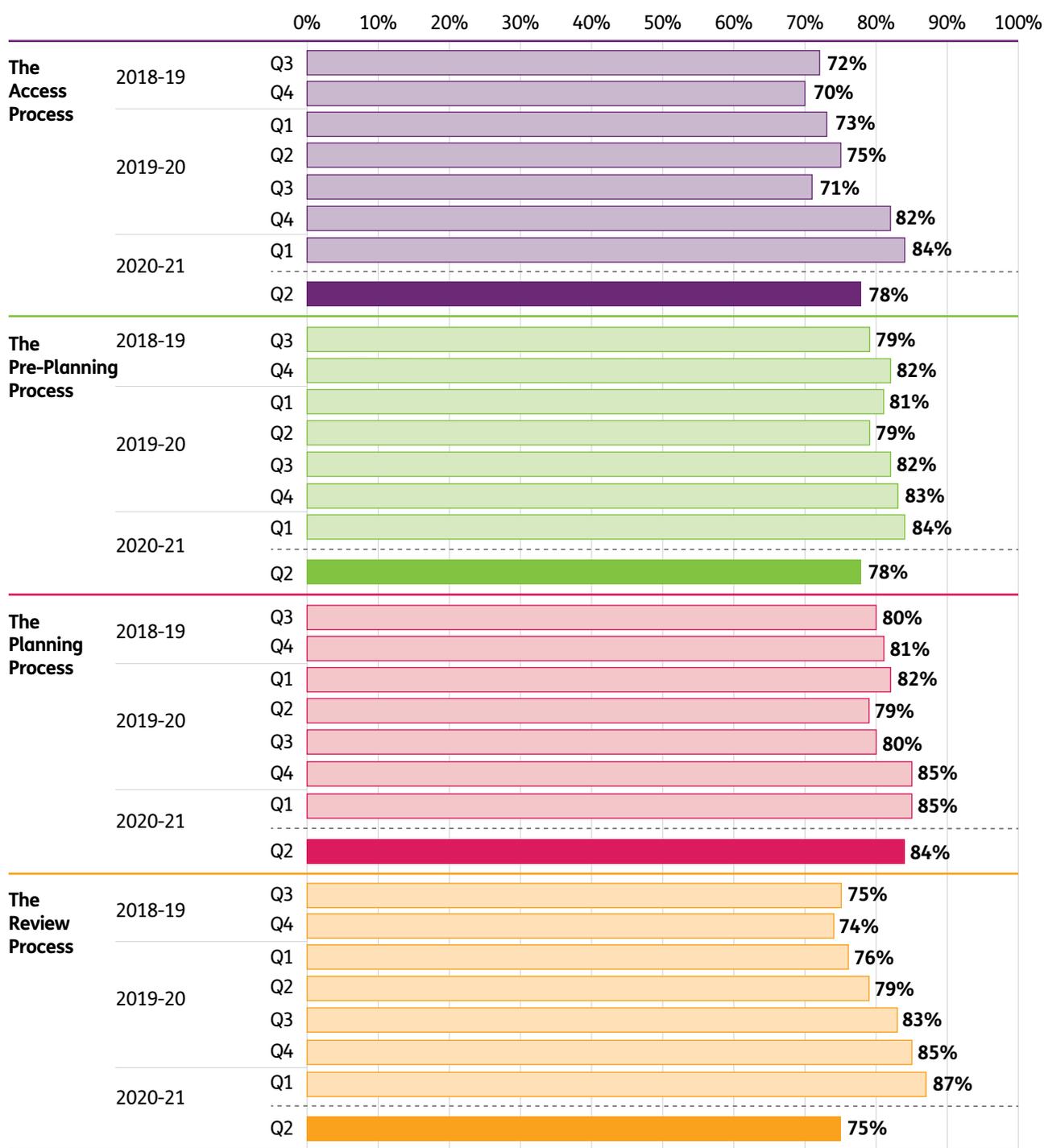
Overall, how was your experience with:



As mentioned above, the change in survey administrator means previous quarters do not compare with this current quarter. This quarter the survey sample was 965 surveys at Access, 1,302 at Pre-Planning, 4,744 at Planning and 12,029 at Review, which is 19,040 in total, 2.25 times higher than the previous quarter. Future quarterly surveys will be compared with this quarter.

Part Two: Participant experience and outcomes

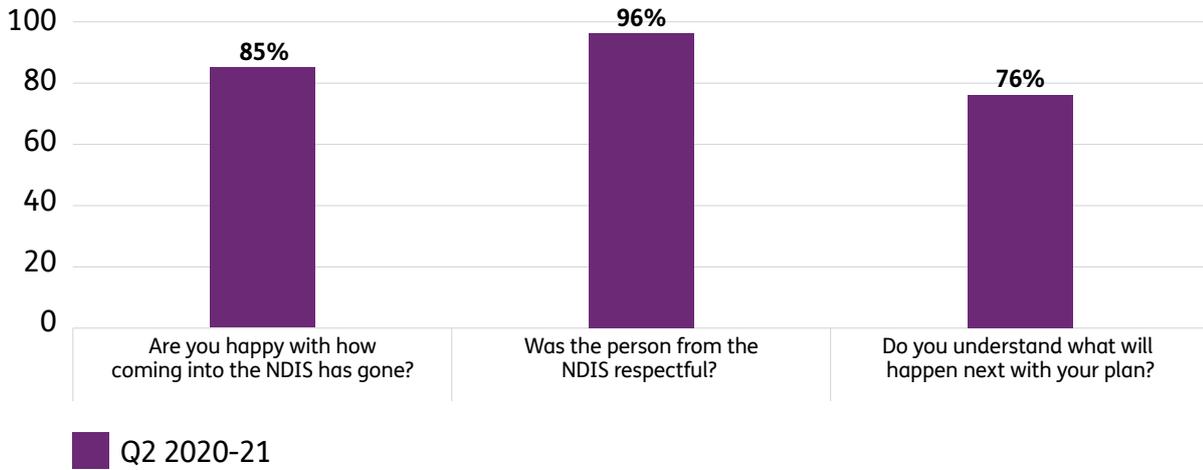
Figure 14: Trend of satisfaction across the pathway (% Very good/good)¹²



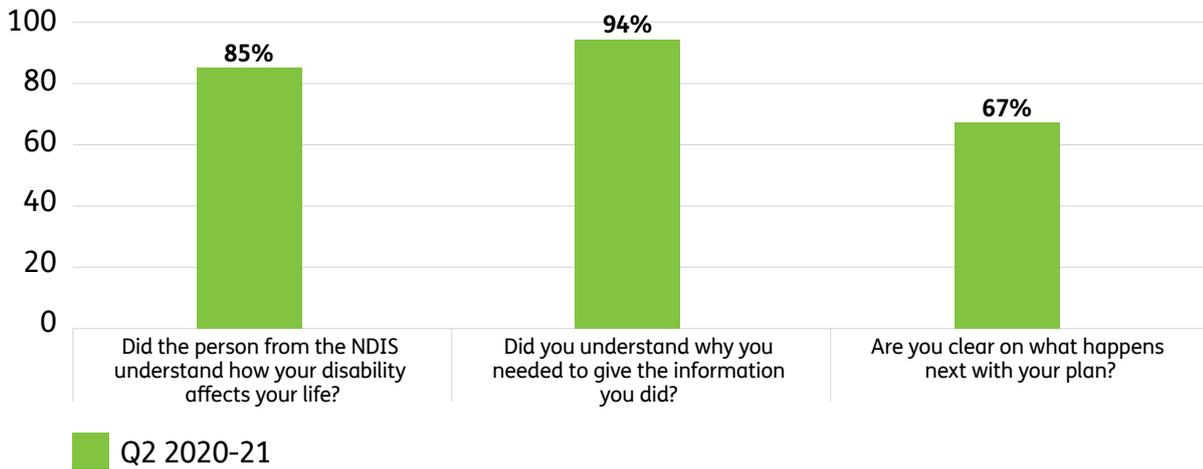
¹² Participant satisfaction results for prior quarters have been restated using data as at 31 December 2020 due to retrospective changes in the underlying data. These changes mainly arise from lags in data collection.

Figure 15: Satisfaction across the four stages of the pathway

Stage One: Access



Stage Two: Pre-planning



Stage Three: Planning

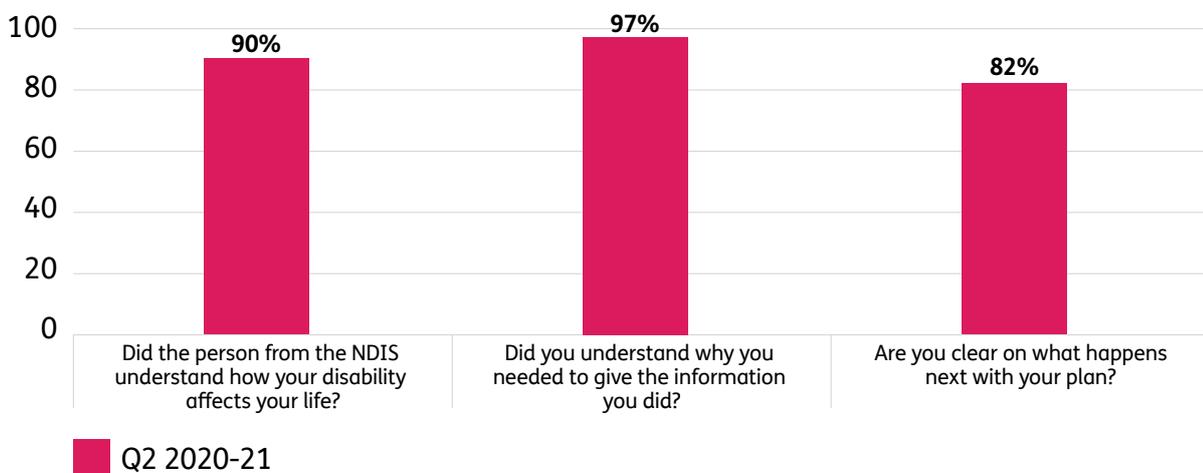
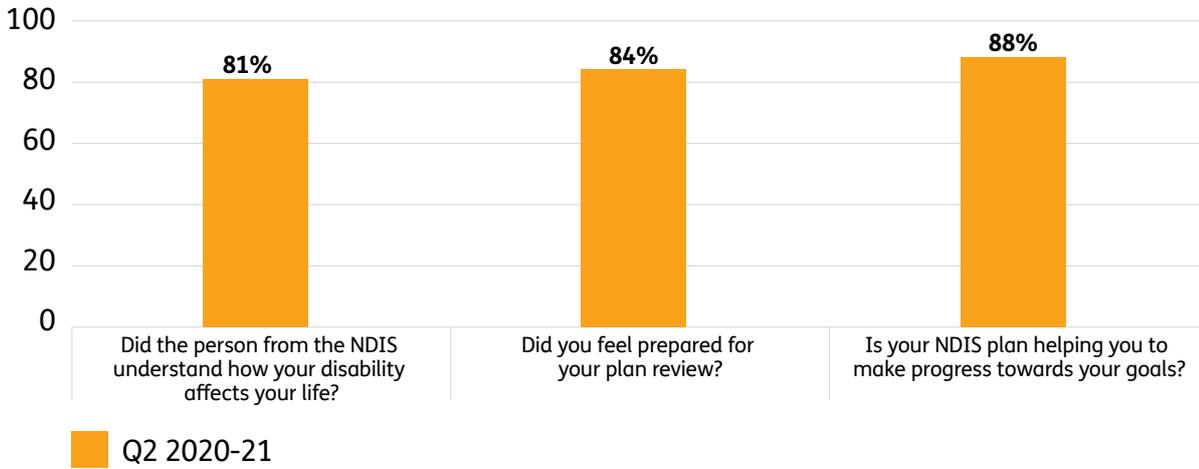


Figure 15: Satisfaction across the four stages of the pathway cont.

Stage Four: Plan Review



The surveys also include questions that produce further insights at each stage of the pathway. The results indicate that satisfaction for Q2 2020-21, as measured by these questions, is comparable to prior quarters overall.

For this quarter and historically, the percentage who have a clear understanding of what happens next with their plan in the first three steps of the participant pathway has been lower than the positive response rate for other questions. For example, at planning, 82% were clear on what happens next with their plan (the same percentage as for prior quarters combined), lower than the 87%-97% responding positively to other questions about planning.

Participants surveyed responded very positively to questions on whether the person from the NDIS was respectful and to understanding why they needed to provide the information they did.

In conjunction with transferring the survey to a different independent administrator, the NDIA has also taken the opportunity to review the sampling scheme and (as mentioned above) increased the sample size (by 2.25 times) in order to improve the statistical reliability of results. These improvements will also allow a finer disaggregation of results so that the experience of different cohorts of participants can be analysed and more targeted improvements to the Scheme can be made.

2.5 The NDIS Contact Centre

The NDIS contact centre continues to process a high volume of calls in a timely manner

The provider responsible for operating the NDIS Contact Centre has continued to meet service levels with respect to call response times, wait times and abandoned call rates for enquiries made to the NDIS.

- For the quarter ending December 2020, the National Contact Centre (NCC) answered **243,754** phone calls. The average answer speed was **34** seconds.
- The NCC is contracted to reach a weekly service level of **80%** of calls answered within **60 seconds**. At the end of the December 2020, NCC was achieving a service level of **81.2%**.
- Average abandonment rates are consistently low at **1.3%**.
- **11,310** Webchat enquiries were responded to across the quarter, with **98.5%** answered within **10** seconds
- Throughout the quarter **236,928** emails were responded to, with **73.7%** progressed within **2 business days** of them being received.¹³
- The rate of enquiries being resolved within the first response to the contact was **73%** in the December quarter. Notable category improvements for the quarter include:
 - Bank Account Update Approvals – **29%** to **76%**,
 - Payment Requests – **78%** to **88%**,
 - Provider related interactions – **93%** to **96%**, and
 - Supported Independent Living enquiries – **45%** to **69%**.

¹³ The holiday season affected the result this quarter. The result in the September 2020 quarter was 99.9%.



Choir provides the key to unlock Danielle's life

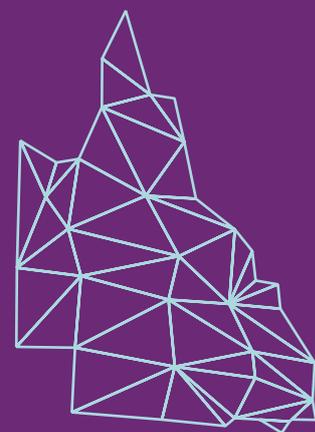
When Dennis took his daughter **Danielle** (seated), an NDIS participant, to listen to Mackay's all-abilities Choir of Unheard Voices five years ago, he had no idea he had finally discovered the key to unlock her life.

Since that day Danielle, now 35, has become a core member of the choir and loves nothing more than performing to live audiences around the Queensland regional centre. Choir founder and organiser Margie Ross, says Danielle is a perfect example of the power of music and song to change people's lives.

"When Danielle started with us five years ago she was largely non-verbal and presented as quite disengaged," Margie says. "After about a year I heard her repeat the count-in that I always do ahead of a song – and that was it for me! I told her that was now her job and since then she's always counted us in."

Danielle's mother Helen says participation in the choir has transformed her daughter, who has lived with an acquired brain injury after experiencing a massive brain infection following a bout of meningitis when she was six months old. Danielle is also blind.

