



# Health professionals, psychosocial disability and the National Disability Insurance Scheme

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The Dietitians Association of Australia is the national association of the dietetic profession with over 6000 members, and branches in each state and territory. DAA is a leader in nutrition and advocates for food and nutrition for healthier people and healthier communities. DAA appreciates the opportunity to respond to the survey on *Health professionals, psychosocial disability and the National Disability Insurance Scheme* by Mental Health Australia.

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The following questions relate specifically to assisting people with psychosocial disability to access the NDIS. They do not relate to planning, plan implementation or plan review.

1. The NDIA describes the role of health professionals in the NDIS access process as follows. Please indicate which of these functions you believe your profession should perform:

- a. “helping patients understand the NDIS, particularly for people who have limited community connections and support outside their GP

Accredited Practising Dietitians who have developed a good rapport with a person with psychosocial disability may be in a position to assist that person to understand the NDIS, including what it may mean for them and how they can access the NDIS. For example, an Accredited Practising Dietitian supporting a young person with mental health problems in health and wellbeing who was living in a nursing home identified that the person might be eligible for the NDIS.

- b. setting expectations for patients about the likelihood of funding, and the responsibilities of the NDIS compared to the health sector

Accredited Practising Dietitians have some role in setting expectations for people with psychosocial disability about the likelihood of funding and the responsibilities of the NDIS compared to the health sector, although dietitians are not able to pre-empt funding decisions made by the NDIA. Dietitians can be most confident in the role of setting expectations when they have significant experience in psychosocial disability, knowledge of the local health sector and knowledge of the NDIS rules.

The Dietitians Association of Australia considers it important to note that the person with psychosocial disability should be supported in the environment that works best for them. The NDIS provides the opportunity for this to be in a person’s home environment. There are a number of reasons why the health sector or alternatives will not provide adequate support for the person with psychosocial disability.

- Many health services do not have the resources to meet NDIS participant needs i.e. health services may not have the number of dietitians or dietitians skilled in supporting people with psychosocial disability.
- People with psychosocial disability with functional impacts on eating, drinking and nutrition are likely to need many consultations with sufficient frequency and duration with an Accredited Practising Dietitian to be effective. For example, the SMILES trial and HELFIMED trials delivered seven or eight services intensively over three months. Consequently, Accredited Practising Dietitians consider that the use of Medicare Chronic Disease Management items to access dietetic

services will rarely meet the complex functional needs of NDIS participants with psychosocial disability, particularly where there are comorbidities such as intellectual disability and mental illness because the Medicare items are too limited in number and duration.

- People with psychosocial disability may not be able to meet the cost personally of consulting an Accredited Practising Dietitian to achieve their goals and aspirations if dietitian services and nutrition support products are not included in their NDIS plan.

c. supporting a patient's NDIS access request by:

- i. completing the supporting evidence section of the Access Request Form

An Accredited Practising Dietitian can assist a person with psychosocial disability by completing the health professional section of the Access Request Form, with details about how the person psychosocial disability impacts on their functional capacity, and health and wellbeing.

An Accredited Practising Dietitian is able to provide evidence and supporting documentation as to how the person's nutrition needs relate directly to their psychosocial disability. This may be in addition to other information provided by other health professionals, such as a psychiatrist or psychologist.

- ii. documenting that they have or are likely to have a permanent disability

Accredited Practising Dietitians are qualified to assess and document functional impairments related to the disability which impact on self-care related to eating and drinking, nutrition or hydration. Dietitians are not qualified to make an assessment about the permanency of the psychosocial disability itself.

- iii. providing copies of reports or assessments relevant to the diagnosis/condition that outline the extent of the functional impact of the disability."

Accredited Practising Dietitians would provide copies of reports or assessments relevant to the diagnosis or condition that outlines the extent of the functional impact of the disability. Providing such documentation is a standard part of dietetic practice (e.g. reports to referrers or other health professionals, as required and with consent) and is a requirement of other funding sources. For example, in the case of psychosocial disability, the Accredited Practising Dietitian would document that decision-making and knowledge to support informed food choices may be impaired or impaired appetite regulation may lead to excess food intake.

