**NDIS Newcastle consultation summary**

In August this year, Elena and Emma visited Newcastle to hold a consultation to hear people’s feedback on the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and mental health. Consumers, carers and service providers attended the consultation. The main issues people talked about were: issues communicating with the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA), experience with individual funded packages, a lack of support for carers, difficulty in accessing psychiatrists and psychologists and concern for people who are not eligible for the NDIS and what services will be available in the future.

One of the key issues people spoke about was difficulty in communicating with the NDIA. This included, the NDIA not responding in a timely manner to emails or letters, letters being received in hard to read English, and when people are being assessed if they are eligible for the NDIS, this was often done over the phone with people not being provided an alternative way of communicating, such as a face to face meeting.

People provided feedback on their experiences with individual funded packages. One person had a very positive experience and was able to access more support than before.

*“It’s actually helped me a great deal. I have a tendency to isolate, and I’ve found having two different workers at different times of the week in my flat is actually very good for me. One has a sort of a case manager role, and the other is helping me with cooking and with house management and stuff. I find that the two work together very well, even though they’re from different agencies”*

A carer also spoke about difficulties with her son’s package, in getting information about what was included, it was taking a long time to be able to put the plan into action and that it was not specific to her son’s needs. She also spoke about the importance in having assistance when applying for the NDIS.

*“And I also came to [service] and [intake officer] helped me with the processes and stuff, because I didn’t know them. And after I’d finished the applications and everything, I printed them, and came here and they photocopied everything, and it was just such a great support at that time”*

People also talked about experiences with service provision and the importance that services are respectful.

*“It’s looking like it’s going to be really good for him, as long as they treat people like human beings. And what I mean by that is, if they have an appointment they ring early – they’re required to ring - the client is required to ring 24 hours beforehand if they can’t attend an interview. Why should the person who’s giving the help be able to ring up ten minutes before and say “sorry, I can’t make it.” I just think it’s not treating our people with respect”*

There is concern for what supports carers can access with the transition to the NDIS, as mental health respite is very difficult to access within NDIS packages. People spoke about their concerns for carers who are caring for people who are not eligible for the NDIS, as mental health carer respite services are only providing services to carers who are caring for someone who is on the NDIS.

Additional issues people brought up were how difficult it is to access psychologists and in particular psychiatrists, as the NDIS does not cover access to a psychiatrist. This was due to the cost of accessing a psychiatrist and difficulty in finding one psychiatrist a person could see on a regular basis. People also spoke about their concerns for forensic consumers in the NDIS and what services forensic consumers can access when in the community on leave if the NDIS does not provide supports for them.

Thank you to everyone who attended this consultation and the service who hosted us. There are a few new pieces of work Being is undertaking on the NDIS and mental health, we are about to start writing a report with information and recommendations learned from these consultations and the online survey.