"Being part of the choir has helped Danielle become much more social and accepting of other people," Helen says. "You tell her 'choir today?' and she's straight up on her feet, she wants to go."



To see the choir in action, visit www.facebook.com/just2sing

Part Three:

Participant Service Guarantee and Participant Service Improvement Plan



Part Three:

Participant Service Guarantee and Participant Service Improvement Plan

The NDIA is committed to improving how we serve NDIS participants. That's why we've introduced a Participant Service Charter to explain what participants can expect when they deal with us, and the Participant Service Improvement Plan that outlines all the improvements we will make.

Our **Participant Service Charter** sets out what participants can expect from the NDIA and Partners in the Community (PiTC) organisations. It provides overall principles for interactions with participants, and clear service standards and timeframes. These are included in the proposed **Participant Service Guarantee**.

The Participant Service Charter is also underpinned by the specific tangible actions listed in the **Participant Service Improvement Plan 2020-21**.

This section provides an update on progress against the Participant Service Guarantee and the Participant Service Improvement Plan.

3.1 Participant Service Charter and Guarantee

The latest quarter shows that service standards are being met across eight PSG metrics.

Performance against the proposed service standards – December 2020

Legislation to implement the Participant Service Charter and Guarantee has been delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the NDIA has commenced measuring performance against the PSG metrics where possible, and will expand this reporting in future quarters.¹⁴

Service type	Description of the service being guaranteed	Service Guarantee	Performance	Comparison to target of 95%
General	Explanation of a previous decision, after a request for explanation is received ¹	28 days	100% in the December 2020 Quarter	●
Access	Make an access decision, or request for more information, after an access request has been received	21 days	100% in the December 2020 Quarter	●
Access	Allow sufficient time for prospective participants to provide information, after NDIA has requested further information	90 days	Reporting will commence in the 30 June 2021 report	
Access	Make an access decision, after the final information has been provided	14 days	98% in the December 2020 Quarter	●
Planning	Commence facilitating the preparation of a plan, after an access decision has been made	21 days	74% in the December 2020 Quarter	■
Planning	Approve a participant's plan, after an access decision has been made	70 days	92% in the December 2020 Quarter	▲
Planning	Approve a plan for ECEI participants, after an access decision has been made.	90 days	98% in the December 2020 Quarter	●
Implementation	Offer to hold a plan implementation meeting, after the plan is approved	As soon as reasonably practical	Reporting will commence in the 30 June 2021 report	
Implementation	If the participant accepts the offer, hold a plan implementation meeting	28 days	Reporting will commence in the 30 June 2021 report	

● 95% and over ▲ 85%-95% ■ Less than 85%

¹⁴ Commencement dates for reporting PSG metrics have changed compared to the prior quarter report, with some metrics being reported earlier than expected and some being reported later than expected.

Part Three: Participant Service Guarantee and Participant Service Improvement Plan

Service type	Description of the service being guaranteed	Service Guarantee	Performance	Comparison to target of 95%
Implementation	Provide a copy of the plan to a participant, after the plan is approved	7 days	Reporting will commence in the 30 June 2021 report	
Plan review	Commence facilitating a scheduled plan review, prior to the scheduled review date	56 days	61% in the December 2020 Quarter	■
Plan review	Decide whether to undertake a participant requested plan review, after the request is received	21 days	100% in the December 2020 Quarter	●
Plan review	Complete a participant requested review, after the decision to accept the request is made	42 days	72% in the December 2020 Quarter	■
Plan variations	Vary a plan, after the receipt of information that triggers the plan amendment process	28 days	Reporting will commence in the 30 June 2021 report	
Plan variations	Vary a plan, after receipt of information relating to a complex quote that triggers a plan amendment process	50 days	Reporting will commence in the 30 June 2021 report	
Plan variations	Provide a copy of the plan to a participant, after the plan is amended	7 days	Reporting will commence in the 30 June 2021 report	
Reviewable decisions	Complete an internal review of a reviewable decision, after a request is received	90 days	98% in the December 2020 Quarter	●
Reviewable decisions	Implement an AAT decision to vary a plan, after receiving notification of the AAT decision	28 days	Reporting will commence in the 30 June 2021 report	
Nominee	Cancel participant requested nominee	14 days	95% in the December 2020 Quarter	●
Nominee	Cancel CEO initiated nominee	14 days	100% in the December 2020 Quarter	●

● 95% and over ▲ 85%-95% ■ Less than 85%

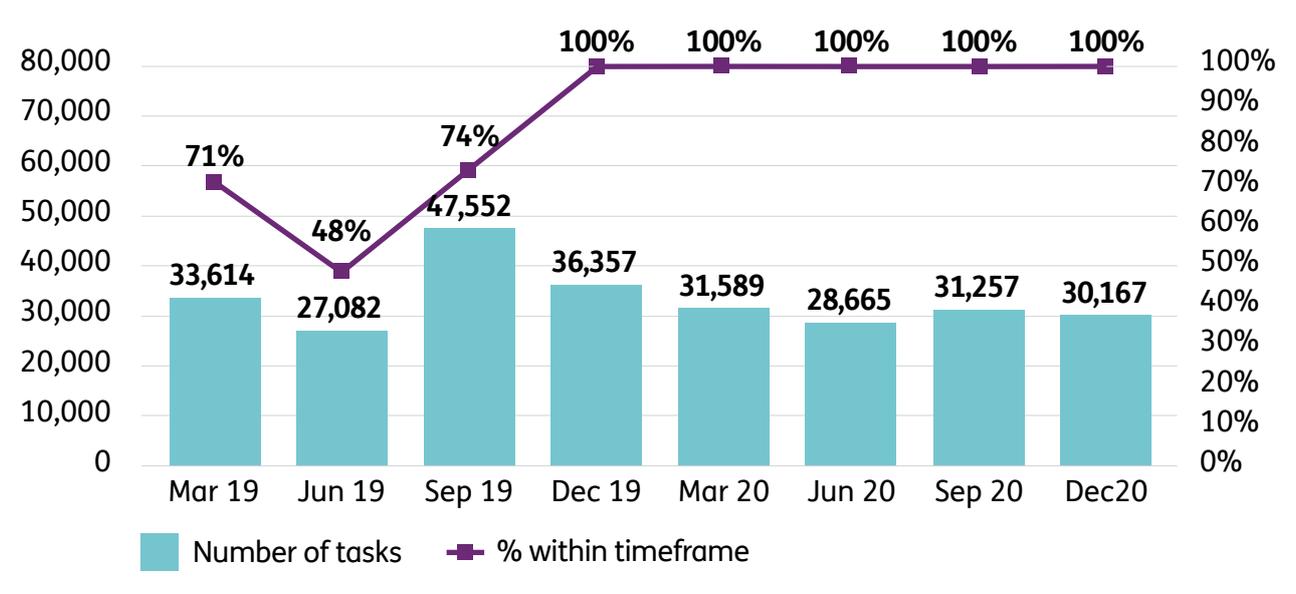
Key trends in PSG metrics

The NDIA has consistently been meeting the PSG timeframes for eight of the metrics over the last few quarters, and there has been marked improvement from one year ago.

Access Decisions

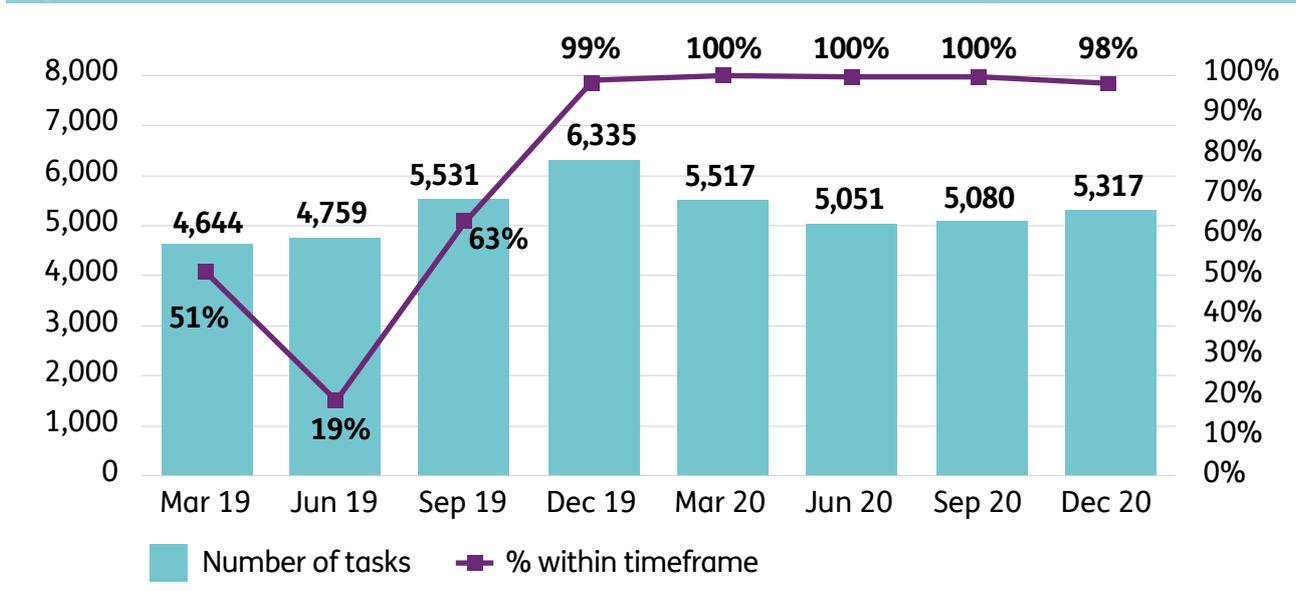
The NDIA has consistently met the 21 day timeframe in respect to access decisions over the last five quarters, which is a big improvement from the quarter prior, when the percentage met was 74 per cent.

Figure 16: Access decision made, or further information requested, after receiving access request



The NDIA has also consistently met the 14 day timeframe in respect to making an access decision after the final information has been provided. Once again this is a big improvement from the September 2019 quarter, where only 63% of decisions were made within the timeframe.

Figure 17: Make an access decision, after the final information has been provided



Planning

Plan approval timeframes over the last few quarters have improved, with plan approval for participants aged 0 to 6, and participants aged 7 and above, now over 90 per cent within their respective timeframes (90 days and 70 days respectively). Additionally, recent quarters show improvement in timeframes (21 days) for commencement of the preparation of a plan once access has been met.

Figure 18: Commence facilitating the preparation of a plan, after an access decision has been made

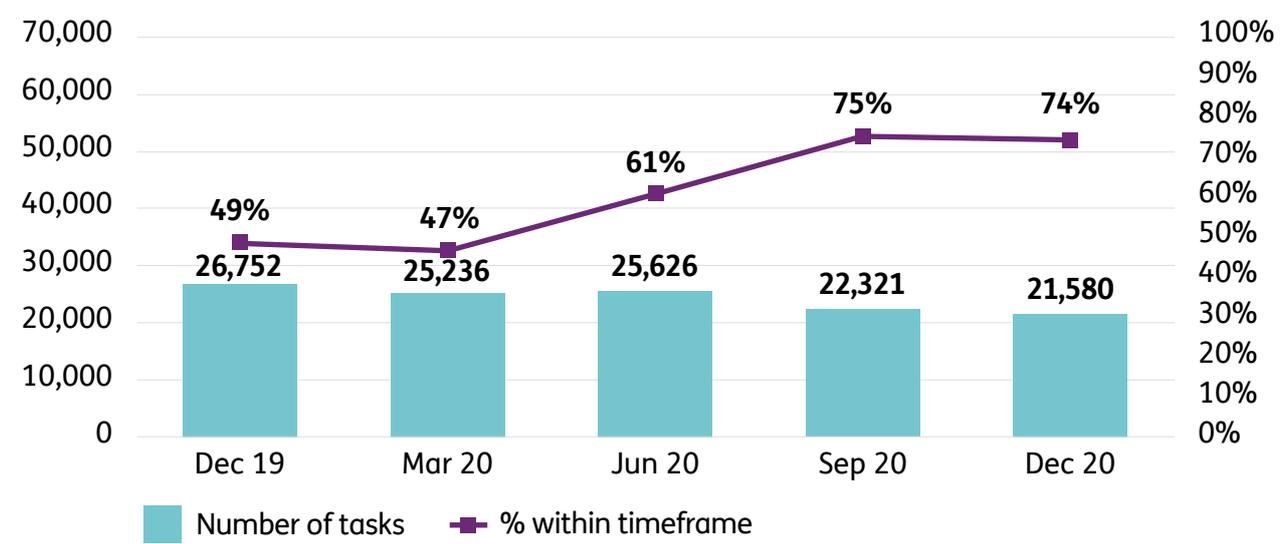


Figure 19: First plan approved after access decision has been made, 7+ years

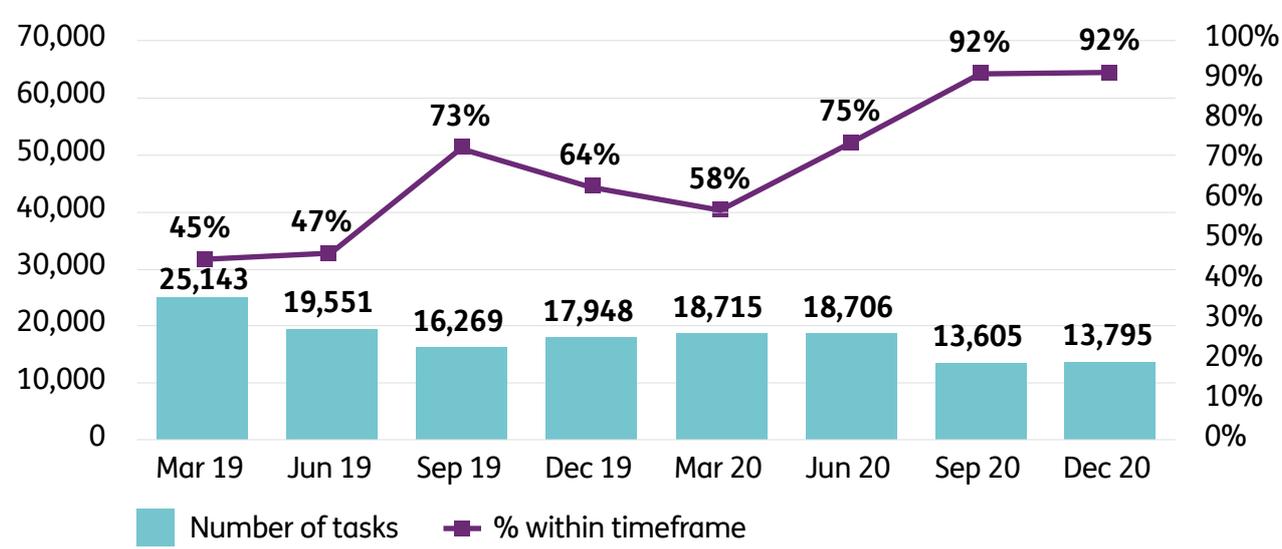
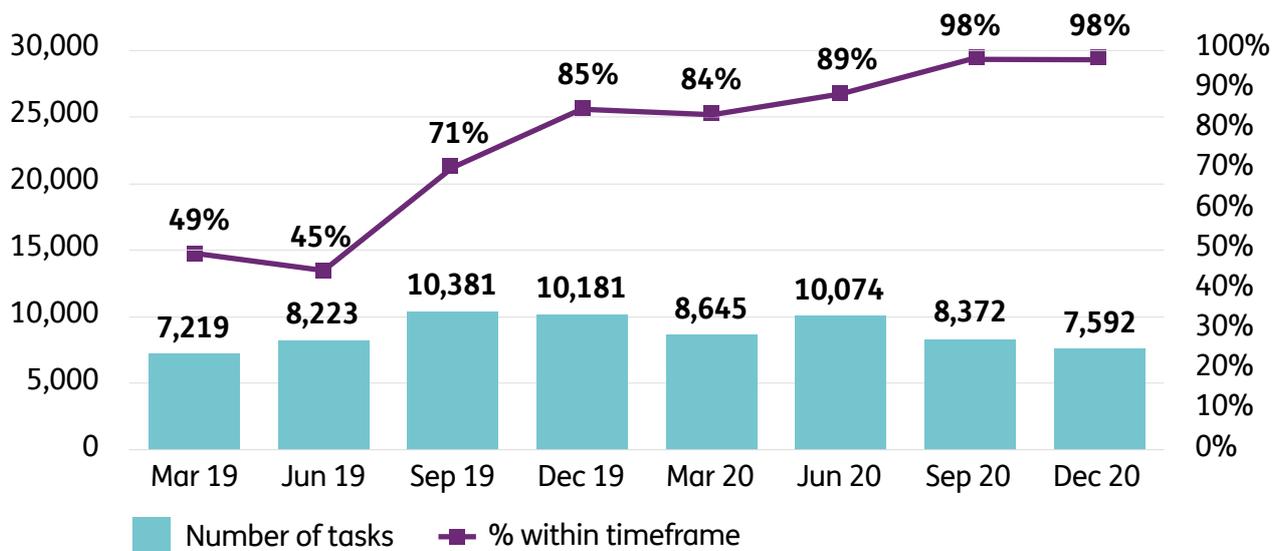