The Accredited Practising Dietitian would also document goals of therapy, such as building capacity of the person, family and support

workers related to self-care activities to enable the person to achieve their goals.

2. Please describe other roles you believe your profession should perform in assisting people with psychosocial disability with NDIS access?

The Dietitians Association of Australia and Accredited Practising Dietitians advocate for people with disability to access the NDIS to achieve their goals and aspirations.

- DAA and Accredited Practising Dietitians have a particular role where they perceive people with a disability with functional impairments on eating, drinking and nutrition can achieve their goals in daily living, health and wellbeing with the support of Accredited Practising Dietitian services and nutrition support products.
- Accredited Practising Dietitians work with other disciplines to support people with disability, e.g. occupational therapy for functional decline and muscle strength or speech pathology for swallow and texture modifications. In this case, dietitians may advocate for the person with disability to access other services through the NDIS.

For many people services, such as Accredited Practising Dietitian services, located in the community through the NDIS will be most appropriate. Having an Accredited Practising Dietitian visit the person with disability in their home environment enables the Dietitian to provide the most practical and informed support to the person with disability, their family and their support workers.

3. What barriers do you currently face in assisting people with psychosocial disability to access the NDIS?

Barriers arise from lack of knowledge of NDIA planners that someone with psychosocial disability may be eligible for the NDIS. Planners may refer people with disability to health services or elsewhere because they do not know any different, because of misinformation or they have been instructed by NDIA management to refer to other services. To illustrate this, an Accredited Practising Dietitian in Western Australia reported in May 2018 that a NDIA planner suggested (erroneously) that an NDIS participant with growth faltering, ASD and anxiety diagnoses could be supported by the home economics teacher at school, not the Accredited Practising Dietitian requested by the participant. This is for someone already in the NDIS, but demonstrates the limited knowledge base of NDIA planners.

We are aware that the NDIA may agree that a person has a disability and would be eligible for the NDIS, but they interpret the NDIS legislation saying they are unable to provide a support because they consider another agency responsible for the services or products needed by the person with disability. The local and national mechanisms available to resolve interface issues within a suitable timeframe are inadequate and this presents a barrier to a person gaining access to the NDIS.

We note that there is a high degree of inconsistency in what is deemed eligible for the NDIS and what is not eligible.

There is poor understanding on the part of planners and management in the NDIA of the impacts of psychosocial disability on the functional impact on health and wellbeing, and specifically on a person's capacity in self-care related to eating, drinking and nutrition. Furthermore, NDIA planners are generally unaware that Accredited Practising Dietitians can provide evidence that products and services are reasonable and necessary under the NDIS to assist the person with psychosocial disability to build their capacity in self-care and increase their social and community participation.

4. What would assist you to undertake this role more efficiently and effectively?

Improved processes for delivering and implementing policy decisions by the NDIA.

Codesign of new pathways and resources with the NDIA and health professionals such as Accredited Practising Dietitians

More training of NDIA managers and planners about eligibility for access to the NDIA.

More fact sheets and other resources to inform people with psychosocial disability with diverse communication needs about access to the NDIS.

More training and information for NDIA managers and planners about using the sources of evidence which support a person's eligibility for entrance to the NDIA, for example, reports from health professionals such as Accredited Practising Dietitians.

Greater openness on the part of the NDIA to working with health professionals, such as Accredited Practising Dietitians to improve understanding of the NDIA on how Accredited Practising Dietitians provide person centred support for the whole person i.e. improved self-care related to eating and drinking has an impact on both physical and mental wellbeing.

Training of NDIS planners on the role of Accredited Practising Dietitians in

- supporting people with psychosocial disability as individuals through nutrition counselling, behaviour management and behaviour change.
- building the capacity of people with psychosocial disability, their family and support workers in group homes with respect to food safety aspects in eating and drinking related to food choice, food hygiene, food storage, and food preparation.
- building the support of people with psychosocial disability or their support workers in related to food security, food purchasing and budgeting.