

The NDIS for Women with Disabilities

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is the new support scheme for Australians with a disability. This fact sheet is to help you, as a woman with a disability, better understand the NDIS to get the most out of it.

The NDIS offers a real opportunity for women to have more choice and control over the way they live and the services they use. It can support you to participate in the community and the workforce.

We hope this fact sheet helps you to get an NDIS Plan that meets your needs now and in the future. It can also help you know what to look for in a quality, woman-sensitive service and where to go if you are not eligible for a funding package.

About the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)

The NDIS is run by the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA). The NDIS supports people with a 'permanent and significant disability'. To be eligible for an NDIS funding package you must have a disability that:

- is likely to be with you all your life
- makes it hard for you to do everyday activities without some kind of support.

People eligible for an NDIS funding package are called "participants".

Choice and control

The NDIS is based on the idea that people with a disability should be able to choose how they live their life, and they should have access to the support they need because of their disability, to lead the life they want.

As an NDIS participant you have the right to decide:

- What you want to do in your life – what your goals are. This might include goals about your education and employment, health and wellbeing and being active in your community
- What support you need for everyday activities to meet your goals
- How your support is provided to you and who provides it.

The NDIS was tried out in several regions in Australia from 2013–2015. The NDIA is now rolling out the new scheme in other parts of Australia. All regions will have the NDIS by the end of 2019.

In Victoria some regions already have the NDIS. Find out when your region will get the NDIS: <https://www.ndis.gov.au/about-us/our-sites/VIC.html>

Are you eligible?

To be eligible to be a participant in Victoria you need to:

- Have a permanent and significant disability that affects you taking part in everyday activities
- Be aged less than 65 when you first access the scheme
- Be an Australian citizen, a permanent resident, or a New Zealand citizen who holds a Protected Special Category Visa
- Until the rollout is completed you will also have to check if you are living in a region where the NDIS is available on this link: <https://www.ndis.gov.au/about-us/our-sites/VIC.html>

You can check whether you meet the NDIS access requirements at

<http://www.ndis.gov.au/ndis-access-checklist>

If you already get support through the Victorian government disability program, you will get a letter then a phone call from the NDIS when it is time to move across to the NDIS. Your existing supports and services will continue until you move across.

If you do not currently get disability supports and the NDIS is available in your area you can apply by calling the NDIS.

You can apply to enter the NDIS six months before the Scheme comes to your area.

To find your local office, phone 1800 800 110 or email: enquiries@NDIS.gov.au or check this link: <https://www.ndis.gov.au/about-us/locations.html#vic>

Do I need an NDIS assessment?

To access the NDIS, you may need to provide information on what your disability is, how long it will last and its impact on your life. If you already get supports through the Victorian government disability program, this may not be needed.

More information on access requirements can be found on the NDIS website: <https://www.ndis.gov.au/participants/accessNDIS.html>

Planning and making the NDIS work for you

Once you have been assessed as eligible an NDIS Planner will work with you to develop your Plan. In most cases you will have a face-to-face planning meeting, if that's what you want. A face-to-face meeting could be at your home, at the Planner's office or somewhere else you feel comfortable. You can choose where and how you want to have your meeting. It is important that your Planner listens to you and understands your needs. You can ask to change your Planner at any time by contacting the NDIA.

Your Plan should be flexible and focus on you. It will focus on "reasonable and necessary supports" to meet your goals. This may take more than one meeting.

What will be in your Plan?

Your Plan will include:

- Your goals – what you want to do in your life
- Your current supports – the people and the equipment that help you do things in your life now
- What you want to keep the same
- What you want to do differently
- A monitoring and review timetable to think about any future changes in your needs and circumstances.

Who should you have with you?

You have the right to choose who you want or don't want to be at your planning meeting.

You can meet the Planner on your own or ask someone you trust to be with you. No one can be there without your consent. The NDIS must follow your wishes about this.