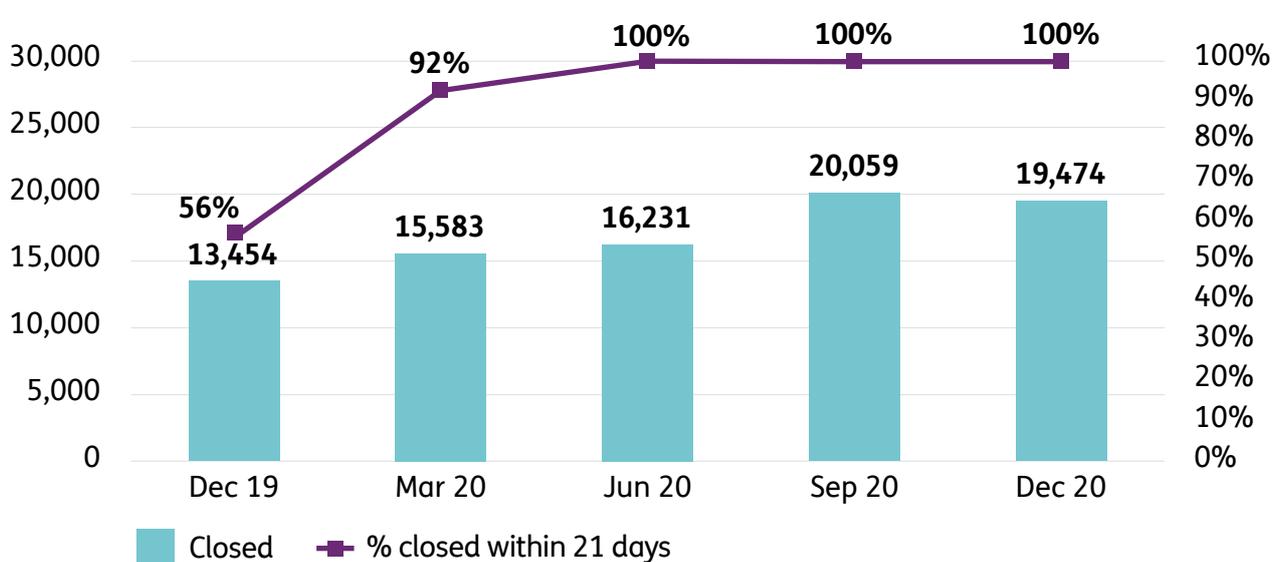
Figure 20: First plan approved after access decision has been made, 0-6 years



Plan Review

Decisions about whether or not to conduct a Participant Requested Review (PRR) are now made within 21 days 100 per cent of the time.

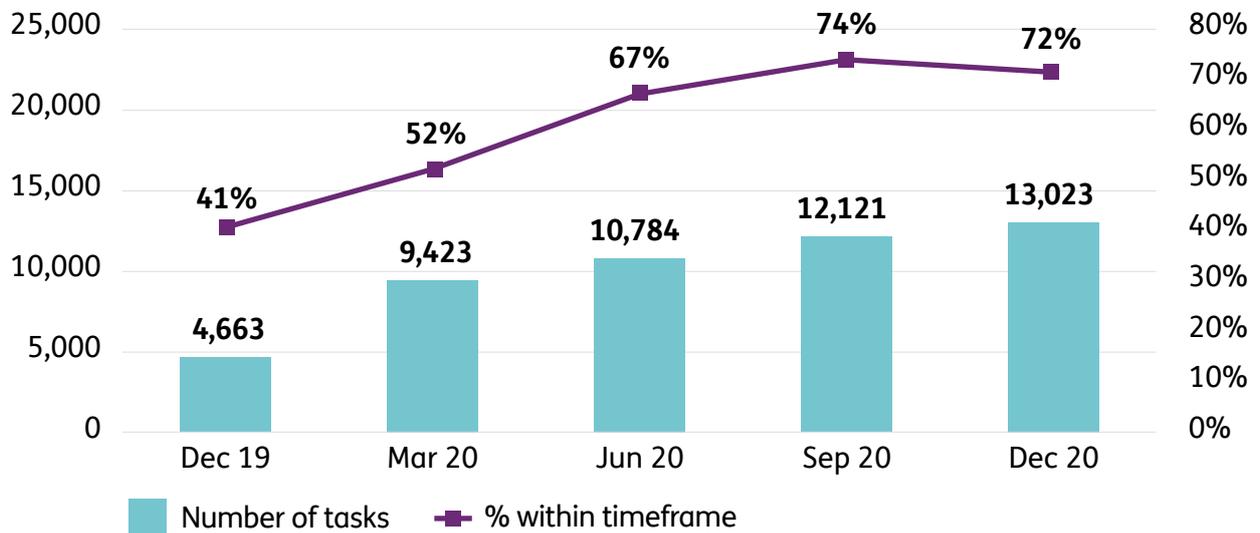
Figure 21: Decision made to undertake PRR after request is received



Part Three: Participant Service Guarantee and Participant Service Improvement Plan

Participant Requested Review (PRR) timeframes have steadily improved over the last few quarters, improving from 41 per cent in the December 2019 quarter to 72 per cent in the December 2020 quarter.

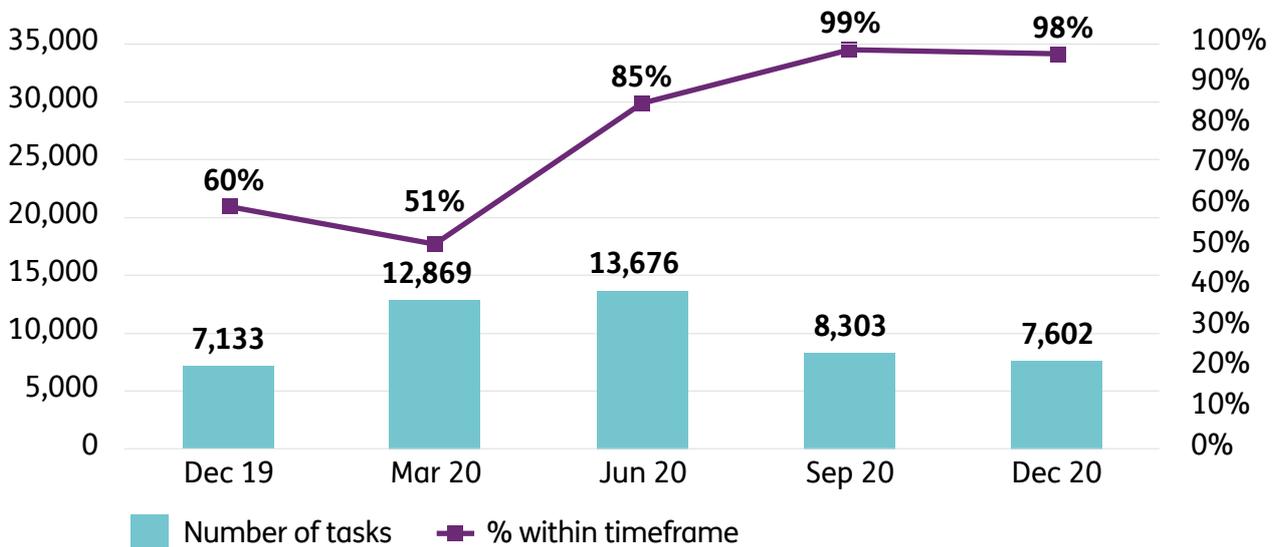
Figure 22: PRR completed after decision made to undertake review



Reviewable Decisions

The NDIA is now completing Reviews of Reviewable Decisions within the 90 day timeframe 98 per cent of the time.

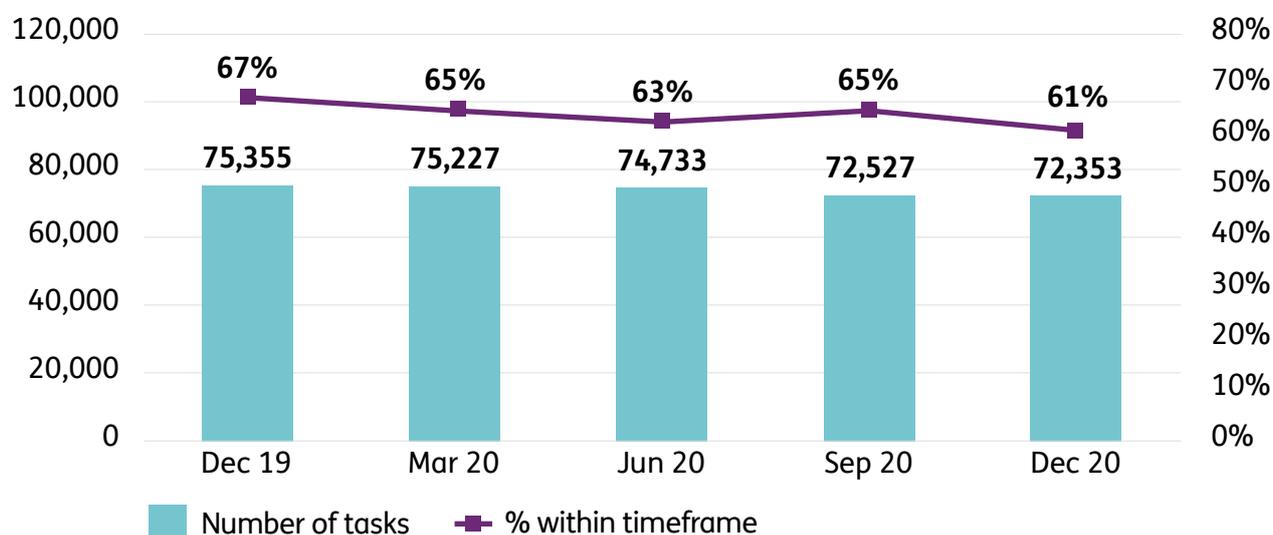
Figure 23: Complete Review of a Reviewable Decision after request is received



Part Three: Participant Service Guarantee and Participant Service Improvement Plan

Whilst progress towards meeting timeframes across most PSG metrics is evident, further improvement is required for commencing a scheduled plan review, with only 61% completed within the timeframe in the December 2020 quarter.

Figure 24: Commence facilitating a scheduled plan review, prior to the scheduled review date¹⁵



Service standards for the National Contact Centre

Service type	Description of the service being guaranteed	Performance
General	Our National Contact Centre will answer 80% of calls within 60 seconds.	81% in December 2020

Service standards for complaints

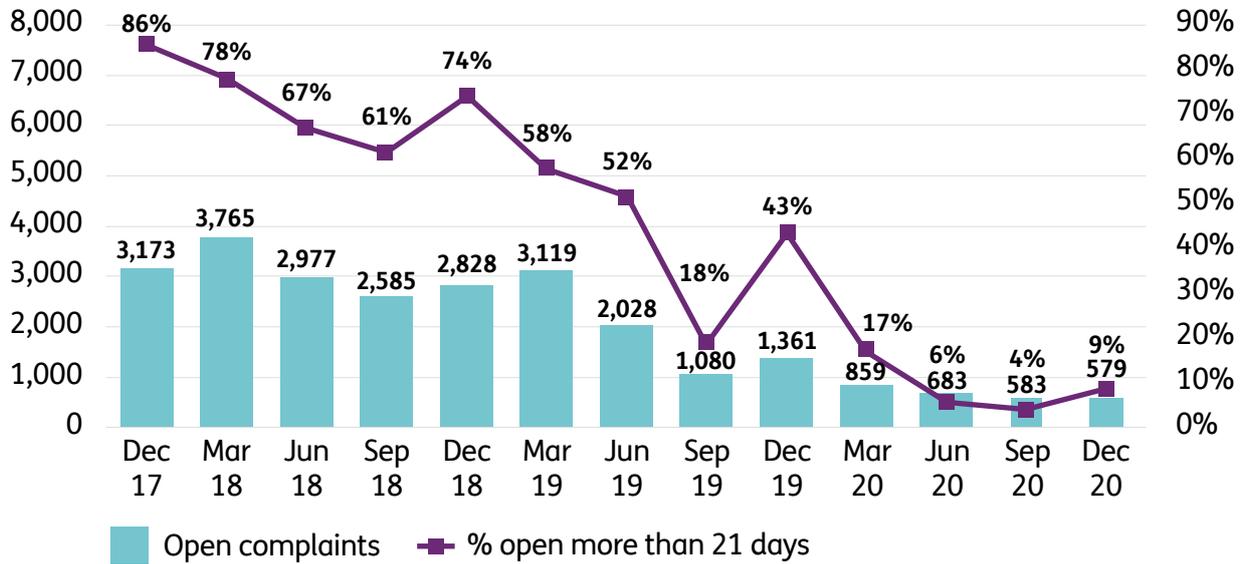
Service type	Description of the service being guaranteed	Service Guarantee	Performance
Complaints	Acknowledge a complaint after we receive it	1 day	Reporting commences in 2021
	Make contact after we receive a complaint	2 days	Reporting commences in 2021
	Resolve 90% of complaints within 21 days after we receive it. More complex complaints may take longer to address.	NA	92% in the December 2020 quarter

¹⁵ Despite current underachievement of this scheduled review target, the NDIA's new participant check-in process ensures that every scheduled review begins with a contact from the planner or partner to discuss review options well before any scheduled review date.

