



Many people who are dissatisfied with the scheme have reported they couldn't find care providers to deliver their funded and approved plans from shutterstock.com

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is “on track in terms of costs”, according to a [position paper](#) released by the Productivity Commission this week. The report further stated that:

if implemented well, it will substantially improve the well-being of people with disability and Australians more generally.

But the Commission's paper also expressed some significant concerns at the speed the scheme is being rolled out, and that this could undermine its overall effectiveness. The report highlighted a number of areas that are proving challenging for those accessing the scheme. It noted that such barriers to access are, in fact, contributing to keeping the costs on track.

Where the NDIS is succeeding

Rarely a day has gone by in recent months without a news story about the perceived failings of the NDIS. The scheme has been reported as “[plagued with problems](#)” and concerns aired about [a potential](#)
[“cost blowout”](#);

As a result, the government asked the Productivity Commission to undertake an [independent review](#) into the overall costs of the scheme, its value for money and long-term sustainability. The full report is due by September.

The current position paper goes to great lengths to acknowledge the size of the challenge in delivering the NDIS. It argues that the

scale, pace and nature of the changes it is driving are unprecedented in Australia.

When fully implemented, the scheme will involve the delivery of individualised support to 475,000 people at a cost of A\$22 billion per year.

There is no doubt [the NDIS is complex](#), but the Commission finds that there is “extraordinary” commitment to the success and sustainability of the scheme. It notes that making the scheme work is not simply the job of the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA), but also that of government, participants, families and carers, providers and the community.

Based on the data collected, the Commission finds NDIS costs are broadly on track with the modelling of the NDIA. A greater number of children are entering the scheme than expected, leading to some cost pressures, but the report notes the NDIA is putting initiatives in place to help deal with these challenges.

The report also finds benefits of the NDIS becoming apparent, with many, but not all, NDIS participants receiving more disability support than previously and having more choice and control.

Problems with the scheme

Many people who are dissatisfied with the scheme have reported they couldn't find care providers to deliver their funded and approved plans. This kind of under-utilisation of services is a factor contributing to keeping costs on track. Such findings are in line with [recent independent research](#) into consumer experiences of the scheme.

Overall the report finds there is insufficient flexibility in the NDIA's operational budget and that money could be spent more in a way that reflects the insurance principles of the scheme, such as greater amounts of funding being invested in prevention and early intervention services.

The process of care planning needs greater attention. Pressure on the NDIA to get numbers of

people on to the scheme means that the quality of the care planning processes have been decreased in some cases. This has caused “confusion for many participants about planning processes” and has resulted in poor outcomes for them.

There is a significant challenge in relation to the disability care workforce. The Commission estimates that one in five new jobs created in Australia in the next few years will need to be in the disability care sector. The report notes that current approaches to generating greater numbers of workers and providers are insufficient.

A range of responses required to address these include a more targeted approach to skilled migration, better market management, and allowing formal and informal carers to provide paid care and better price monitoring and regulation.

The interface between the NDIS and other disability and mainstream services has also proved problematic. There is a lack of clarity in terms of where the responsibilities of different levels of government lie and who should be providing which services. Some people with a disability have lost access to supports they used to get as state government disability services close down.

Need for political will

The Commission describes the roll-out to the full scheme as “highly ambitious” and expresses concern it risks not being implemented as intended. Indeed the speed of the NDIS roll-out is described as having “put the scheme’s success and financial sustainability at risk”.

The report concludes that if the scheme is to achieve its objectives there needs to be a

better balance between participant intake, the quality of plans, participant outcomes, and financial sustainability.

The NDIS is taking a number of steps to deal with these issues but the Commission “is unable to form a judgement on whether such a refocus can be achieved while also meeting the roll-out

The NDIS costs are on track, but that doesn't mean all participants are getting the support they need

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timetable”.

What all of this means is that we will need to see some enormous political will to enable the scheme to be supported to reach its full potential. This will likely involve some slowing of the timetable for implementation and some difficult work to deal with a number of the areas that have been identified as problematic. Whether the government has an appetite to see this through remains to be seen.

Helen Dickinson receives funding from NHMRC

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