



Advice to the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs / Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Carers

Policy on the NDIS and the Deaf Sector: Summary Outcomes of a National Deaf Sector Forum on the NDIS held on 3 February 2012

1. Key messages and recommendations

This paper, based on a forum held on 3rd February 2012 and subsequent informal discussions within the Deaf sector, sets out the current issues for the Deaf sector in preparing for the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

There is a lack of understanding within the sector about the NDIS, what it proposes and its impact on Deaf people, their families and service providers. The forum was a first step in developing a better understanding and identifying what needs to happen for the sector to become NDIS ready.

The Deaf sector has traditionally been dominated by a small number of well-established service providers, generally one in each state, providing an all-purpose model for a community that has a small number of reasonably well educated and high achieving Deaf people and a larger number of disempowered, poorly educated people overly dependent on welfare model services.

There is a perception that not much will change for the Deaf sector unless Deaf people themselves drive this change. The tight knit nature of the Deaf community is both a strength and a barrier for change. For traditional service providers it means that people will still go to them for services. These providers have a very good in-depth understanding of the needs of Deaf people and a strong ability to communicate effectively with them. Deaf people feel culturally safe with these providers.

However, traditional service models, in combination with poor education, have also led to over-dependence on welfare and disempowerment for many Deaf people. Having Deaf people continue to look to these traditional providers for all their services will mean there is little if any incentive for providers to make significant changes in the types of services they provide and how they provide them unless we can find ways to develop Deaf people's ability to be informed and make their own decisions and in this way bring market forces to bear on service providers, thus driving the changes that are needed in service provision.

It is therefore imperative that there be a focus on **capacity building for Deaf people** themselves and also for parents, and this capacity building needs to begin now and include:

- Raising awareness of the NDIS, what it means and its impacts. This includes fostering Deaf people's awareness of the possibilities that an NDIS offers them, and what type of services would most benefit them, as distinct from what type of services are currently offered.
- Creating resources to develop Deaf people's ability to research their own needs and take control of their own lives / decision making.

Service providers also need to be encouraged and supported to become NDIS ready, and the workforce – interpreters in particular – needs to be expanded.

The sector needs to work collaboratively to ensure that Deaf people's needs are included in the development of the NDIS foundations.

In particular it is absolutely imperative at this time that the following key issue be resolved in the NDIS foundation work:

- Only people with severe/profound disability are eligible for tier 3 services. But for deaf people, degree of deafness is not necessarily an indicator of need. As an example a person who is profoundly deaf may have excellent social and economic functionality and conversely a person who is only moderately deaf may have low social and economic functionality and need services more than the person who is profoundly deaf. Such functionality can be a result of environmental factors such as family background and education but the Productivity Commission report does not allow for environmental factors to be considered in assessment. People who use Auslan do so because they need it. They do not always need it all of the time, but they need it at least some of the time. **All Deaf people who use Auslan need to be eligible for tier 3 services, not only people who are severely or profoundly deaf.**

The role of Disability Support Organisations (DSO) and their relationship with service providers is also a key issue. DSOs working with Deaf people need to have a relationship with the Deaf community and the ability to communicate effectively with Deaf people. Interpreters are not the blanket answer to everything, there are situations where it is best if the service provider or support person themselves are able to communicate directly with the Deaf person in Auslan.

Deaf people who have been disempowered by poor education, poor access to information and a long term reliance on welfare services in an environment where there is basically only one service provider need skills development to help them learn to make their own decisions and manage their money. Disability Support Organisations will provide this type of support for those who most need it, but many people, given the right empowerment training, have the capacity to become independent of DSO support, and developing this independence should begin now. There is a danger that leaving this capacity building to the DSO function alone will entrench current disempowerment and merely shift it sideways to a different service type i.e. from welfare dependence to dependence on the DSO.

A summary of current issues for the Deaf sector and the NDIS is contained in section 4 of this document.

Recommendations, contained in section 5, are:

Capacity building for Deaf people

- When Government makes information about the NDIS publicly available, it should also provide it in a culturally and linguistically appropriate way for Deaf people – i.e. in Auslan.
- Programs to empower Deaf people and raise their expectations through skills development for independence and self-determination need to be funded now, before the NDIS begins to roll out. These programs should at least begin at launch sites as soon as these sites are announced.
- Government needs to ensure that the Deaf sector is appropriately included in community engagement activities.
- Capacity building needs to be properly funded, separately from other service provision and advocacy activities.