Key trends in complaints

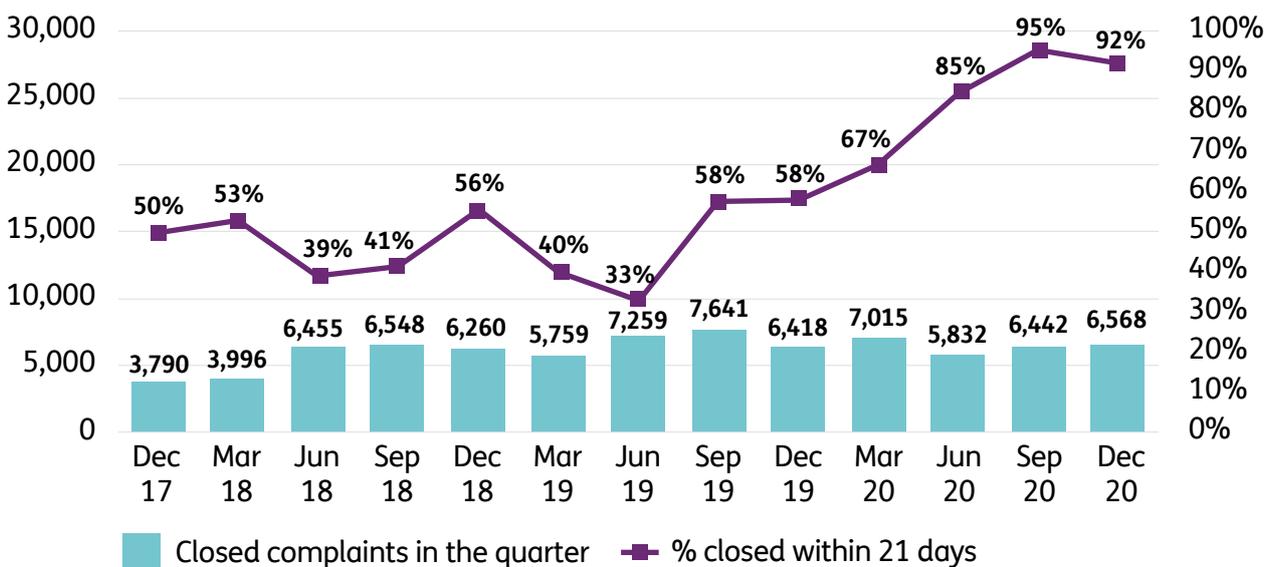
The number of open complaints has reduced significantly over recent quarters and the per cent of total complaints that have been open for more than 21 days has also significantly reduced.

Figure 25: Open complaints and per cent that have been open for more than 21 days¹⁶



The number of completed complaints has been consistent over recent quarters despite the significant increase in participant numbers. Additionally, the per cent of complaints that have been closed within 21 days was 92 per cent in the most recent quarter, a significant improvement compared to prior quarters.

Figure 26: Closed complaints and per cent completed within 21 day timeframe¹⁷



¹⁶ The numbers of complaints reported for the most recent quarter may still increase to the extent there is a lag in data collection. However, any increase is not expected to have a material impact on the results.

¹⁷ *ibid.*

3.2 Participant Service Improvement Plan (SIP)

Progress is being made against the Participant SIP deliverables.

This Service Improvement Plan 2020-21 (SIP) is the key to making real the promises in the Service Charter and Participant Service Guarantee. It sets out what the NDIA and partners are going to do over the next two years to deliver an NDIS that meets expectations.

The Participant SIP is specific and tangible. The Quarterly report to disability ministers will report on progress as set out in the Participant SIP.

Highlights for this quarter include:

SIP Commitment	What have we delivered?
We will put the name of an NDIS contact person on our letters to you.	Changes have been made to our letters to include the name of a real person.
You will be able to access your personal data and plan details without having to ask through a Freedom of Information (FOI) request.	The NDIS website now includes a Participant Information Access site to make it easier for participants to get information.
There will be a simple and quick process when you need to make minor changes to your plan – it won't require a full "review".	Our new 'Light touch plan review' has now been implemented nationally and delivered earlier than expected.
There will be a standard form (for all housing including SDA) and application process for SDA .	Home and Living supports form is now available on the NDIA website.
There will be a national SDA-matching website showing available properties.	Provider matching platforms and SDA vacancies are now being promoted via the NDIS website (released on 27 October 2020).
There will be a NDIS carer connect network for ageing parents of people with a disability.	Contracts to deliver services have been executed and service delivery has commenced.

This builds on the work undertaken last quarter, which included:

- Improvements to the NDIS Contact Centre to provide more consistent and helpful information.
- Rule changes to increase the flexibility in living options for participants with SDA.
- The engagement of specialist community connectors who have commenced delivering services.
- The placement of Health and Justice Liaison Officers across all States and Territories.

Service Improvement Plan (SIP) – Commitments and Progress¹⁸

Communicating with us

Changes have been made to our letters to include the name of someone you can contact. Also, by June 2021 you will have a current contact name recorded for all your interactions with us.

We have also committed to an increased digital experience and have commenced work on online forms, and the website and portal.

SIP Commitment	Progress to date ¹⁹	Expected Completion
The NDIS Contact Centre will give you more helpful and consistent information		✓
We will put the name of an NDIS contact person on our letters to you		✓
You will have a current contact name for all your interactions with us		Jun 21
You will be able to use online forms and services where you want to		Dec 21
You will be able to track where your application or inquiry is up to online		Dec 21
The website and portal will be clearer and easier to use		Dec 21

Getting information from us

The Participant Information Access (PIA) was launched on 1 July 2020, making it easier for participants to access their information, and feedback from participants has been overwhelmingly positive.

Work is progressing to make our guidelines clearer to ensure that is consistency in how we make decisions.

SIP Commitment	Progress to date ²⁰	Expected Completion
You will be able to access your personal data and plan details without having to ask through a Freedom of Information (FOI) request		✓
Our decision letters will have reasons for why we have decided something in plain English		Jun 21
We will be clearer on what reasonable and necessary supports means, with case studies and examples		Dec 21
We will have clearer guidelines and procedures so there is consistency in how we make decisions; and we will make more of these public		Dec 21
Our guidelines will come with plain English descriptions and more examples		Dec 21
Our documents will use consistent terms and definitions with less jargon		Jun 22

¹⁸ The expected completion date for three of the SIP commitments have changed compared to the prior report.

¹⁹ Represents a qualitative assessment of work undertaken to date, for all of the tables below.

²⁰ *ibid.*

Part Three: Participant Service Guarantee and Participant Service Improvement Plan

Gaining Access to the NDIS

Work to review the planning process including the use of independent assessments to ensure support funding is more certain, fair and consistent is well progressed. This is part of a broader program of works due for completion in 2022.

SIP Commitment	Progress to date ²¹	Expected Completion
You will be able to apply to the NDIS in the way you want, including using an online access request form		Dec 21
We will increasingly use independent assessments , that we pay for, as a fair and consistent way to determine access to the NDIS		Jun 22
We will make sure you are connected to other mainstream and community supports and services as well, even if you don't gain access to the NDIS		Jun 22

Making your plan

We are working towards supporting participants in the way that they choose to interact with us, including continuing face-to-face meetings where that is a participant's preference. Video conferencing is currently being offered to participants that wish to have their planning meetings through this approach. Further work will continue to embed the process into the agreed ongoing solution.

SIP Commitment	Progress to date ²²	Expected Completion
We will support more video-conference planning meetings		Jun 21
If you want, you will be able to have a face-to-face meeting with the person who makes a decision about your plan supports and funding		Jun 21
You will get plan summary statements and draft plans before your plan is approved so you can check your information is right and there are no surprises		Jun 21
We will use an independent assessment to ensure support funding in total is more certain, fair, consistent and quicker		Jun 22
We will support you, if you want, to build goals in your plan that are clearly defined, realistic and attainable		Jun 22
We're working to build more do-it-yourself online plan tools		Jun 22

²¹ Represents a qualitative assessment of work undertaken to date, for all of the tables below.

²² *ibid.*

Part Three: Participant Service Guarantee and Participant Service Improvement Plan

Using your plan

Participant plans are now enabled for up to three years. We will check-in with you on how the plan is going and whether an update or review is needed. ‘Our new ‘Light touch plan review’ has now been implemented nationally and delivered earlier than expected – enabling you to make minor changes to your plan.

Initial work has been completed to make plan budgets more flexible so participants can use their funding as they wish. Further work is underway to enhance plan flexibility further.

We will give you more support in using your plan, for finding both disability services and mainstream supports. Partners are currently providing connections for participants to community and mainstream supports.

SIP Commitment	Progress to date ²³	Expected Completion
Your plan will be longer and ongoing . It will be reviewed when you or we request it – for example, if your circumstances change or something significant happens in your life		✓
There will be a simple and quick process when you need to make minor changes to your plan – it won’t require a full “review”		✓
We will give you more support for using your plan , for finding both disability services and mainstream supports		Jun 21
We will be clearer about support coordination services , and what you should expect		Jun 21
We will check-in with you on how the plan is going, and whether an update or review is needed		Jun 21
We will work with communities in remote and very remote areas , and other areas lacking services, to trial new ways of organising services so you can more easily use your support funding		Jun 22
You will be able to manage your plan more easily, using a new NDIS mobile app		Jun 21
We will make plan budgets more flexible so you can use your funding as you wish		Jun 22
We will make it easier to self-manage your plan, with the right support and controls in place; and to change easily between plan and self-managed		Jun 22

²³ Represents a qualitative assessment of work undertaken to date, for all of the tables below.

Part Three: Participant Service Guarantee and Participant Service Improvement Plan

Payments from your plan

The NDIA has finalised its payments strategy and is starting to scope a tender for a simpler point of sale payment mechanism. Enhancements to our current systems have made a significant improvement in timeliness of payments. Further work is in progress to deliver real time payments capability.

SIP Commitment	Progress to date ²⁴	Expected Completion
Payments will be able to be made simply and directly for registered and non-registered providers of services – no more paying first from your own cash and claiming it back		Jun 22
We will have new systems to make sure providers are paid promptly and accurately, so your support is not interrupted		Jun 22

Parts of your plan

Participants will be able to quickly access assistive technology and home modifications with less red tape. This will include a simpler process for requesting complex and non-standard assistive technology or home modifications.

Rule changes have been completed to increase the flexibility in living options for participants who are eligible for SDA. A standard form (for all housing including SDA) has been developed and is now available. Further work is underway to create an SDA dwelling enrolment function which is scheduled for release later this year.

Work has commenced to ensure that the right goals and supports are included in participant plans. A tool has been published to assist participants who work in ADEs prepare for plan discussions.

SIP Commitment	Progress to date ²⁵	Expected Completion
We will increase the flexibility in living options if you are eligible for SDA		✓
There will be a national SDA-matching website showing all available properties		✓
We will issue new easy-to-understand guidelines for complex home modifications		✓
There will be a standard form and application process for SDA		✓
We will process applications for all supports associated with housing and accommodation issues together and more quickly		Jun 21
We will focus on your plan and goals supporting you to gain employment if that is what you want		Jun 22
You will be able to quickly access assistive technology and home modifications with less red tape. This includes a simpler process for requesting complex and non-standard assistive technology or home modifications		Jun 21
We will encourage Individualised Living Options as an alternative to traditional group homes		Jun 22

²⁴ Represents a qualitative assessment of work undertaken to date, for all of the tables below.

²⁵ *ibid.*

Part Three: Participant Service Guarantee and Participant Service Improvement Plan

Support for engaging with us

The NDIA has engaged specialist community connectors in remote, CALD, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to better engage with participants.

Work continues to develop training packages and tools to support work across a range of disability cohorts, CALD and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Training programmes are due to be released to staff throughout 2020-21 to improve cultural and disability awareness of front-line staff.

The NDIA has also established a NDIS carer connect network for ageing parents of people with a disability.

Consultation of the ECEI review commenced in December 2020.²⁶ Feedback from the sector will be used to refine the ECEI reset, which will be progressively rolled out over the next 18 months.

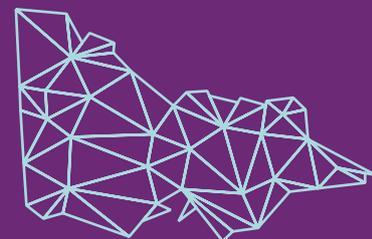
SIP Commitment	Progress to date ²⁷	Expected Completion
We will fund specialist community connectors (in remote, culturally and linguistically diverse, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities) to deeply understand how you want to engage with us		✓
Liaison Officers , for Health and Justice especially, will help participants interact with the NDIS in each State and Territory		✓
We will have a NDIS carer connect network for aging parents of people with a disability		✓
We will pro-actively check-in with you, especially if you may be in a vulnerable situation		Jun 21
Our front-line teams will have improved cultural and disability awareness		Jun 21
We want to support and promote children and young people's voice in their own plans; while also working closely with parents and carers		Jun 22
We will improve the way we provide you support for independent decision-making		Jun 22
We will improve our direct support for you if you have complex needs and require critical supports , or are otherwise potentially vulnerable		Jun 22
We will support you if you are a Young Person in Residential Aged Care to live elsewhere		Jun 22
We will fund early intervention supports for children more flexibly		Jun 22

²⁶ www.ndis.gov.au/about-us/improving-ndis/early-support-young-children-and-families#ecei-reset-consultation-papers

²⁷ Represents a qualitative assessment of work undertaken to date, for all of the tables below.



Through Monty's NDIS supports he's working and competing



The NDIS is supporting **Monty**, a 20 year old from Beaumaris, to pursue his triathlon goals and to work in a field he is passionate about.

A familiar face on the local triathlon scene, Monty trains regularly and volunteers one day a week at Giant Ormond bicycle store. He also works with various NDIS support workers, at GTR Events, across its portfolio, which includes setting up events right across Victoria, while also competing in various Triathlons himself.

Monty, who has an intellectual disability and Galactosemia – a metabolic disorder, affecting his sight, has been able to get supports that have kept him active, built his confidence and supported him to become more independent.

“In 2016/2017 Monty won the Multi-Class Duathlon and the Multi-Class Triathlon series with Sole Motive,” she said.

“He also did the Sprint Gatorade races and Challenge Melbourne Sprint Distance race with mainstream peers, and he's just become the first athlete with an intellectual disability selected for the Triathlon Victoria Development Squad.”

“There's still a lot I'd love to do,” Monty said. “My goal is to go to Hawaii and compete in the Ironman World Championships, but it's a five year plan,” he added with a laugh.

