



Consultation on NDIS access changes



Executive summary

The Department of Health, Disability and Ageing is seeking your feedback on the proposed reforms to improve access and eligibility to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

The NDIS was established to provide supports to people with permanent and significant disability. As the Scheme has matured, concerns have emerged about the consistency, transparency and fairness of current access and eligibility arrangements. The 2023 Independent Review into the NDIS (the NDIS Review) found that access arrangements are complex to navigate and lead to inconsistent and inequitable access decisions. It also found that access processes rely too heavily on diagnosis, rather than a consistent assessment of the impact a person's impairment has on their functional capacity.

The long-term sustainability of the NDIS is at risk, so the Australian Government is progressing reforms to ensure the NDIS continues to support current and future generations of Australians with disability.

The Government is strengthening the approach to access to the NDIS to improve the consistency, transparency and fairness of access decisions. The reforms will support a clearer, more objective and evidence-based approach to determining access. It will make the application process easier to understand and navigate for people with disability, their families and carers.

A [Technical Advisory Group \(TAG\)](#) on NDIS Functional Capacity was established in July 2026 by Commonwealth, state and territories governments. The TAG will provide expert, independent, evidence-based advice to the Disability Reform Ministerial Council (DRMC) to support access reforms. The TAG will help develop robust and consistent NDIS access decision-making processes and standardised evidence requirements for assessing substantially reduced functional capacity. It will look at different assessment approaches, tools and thresholds and how these can best support decisions around who can access the NDIS. This will lead to fairer, more consistent access decisions and less burden on prospective and current participants and their families.

The views of people with disability, families and carers, disability representatives and the broader sector will play a critical role in informing this work. We want to hear from:

- people with disability, their families, carers and kin
- disability representative organisations and advocates
- disability service providers
- health professionals and disability support workers.

Your feedback will help shape the design and delivery of the proposed reforms to NDIS access and eligibility. Questions for consultation are under the Consultation questions section found on page 7 of the consultation paper.

This consultation is the first opportunity for the disability community and broader sector to provide feedback on the proposed approach to NDIS access reforms. Feedback received through this process will help inform the next stages of policy design, alongside expert advice from the TAG. The department will seek further feedback from the disability community as the reforms are developed. There will be a number of ways to provide input so all people with disability, families, carers and other stakeholders can be included.

What we are doing

Reform context

As part of the 2026–27 Budget, the Government announced a package of reforms to the NDIS, including the introduction of clearer eligibility requirements. These reforms will secure the Scheme's long-term sustainability, protecting the NDIS for people with permanent and significant disability and for future generations who will rely on it.

NDIS access reforms include:

- Reinforcing boundaries between the NDIS and mainstream services, including Thriving Kids and future phases of Foundational Supports
- More consistently assessing if the NDIS is the appropriate system of support and if treatment can reduce the impairment in relation to permanence
- Introducing a standardised, evidence-based assessment of a person's functional capacity to determine access to the NDIS
- Removing diagnosis lists as the means of entry to the NDIS.

Changes to access are being implemented alongside broader disability reform initiatives. In January 2026, National Cabinet agreed to jointly invest in supports outside the NDIS, known as 'Foundational Supports'. As a first step, governments agreed to contribute \$4 billion over 5 years to implement the first phase of Foundational Supports, known as 'Thriving Kids'. This investment will support children aged 8 and under with developmental delay and/or autism with low to moderate support needs, and their families, carers and kin. Thriving Kids will commence from October 2026, reaching full rollout by January 2028. The TAG will not advise on access thresholds for Thriving Kids.

On 19 August 2026, the the National Disability Insurance Scheme Amendment (the Bill) passed by Parliament, giving effect to some of the changes announced in the 2026–27 Budget. Access measures are outlined in Schedule 1 of the Bill including:

- A new definition of functional capacity (Part 1)
- Clarifying the definition of permanence of impairment (Part 8)
- Clarifying eligibility based on access to other services (Part 9)

Access reforms will be implemented from 1 January 2028, with current NDIS participants reassessed over a 3-year transition period. Further detail on the Bill may be found on: [NDIS Amendment \(Securing the NDIS for Future Generations\) Bill 2026 - fact sheet](#).

What is being proposed

The current access process relies heavily on a person's diagnosis and the type of evidence they can provide. Currently some people are found eligible because they have a diagnosis which is on an access list. Other people who experience similar functional impacts need to provide more detailed evidence to show how their disability affects their everyday life. This means some people with certain diagnoses can more easily access the NDIS than others with similar needs. This process is difficult to understand and often leads to inconsistent and unfair outcomes.

From 1 January 2028, this will change. Access to the NDIS will no longer rely mainly on a person's diagnosis. Instead, eligibility for the NDIS disability requirements will be based on a standardised, evidence-based assessment of a person's functional capacity and how it impacts their day-to-day living.