Eligibility and assessment

- In the development of eligibility and assessment frameworks, proper account must be taken of the need to include the impact of some environmental factors such as education, language

fluency and communication access. All deaf people who use Auslan (not only those who are severely or profoundly deaf) need to be eligible for tier 3 services.

- The interface with aged care should be considered in the development of eligibility and assessment tools.

Identifying the types of services and supports Deaf people need

- Government needs to ensure that service packages are not limited to currently available services but are flexible enough to include new service types; and that they take account of the needs of deaf people with other disabilities and different support needs at different life stages.

Disability Support Organisations

- The role of Disability Support Organisations and their relationship with service providers needs to be clarified. In clarifying it, Government needs to ensure that the DSO model caters for the specific language and communication needs and the small size of the Deaf community.

Quality assurance and monitoring

- Government needs to work with the sector to ensure that service quality standards accommodate specialist services such as interpreting where the professional frequently works with the client alone and unsupervised; and that a monitoring system / watchdog organisation is established.

Education

- Clarity is needed on whether interpreting for Deaf students in schools, including for non-classroom based school events, will be provided under the NDIS or as part of the education system.

Making services NDIS ready

- Providers of specialist Deaf services need to be encouraged and assisted to become NDIS ready, including preparing new models for servicing regional areas.
- Government needs to work with the sector to expand the qualified interpreters workforce.

Sector collaboration

- Government needs to ensure that the Deaf sector is appropriately resourced for collaborative activities that ensure the inclusion of the sector in the development of the NDIS infrastructure.

2. Background

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities states:

*Preamble (n): Recognizing the importance for persons with disabilities of their individual autonomy and independence, including the freedom to make their own choices,
Preamble (o): Considering that persons with disabilities should have the opportunity to be actively involved in decision-making processes about policies and programmes, including those directly concerning them.*

Article 4 – General obligations

1. *States Parties undertake to ensure and promote the full realization of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all persons with disabilities without discrimination of any kind on the basis of disability. To this end, States Parties undertake:
 - h. *To provide accessible information to persons with disabilities about...support services and facilities;*
 - i. *To promote the training of professionals and staff working with persons with disabilities in the rights recognized in this Convention so as to better provide the assistance and services guaranteed by those rights.**
3. *In the development and implementation of legislation and policies to implement the present Convention, and in other decision-making processes concerning issues relating to persons with disabilities, States Parties shall closely consult with and actively involve persons with disabilities, including children with disabilities, through their representative organizations.*

Following the release of a Productivity Commission report recommending the establishment of a National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), Australian Governments are currently in the process of developing the framework for such a scheme. If the NDIS is established as the Productivity Commission outlined, it will go a long way towards meeting the above requirements of the UN CRPD.

However, in informal discussions with various groups within the Deaf Sector – Deaf people, parents and service providers – it has been evident that there is a lack of understanding within the sector about the NDIS, what it proposes and its impact on Deaf people, their families and service providers.

Following discussions with Ken Baker, CEO of National Disability Services (NDS), in late 2011, NDS agreed to work with Deaf Australia to host a National Deaf Sector Forum on the NDIS, to raise awareness of the NDIS and foster discussions on the impact it will have on the sector and what the sector needs to do to prepare for the forthcoming changes. This forum was held on 3rd February 2012.

Invited attendees included representatives from the major Deaf Sector services providers – Deaf Societies, Deaf Children Australia, NABS and some local service providers – Ephpheta Centre and Wilma Women's Health Centre; parent organisations – Parents of Deaf Children (formerly Parent Council for Deaf Education) and Aussie Deaf Kids; Deaf and hard of hearing community representatives – Deaf Australia and our state branches, Deafness Forum. In all, 23 people attended.

A series of presentations were organised to raise awareness and encourage participants to begin discussing the issues. Following the forum Deaf Australia held some informal discussions with various participants and with NDS staff.

This document outlines the forum and subsequent discussions and contains recommendations for follow up action.

