

ebook

Intellectual disability and the NDIS

Helping you create a positive, enriching NDIS experience.



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Intellectual disability and the NDIS

2026

In Australia, around **450,000** people have an intellectual disability.

Having an intellectual disability can affect how you learn, communicate, and solve problems. It can be challenging for both you and your family or support network.

The NDIS provides funding for services that promote independence and help you achieve important life goals. For example, it can support you as you adapt to new situations, like starting school or moving to a new home.

If you have a caregiver, the NDIS can also help people maintain their own job and responsibilities. In addition, it offers respite support, allowing caregivers to take short breaks from their caring duties when needed.

Plan Partners are experts in NDIS plan management and support coordination. We have created this eBook to give you helpful insights into how the NDIS works, who is eligible, and how to make the most of your funding.

How does the NDIS work?

The NDIS provides funding to eligible people with disability, based on what they need and want to achieve. This funding is for services and supports that assist with everyday living.

To get NDIS funding for an intellectual disability or impairment, a psychologist, occupational therapist, or speech therapist needs to confirm your condition and provide proof that you meet the requirements.

If your application is approved by the NDIS, you will receive a plan that shows your goals and the funding you've been given. You can use this funding to pay for services and supports that help you reach your goals and become more independent in life.



Handy Tip: Goalbuilding

Goals are personal and can be different for everyone. Your goals might include improving your communication, making friends, or finding a job.

You have complete control over the supports you choose and which service providers you think are best for you.

How is intellectual disability diagnosed?

Intellectual disability is often noticed during early childhood if a child is developing more slowly than other children.

To diagnose intellectual disability, a specialist—a clinical psychologist or psychiatrist—carefully evaluates the person. They look at various aspects of the person’s abilities and functioning.

One part of the evaluation involves an IQ test. This test measures how well someone thinks and reasons. An IQ score helps understand a person’s cognitive abilities.



Levels of intellectual disability

Intellectual disabilities are grouped into four levels:

Mild People with mild intellectual disability can learn and function with some support.	Severe Severe disability means significant challenges in daily life.
Moderate Those with moderate disability need more assistance.	Profound The most severe level, where substantial support is required.

Clinical Confirmation

While an IQ score below 70 might suggest intellectual disability, it must be confirmed through a clinical assessment.

Getting an accurate score can be tricky due to task difficulty, especially in childhood or for severe disabilities.

Adaptive Behaviours

Beyond IQ, diagnosis also considers “adaptive behaviours”. These are everyday skills needed to live, work, and interact in the community.

Getting started with the NDIS

7 steps to getting you started with the NDIS

1. Check your eligibility

The NDIS looks at each person's individual situation and to be eligible for the NDIA, you must meet their requirements.

There's more info on the ["Could you be eligible?" section of this eBook](#)

2. Learn how to apply

The [NDIS has a website](#), a hotline (1800 800 110), and local offices. If you have questions about applying, chat to the NDIA directly using these resources.

3. Have a medical assessment

Your clinical psychologist or psychiatrist can give you important papers to support your application.

4. Send your application

Work with your health specialist (the person who treats you) to gather your documents.

Then contact the NDIS partner office to ask about applying. You can also call the NDIS at 1800 800 110 or email them at enquiries@ndis.gov.au.

5. Prepare for your planning meeting

If your [application is approved](#), you'll have a planning meeting with a person from the NDIS. This meeting is important for planning the supports and services you need.

6. Understand your plan

When you get your NDIS plan, check that everything is right. Start [learning about your plan](#) and the help you can get.

If you're worried or think your plan needs changes, talk to the NDIS.

7. Start finding supports

Now you can [find the best supports](#) for you. These might include things like talking to a psychologist, getting therapy, or finding help with housing.

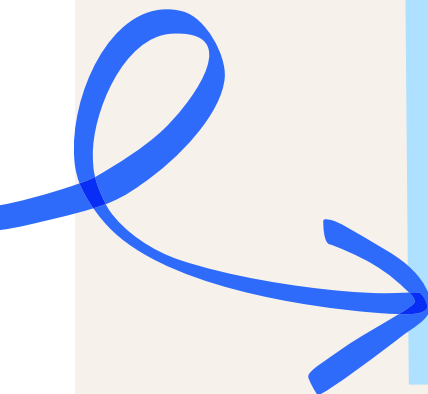


Handy Tip:

Sometimes, it's not easy trying to find and arrange the help you need. This is especially true if you're just starting with the NDIS.

But here's some good news: If you are eligible, you could get your very own support coordinator from Plan Partners. We can help you understand your options and connect you with the best supports for you.

Call us on 1300 333 700 to learn more.



Who can access the NDIS?

