

Statement from the Australian Physiotherapy Association on the NDIS Review

27 October 2023

As we await the publication of the findings and recommendations of the NDIS Review, the Australian Physiotherapy Association (APA) renews our support for an effective, equitable, and fully funded National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

More broadly, we advocate for urgent reform of the broader ecosystem of supports and services so that all people with disability can access the physiotherapy treatments and supports they need, when and where they need them.

Background

Over the last year, the APA has contributed to the NDIS Review to advocate for greater access to physiotherapy supports for NDIS participants. We promoted the value of physiotherapy supports and what they bring to people with disability of all ages to maintain or increase function and mobility, and ultimately social and economic participation and inclusion.

We agree with the initial findings of the Review, and what is widely known; that the NDIS needs to be seen in the broader context of the needs of all people with disability. Publicly funded access to physiotherapy supports remains largely non-existent outside of the NDIS, and many people with disability are missing out.

With long-term sustainability of the Scheme being a central concern for governments, the hurtful rhetoric around price gouging has proliferated, unfairly and disproportionately targeting allied health professionals.

It is important to restate that there are reasons why fees may differ between NDIS fees and private billing fees, however, the APA is firm in its stance on NDIS billing – that we support the Government's approach to ensuring that NDIS dollars are properly spent and accounted for, and that NDIS participants are never ripped off by anyone. The APA's position is clear: we have no tolerance for unnecessary overcharging.

At the same time, it is critically important that fees keep up with the actual cost of providing supports, and the APA has been advocating for an indexation of NDIS pricing limits to CPI.

The NDIS Review Panel has already communicated about some of the recommendations they intend to include in their final report to disability ministers at the end of October 2023. If accepted by the federal and state governments, these indicate that some major reforms can be expected.

The APA supports reform of the NDIS that go towards restoring the Scheme so it delivers on its original intent.

Recommendations

Throughout the Review process, the APA has made a number of recommendations, including:

Pricing

The APA recommended that the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA):

- Indexes Therapy supports pricing limits to CPI;
- Works with the APA to develop information and guidelines about best practice physiotherapy supports that help participants achieve their goals;
- Works with the APA and participants on developing outcome measurements for physiotherapy supports; and
- Works with the APA to look at meaningful indicators of quality physiotherapy supports.

The APA recommended that the NDIS Review:

- Conduct or commission an independent review of the actual costs of delivering physiotherapy supports in the NDIS;
- Conduct or commission a fee comparison like-for-like, taking into consideration the specificities of delivering supports in the NDIS compared with delivering supports in State Schemes or to deliver treatment to private patients.

Quality and Safety

The APA recommended that:

- Ahpra registration of physiotherapists and the quality and safety it already provides is recognised in the context of the provision of NDIS supports to avoid duplication of checks and processes;
- Regulation across the care sectors is aligned to avoid duplication; and
- Regulation processes are accessible, affordable, and geared towards improving quality and safety.

Access and planning

The APA recommended that the NDIA:

- Ensure the eligibility and planning workforce is skilled, qualified in disability, function, and when possible has lived experience; and
- Trust the expertise of physiotherapists and accept their recommendations.

Ecosystem of supports

The APA recommended that governments – local, state and federal:

- Ensure national coordination across all sectors to ensure accessibility and inclusion: housing (and building standards), education, health, social services, care, transport, etc.; and
- Ensure consistency of access and accessibility (to the highest standard) and availability of supports across states and within states.

Access to publicly funded physiotherapy:

The APA recommends that:

- Physiotherapists are embedded in schools to provide therapy supports based on physical goals to improve inclusion, participation, and interaction with peers; and
- Access to physiotherapy (including group sessions) is funded in primary care beyond the very limited MBS items that exist for chronic conditions.

Conclusion

The APA is committed to contributing to better outcomes for people with disability thanks to physiotherapy. The NDIS Review panel has indicated that a lot of design and implementation work will need to be undertaken to finalise exactly how the recommendations will work in practice. We are looking forward to working with the government and the NDIA to build together the future NDIS.

APA's written submissions to the NDIS Review are available at <https://australian.physio/advocacy/submission-and-statements>