3. The forum

The first four presenters focused on the community sector environment, the development of information on the NDIS, and on assessing the risks and pitfalls to service organisations in the roll out of the NDIS. The final presenter focussed on her experiences in operating a person centred service.

A. Ken Baker, CEO, National Disability Services

Ken provided an overview of the current disability environment including recent changes. He used the analogy of a house falling down and the option to either renovate or totally rebuild. When rebuilding, it is important to be sure of the design before building – this is the stage the Government is at now. It is a time of transformational change for the disability sector, but there are inherent risks.

As well as the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) there are 3 major contributors affecting the sector:

- **Welfare to Work reforms**
These major reforms began with the 2005 budget and focus on tightening the number of people on disability support pensions.
- **National Disability Strategy**
The National Disability Strategy has set out good intentions; however, the details and implementation are critical issues.

The National Disability Strategy has support from the whole of government at all three levels, local, state, federal. The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) has endorsed a 10 year strategy, but there are two weaknesses:

- a) no funding attached; and
- b) has been “aspirational statements” and requires further information setting out commitment, KPIs, etc.

The Disability sector needs to give this strategy focus and encourage government to make concrete commitments to implementing it.

- **Not for profit / Charities Review**
The charitable sector had seen many major inquiries over many years. Things are now moving ahead with the establishment of a national regulatory body, the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission, to be established and operational by 1 July 2012. The Government proposes that changes to national legislation will harmonise existing systems and help organisations with unified national fundraising laws.

The definition of a charity, unchanged from the 400 year old common law definition, will be launched by July 2013.

The Compact between the not-for-profit sector and government will include new codes of practice which focus on how government consults with the sector.

National Disability Insurance Scheme

The three key tasks ahead in order to implement the NDIS successfully involve:

- **Politics.** We need to ensure that in-principle commitment from all parties is turned into concrete support, and that the NDIS remains a priority of all parties.
- **Preparation.** Significant work is happening at state and federal levels, including design of legislation for the NDIS agency and the announcement of launch sites.
- **Policy.** A lot of detail is still to be decided. It needs to be tested with people with direct life experience of disability, and with carers and workers.

National Disability Services (NDS) has identified a set of design issues in a paper titled *Preparing the Disability Sector for the New World* to help service providers to be ready for the roll out. Some of the key design areas which service providers need to focus on are pricing arrangements, the need for a larger workforce in the disability sector to assist the person centred approach, and redesign of policies.

Deaf sector organisations need to ensure engagement by keeping everyone informed and up to date with progress.

Some of the key issues for government and service providers to focus on are:

- **Workforce** – coping with competition for workers – how to become an employer of choice.
- **Clients mobility** – more offerings and more competition.
- **Sector may attract large for-profit providers** (as evidenced in aged care and child care). These businesses have the funds to undertake marketing.
- The move from block funded to **individualised person centred approach** and the planning needed for clients will be a cultural change for many organisations and raises risk management issues.
- The threats to **regional services** that rely on block funding.

Re the recent **SACS wages decision**: The Fair Work Act decision was positive and the roll out of the NDIS would see a requirement to double the size of the current workforce. Higher wages may attract more people into this type of work. The roll out will be over 8 years and it is imperative that the government ensures the increases are fully funded. A number of organisations in the Deaf sector are already reliant on fundraising to cover the government shortfall; the perverse outcome will be that the most self-reliant will be the most disadvantaged.

B. Dr Nick Hartland, FAHCSIA

Dr Hartland provided an overview of what is happening in terms of preparations for the roll out of the NDIS. He advised:

COAG has established a select council on disability reform which includes the Disability Ministers and Treasurers. It has met once (and will have met on 9/2/2012). The Productivity Commission (PC) recommendations provide a framework and policy directions.

There is a need to engage with community stakeholders (engage rather than consult) to ensure all the complexities are addressed for launch in 2013.

The NDIS – what does it mean? It will work along insurance principles. It will not be based on how the DSP works, e.g., everyone gets the same payments. Payments will be around individual needs. The NDIS will however not operate in the same way as fault based insurance scheme, the compo framework, or Medicare. It will look across a person's life trajectory. The NDIS is a difficult

concept, transition problem for how we get from here to where we want to be. Moving people into the system may be long and gradual.