If you have an intellectual disability that makes it hard to do everyday activities, you might be able to get help from the NDIS.

The decision is made by the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA), the agency in charge of the NDIS. They carefully look at each person's situation to see if they qualify.

1. To be eligible for the NDIS, you must have a disability or impairment that:

- has been diagnosed by a clinical psychologist or psychiatrist
- is likely to be permanent
- makes it harder for you to do everyday tasks
- affects your ability to take part in social or economic activities. For example, your disability might make it hard for you to communicate, learn or move around.

2. Additional requirements

You also need to meet these extra conditions:

- ✓ Be an Australian citizen, or have a permanent or Special Category Visa (SCV)
- ✓ Be under 65 years old when you apply to join the NDIS.

3. Areas of difficulty

Eligible participants usually struggle with tasks in at least one of these areas:

- Communication
- Social interaction
- Learning
- Mobility
- Self-care

How can you access the NDIS?

To get NDIS support, you need to show proof from your psychologist, occupational therapist, or speech therapist that you have an intellectual disability. The NDIS looks at different types of evidence, listed here from most important to least important:

- Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-V)
- Vineland Adaptive Behaviour Scale (Vineland-II)
- World Health Organisation Disability Assessment Schedule (WHODAS) 2.0 (for 17 years and older) or PEDI-CAT (for 16 years and younger)

You should work with your healthcare specialist to put together your application, including all the necessary documents.



What happens if your application is successful?

If your application for the NDIS is approved, the NDIA will contact you within 21 days to set up your first planning meeting.

In this meeting:

- You can talk about what help you need.
- Your Local Area Coordinator (LAC) will ask about your short-term and long-term goals.
- These goals will be the basis for your NDIS plan and the funds you get.

Here are some tips for your planning meeting:

- ✓ Include strong reports from your GP or clinical psychologist. These reports should clearly explain what you need, and any barriers related to your disability.

- ✓ Be specific about your goals. Maybe you want to be more independent at home, to study, or find a job.
- ✓ Think about different goals so your plan can be flexible and cover different kinds of supports.

Handy Tip:

Want to learn more about eligibility?

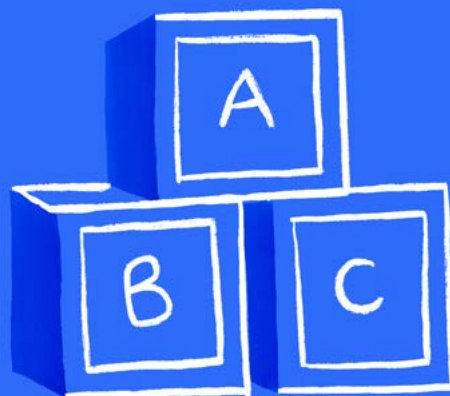
[Read our article](#)

Children with intellectual disability

Helping parents navigate school years

Being a parent or carer of a child with an intellectual disability can feel overwhelming when you're trying to choose the right path for their education and development.

As a parent, it's up to you and your health team to decide on the best course of action for your child, you know them best!



Here are some important things to consider:

1. Mainstream vs. Specialist Schools

Mainstream schools are required to accept all students, they can be a great option. However, sometimes specialist schools understand the unique needs of their children better.

2. Physical Disabilities and Education

If your child has a physical disability (like cerebral palsy), it's important to consider both education and therapy.

3. Mainstream School Support

If you decide on a mainstream school, they must provide the right help for your child's learning (such as learning assistants, Auslan interpreters (for sign language), and other tools that make learning easier).

How the NDIS supports your child's schooling

If your child is on the NDIS, it shouldn't change the extra help they get at school. This includes programs like Disability Inclusion or the Program for Students with Disabilities (PSD).

The NDIS supports everyday things your child needs because of their disability, excluding those related to learning. NDIS supports include:

- Personal care and assistance at school
- Physical, occupational, and speech therapies
- Transport to and from school
- Specialist support needed to move onto higher education, training, or work.

Transitioning to adulthood



School Leave Employment Supports (SLES)

When you finish school, it can feel like a big change, as you move away from your familiar routines and schedules. While adulthood brings a different kind of independence that might not always include paid work.

The NDIS has a program called SLES. It helps eligible students who finish year 12 or leave school (up to age 22). SLES prepares you for work by building skills and confidence through training and work experience.



Living independently

Living independently is an important step into adulthood. Some people with disability live on their own, while others live with friends in disability accommodation.

The NDIS supports these living arrangements. It helps with things like managing daily tasks, making friends, and being a part of the community.

Supports include help with personal care, household tasks, and making your living space safe and comfortable.