Part Four:

Providers and the growing market



Part Four:

Providers and the growing market

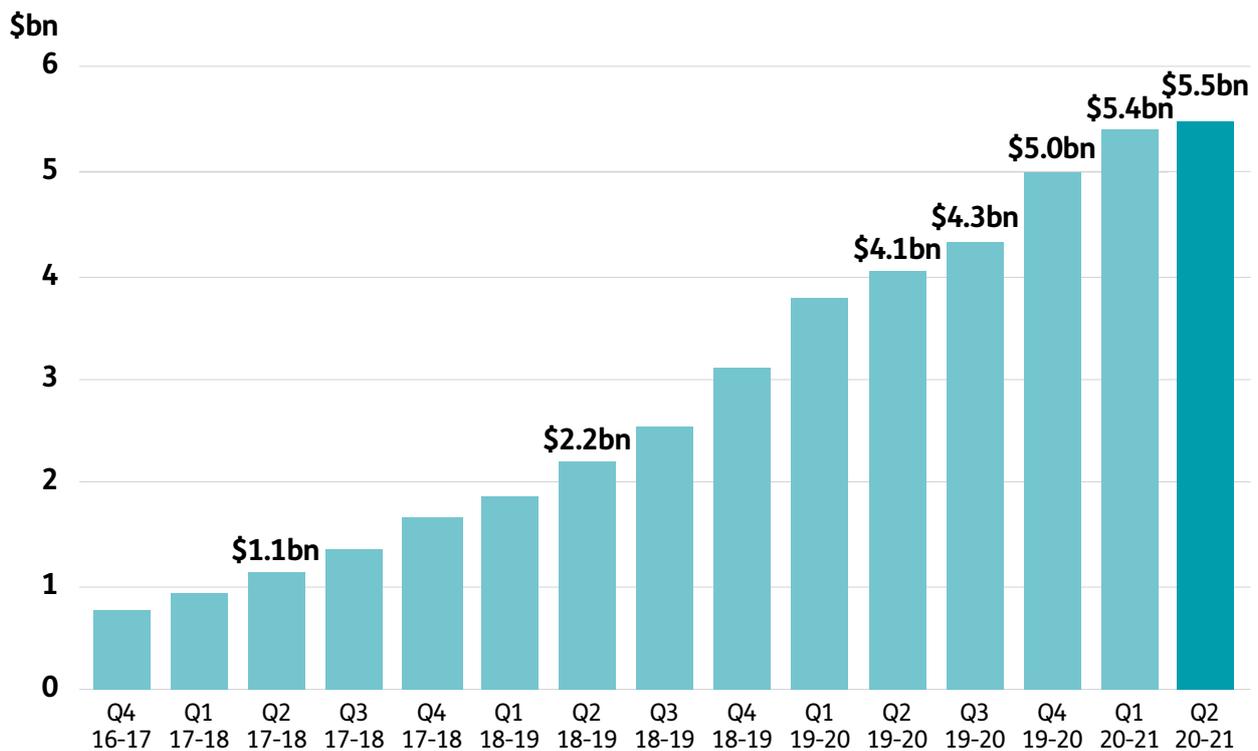
\$5.5bn was paid for participant supports in the December 2020 quarter.

4.1 Growth in the NDIS market

Payments for NDIS supports have continued to grow.

The amount paid each quarter for NDIS supports continue to increase. \$5.5 billion was paid in the December 2020 quarter, compared with \$5.4 billion in the September 2020 quarter, and \$5.0 billion in the June 2020 quarter.

Figure 27: Total payments by quarter²⁸

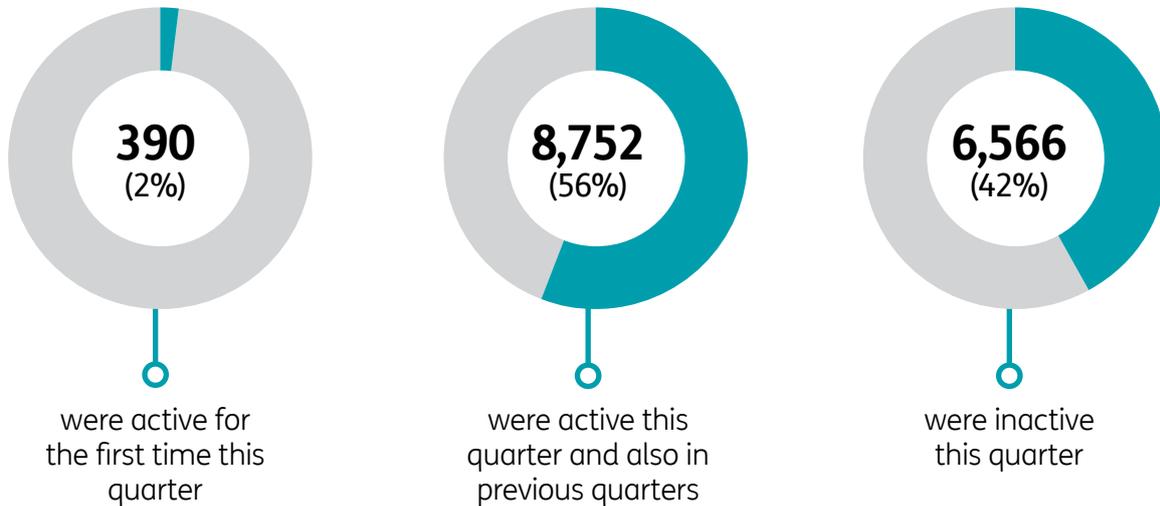


²⁸ The chart represents the amount paid each quarter, regardless of when the support was provided.

4.2 Active providers

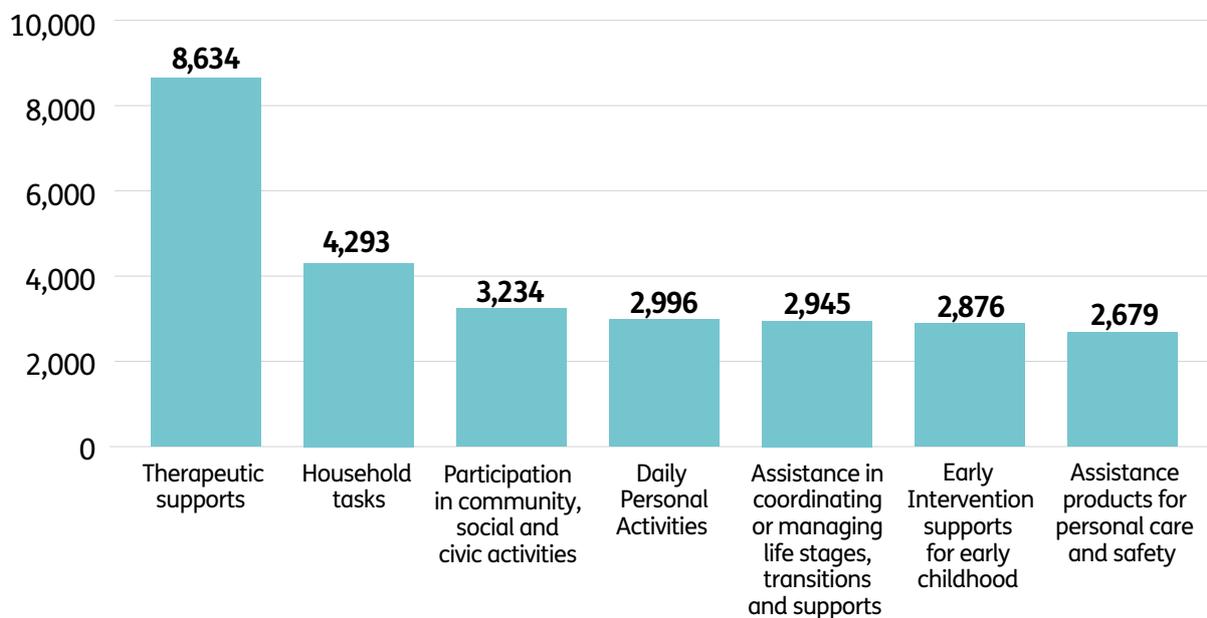
Therapeutic supports continue to be the largest registration group for active providers.

Since the start of the Scheme, 15,708 providers have supported participants.²⁹ Of these:



The registration groups with the largest number of active registered providers are therapeutic supports and household tasks.

Figure 28: The largest registration groups for active providers



²⁹ This is providers of agency-managed participants. Self-managed participants and participants with a plan manager can use unregistered providers, and hence the total number of providers supporting participants will be higher than 15,708. Further, some of the 6,566 inactive providers in the quarter will be supporting participants with a plan manager or who self-manage.

4.3 Average plan budgets and average payments

Average plan budgets and average payments to participants continue to increase.

The average payment per participant has increased by almost 48% over the three years from 2017 to 2020, and the average plan budget has increased by 22% over the same three years.

While part of the increase is due to the maturing of the Scheme, the increase is significantly above wage inflation as seen in the chart below. The implication of this rate of increase is commented on in Section 5 of this report.

Figure 29: Average Payments per year as at 31 December by year³⁰

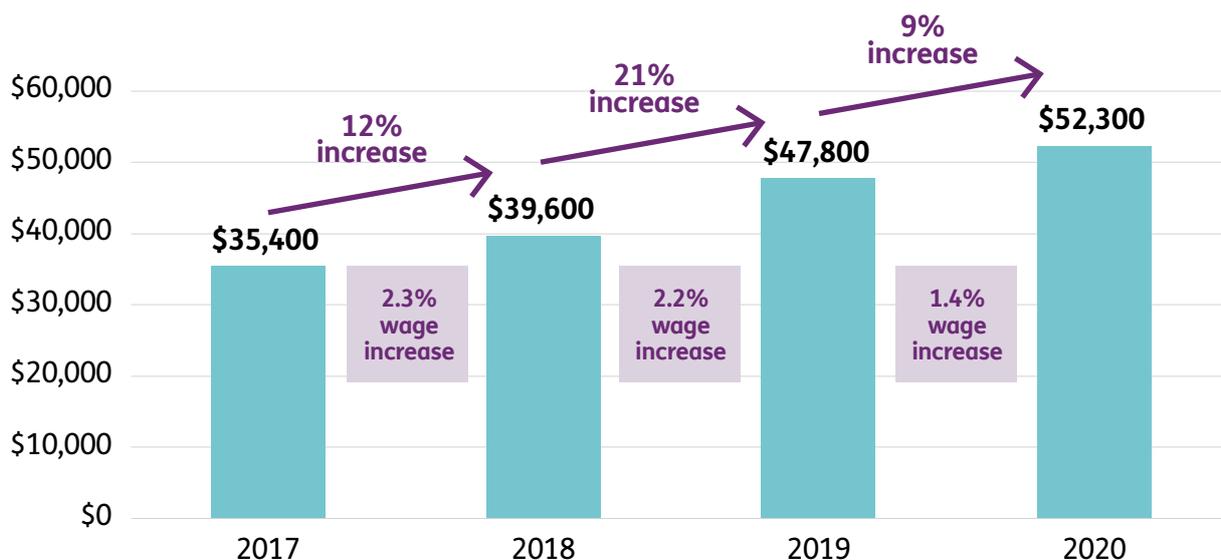
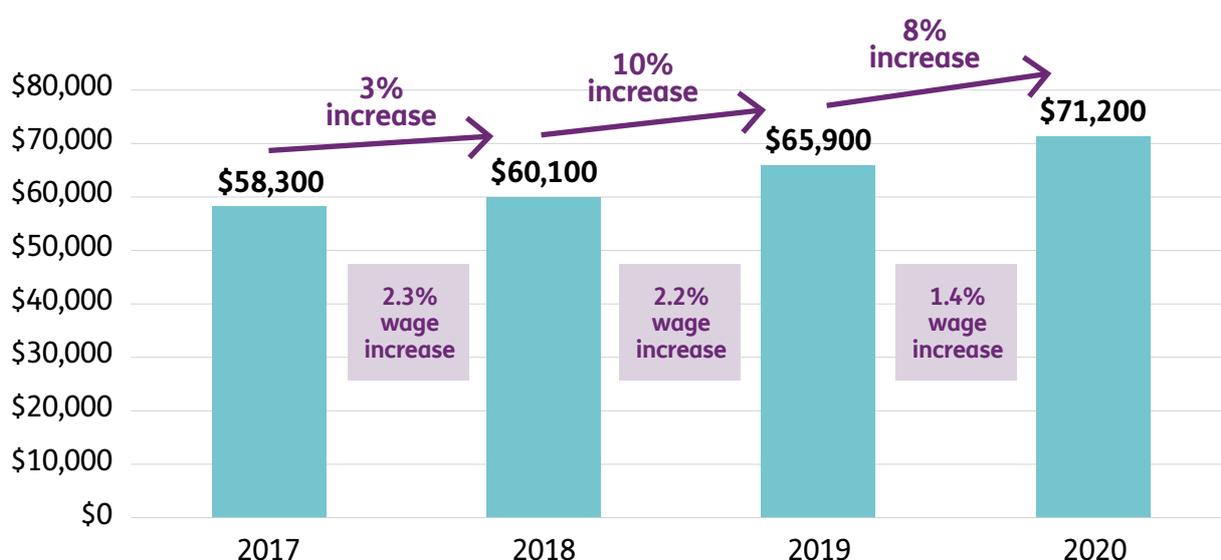


Figure 30: Average annualised committed supports as at 31 December by year³¹



³⁰ Wage inflation figures obtained from the Australian Bureau of Statistics - September 2020 Wage Price Index (Cat 6345.0). The increases in average payments are driven by both price increases and increases in the volume of supports provided.

³¹ Wage inflation figures obtained from the Australian Bureau of Statistics - September 2020 Wage Price Index (Cat 6345.0). The increases in average annualised committed supports are driven by both price increases and increases in the volume of supports provided.

4.4 Choice and control, utilisation and market concentration

Comprehensive data on market effectiveness is being used to improve participant outcomes across all regions through identifying thin markets.

Three key indicators outlined in the NDIA Corporate Plan aspiration of a “Competitive market with innovative supports” are:

– **choice and control**

– **utilisation**

– **market concentration**

Understanding the extent of variation in performance in these indicators across geographical regions assists with identifying “hot spots”.

Choice and control

The NDIS outcomes framework questionnaires ask participants “Do you choose who supports you?”. The percentage who indicated that they choose who supports them was compared across geographical regions to identify the regions comparatively better and worse than others.

The ‘benchmark’ in this analysis is the national average after adjusting for the proportion of participants in SIL in each region and the length of time participants had been in the Scheme.

Overall, 44 of the 80 regions (55%) in the analysis were within five percentage points of the national average, three regions (4%) were more than 10 percentage points above the national average, and four regions (5%) were more than 10 percentage points below the national average.

The three service districts more than 10 percentage points above the national average were ACT, Barkly in Northern Territory and Barwon in Victoria. The regions more than 10 percentage points below the national average were Darwin Remote, Katherine and East Arnhem in the Northern Territory, and Goldfields-Esperance in Western Australia.