Currently there is a review of the assessment process including the tools required to plan funding packages. There has been work on how the gateway may look and interact with the current system; however this is not quite ready to be shared.

The Commonwealth is not assuming that the NDIS will be housed by Centrelink. However, it may need to draw on the resources of existing agencies in remote areas.

PC has recommended it is not appropriate for the NDIS to be means tested.

There will be assessment tools not just one tool/method of assessment.

There are good examples from The Netherlands, whose system looks similar, but the Australian approach will be different. The Minister has not yet made decisions about process and how to roll out the NDIS.

Questions were then asked relating to funding for case managers – for example the Better Start program does not include funding for this role. The response was that there will be a need for case management, including intensive management for people with a history of lifetime dependence as well as facilitator roles.

The assessment process for Better Start was further discussed and it was noted that Auslan needs to be included, and an understanding of how Deaf people communicate. It was agreed that it was important to encourage the engagement of the Deaf community as well as Deaf sector organisations.

It was noted that the NDIS crossed all disabilities.

It was also noted that the tools for functional assessment should ensure that diagnosis occurred only once, and did not require re-assessment. This could be expensive, particularly if it was not covered by the NDIS.

C. Philippa Angley, National Policy Manager, National Disability Services

Philippa discussed the implications of the NDIS for Deaf people and what will be different from past arrangements.

Tier 1: Information about disabilities – could be provided by websites.

Tier 2: Information for those seeking assistance about support services. There will need to be knowledge about assisting/understanding Deaf people's needs. How the quality and standard of providers would be benchmarked had not yet been established. There may need to be monitoring agencies which focus on a quality framework to identify what makes good quality services.

Tier 3: Disability support from the sector. For people with severe and profound disabilities who will need support services and early intervention, including people with mental health issues. Will provide individualised packages based on what is reasonable and necessary for the person.

Some key points were:

- NDIS was not established to cost shift for other services. For example Employment Assistance Fund would remain under employment. However, it may be possible to utilise NDIS funding to cover the costs of interpreters once the \$6,000 limit had been reached under EAF.

- Disability Employment Services will continue to sit outside the NDIS but supported employment will go into NDIS.
- NDS wants to identify the issues for Deaf and hard of hearing people. NDS wanted to factor in eligibility criteria, assessment, and aged care and interface issues for discussion with the consultative group.
- Under NDIS there will be more opportunities for Deaf people to procure services.

Some inclusions should/could be:

- Funding for Auslan training for parents, siblings etc.
- Funding for interpreters for all situations should be included; i.e. funerals, leisure activities etc.

In **discussions** it was noted that:

- It is important that information be provided in a culturally and linguistically appropriate way for Deaf people as there is a lack of awareness about the NDIS.
- It is important that literacy and language and definitions are clear.
- There is an issue with tier 3 assessments being based on severe/profound disability – this is not always an indicator of need. As an example a person who is profoundly deaf may have excellent social and economic functionality and conversely a person who is only moderately deaf may have low social and economic functionality and need services more than the person who is profoundly deaf. Such functionality can be a result of environmental factors such as family background and education but the PC does not allow for environmental factors to be considered in assessments.
- Different types of support services are needed at different times of life.
- Interface with aged care is a concern. Deaf people have Deaf specific needs after age 65 regardless of whether the onset of deafness occurred before or after this age.
- There is uncertainty about Disability Support Organisations, the scope of the NDIS, the resource allocation system, and the status of advisory roles and service providers. It was envisaged that initially DSOs would be funded to provide information and awareness.
- Disability Support Organisations working with Deaf people need to have a relationship with the Deaf community.
- How will Deaf people know which providers have good quality services? Who will monitor service quality, especially for specialist services such as interpreting? What quality standards will be established and how, by whom?
- Interpreters for education. Will they be provided under the NDIS or as part of the education system? Interpreters are needed not just for classroom activities but for school community events, excursions and so on.
- Important to ensure that Deaf people with other disabilities have their needs met.
- There are a lot of disempowered Deaf people who have a long term reliance on service providers in an environment where there is basically only one service provider. They need additional skills development to help them learn to make their own decisions and manage their money.