If you are under 18 years old, your parent, guardian or representative will need to sign off on your plan before it goes to the NDIS.

“ (It’s good to have someone with you as a backup, they can pick up different pieces of information and keep you on track.”

Issues for women to think about for their Plan

- Do you have particular roles that you need support for? For example, you might be a mother or be caring for elderly parents.
- Are there things you need to have in your plan to make sure you feel safe?
- Are there particular tasks you will need help with as a woman?
- Do you have health tasks that you need support for? For example, help to go to a Breastscreen appointment.
- Will your support workers need to have particular skills or qualities for you to feel safe and comfortable with them?

Accessing Community Services

The NDIS does not generally fund you to use services that are for the whole community. However, they may be able to help with information and referral. If you need help to access community services, talk to the Planner about including this extra support in your plan.

Family Services

Your parenting role needs to be acknowledged in your Plan. You may want access to maternal and child health services, playgroups and childcare.

Supports provided by the NDIS can strengthen your role as a mother. Speak to your Planner about your goals and the support you need to care for your children.

Health Services for Women

You have the right to make decisions about your health care and have access to programs such as sexual health. Your choices can be included in your Plan. If the health program is not accessible you can get help from a Local Area Coordinator (LAC). They can work with that service or find a service that meets your needs. For information about Local Area Coordinators see page 4 of this Fact Sheet.

Family Violence Services

The NDIS should support you to get help if you do not feel safe in your home, in your family or intimate relationship. Things that make you feel unsafe could include emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual assault, controlling behaviour, controlling money or withholding medication or disability equipment or aids.

If any of the above is happening to you, contact someone you trust. There is **more information** about your right to be safe and where to get help in [WDV Fact Sheet 3: Violence against women with disabilities](#).

Managing your Plan and Funding

There are various ways your Plan can be managed:

- Managing your funding yourself. You will be given funds from the NDIS to pay the people and organisations providing the support
- Nominating another person to manage your funding. This is called a ‘Plan nominee’
- Using a registered Plan management provider. Your Planner can help you find one
- Asking the NDIA to manage your funding for you, or
- A combination of any of the above.

Choosing the right service provider

Your Plan lets you choose which service provider you use. It is important to get independent information about service providers as well as the information they give about themselves. You need to carefully look at what the service provides and how it does this. You should have a choice about the workers who support you. It is important to ensure your safety and well-being.

The Checklist at the end of this factsheet has questions you can ask service providers so that you know they provide woman-sensitive services and the sort of workers that you want.

“ Because these people are coming into your house, you need to be comfortable with them. ... The person coming into my personal space also needs to be comfortable. ... If the agency won't facilitate that, then they're probably not the agency you want to be with. ... Ask other people what agencies they go with, or who do they recommend. You just can't discount the value of word of mouth.' (Nicole, *You Can Ask That*, WDV video, 2017)

What if you're not eligible for an NDIS funding package?

Not all women with disabilities will be eligible for an NDIS package. If the NDIA has decided that you are not eligible and you think they are wrong, you can ask the NDIA to review the decision. Advocacy services can help you with this. There is more information about this below.

Local Area Coordinators

Local Area Coordinators (LACs) are organisations that work in the local community to ensure services are accessible and inclusive. They work with people with disabilities whether they get an NDIS funding package or not. Your LAC can link you to local services that meet your needs, for example neighbourhood houses, support groups, health services and local women's groups.

The Local Area Coordinator can link you to important services and community programs for women – make sure they understand your needs.

Making sure the NDIS works for you

It is OK to complain if you are unhappy about the NDIS or your support services. It is your right to change your service or support person if you are not happy with them. <https://www.odsc.vic.gov.au/2017/09/22/ok-complain-ndis-funded-disability-services/>

If you are unhappy with the service you receive you should contact the service provider immediately and ask them to sort out the situation. If you aren't satisfied with the result you should also inform the NDIA.