Opportunities and Challenges

Growing up with an intellectual disability comes with new experiences and challenges. With the right support from programs like Supported Independent Living (SIL), you can build a more independent life.

Learn more about SIL in the [Plan Partners Knowledge Centre](#).

Self-manage, NDIA-manage or plan-manage?

Before your planning meeting, it's a good idea to decide how you want to manage your plan, so you can let your NDIS representative know.



Handy Tip:

Dealing with the paperwork for your NDIS plan can take a lot of time—somewhere between 5 and 20 hours each week. Our team can help with something called 'plan management'. We'll look after the paperwork for you. And here's why it's important: We want to make sure essential services, like psychology, keep going without any payment problems. So, we'll process your invoices correctly and on time. That way, your supports won't be interrupted.

To find out more, call us on 1300 333 700.

You can choose from 3 options:

1. Self-managed:

You're solely responsible for managing your admin and funds. This option can be quite overwhelming if you're new to the NDIS, have a busy schedule or complex support needs.

2. NDIA-managed:

The NDIA manages your plan for you. Take in mind with this option, you can only use service providers that are registered with the NDIA and so you lose access to many smaller, local providers who may be a great fit for you.

3. Plan-managed:

A plan manager like Plan Partners takes care of all your admin, including making sure your service providers are paid on time and accurately. All participants are entitled to have a plan manager and it's fully funded by the NDIS at no cost to you. If you'd like to go with this option, be sure to let your *My NDIS Contact* know in your planning meeting.

What supports are funded by the NDIS?

The NDIS funds “reasonable and necessary” supports that meet your disability support needs.

Handy Tip:

To learn more about how reasonable and necessary works check out our article

[Read our article](#)

What’s Reasonable and Necessary?

To be considered reasonable and necessary, a support or service:

- ✓ must be related to your disability.
- ✓ must not include day-to-day living costs not related to your disability, such as groceries.
- ✓ should represent value for money.
- ✓ must help you achieve your goals.
- ✓ should consider the help you receive from other government services, your family, and networks.



Categories of support

The NDIS funds four types of help:



Core supports

These are everyday things, like cleaning, low cost assistive technology or support workers. Your Core supports budget is the most flexible. In most cases, you can use your funding across any of the below four support categories. But sometimes, especially for transport funding, there might be less flexibility.

1. Assistance with Daily Life
2. Consumables
3. Assistance with Social & Community Participation
4. Transport



Capacity Building

Capacity building supports help you learn new skills and have more independence, such as finding a job, managing your NDIS plan, or therapy.



Capital supports

Capital supports are bigger, one-off items that help you in your everyday life. They include specialist disability accommodation, changes to make your home more suitable to live in, and assistive technology, like wheelchairs or prosthetics.



Recurring supports

This funding is for recurring transport, which is everyday travel needs. Use it for whatever transport works best for you, like public transport, taxis, or other options that suit your lifestyle. This funding option is only available to those on PACE and is managed exclusively through the NDIA directly (not Plan Partners).

Accessing and managing supports

The NDIS lets you choose the help you need but sometimes, it can be tricky understanding all the different types of supports and what's available.

To make things easier, answer the following questions and write down your answers:

- ✓ What supports do you require?
- ✓ When do you need them to start?
- ✓ How many hours of supports do you need?
- ✓ What skills or traits would you like your support worker to have?

Handy Tip:

Read our article, [“How to organise your own team of disability support workers”](#) for help with finding your supports.

Resources to support you

Online care platforms can make finding supports easier, including allied health professionals, and psychiatrists who understand intellectual disability.

Here are a few well-known platforms:



Mable



Clickability



Careseekers

Support coordination helps you understand your plan—what it includes and how to make it work. It's funded by the NDIS, but not everyone can get it.

Check out our article called, [“Am I eligible for support coordination?”](#) to find out if support coordination is an option for you.

Our top supports for participants with an intellectual disability



Getting the right help from the NDIS is super important to reach your goals. Here are some supports our team recommends, especially for people with intellectual disability:

Social skills development

A support worker can help you access community activities to build friendships and lead a more social life.

Which category?

Assistance with Social and Community Participation (Capacity Building)

Plan management

Managing the invoices and paperwork for your NDIS plan can take a lot of time and cause extra stress. A plan manager (like Plan Partners) takes care of this for you, making sure your providers are paid on time, so your supports continue smoothly.

Which Category?

Choice and Control (Capacity Building)

Employment

Helping you volunteer or find a job. This may include looking for work or building skills to get a job.

Which category?

Finding and Keeping a Job (Capacity Building)

Support coordination

Your first and second NDIS plans can be confusing and sometimes overwhelming. Many people don't understand the categories, funding, or support options available to them.