- The question was raised about funding for community development and community training to ensure understanding of the NDIS and it was agreed that this would require separate funding. It was important that Deaf people did not miss out on opportunities and the communication roll out about the NDIS should not become an onus on Deaf Societies.
- A watchdog organisation is needed to monitor how things happen. NDS will argue strongly for this.

D. Gordon Duff, Principal Adviser Industry Development, National Disability Services

Gordon discussed implications for service providers.

Key points:

- The concept of personalised services / person centred approaches is about how people can live their lives rather than receive a service. Personalisation / individualised budgets / self directed supports / individualised funding all mean the same thing.
- The service/support provision pathway will be very different. Instead of being linear with the Deaf person as the end user, it will be circular and many directional with the person at the centre.
- From experience, people will decide whether they go a new way or not.
- Brokers or Disability Support Organisations will serve all tiers.
- Implications for service providers include:
 - The importance of intermediaries;
 - Consumer preferences will need to be catered for;
 - Positioning will be important;
 - Infrastructure and costs;
 - Culture and readiness.
- There may be some unintended consequences:
 - Workforce regression – casualisation and de-professionalism;
 - Service system viability – reliable evidence on cost implications and potential efficiency savings is not yet available; higher transaction costs can be offset by other efficiency gains;
 - Advantages and disadvantages for families and carers – commodification of family relationships and natural supports.
- There are significant threats and opportunities for service providers.
- There needs to be a transformation of the business model and a whole of organisation approach.
- Services remain a key to reform – there can be no realisation of rights without appropriate, timely, responsive services and supports.

Discussion highlighted the following issues:

- There are a lot of disempowered Deaf people – they need to be empowered to take their place in the new NDIS model.
- Important for the sector to be working quite closely together.
- Need to build on strengths and collaborate.

E. Barbel Winter, Business Development - Self Managed Programs, Ability Options

Barbel spoke on the practical challenges of rolling out self-managed funding packages with a person-centred approach, based on her experiences at Ability Options.

Ability Options have found that almost anything will fit into a self-managed model.

Clients chose options differently. Younger families chose non-segregated environments. There is a class difference on what people spend on and how services are used: poor/isolated clients choose what the middle class take for granted. Middle class clients are more likely to choose options such as snow boarding, arts programs and some one-on-one activities; poorer clients choose things like gym, cooking classes, and are more inclined to be in group classes or activities to make the funding go further.

When clients first transition to the self-funding option they often have a limited vision of their choices or are stuck in a world of not expecting much. Over time, clients learn to use packages effectively and increase their expectations.

There is mostly a casual workforce at Ability Options. Staff are not certified, often staff are chosen by the client. Clients spend an average of 60-80% on community inclusion staff for activities or therapies. When required, Ability Options provide qualified interpreters and community support.

Risk is an issue and Ability Options focus on not only risk but more importantly safety issues. Sometimes Ability Options have said no to activities or trainers/carers. Some relationships they don't want because of safety and risk.

The packages assisted people to connect with community/friends/family. People really become customers and more engaged; and organisations become more accountable.

Culture, staff, IT and financial systems, quality, risk and safety will all look different. Service providers need to rethink how these things are done.

Barbel commented that for Deaf sector services, their strength is a tight knit community. People will still come to established providers as they traditionally have.

There was no significant discussion following Barbel's presentation, but Deaf Australia notes the following points are significant for our sector:

- Almost anything will fit into a self-managed model.
- When clients first transition to the self-funding option they often have a limited vision of their choices or are stuck in a world of not expecting much. Over time, clients learn to use packages effectively and increase their expectations.
- Clients spend an average of 60-80% on community inclusion staff for activities or therapies.
- The packages assisted people to connect with community/friends/family. People really become customers and more engaged; and organisations become more accountable.
- Culture, staff, IT and financial systems, quality, risk and safety will all look different. Service providers need to rethink how these things are done.
- For Deaf sector services, their strength is a tight knit community. People will still come to established providers as they traditionally have.