If you are unhappy with the service you receive from an NDIA worker you can make a complaint by talking to someone at an NDIA office or you can fill in an online complaint form on the NDIS website <http://www.ndis.gov.au/about-us/contact-us/feedback-complaints> or call 1800 800 110.

What if I am still unhappy?

If you disagree with a decision made by the NDIA, you must first ask the Agency to review the decision. You can apply for an internal review at <http://www.ndis.gov.au/participants/reasonable-and-necessary-supports/decision-review> or by ringing 1800 800 110. If you are not happy with the result of the internal review, the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT) can review a range of decisions made by the NDIA, including decisions about who is eligible to access the scheme, supports provided under the scheme and the registration of providers of supports. However, the AAT cannot review a decision until you have had an internal review.

You can get help with the review process from advocates. You can find your local advocacy service here: <https://disabilityadvocacyfinder.dss.gov.au/disability/ndap/>

Your right to be safe

It is important to ensure that the supports you receive are provided in the way you want and keep you safe. This should still allow you to take risks but not expose you to harm, abuse, neglect or exploitation. You have the right to:

- Be listened to
- Be safe and feel safe
- Have accessible information
- Have supports that respect your dignity as a woman and your privacy
- Have supports that do what was agreed to in your Plan
- Choice about who provides the support (e.g. you may want to have a female worker).

“ I live by myself... I need to know that when people come into my house, that myself and my stuff are safe. New providers will all need to be police checked so that we know the kind of people that are coming into our houses.” (Suni, WDV Submission, 2015)

Government is working to set up a system of Quality and Safeguards across Australia by mid-2019. This system will manage complaints and registration of services.

Until then, if you have a complaint about a service provider, the Victorian Disability Services Commissioner can take your complaint or help you find the right place to go. You can check their website: <http://www.odsc.vic.gov.au/> or call them on 1800 677 342.

If you have a complaint about the NDIA, you can contact the Commonwealth Ombudsman: <http://www.ombudsman.gov.au/about/working-with-people-with-disability>

Need to know more about the NDIS?

Visit the NDIS website: <http://www.ndis.gov.au>
Email: <http://www.ndis.gov.au/form/contact-form>
Phone: 1800 800 110

If you have a hearing or speech loss:

- Speak and Listen (National Relay Service): **1800 555 727** ask for **1800 800 110**
- TTY: **1800 555 677** then ask for **1800 800 110**
- If you are a non-English speaker **TIS: 131 450**

Resources are also available from the NDIS website in plain English, and in some community languages. To find out more go to the NDIS website: <http://www.ndis.gov.au/> or the Disability loop website: <https://www.disabilityloop.org.au/>

Many **service providers** are putting on information sessions and planning workshops to help people get ready for the NDIS. They may have information on their websites or give clients printed information. You also need to get **independent information**. Good information is based on evidence about what makes a good service and is free from conflict of interest.

You can also go to information workshops or peer support groups or connect by joining Facebook groups like these:

- [NDIS Grassroots Discussion](#)
- [I LOVE NDIS](#)



The NDIS is still changing as it is being rolled out. WDV will keep you informed and update our fact sheet as the NDIS changes.

Ingrid's Story

Ingrid's story shows that it is important for the NDIS to respect a woman's right to determine how she lives her life and how she maintains equality in her relationships. Ingrid cares for her husband as he cares for her. Ingrid also recognises her right to receive support in her role caring for her mother.

I have cerebral palsy and am an NDIS participant in Geelong. I live with my husband and we have an organic garden. Having organic food is a priority for me. As well as the health, well-being and cultural aspect, it means I can be as sustainable as possible.

In my first Plan with the NDIS I asked that meals be prepared for me and my husband. This was initially rejected, but I persisted with my request as my husband has particular food allergies. I went back to my Planner and discussed it again in terms of my goal as a wife. I wanted to provide my husband with healthy food as he provides so much day to day support for me. This goal was added to my Plan, and I am now having nutritious meals prepared for myself and my husband.