The access lists that currently determine eligibility based on diagnosis will be replaced by a fairer, more transparent and objective access decision-making process. People applying to the NDIS will complete a functional capacity assessment as part of demonstrating their eligibility for the Scheme. The TAG will provide advice to help develop those standardised evidence requirements.

There will also be clearer guidance about the evidence needed to support access decisions. This includes guidance about how to assess whether an impairment is permanent, or likely to be permanent, and how treatment, intervention and rehabilitation should be considered when determining eligibility to the NDIS.

Together, these changes aim to ensure the NDIS remains focused on people with permanent or likely permanent and significant disability. It aims to support clearer, more transparent and evidence-based approaches to decision-making.

The new access decision-making process will be person-centred and based on functional capacity rather than diagnosis. It will be informed by evidence, clinical expertise and lived experience, including the experiences of people with disability, families and carers.

Any changes will be consistent with the objects and principles of the Bill including Australia's human rights obligations. The process will be equitable, accessible and proportionate, including for people with episodic, degenerative and fluctuating disability, while avoiding administrative burden and duplication between systems for people with disability, families, and carers.

Access changes will be informed by expert advice from the TAG and consultation with the disability community.

Draft guiding principles for the future NDIS access decision-making process

The department has developed a set of draft guiding principles to help shape the future access decision-making process.

The guiding principles set the overarching values and objectives that could underpin and guide the design, implementation and ongoing refinement of a new access decision-making process.

These principles are provided for consultation and community feedback and do not represent final government policy. Feedback from people with disability, families, carers, service

providers, advocates and the broader community will help inform their further development.

1. Aligned to the NDIS Act and the human rights of people with disability

The access decision-making process should be consistent with the objects and principles of the NDIS Act and uphold Australia's human rights obligations, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. It should promote the rights, dignity, autonomy and inclusion of people with disability in decisions that affect them.

2. Informed by lived experience, including people with disability, families and carers

The design, implementation and ongoing refinement of the access decision-making process should be informed by the expertise and lived experience of people with disability, families and carers. It should reflect the diversity of disability experiences, backgrounds and life circumstances and support processes that are practical, trusted and responsive to community needs.

3. Evidence-based and consistent

The access decision-making process should be informed by contemporary evidence and supported by methods that are reliable, valid, equitable and capable of consistent application across diverse disability cohorts. It should provide a standardised and nationally consistent approach to assessing eligibility criteria, including functional capacity and substantially reduced functional capacity, to support fair, transparent and equitable decision-making.

4. Person-centred and strengths-based

People with disability should be at the centre of the access experience. The process should be respectful, inclusive and focused on understanding the functional impact of disability while recognising strengths, capabilities and individual circumstances. It should minimise burden, avoid unnecessary repetition, and support meaningful participation by people with disability and, where appropriate, their families, carers, kin, advocates and supporters.

5. Equitable, inclusive and safe

The access decision-making process should be equitable, inclusive and non-discriminatory. It should deliver consistent outcomes regardless of disability type, age, gender, cultural background, geographic location or other personal characteristics. It should embed cultural safety, psychological safety and trauma-informed practice, and work effectively for people whose disability may be complex, fluctuating, episodic or not immediately visible.

6. Transparent, proportionate and accessible

The access decision-making process should be clear, easy to understand and accessible. People should be able to easily understand what information is required, how evidence is considered and how decisions are made. It should minimise administrative burden, avoid duplication, provide appropriate adjustments and supports, and be accessible to people across a range of geographic, cultural and communication contexts.

7. Continuous quality improvement

The access decision-making process should be subject to ongoing monitoring, evaluation and continuous improvement to ensure it remains accurate, consistent, equitable and evidence-based. Data, stakeholder feedback and implementation experience should be used to strengthen assessment approaches, workforce capability and decision-making quality over time.

Why we are making these changes

The NDIS plays a critical role in supporting people with permanent and significant disability. However, participant numbers and the cost have grown much faster than originally projected. The NDIS is now one of the Government's largest programs and one of the fastest-growing areas of government spending. Without change, the long-term sustainability of the NDIS is at risk.

This was acknowledged at National Cabinet in January 2026, where all governments agreed to limit annual increases in NDIS costs to more sustainable levels – of 5 to 6 per cent or lower. These NDIS reforms are needed now to secure the NDIS for future generations of people with disability.

The Government wants to make sure people are connected to the supports that best meet their needs, whether that is the NDIS, mainstream services, Foundational Supports or community supports.

The NDIS Review identified significant concerns with the current access pathway. Participants, families and stakeholders reported that access processes can be complex, inconsistent and difficult to navigate. The NDIS Review found that eligibility decisions can be influenced by a person's diagnosis, access to supporting evidence and ability to navigate the system, rather than a consistent assessment of functional capacity and support needs.