F. Forum summary and wrap up

General **discussion** identified the following issues as being of importance to consider and monitor:

1. Eligibility;
2. Assessment;
3. Early Intervention;
4. Service types;
5. Interfaces between sectors;
6. Language and definition;
7. Education;
8. Interface with aged care;
9. Communications and Pathways;
10. Watchdog re quality.

Discussion also brought out the following points:

- The Deaf sector needs to think about what our aims are for the Deaf community and work out how we can work together to achieve this.
- What form would DSOs take for the Deaf sector? Would it be one national organisation? Several? Should / could DSOs provide brokerage?
- What might regional models look like given that numbers in the regions are small?
- There needs to be ongoing dialogue between service providers, parents and Deaf people.
- There need to be information sessions about the NDIS, especially for Deaf people, as awareness about it is low.
- Launch sites – the sector needs to collaborate to ensure inclusion of Deaf involvement in launch sites.
- Need to work on creating more interpreters.
- NDS will provide information about research and engagement opportunities as well as advertising launch sites once these were confirmed.
- Members of the Deaf Community are encouraged to make proposals to assist in designing research and feedback on the NDIS.
- Deaf sector needs to collaborate to find information from Deaf people to feed into NDIS to ensure their views and positions are understood.
- Deaf sector organisations should focus on reviewing and preparing capacity building requirements.

NDS offered to compile information through the *Progress for Providers* package for the Deaf sector – this would involve organisations completing *the Progress for Providers* tool which covers key areas of change and development and helps form a picture of an organisation's progress in responding to person-centred approaches. These can then be formed in a sector wide analysis.

4. Post-forum

Following the forum a number of informal discussions were held with many of the participants. It is clear that the forum was an important and valuable step in raising awareness in the sector.

However, the forum targeted only a small number of people and even among these participants there is still a great deal of uncertainty about what to expect and how to prepare for the changes and it is clear that Deaf people's knowledge about the NDIS is low.

In discussions with NDS it was agreed that a follow up forum should be offered in, say, six months' time when more should be known about government's plans for the NDIS.

The Deaf sector has traditionally been dominated by a small number of well-established service providers, generally one in each state, providing an all-purpose model for a community that has a small number of reasonably well educated and high achieving Deaf people and a large number of disempowered, poorly educated people overly dependent on welfare model services.

There is a perception that not much will change for the Deaf sector unless Deaf people themselves drive this change. Barbel Winter's comment that the tight knit nature of the Deaf community is a strength for the sector is made from a service provider's perspective.

For Deaf people, continuing to go to the traditional providers can be both a strength and a barrier to self-determination. These providers have a very good in-depth understanding of the needs of Deaf people and a strong ability to communicate effectively with them. Deaf people feel culturally safe with these providers. However, their traditional service models have also led to over-dependence and disempowerment for many Deaf people.

Having Deaf people continue to look to these traditional providers for all their services will mean there is little or no incentive for providers to make significant changes in the types of services they provide and how they provide them unless we can find ways to develop Deaf people's ability to be informed and make their own decisions and in this way bring market forces to bear on service providers, thus driving the changes that are needed in service provision.

It is therefore imperative that there be a focus on capacity building for Deaf people themselves and this capacity building needs to include:

- Raising awareness of the NDIS, what it means and its impacts. This includes fostering Deaf people's awareness of the possibilities that an NDIS offers them, and what type of services would most benefit them, as distinct from what type of services are currently offered.
- Creating resources to develop Deaf people's ability to research their own needs and take control of their own lives / decision making.

5. Summary of current issues for the Deaf sector in relation to the NDIS

If the UN CRPD rights referred to at the beginning of this document are to be met for Deaf people in the implementation of the NDIS, then some things need to happen between now and when the NDIS begins to roll out.

Capacity building for Deaf people

- It is important that information be provided in a culturally and linguistically appropriate way for Deaf people as there is a lack of awareness about the NDIS.
- Deaf people who have been disempowered by poor education, poor access to information and a long term reliance on welfare services in an environment where there is basically only one service provider need skills development to help them learn to make their own decisions and manage their money. Disability Support Organisations will provide this type of support for those who most need it, but many people, given the right empowerment training, have the capacity to become independent of DSO support, and developing this independence should begin now. There is a danger that leaving this capacity building to the DSO function alone will entrench

current disempowerment and merely shift it sideways to a different service type i.e. from welfare dependence to dependence on the DSO.