At 31 December 2020:

– Darwin Remote has 367 active participants and plan budgets totalling \$35 million

– Katherine has 188 active participants and plan budgets totalling \$32 million

– East Arnhem has 184 active participants and plan budgets totalling \$22 million

– Goldfields-Esperance had 575 active participants and plan budgets totalling \$48 million

Figure 31: Choice and control – number of service districts – gap to benchmark

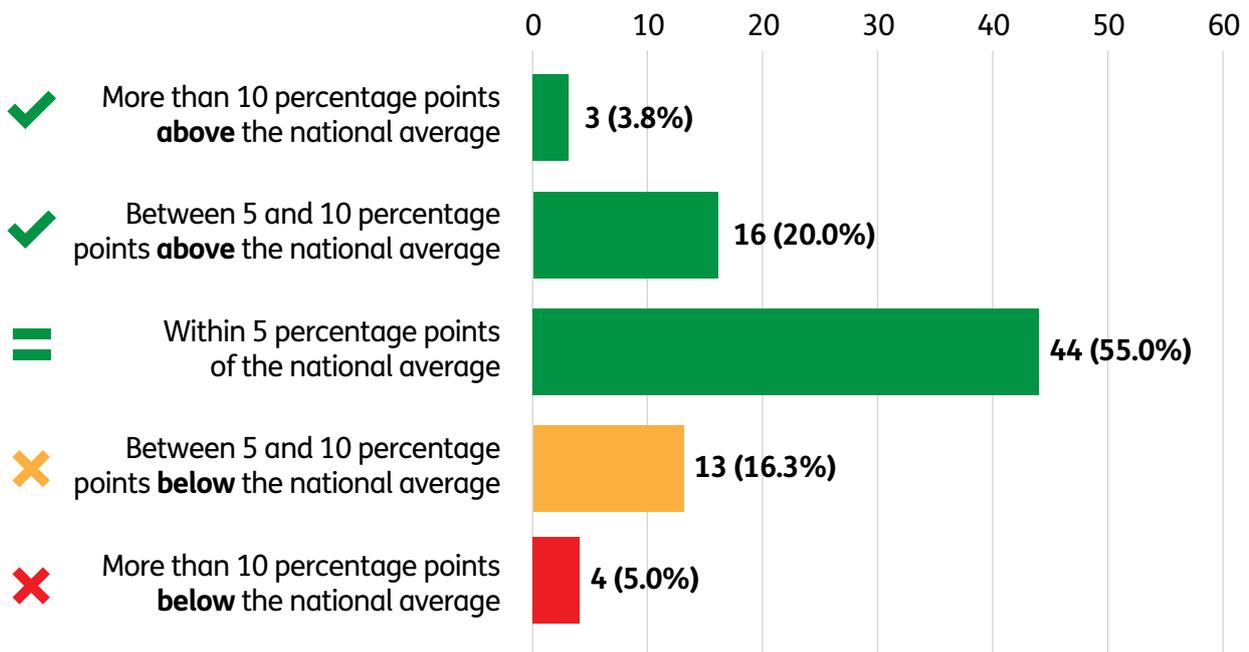


Figure 32: Choice and control service districts breakdown – 31 December 2020

Region	State/Territory	Active participants	Annualised plan budget (\$m)
More than 10 percentage points above the national average			
ACT	Australian Capital Territory	8,143	\$520
Barwon	Victoria	8,703	\$558
Barkly	Northern Territory	162	\$16
Between 5 and 10 percentage points above the national average			
Hunter New England	New South Wales	23,405	\$1,706
Inner Gippsland	Victoria	4,515	\$272
Outer Gippsland	Victoria	2,024	\$129
Mackay	Queensland	2,912	\$189
Toowoomba	Queensland	5,614	\$441
Barossa, Light and Lower North	South Australia	1,807	\$93
Eastern Adelaide	South Australia	3,291	\$268
Eyre and Western	South Australia	1,187	\$87
Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island	South Australia	1,022	\$77
Limestone Coast	South Australia	1,290	\$88
Murray and Mallee	South Australia	1,587	\$108
Western Adelaide	South Australia	3,403	\$251
Yorke and Mid North	South Australia	1,539	\$89
TAS North West	Tasmania	2,332	\$188
South Metro	Western Australia	5,762	\$371
Within 5 percentage points of the national average			
Central Coast	New South Wales	7,841	\$504
Far West	New South Wales	579	\$46
Illawarra Shoalhaven	New South Wales	8,039	\$597
Mid North Coast	New South Wales	5,520	\$395
Murrumbidgee	New South Wales	6,010	\$406
Nepean Blue Mountains	New South Wales	8,098	\$564
Northern NSW	New South Wales	6,388	\$474
Southern NSW	New South Wales	3,951	\$248
Western NSW	New South Wales	5,643	\$439
Bayside Peninsula	Victoria	13,994	\$1,047
Central Highlands	Victoria	4,718	\$285
Goulburn	Victoria	3,463	\$194
Hume Moreland	Victoria	7,869	\$446
Loddon	Victoria	6,223	\$350
Mallee	Victoria	1,889	\$126
North East Melbourne	Victoria	11,411	\$774
Outer East Melbourne	Victoria	8,741	\$611
Ovens Murray	Victoria	3,048	\$165
Western District	Victoria	3,508	\$226
Western Melbourne	Victoria	10,004	\$599
Beenleigh	Queensland	8,382	\$645

Figure 32: Choice and control service districts breakdown – 31 December 2020 cont.

Region	State/Territory	Active participants	Annualised plan budget (\$m)
Within 5 percentage points of the national average cont.			
Brisbane	Queensland	15,755	\$1,284
Bundaberg	Queensland	2,595	\$179
Caboolture/Strathpine	Queensland	8,514	\$669
Cairns	Queensland	4,074	\$359
Ipswich	Queensland	6,950	\$483
Maroochydore	Queensland	7,183	\$570
Maryborough	Queensland	3,514	\$278
Robina	Queensland	8,330	\$589
Rockhampton	Queensland	4,683	\$323
Townsville	Queensland	5,431	\$397
Adelaide Hills	South Australia	1,446	\$89
Far North (SA)	South Australia	480	\$41
Northern Adelaide	South Australia	12,769	\$801
Southern Adelaide	South Australia	8,374	\$614
TAS North	Tasmania	2,810	\$227
Darwin Urban	Northern Territory	2,251	\$264
Great Southern	Western Australia	877	\$62
Kimberley-Pilbara	Western Australia	1,142	\$95
South West	Western Australia	3,130	\$195
North East Metro	Western Australia	6,035	\$466
South East Metro	Western Australia	4,041	\$335
Midwest-Gascoyne	Western Australia	776	\$46
Central South Metro	Western Australia	4,683	\$327
Between 5 and 10 percentage points below the national average			
North Sydney	New South Wales	9,565	\$814
South Eastern Sydney	New South Wales	8,993	\$667
South Western Sydney	New South Wales	18,360	\$1,188
Sydney	New South Wales	7,533	\$541
Western Sydney	New South Wales	15,459	\$1,104
Brimbank Melton	Victoria	6,979	\$413
Inner East Melbourne	Victoria	8,687	\$706
Southern Melbourne	Victoria	10,591	\$635
TAS South East	Tasmania	2,100	\$145
Central Australia	Northern Territory	591	\$124
Wheat Belt	Western Australia	899	\$51
Central North Metro	Western Australia	4,096	\$383
North Metro	Western Australia	4,788	\$322
More than 10 percentage points below the national average			
Darwin Remote	Northern Territory	367	\$35
East Arnhem	Northern Territory	184	\$22
Katherine	Northern Territory	188	\$32
Goldfields-Esperance	Western Australia	575	\$48

Part Four: Providers and the growing market

Utilisation

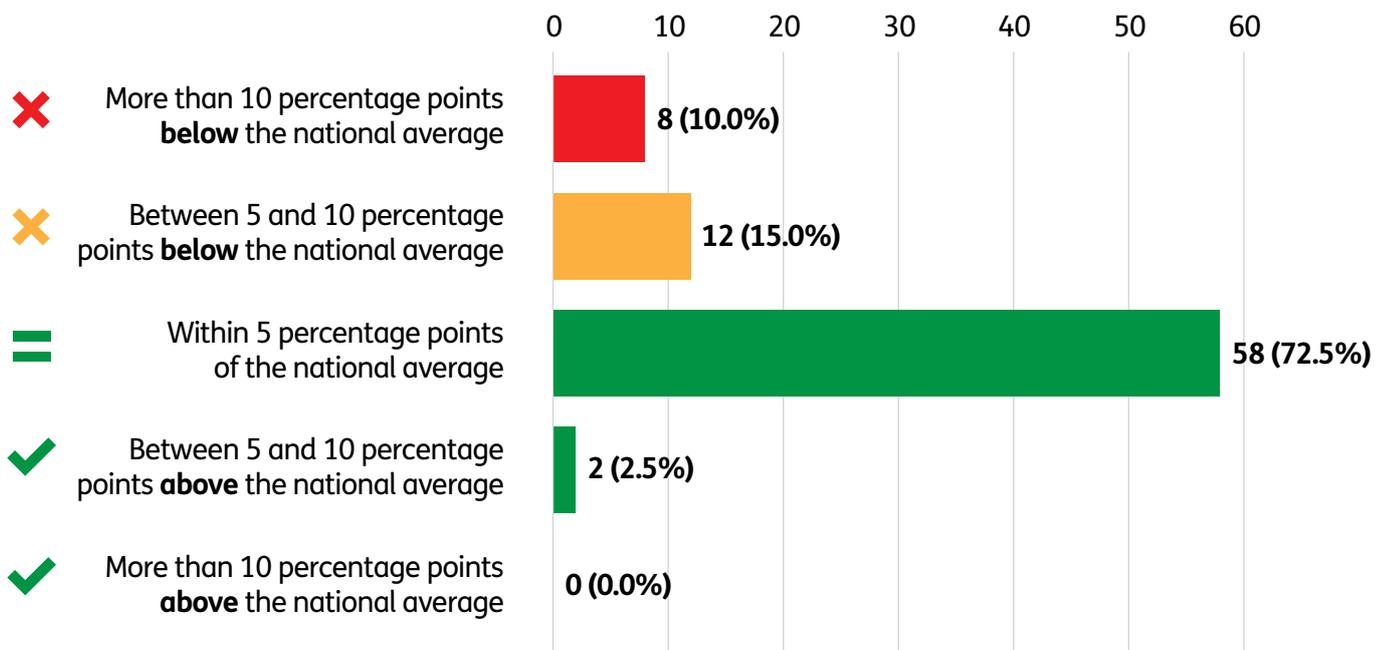
As seen in Figures 29 and 30, the average payment per participant has increased by almost 48% over the three years from 2017 to 2020, and the average plan budget has increased by 22% over the same three years. Participants are getting more support over time so understanding differences between plan budgets and payments (utilisation) across geographical regions is important in identifying “hot spots” where participants are getting relatively less support compared with other geographical regions.

Overall, 58 of the 80 regions (73%) in the analysis are within five percentage points of the national average³², no regions were more than 10 percentage points above the national average, and eight regions (10%) were more than 10 percentage points below the national average.

The eight regions more than 10 percentage points below the national average were smaller regional and remote service districts in Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory. These eight regions have remained consistent over recent quarters. The Thin Market trials underway, as detailed in section 4.5 of this report, are targeting some of these regions.

There are twelve regions between five and 10 percentage points below the national average – these are also mainly in regional and remote areas.

Figure 33: Utilisation – number of service districts – gap to benchmark



³² Utilisation has been adjusted to account for the differences in the proportion of participants in each region receiving SIL, along with the time participants have been in the Scheme.

Figure 34: Utilisation service districts breakdown – 31 December 2020

Region	State/Territory	Active participants	Annualised plan budget (\$m)
More than 10 percentage points below the national average			
Outer Gippsland	Victoria	2,024	\$129
Eyre and Western	South Australia	1,187	\$87
Far North (SA)	South Australia	480	\$41
Murray and Mallee	South Australia	1,587	\$108
Barkly	Northern Territory	162	\$16
Darwin Remote	Northern Territory	367	\$35
East Arnhem	Northern Territory	184	\$22
Kimberley-Pilbara	Western Australia	1,142	\$95
Between 5 and 10 percentage points below the national average			
Far West	New South Wales	579	\$46
Western NSW	New South Wales	5,643	\$439
Barwon	Victoria	8,703	\$558
Central Highlands	Victoria	4,718	\$285
Goulburn	Victoria	3,463	\$194
Inner East Melbourne	Victoria	8,687	\$706
Inner Gippsland	Victoria	4,515	\$272
Ovens Murray	Victoria	3,048	\$165
Western District	Victoria	3,508	\$226
Limestone Coast	South Australia	1,290	\$88
Wheat Belt	Western Australia	899	\$51
Goldfields-Esperance	Western Australia	575	\$48
Within 5 percentage points of the national average			
ACT	Australian Capital Territory	8,143	\$520
Central Coast	New South Wales	7,841	\$504
Hunter New England	New South Wales	23,405	\$1,706
Illawarra Shoalhaven	New South Wales	8,039	\$597
Mid North Coast	New South Wales	5,520	\$395
Murrumbidgee	New South Wales	6,010	\$406
Nepean Blue Mountains	New South Wales	8,098	\$564
North Sydney	New South Wales	9,565	\$814
Northern NSW	New South Wales	6,388	\$474
South Eastern Sydney	New South Wales	8,993	\$667
Southern NSW	New South Wales	3,951	\$248
Sydney	New South Wales	7,533	\$541
Western Sydney	New South Wales	15,459	\$1,104
Bayside Peninsula	Victoria	13,994	\$1,047
Brimbank Melton	Victoria	6,979	\$413
Hume Moreland	Victoria	7,869	\$446
Loddon	Victoria	6,223	\$350
Mallee	Victoria	1,889	\$126
North East Melbourne	Victoria	11,411	\$774
Outer East Melbourne	Victoria	8,741	\$611

Figure 34: Utilisation service districts breakdown – 31 December 2020 cont.

Region	State/Territory	Active participants	Annualised plan budget (\$m)
Within 5 percentage points of the national average cont.			
Southern Melbourne	Victoria	10,591	\$635
Western Melbourne	Victoria	10,004	\$599
Beenleigh	Queensland	8,382	\$645
Brisbane	Queensland	15,755	\$1,284
Bundaberg	Queensland	2,595	\$179
Caboolture/Strathpine	Queensland	8,514	\$669
Cairns	Queensland	4,074	\$359
Ipswich	Queensland	6,950	\$483
Mackay	Queensland	2,912	\$189
Maroochydore	Queensland	7,183	\$570
Maryborough	Queensland	3,514	\$278
Rockhampton	Queensland	4,683	\$323
Toowoomba	Queensland	5,614	\$441
Townsville	Queensland	5,431	\$397
Adelaide Hills	South Australia	1,446	\$89
Barossa, Light and Lower North	South Australia	1,807	\$93
Eastern Adelaide	South Australia	3,291	\$268
Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island	South Australia	1,022	\$77
Northern Adelaide	South Australia	12,769	\$801
Southern Adelaide	South Australia	8,374	\$614
Western Adelaide	South Australia	3,403	\$251
Yorke and Mid North	South Australia	1,539	\$89
TAS North	Tasmania	2,810	\$227
TAS North West	Tasmania	2,332	\$188
TAS South East	Tasmania	2,100	\$145
TAS South West	Tasmania	2,626	\$247
Central Australia	Northern Territory	591	\$124
Darwin Urban	Northern Territory	2,251	\$264
Katherine	Northern Territory	188	\$32
Great Southern	Western Australia	877	\$62
South Metro	Western Australia	5,762	\$371
South West	Western Australia	3,130	\$195
North East Metro	Western Australia	6,035	\$466
South East Metro	Western Australia	4,041	\$335
Central North Metro	Western Australia	4,096	\$383
Midwest-Gascoyne	Western Australia	776	\$46
Central South Metro	Western Australia	4,683	\$327
North Metro	Western Australia	4,788	\$322
Between 5 and 10 percentage points above the national average			
South Western Sydney	New South Wales	18,360	\$1,188
Robina	Queensland	8,330	\$589

Part Four: Providers and the growing market

Market concentration

Understanding the distribution of payments to service providers in a service district can indicate whether a small number of providers receive most of the payments from the NDIA, or whether a large number of providers are receiving the payments. Where only a small number of providers are receiving a large amount of the payments, the market is considered to be more concentrated and could mean that there is less competition in the area. On average across service districts, 59 per cent of payments go to the largest 10 providers.

There are seven service districts where 85 per cent or more of payments go to the largest 10 providers (9%) and 19 service districts where less than 45 per cent of payments went to the 10 largest providers (24%).

