



From the Bendigo Advertiser 22/3/21

A BENDIGO mother fears her daughter's wellbeing will be hit hard by individual assessments, soon to be introduced into the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

Under the change NDIS participants will undertake an assessment of about three hours designed to determine their capability to determine their NDIS budget. The change is set to take place by the end of 2021.

ADVERTISING

Disability advocates have [spoken out against the scheme, saying it will leave participants viewed as numbers rather than people.](#)

Bendigo resident Kim Fairbairn-Baker said she feared the assessment would not adequately represent her daughter's needs, which she was hearing was a common trend in independent assessment pilot program in Melbourne.

Read more: [Why are families in need being denied support](#)

Ms Fairbairn-Baker said this threatened daughter Jayde Baker's ability to have an individual identity beyond that of her family, which was appropriate for a 25-year-old.

Miss Baker is on her third NDIS plan, which will be finished at the end of 2020. She works at a bakery, volunteers at a kindergarten and has her own business biscuit, with support from carers.

Ms Fairbairn-Baker said if the individual assessment legislation passed her daughter's needs would be assessed over just a few hours, using yes - no questions, by a stranger, from an unfamiliar organisation.

She said only speaking with a person with a disability to determine NDIS funding meant assessors might miss needs identified by families and carers.

Ms Fairbairn-Baker said Miss Baker already had a team of specialists around her, who knew her needs and circumstances and wrote reports.

She said Miss Baker was at a risk of becoming too dependent on her family, rather than being part of the community, if her NDIS plan was downgraded.

Read more: [Disability groups warn against NDIS change](#)

"If she didn't have the support ..., she would lose any access she had to the community," Ms Fairbairn-Baker said.

"She should be able to have her own identity as a 25-year-old young woman."

Ms Fairbairn-Baker said the individual assessments were a philosophical change from the original intention of the NDIS, putting money rather than people at the centre of the scheme.

She said several organisations assigned contracts for independent assessment did not appear to be experienced in the disability field.

"It's pretty unfair in Australia, to say the people most vulnerable, least able to speak up for themselves and advocate for themselves, are at the mercy of legislation that puts them in cookie cutter mode," she said.

The independent assessment model will also be used to measure eligibility for new NDIS participants.

In early March an alliance of 20 disability representatives, providers and advocates urged the federal government to stop independent assessments.

Inclusion Australia chief executive Catherine McAlpine said people with disabilities needed to be treated as individuals, rather than numbers.

Organisations fear the yes - no question format of the assessments does not allow context or complexities to be taken into account in the assessment.

Read more: [NDIS eligibility assessment reform sparks concern](#)

Central Victorian NDIS participants have also [raised concerns the independent assessment process will create another barrier for applicants, leaving people without the support they needed](#).

Bendigo advocates warned in December that [families experienced stress and trauma as they struggled to access disability support needed for their children](#).

A National Disability Insurance Agency spokesperson said independent assessments would allow participants to have a more accurate, flexible, personalised budget, with greater choice and control over the support they received.

They said a NDIA delegate would continue to be responsible for decisions about access to the scheme.

The spokesperson said functional assessments had always been part of the NDIS, but the current approach relied on individuals seeking their own assessment, at their own expense, meaning those who could pay more tended to receive more funds.

They said independent assessments did not have a time limit, saying they focused on understanding each person's individual circumstances and their ability to manage tasks and everyday life.

Bendigo MP Lisa Chesters said many people would be worse off when independent assessments were brought into the NDIS, saying it was moving the eligibility goalposts for people with a disability.

"We want an NDIS that is consistent and fair, but question the need for Independent Assessments," Ms Chesters said.

"A broad coalition of disability groups, legal centres and service providers have called on the government to halt the rollout, which they say has been rushed and is aimed at cost cutting."