- Lessons need to be learned from the Ability Options' experience with clients who have a limited vision of their choices or are stuck in a world of not expecting much when they first transition to the self-funding option, learning over time to use packages effectively and increase their expectations. Deaf Australia expects that this journey will be similar for Deaf people but sees no reason why it should take so long. Resources need to be developed for Deaf people to begin now on this journey from low expectations to higher life expectations and self-management.
- Engagement with the Deaf sector in the development of the NDIS infrastructure is not happening. Members of the Deaf Community need to be encouraged and enabled to make proposals to assist in designing the foundations, research and feedback on the NDIS. However, for this engagement to happen, capacity building needs to happen first.
- Capacity building for Deaf people needs to include:
 - Raising awareness of the NDIS, what it means and its impacts. This includes fostering Deaf people's awareness of the possibilities that an NDIS offers them, and what type of services would most benefit them, as distinct from what type of services are currently offered.
 - Creating resources to develop Deaf people's ability to research their own needs and take control of their own lives / decision making.
- Capacity building needs to be properly funded, separately from other service provision. Leaving it unfunded will mean that Deaf people will go to their current service providers – i.e. the Deaf Societies – for information about the NDIS, further entrenching welfare dependence and traditional service models and inappropriately and unfairly placing the onus for community awareness-raising onto the service providers.

Eligibility and assessment

- There is an issue with tier 3 assessments being based on severe/profound disability. Degree of deafness is not always an indicator of need. People who use Auslan include those who are moderately deaf, not only severely and profoundly deaf. Social and economic functionality can be a result of environmental factors such as family background, education and language fluency but the PC does not allow for environmental factors to be considered in assessments. Government needs to take this into account in the development of eligibility and assessment tools.
- The interface with aged care is a concern and needs to be considered in eligibility and assessment tools. Deaf people have deaf specific needs after age 65 regardless of whether the onset of deafness occurred before or after this age.

Identifying the types of services and supports Deaf people need

- Services that are currently available do not necessarily give a full picture of what services and supports Deaf people actually need. What is available now is generally based on what is funded and this is not necessarily a reliable indicator for what could or should be available: many Deaf and hard of hearing people are not currently receiving the support they need because the services are not there.
- Different types of support services are needed at different times of life.
- As identified under Capacity building above, resources need to be created to develop Deaf people's ability to research their own needs and take control of their own lives / decision making. This will enable them to communicate to service providers about the types of services and supports they need. In this way Deaf people themselves will be able to drive change rather than continue to be passive recipients of services that providers decide to make available.

- It is important to ensure that Deaf people with other disabilities have their needs met.

Disability Support Organisations

- The role of Disability Support Organisations and their relationship with service providers needs to be clarified.
- It is understood that according to the Productivity Commission report service organisations and Disability Support Organisations are to be separate. Deaf Australia supports this separation of roles.
- However, it will be important that organisations that take on the DSO role have the ability to communicate effectively with and understand the specific needs of Deaf people. Experience has shown that cross disability organisations do not usually have this ability. There is concern that because of the specialised skills required to work with Deaf people and the relatively small size of the Deaf community, the DSO role and the service provider role will be merged in the same organisations, thus effectively entrenching traditional models of service provision. Government needs to be aware of this and work with the sector to ensure that the intention of the DSO model is realised for Deaf people.
- Again because of the small size of the Deaf community, there is uncertainty about the form that DSOs would take for the Deaf sector. Would it be one national organisation or several? Further discussion needs to occur on this issue.

Quality assurance and monitoring

- Currently Deaf people generally go to the same service provider in their state for most if not all their service needs. Many tend to passively accept the service they are offered and not make judgements about its suitability or quality. Under the NDIS they will need to learn how to judge which providers have good quality services and how to be assertive about expecting good quality. This needs to be included in capacity building activities.
- There is also the question of who will monitor service quality, especially for specialist services such as interpreting. Quality standards need to be established. There is of course the question of how these standards should be established and by whom. There needs to be discussion about this.
- A watchdog organisation is needed to monitor how things happen.