A support coordinator knows a lot about the NDIS, the disability sector, and local providers. We can work with you to help you understand and get the most out of your NDIS plan.

Which category?

Support Coordination (Capacity Building).

Cleaning

A clean and tidy home makes it a more relaxing and healthier place to live, so you feel happier and calmer.

Which category?

Assistance with Daily Life (Core)

Resources

Not eligible for the NDIS?

Sometimes, the NDIA may decide that another service can better meet your needs. If this happens, they will contact you to explain why your application was unsuccessful.

You should get a letter explaining their decision, including the reasons why and what you can do next. They can also help you connect with a Local Area Coordinator (LAC), who can guide you through other support services.

The [NDIS website](#) lists other resources and support options if you are not eligible for the NDIS.



Handy Tip:

Choosing good service providers that you trust and get along with can make your NDIS experience better. If you don't feel a good connection with your provider, it's okay to find a new one that's more suited to you.

Crisis Support Lines

There are also many support lines that operate 24/7 if you need to speak to someone.

[Lifeline](#): 13 11 14

[Beyond Blue](#): 1300 224 636

[Kids Help Line](#): 1800 551 800

[Suicide Call Back Service](#): 1300 659 467



FAQs

Can family members of a person with an intellectual disability get help from the NDIS?

The NDIS will only pay family or friends for support in very rare and special cases. This is because the NDIS believes that help from family and friends is a normal part of everyday life for everyone, with or without a disability.

How often is an NDIS plan reviewed for someone with an intellectual disability?

Participants usually review their plan with the NDIA every 12 months. These reviews are a good chance to check progress and set new goals to improve skills and independence.

Do I need a clinical assessment to access the NDIS?

Yes, usually getting a diagnosis involves a detailed check by a specialist like a clinical psychologist or psychiatrist. This process includes an IQ test, which measures how well you think and reason.

Can IQ test results be used as evidence of diagnosis for intellectual disability?

No, an IQ test alone isn't enough. If the assessment shows that you have a moderate, severe, or profound intellectual disability, then you are likely to meet the NDIS disability requirements.

How does the NDIS ensure the rights and choices of people with intellectual disabilities are respected?

The NDIS Code of Conduct helps make sure that supports and services for people with disabilities are delivered safely and ethically. It sets rules for how NDIS providers and workers should behave. You can learn more about the Code on the [NDIS website](#).

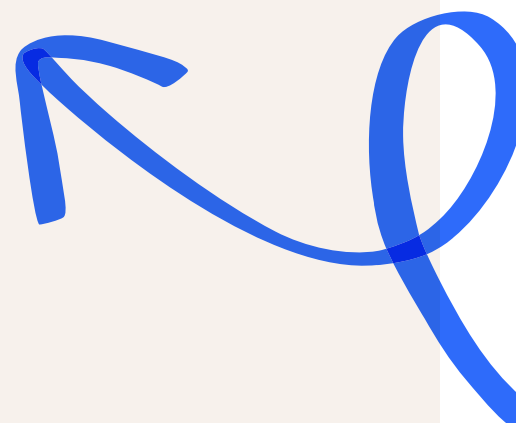
I'm unhappy with the NDIS plan I received, what can I do?

If you're unhappy with your new NDIS plan, you can request an 'internal review' within three months to make changes.

What happens if your support needs change?

You can fill out a 'change of details or change of situation' form and send it to the NDIS. If they approve it, this could lead to a review of your plan.

To increase your chances of getting the supports you need during the review, make sure to collect plenty of supporting evidence for your planning meeting.



Who are Plan Partners?

Sometimes, it feels like you're navigating the NDIS all by yourself. It can be confusing and overwhelming. Plan Partners are one of Australia's trusted NDIS plan management and support coordination providers. As your NDIS plan manager, we take care of all your NDIS admin, while you keep full control of your plan and decision making.

Plan management with Plan Partners

Imagine having someone who helps you with your finances, like a bookkeeper. Well, that's what we do as your plan manager. But here's the cool part: we're funded by the NDIS. You still get to decide how to use your NDIS funding, but we take care of all the paperwork—like paying your provider invoices—and we're here to support you to get the most out of your funds.

Support coordination with Plan Partners

With Plan Partners, you get a dedicated support coordinator who knows a lot about the disability sector and the NDIS. Your support coordinator will work alongside you to help you get the most out of your NDIS plan. This includes understanding your supports and how to use your budgets.

To learn more about our services, call our friendly team today on 1300 333 700.

Have a question or perhaps you'd like to sign up for our services?

[Visit our website](#)



Email

info@planpartners.com.au



Call us

1300 333 700



Live chat

planpartners.com.au

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