As women we are partners, parents and daughters – we are often charged with the responsibility of providing care and we have the right to have support to provide this care whether it is cooking meals, changing nappies or spending time with our parents.

The NDIS has been really great in ensuring I get equipment when I need it and not have to be on a waiting list for years and having to contribute my own money toward the cost of the equipment. However, I am concerned about the lack of housing options.

Before becoming a NDIS participant I had long term support workers. I was able to continue with these workers, which was important to me as they provide me with enduring care and some companionship too – I am very gregarious.

The simple things like going to the toilet and bathing are becoming more of a challenge and I can see I might need more support hours in the future.

I now have two service providers which offers me more flexibility. I use some community access support to visit my 93 year old mother who lives in an aged care facility in Melbourne. This has allowed me to visit her more often which is important to me and takes the pressure off my husband, who dislikes going to Melbourne.

I am concerned that some services like Traveller's Aid in Melbourne that make the whole community more accessible will not be funded and that this will severely limit the success of the NDIS. I am always speaking out about these things but I am concerned for those women who cannot speak up for themselves. They may not get the support they rightfully deserve.

The most important tip I have for other women accessing the NDIS is to be more assertive and/or get a good advocate.

NDIS Checklist: Get Ready for the NDIS

Tick when completed

Familiarise yourself with the NDIS

Register your interest on the NDIS website www.ndis.gov.au

Go to NDIS information sessions. Find out when the NDIS is coming to your area

Learn the NDIS language

Understand the eligibility criteria

Join a peer support group

Join an advocacy group like Women with Disabilities Victoria

When you receive funding from the NDIS, learn how to use the NDIS portal

Your plan: exercising 'Choice and Control'

What does a good life mean to you? What are your dreams?

What is a realistic goal for now?

Talk to friends or someone independent about your thoughts and ideas

Learn how to write goals that describe what you want and why you want it.
e.g. I want to go to a gym to maintain fitness and mobility to build my independence

Find out what's happening in your community. NDIS Local Area Coordinators can help you connect to the world outside disability services

Your supports and services: making sure they are right for you

Make a list of all the important people in your life and what they do to support you

Are the services and supports you have now what you want for the future?

You are entitled to have services provided in the way you want. Do you have particular cultural and spiritual preferences and/or sexual preferences?

Think about how you want your support and what qualities, skills and qualifications you want your support workers to have

Find out about a few different service providers and their reputation

Ask other people if they would recommend the services they use

Understand your funding – how much it is, what it pays for and how it is managed

Working with your Planner

Meeting somewhere you feel relaxed will help you feel comfortable and help the Planner understand your life

Do you want to have an advocate/supporter with you? Another person you trust can help you to remember and understand all the information

If you are not happy with your Plan make sure you know how you can change it

Ask about how to lodge a complaint and how disputes and complaints are managed

Selecting women-sensitive service providers

What services do they offer?

What is the cost of the services?

Are they experienced in the service you want?

Can services be adapted to suit you?

Do you like the values the service has?

Is the service registered with the NDIS?

Can you be involved in choosing/recruiting your staff if you want?

Can they guarantee female support workers on request?

Have their workers received training on issues that concern women with disabilities?

What other training are staff given?

What checks do they have to ensure that staff are reliable and trustworthy?

How does the service ensure quality of service?

What is their ratio of casual to permanent staff?

How will they protect your safety and wellbeing?

What is their policy on providing safe and respectful intimate care?

What is their policy on how to respond to a woman disclosing abuse?

What is their policy on the use of restraints and seclusion?

What sort of complaints process does the service provider have?

Remember

- Trust yourself and your judgement. If it doesn't feel right it probably isn't.
- You have a right to information that you can understand.
- You have a right to be treated respectfully and as an equal.
- You have a right to an advocate.
- You have a right to expect services will give you the support they agreed to provide.
- You can change service providers if you aren't happy.
- It's important to talk to someone you trust if you are unhappy or feel unsafe.