Education

- Deaf people need interpreters at all levels of education. While the post-school education system generally does provide interpreting services, the quality and availability of interpreters at the school level is poor. There needs to be more certainty about whether interpreting will be provided under the NDIS or as part of the education system.
- Interpreters are needed not just for classroom activities but for school community events, excursions and so on.

Making services NDIS ready

- For service providers, culture, staff, IT and financial systems, quality, risk and safety will all look different under the NDIS. Service providers need to rethink how these things are done and they need to be encouraged and assisted to begin this activity now.
- The numbers of Deaf people in regional areas are small. Service providers need to be assisted to envision what regional models of service provision will look like.
- Work needs to be done on increasing the numbers of qualified interpreters. This is a complex issue and there needs to be a plan for it. Can government assist to develop this plan?

Sector collaboration

- It is important for the deaf sector to be working closely together, to build on strengths and prepare for the NDIS. There needs to be ongoing dialogue between service providers, parents and Deaf people to ensure:
 - the inclusion of Deaf involvement in launch sites;
 - information from Deaf people is fed into the development of the NDIS infrastructure and policies to ensure their needs are understood and included.
- The sector also needs to collaborate to ensure that there are information sessions about the NDIS for the sector, especially for Deaf people, as awareness about it is low.

It is clear that much more work needs to be done to prepare the Deaf sector for the NDIS.

Deaf Australia believes that capacity building for Deaf people is an absolute and urgent priority to ensure they are able to engage in the development of the NDIS, are informed and empowered to make their own decisions and provide real market influence on service provision, and thereby take their rightful place in a new disability support system.

New ways and new resources for building this capacity need to be developed but Deaf Australia does not currently have the resources to do this work. Neither does anyone else in the sector. It is not appropriate to leave this work to service providers, although working in collaboration with service providers and parents/carers is important. It is imperative that Government allocates resources specifically for this capacity building as a matter of urgency.

5. Recommendations to Government

Deaf Australia recommends that:

Capacity building for Deaf people

- When Government makes information about the NDIS publicly available, it should also provide it in a culturally and linguistically appropriate way for Deaf people – i.e. in Auslan.
- Programs to empower Deaf people and raise their expectations through skills development for independence and self-determination need to be funded now, before the NDIS begins to roll out. These programs should at least begin at launch sites as soon as these sites are announced.
- Government needs to ensure that the Deaf sector is appropriately included in community engagement activities.
- Capacity building needs to be properly funded, separately from other service provision and advocacy activities.

Eligibility and assessment

- In the development of eligibility and assessment frameworks, proper account must be taken of the need to include the impact of some environmental factors such as education, language fluency and communication access. All deaf people who use Auslan (not only those who are severely or profoundly deaf) need to be eligible for tier 3 services.
- The interface with aged care should be considered in the development of eligibility and assessment tools.

Identifying the types of services and supports Deaf people need

- Government needs to ensure that service packages are not limited to currently available services but are flexible enough to include new service types; and that they take account of the needs of deaf people with other disabilities and different support needs at different life stages.

Disability Support Organisations

- The role of Disability Support Organisations and their relationship with service providers needs to be clarified. In clarifying it, Government needs to ensure that the DSO model caters for the specific language and communication needs and the small size of the Deaf community.

Quality assurance and monitoring

- Government needs to work with the sector to ensure that service quality standards accommodate specialist services such as interpreting where the professional frequently works with the client alone and unsupervised; and that a monitoring system / watchdog organisation is established.

Education

- Clarity is needed on whether interpreting for Deaf students in schools, including for non-classroom based school events, will be provided under the NDIS or as part of the education system.

Making services NDIS ready

- Providers of specialist Deaf services need to be encouraged and assisted to become NDIS ready, including preparing new models for servicing regional areas.
- Government needs to work with the sector to expand the qualified interpreters workforce.

Sector collaboration

- Government needs to ensure that the Deaf sector is appropriately resourced for collaborative activities that ensure the inclusion of the sector in the development of the NDIS infrastructure.

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Disclaimer: This publication has been prepared by Deaf Australia Inc. for the Australian Government, represented by the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. The views expressed in this publication are those of Deaf Australia Inc. and do not necessarily represent the views of the Australian Government.