The NDIS Review also identified uncertainty and inconsistency in the interpretation and application of key access criteria, including permanence and substantially reduced functional capacity. It recommended a more transparent and robust approach to access based on the assessment of functional capacity to support fairer, more consistent access outcomes.

These reforms are intended to provide greater clarity, consistency and fairness in access decisions, while ensuring the NDIS remains focused on people with permanent and significant disability who require ongoing disability-specific supports.

Have your say

Purpose of this consultation

This consultation focuses specifically on access to the NDIS.

We want your feedback on how a new access process could support the Government's commitment to ensuring the NDIS remains focused on people with permanent and significant disability. We want to make sure the NDIS is available for those who need it most, now and into the future.

This is an initial consultation to inform the foundations of a future access decision-making process, including principles and design considerations that should guide access reforms. We are not yet consulting on all of the details. We recognise that further engagement is needed to understand your views on final eligibility thresholds, transition arrangements or implementation processes. There will be more opportunities to provide feedback as reform work progresses.

Your feedback will inform the design and development of a clearer, more transparent and evidence-based approach to NDIS access decision-making including:

- the introduction of an objective assessment of functional capacity
- how permanence of impairment and appropriate treatment should be considered when determining eligibility for the NDIS, alongside assessment of substantially reduced functional capacity
- how access processes can better determine whether the NDIS is the most appropriate system of support for a person and, where appropriate, support people to connect with other available services and supports
- Options to streamline access processes and evidence to reduce burden on people with disability and their families and carers and ensure a good experience.

We welcome feedback that is inclusive of the perspectives of people with lived experience of disability, First Nations communities, culturally and linguistically diverse people and those living in rural and remote communities.

Feedback from this consultation will support the TAG's consideration of access reform design, ensuring its advice to governments is informed by and reflects the lived experience of people with disability, their families and carers.

Consultation questions

Guiding Principles

1. Do the draft guiding principles provide the right foundation for a future NDIS access process?
2. Should any principles be added, removed or changed?

Access decision-making process design

3. What do we need to consider when designing an access decision-making process that is fair, consistent, transparent, disability-informed and evidence-based?
4. How could the access decision-making process, including referral pathways, be designed to reduce administrative burden and make it easier and more equitable for people with disability, their families and carers to understand what information is needed and how decisions are made? How could this support a proportionate approach to minimise the assessment burden on persons who are clearly eligible with very significant functional impairment?
5. What should be considered to ensure the access decision-making process, as well as referral pathways, works well for all disability cohorts including people with communication, cultural, cognitive, degenerative, fluctuating, episodic or complex support needs?

Evidence requirements

6. What factors and evidence should be considered when determining whether an impairment is permanent or likely permanent, including whether appropriate treatment is likely to improve the functional impact of an impairment?

How to get involved

You can get involved by.

- making a submission
- submitting a video (including in Auslan)
- responding by email.
- asking us to call you.

Submissions for this consultation are open from 31 August 2026 to 02 October 2026.

Questions?

Email: NDISAccessConsultation@health.gov.au

Write to:

NDIS Access Branch

Department of Health, Disability and Ageing

GPO Box 9848

Glossary

Term	Definition
Access reforms	Changes to NDIS access and eligibility arrangements announced as part of the 2026–27 Budget.
Access decision making process	The end-to-end process for determining whether a person meets the eligibility requirements to access the NDIS. This includes applying, gathering and considering evidence, assessing relevant access criteria and making an access decision.
Functional capacity	A person's ability to undertake an activity in a standardised environment, designed to minimise the impact of environmental and personal circumstances. Capacity seeks to understand what a person can do under consistent conditions. *Note: Updated following the passage of the NDIS Amendment (Securing the NDIS for Future Generations) Bill 2026.
Foundational Supports	Supports available outside the NDIS that are intended to assist people with disability, developmental delay, their families and carers.
Impairment	A loss of, or reduction in, physical, intellectual, cognitive, neurological, sensory or psychosocial function
Mainstream services	Services provided through other government systems that are available to all Australians, including health, mental health, education, housing, employment and community services.
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme.
Permanent impairment	A loss of, or damage to, a person's body function, body structure, or mental functioning that is likely to be lifelong and is unlikely to be substantially remedied by available and appropriate treatment.
Substantially Reduced Functional Capacity	A term used in the NDIS Act to describe the level of functional impact required to meet disability access requirements.
TAG	Technical Advisory Group on NDIS Functional Capacity. An independent expert group established by the Australian Government, and states and territories governments to provide advice on NDIS access reforms.

Thriving Kids	The first phase of Foundational Supports, designed to support children aged 8 years and under with developmental delay and/or autism who have low to moderate support needs.
---------------	--