All of the seven service districts where more than 85 per cent of payments go to the 10 largest providers, are regional and remote areas in the Northern Territory, Western Australia and South Australia.

Figure 35: Market concentration – number of service districts – gap to benchmark

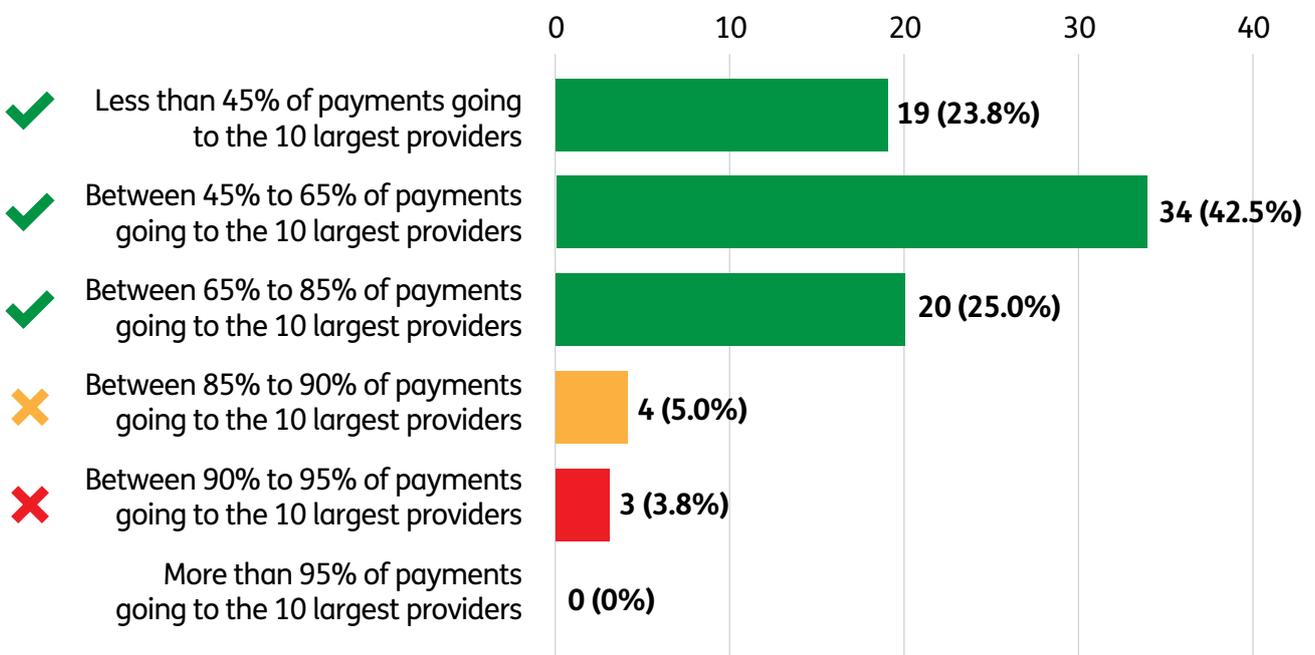


Figure 36: Market concentration service districts breakdown – 31 December 2020

Region	State/Territory	Active participants	Annualised plan budget (\$m)
Less than 45% of payments going to the 10 largest providers			
Central Coast	New South Wales	7,841	\$504
Hunter New England	New South Wales	23,405	\$1,706
Nepean Blue Mountains	New South Wales	8,098	\$564
South Western Sydney	New South Wales	18,360	\$1,188
Sydney	New South Wales	7,533	\$541
Western Sydney	New South Wales	15,459	\$1,104
Hume Moreland	Victoria	7,869	\$446
North East Melbourne	Victoria	11,411	\$774
Western Melbourne	Victoria	10,004	\$599
Beenleigh	Queensland	8,382	\$645
Brisbane	Queensland	15,755	\$1,284
Caboolture/Strathpine	Queensland	8,514	\$669
Ipswich	Queensland	6,950	\$483
Robina	Queensland	8,330	\$589
Toowoomba	Queensland	5,614	\$441
South Metro	Western Australia	5,762	\$371
South East Metro	Western Australia	4,041	\$335
Central South Metro	Western Australia	4,683	\$327
North Metro	Western Australia	4,788	\$322
Between 45% to 65% of payments going to the 10 largest providers			
ACT	Australian Capital territory	8,143	\$520
Illawarra Shoalhaven	New South Wales	8,039	\$597
Mid North Coast	New South Wales	5,520	\$395
Murrumbidgee	New South Wales	6,010	\$406
North Sydney	New South Wales	9,565	\$814
Northern NSW	New South Wales	6,388	\$474
South Eastern Sydney	New South Wales	8,993	\$667
Southern NSW	New South Wales	3,951	\$248
Western NSW	New South Wales	5,643	\$439
Barwon	Victoria	8,703	\$558
Bayside Peninsula	Victoria	13,994	\$1,047
Brimbank Melton	Victoria	6,979	\$413
Central Highlands	Victoria	4,718	\$285
Goulburn	Victoria	3,463	\$194
Inner East Melbourne	Victoria	8,687	\$706
Loddon	Victoria	6,223	\$350
Outer East Melbourne	Victoria	8,741	\$611
Southern Melbourne	Victoria	10,591	\$635
Cairns	Queensland	4,074	\$359
Mackay	Queensland	2,912	\$189
Maroochydore	Queensland	7,183	\$570
Rockhampton	Queensland	4,683	\$323
Townsville	Queensland	5,431	\$397

Figure 36: Market concentration service districts breakdown – 31 December 2020 cont.

Region	State/Territory	Active participants	Annualised plan budget (\$m)
Between 45% to 65% of payments going to the 10 largest providers cont.			
Barossa, Light and Lower North	South Australia	1,807	\$93
Eastern Adelaide	South Australia	3,291	\$268
Northern Adelaide	South Australia	12,769	\$801
Southern Adelaide	South Australia	8,374	\$614
Western Adelaide	South Australia	3,403	\$251
Yorke and Mid North	South Australia	1,539	\$89
TAS South East	Tasmania	2,100	\$145
TAS South West	Tasmania	2,626	\$247
Darwin Urban	Northern Territory	2,251	\$264
North East Metro	Western Australia	6,035	\$466
Central North Metro	Western Australia	4,096	\$383
Between 65% to 85% of payments going to the 10 largest providers			
Far West	New South Wales	579	\$46
Inner Gippsland	Victoria	4,515	\$272
Mallee	Victoria	1,889	\$126
Outer Gippsland	Victoria	2,024	\$129
Ovens Murray	Victoria	3,048	\$165
Western District	Victoria	3,508	\$226
Bundaberg	Queensland	2,595	\$179
Maryborough	Queensland	3,514	\$278
Adelaide Hills	South Australia	1,446	\$89
Eyre and Western	South Australia	1,187	\$87
Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island	South Australia	1,022	\$77
Limestone Coast	South Australia	1,290	\$88
Murray and Mallee	South Australia	1,587	\$108
TAS North	Tasmania	2,810	\$227
TAS North West	Tasmania	2,332	\$188
Central Australia	Northern Territory	591	\$124
Darwin Remote	Northern Territory	367	\$35
East Arnhem	Northern Territory	184	\$22
South West	Western Australia	3,130	\$195
Wheat Belt	Western Australia	899	\$51
Between 85% to 90% of payments going to the 10 largest providers			
Far North (SA)	South Australia	480	\$41
Katherine	Northern Territory	188	\$32
Kimberley-Pilbara	Western Australia	1,142	\$95
Goldfields-Esperance	Western Australia	575	\$48
Between 90% to 95% of payments going to the 10 largest providers			
Barkly	Northern Territory	162	\$16
Great Southern	Western Australia	877	\$62
Midwest-Gascoyne	Western Australia	776	\$46

4.5 Thin markets

Thin market trials are underway in all States and Territories.

The NDIA is progressing trials to address market gaps, in liaison with state and territory governments and other key stakeholders. Trials continue to record positive results in improving participants' access to the supports they need. For example, for the trials that have had interventions in place for over six months, we have seen improved utilisation of over 20 per cent in some support categories. In other sites, direct commissioning or coordinated funding packages are due to commence in early 2021 and will give immediate access to supports for the participants involved.

Collaboration with state and territory governments, including sharing of results and trial progress, will continue through existing formal governance arrangements. An update will be provided to Disability Ministers in 2021. The current trial sites are detailed below.

Northern Territory

- Trials for the Northern Territory are underway and focus on improving utilisation of all NDIS supports in Alice Springs, Barkly, Central Desert and MacDonnell.
- Additional projects to improve plan utilisation have been identified in Katherine (Assistive Technology and Home Modifications), Tiwi Islands (all supports), West Daly (all supports) and West Arnhem (all supports) in the Northern Territory.

Queensland

- Trials in Queensland are focused on improving low plan utilisation rates across all supports in Doomadgee, Mornington, Woorabinda and Cloncurry (focus is on Core Funding, Capacity Building and Assistive Technology).

Western Australia

- WA trial areas include East Kimberley, Broome, Derby-Fitzroy Crossing and Halls Creek across all support types to increase plan utilisation rates.

Other trial areas include:

- SA - Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY lands)
- VIC - Ararat, Baw Baw, Bass Coast, Latrobe, Wellington, South Gippsland, East Gippsland
- TAS - Wynyard-Waratah
- ACT - Canberra
- NSW - Walgett, Brewarrina, Wentworth and Bourke

The NDIA is using the findings from the trials to develop the approach to identifying, prioritising and intervening in markets. Intervention actions are flexible and tailored in response to local issues identified, and may include improving plan implementation, improving information signals, market facilitation, coordinated funding proposals, and if required, direct commissioning.

4.6 NDIS Pricing

Measures to support participants and providers during COVID-19 continue.

COVID-19 response

The temporary measures that are in place to support participants, providers, staff and partners remain in place. The detail of these are discussed in the Executive Summary of this report.

Advance Recovery Payment

On 1 October 2020 the advance payment recovery process started, [as announced 12 June 2020](#).

For six months, from October 2020 to March 2021, the NDIA will apply offsets against a providers monthly payment requests until 16.67%³³ of the provider's total advance payment has been recovered each month. Any payment requests above 16.67% will then be processed as per normal.

The advance payment recovery will be automatically applied through the provider portal system. As at 21 December 2020, close to \$376 million (56.2%) has been recovered through a combination of auto system offset recoveries and provider initiated lump sum returned payments.

SIL pricing reform

The SIL quoting and negotiation process used previously has been replaced with set price limits for SIL supports. Providers are now required to develop a roster of care using the NDIA's current price limits for activities of daily living and submit this to the NDIA for consideration. There is increased rigour around determining the suitability of rosters of care for participants at first plan and for subsequent plan reviews. Importantly, the new process will ensure input from participants, so participants have more control over their plan budget.

³³ One-sixth of the advanced payment.



Aussie band The KingStones live the dream with NDIS support

Five members of Aussie band, The KingStones, have just dropped their latest single 'Living With a Disability' – a catchy pop/rap tune they all wrote to share their insight.

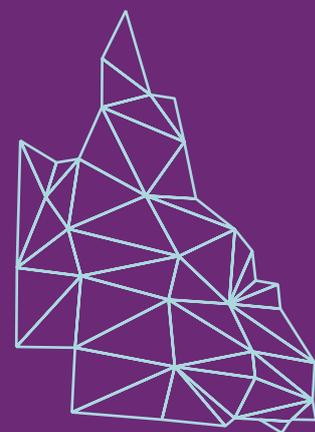
Getting inspirations for the band's name from Kingston, a local suburb, in Logan, QLD, **Juliet** (Jewelz) 21, **Nicholas** (Nikki Drizzz) 21, **Evangel** (Voice of Evangel) 19, **William** (The Bill) 20, and **Daniel** (Dan) 21, are all NDIS participants adamant to prove there is no 'dis' in disability.

KingStones band manager/support worker, Kelvin Vaega said the KingStones formed when they all finished Year 12, and because of a love for music, he and wife, Joan, saw a great opportunity to support these young adults. "Their creativity and enthusiasm is just infectious, and their quest to write lyrics about their personal journeys and express them through music is just so powerful."

"Growing up with a disability hasn't been easy for the KingStones, so to be able to express themselves through music is a beautiful thing," Kelvin said.

"I've loved singing since I was a little kid, and being part of the KingStones is a dream come true," Evangel said.

Nicholas added, "I love making cool sounds and using loops. We really want to make it big so we can represent people with disability and say, 'Hey, look, we can do this'."



Part Five:
Financial
sustainability



A financially sustainable Scheme achieves participant outcomes across their lifetimes, and is affordable now and into the future.

5.1 Participants, committed support and payments across the Scheme

2.3% of the Australian population aged 0-64 years are expected to be NDIS participants.

The Scheme is projected to reach about 532,000 participants by 30 June 2023, of which almost 508,000 are expected to be aged 0 to 64. This is equivalent to 2.3 per cent of the projected Australian general population aged 0 to 64, which is 10 per cent higher than the original estimate of the 2011 Productivity Commission (2.1 per cent). The increase in participation reflects the continued high levels of participant intake seen in the past year. This is particularly evident for children in the more mature geographical regions (where the Scheme has been in place for a relatively longer period than other regions).

Scheme costs for all participants are projected to be about 1.3 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for 2020-21, 1.4 per cent in 2022-23, and 1.7 per cent for 2029-30. This includes participants who remain in the Scheme past 65 years, noting that the Commonwealth government has committed to funding these participants. This is higher than previous projections, due to both higher numbers of expected participants and higher average payments, as well as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the economy, which has seen projected GDP fall.

Figure 37: Active participants and payments (\$m)

	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21 YTD
Active participants	7,285	17,155	29,719	89,610	172,333	286,015	391,999	432,649
Total paid (\$m)	61.3	356.4	674.3	1,935.5	5,091.7	9,711.3	17,226.5	10,866.8 ³⁴

³⁴ The chart represents the amount paid each quarter, regardless of when the support was provided.

5.2 Current pressures and responses to financial sustainability

Management responses are being implemented to manage current pressures.

The drivers of Scheme costs include the number of participants, the amount of support allocated to each plan, how that allocated amount will change over time, the utilisation of individual supports, and the rate at which participants exit the Scheme. It is the responsibility of the NDIA to identify and monitor pressures, and manage them appropriately, using an insurance-based approach to evaluate emerging experience against expectations.

The insurance approach also means taking a lifetime view to supporting participants. This includes investing in participants in the short-term to provide better outcomes over their lifetime. Specifically, building participant capacity to increase independence can result in reduced need for support. This means, in some instances, lower plan budgets and participants exiting the Scheme. Moreover, achieving participant outcomes through value-for-money innovative supports, is vital to the financial sustainability of the Scheme.

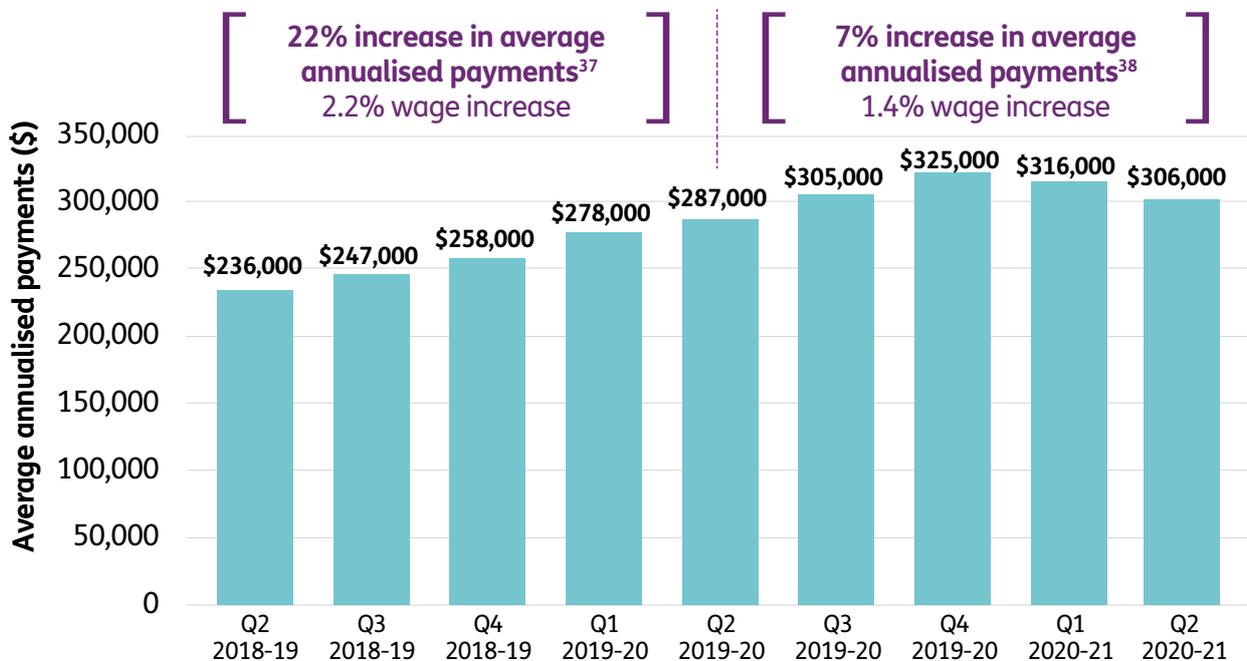
In this context, a range of cost pressures have continued to emerge. These include:

Participant cost pressures

There have been high levels of inflation (well above wage increases) within the Scheme since its inception. In the early years of the Scheme, this inflation reflected the dynamic and rapidly changing environment of a newly established Scheme. However, these high levels of inflation have persisted over time, despite the increasing maturity of the Scheme.

This is evident for participants in SIL, noting that the support costs for participants in SIL are a material component of Scheme cost. Drivers of SIL inflation have included price increases and increases in the quantum of supports provided, for example higher rosters of care.³⁵

Figure 38: Average annualised payments per participant by quarter – SIL participants³⁶



³⁵ Recent measures undertaken have seen lower increases in SIL costs in the most recent year.

³⁶ The payments are for all supports provided to participants in SIL (and not just the SIL daily activity payments). Currently there is an issue with recording whether a participant receives SIL or not in the ICT system, resulting in fewer reported participants in SIL. This issue is being rectified.

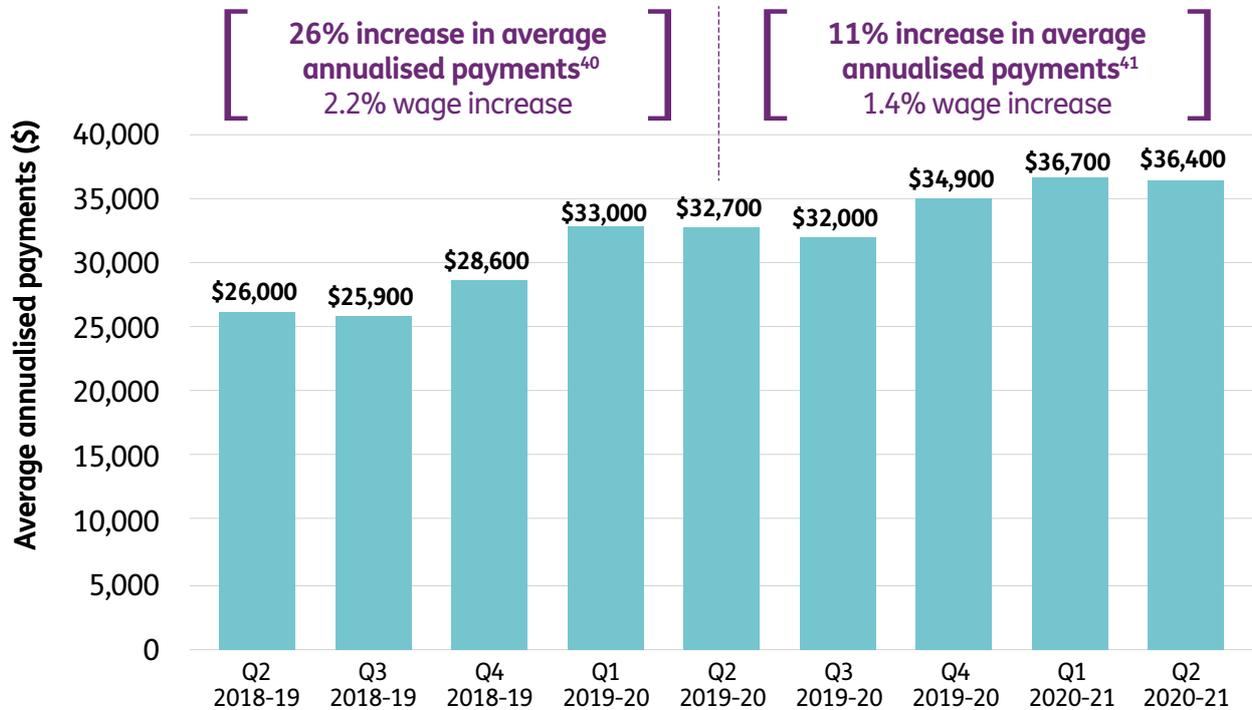
³⁷ Wage inflation figures obtained from the Australian Bureau of Statistics - September 2020 Wage Price Index (Cat 6345.0). The increases in average payments are driven by both price increases and increases in the volume of supports provided.

³⁸ *ibid.*

Part Five: Financial Sustainability

The growth in average annualised payments for non-SIL participants has also been high (and well above wage inflation). This is due to price increases and increases in the volume of support provided to participants. The management of these cost pressures, while ensuring participant outcomes, is important for continued Scheme sustainability.

Figure 39: Average annualised payments per participant by quarter – Non-SIL participants³⁹



Increases to Scheme coverage

The Scheme is facing a number of pressures around Scheme entry and funding decisions. Many of these are related to mainstream interfaces, and include intersection between chronic health conditions and developmental delay with the health system, and affordable housing with the social housing systems. These pressures require continued management responses so that the Scheme does not become a “funder of first or last resort”, especially where other systems are intended or better suited to provide the required supports.

³⁹ The payments are for all supports provided to non-SIL participants.

⁴⁰ Wage inflation figures obtained from the Australian Bureau of Statistics - September 2020 Wage Price Index (Cat 6345.0). The increases in average payments are driven by both price increases and increases in the volume of supports provided.

⁴¹ *ibid.*

Management responses

Proactive management responses to the pressures identified above include:

– Consistency of decision making: The NDIA is working on improving the consistency and equity in decision making of both access and planning decisions across all participants. There is a focus on better aligning a participant’s support package to their circumstances through independent assessments. This will mean the right assessment questions and tools are being used to inform objective access and planning decisions that are more consistent and fairer. This is consistent with the 2011 Productivity Commission Report, as well as the 2019 Review of the NDIS Act, which recommends amendments to the NDIS Act to achieve these outcomes. Other initiatives being undertaken to improve consistency of decision-making include:

- There is significant frontline training underway to improve the capability of the NDIA planners and partners to develop plans and make review decisions that balance the Agency’s aspiration for a positive participant experience with responsibility for long term Scheme sustainability.
- More disciplined approaches to frontline management will ensure that ‘reasonable and necessary’ decisions and participant outcomes are nationally consistent, to a higher standard of quality, which promote participant equity, eliminate avoidable plan reviews and prevent unnecessary plan budget inflation.
- Participant ‘Check In’ service delivery options will ensure that participants have access to the depth of review and medium of interaction approach that most suits them. This will enable more ‘light touch’ plan amendments and plan renewals and extensions to meet participants’ needs.

– The NDIA is working to make the NDIS easier to understand and provide clearer information about how we make decisions. One of the first examples of this is a new format for our Operational Guidelines (OGs). Through the refresh of our OGs we will publish all our internal and external guidance about how we make decisions so there is consistent information internally and externally for NDIA staff, participants and stakeholders.

All NDIS OGs will be refreshed by June 2021 and published on the website. The OGs which have been refreshed already include:

- Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA)
- Short term accommodation or respite
- Medium term accommodation
- Supported independent living
- Younger people in residential aged care
- Assistive technology
- Social and recreation supports
- Work and study supports

– SIL policy reform

The NDIA is also looking at innovative housing solutions which include more contemporary options for people who require a high level of support. A number of alternative accommodation options are emerging, known as Individual Living Options (ILOs). ILOs have the potential to create a more tailored solution to care and support needs for Scheme participants, helping to increase choice and control for participants and improve outcomes. Further development and support for the implementation of ILO type models will occur in 2021.

- In order to address administrative delays, lack of transparency and Scheme sustainability, the SIL quoting and negotiation process used previously has been replaced with price limits for SIL supports. Providers are required to develop a roster of care using the NDIA's set price limits for activities of daily living and submit this to the NDIA for consideration. There will be a focus around assessing the suitability of rosters of care for participants at first plan and for subsequent plan reviews. The new process will also ensure input from participants, so participants are able to have more control over their plan budget.
- While these changes were designed to address immediate concerns, two further consultation papers were released to the public between September and October 2020, to seek feedback and input on how to ensure SIL type services can be delivered into the future in a way that maximises positive outcomes for participants. The focus of these papers included proposed improvements to address operational, sustainability and participant experience challenges, as well as a review of the SIL cost model to better understand cost structures in the market.

The immediate and effective implementation of these management responses is required to both improve participant outcomes and ensure the Scheme is financially sustainable into the future, for the benefit of current and future participants.

6

Part Six:

Staff, advisory groups and the NDIS community



Part Six:

Staff, advisory groups and the NDIS community

The NDIA is continuing to support participants and the disability community through the COVID-19 pandemic.

6.1 A high performing NDIA

Staff and partners continue to support participants remotely, or face-to-face if they choose.

At 31st December 2020, the total NDIS workforce was 10,904, including 4,212 Australian Public Service (APS) employees, 1,509 labour-hire workers and contractors and 5,183 people employed by the NDIA's PiTC and Contact Centre Partners.

The Agency continued to focus on developing its frontline employees' capability this quarter with several new or refreshed training packages developed and deployed. A key deliverable was the capability uplift of frontline leaders and staff in making decisions in relation to Reasonable and Necessary (R&N) funded supports and services for participants.

The Participant Check-in process, developed in response to the successful outreach calls to vulnerable participants during COVID-19, has been successfully introduced and formalised. This was accompanied by short, team-based learning interventions focused on improving the quality of conversations with participants. As an extension to this process, Participant Check-ins Phase 2 has now been introduced as an ongoing process and is not driven simply by scheduled plan reviews.

Independent Assessments is a major program of work with training across both the internal and external workforce. Design work is underway to develop eLearning and virtual classroom learning modules. Training will be supported by an evaluation process to ensure Assessors are fully trained in the assessment tools for people with disability.

The Continuous Improvement Connect (CI Connect) program is designed to provide opportunities for teams to build capability and lift organisational performance. This will be achieved by utilising quality audit data, hotspot reports and key focus areas to make informed decisions on priorities for the next quarter. This targeted approach to topic/theme prioritisation will ensure content produced for the program is timely in addressing the needs of the Agency and participants.

As part of the Agency's commitment to being an employer of choice, the Agency's Inclusion and Diversity Framework was launched in December, 2020. The framework aims to raise awareness, and improve employee engagement by embedding a diverse workforce that supports the inclusion of everyone.

6.2 Public data sharing and the latest release of information

The NDIA continues to release world-leading disability data to improve market innovation and inform participant outcomes.

As part of the NDIA's commitment to publicly share its data, a simple data tool has been available since late 2018 that allowed users to find participant and provider data at state level.

On 2 December 2020, the NDIA released a new, fully accessible interactive data tool with new features and more granular data to replace the simple data tool. The new interactive data tool allows users to:

- apply multiple drop-down filters to each data set (such as state and territory, service district, disability type and more)
- search for data using a map of Australia, divided into service districts – you can zoom in and out and easily switch between the map and data tables
- use the drop-down filters and map to create custom data tables based on the information you need
- export your custom data tables as an excel spreadsheet.

All downloadable data and tables were updated with 30 September 2020 data. These are available at <https://data.ndis.gov.au> and include data on a range of topics, including:

- participant goals
- participant and family/carer outcomes
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants
- plan management types

In addition, Minister Stuart Robert announced on 27 October 2020 the release of SDA demand and supply data on the NDIS Data and Insights website. This data release is part of the NDIA's commitment to publish additional SDA data for participants and the sector. It supports participants and providers to understand not only the current SDA supply but where the demand for SDA is greatest, and where there are opportunities to increase SDA supply. This data was updated with 31 December 2020 data on 29 January 2021.

Several “deep dive” reports and analyses have also been released in previous quarters, and include:

Participant groups:

- participants with autism spectrum disorder (ASD)
- people with a psychosocial disability in the NDIS
- people with an intellectual disability in the NDIS
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants
- CALD participants
- analysis of participants by gender
- young people in the NDIS
- participants by remoteness classification

Outcomes and goals:

- outcomes report for participants, and an outcomes report for families/carers (30 June 2018 and 30 June 2019)
- employment in the NDIS
- people with disability and their NDIS goals

The NDIS market:

- the NDIS Market (30 June 2019, 31 December 2019 and 30 June 2020)
- the NDIS Market by Local Government Area (LGA) (31 December 2019 and 30 June 2020)



Don moves from aged care to enjoy a more independent life

Don couldn't be happier, using his NDIS funding to move from aged care into his own apartment where he can now be more independent.

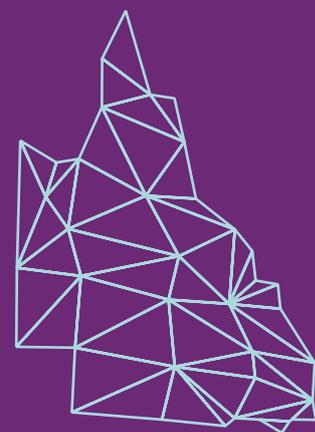
The 52-year-old, who has Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus, has moved to one of 18 independent living apartments in Springfield as part of MS Queensland's Best life Project, which gives people with disability a choice to move from aged care or avoid having to move to it.

"Physically, mentally and financially I'm much better off than I was now I'm on the NDIS," Don said. "It's been a life-saver."

"I love music. I have ever since I was a child. I studied at the Queensland Conservatorium of Music and have my Diploma of Music," Don said proudly. "Now I'm back playing the French horn and dabbling in a bit of self-taught trumpet."

"Without the NDIS, Don would never have been able to move out of aged care and buy all the equipment and supports he needed to live a better life," says Don's Focal Support Coordinator, Patty.

"I've got two goals – one to join a community band, and I'm writing my memoir so I can share my Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus journey with others." Don said, "Now I can live life to the best of my ability, the way I choose."



ndis



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