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Report identifies NDIS gaps for people living with mental illness

Many will be left without appropriate mental health support in the transition to the National Disability Insurance Scheme according to a report detailing experiences of consumers, providers and advocacy groups in the mental health sector.

The *'Mind the Gap'* report, compiled by the University of Sydney and Community Mental Health Australia, highlights problems with the current state of the NDIS for people with psychosocial disability such as eligibility criteria that exclude many, slow uptake and engagement due to a disconnect between the notion of 'disability' and 'mental health', and inadequate involvement models for carers and families.

However, with an estimated 690,000 Australian's living with severe mental ill-health, the most pressing concern is the gap beyond the NDIS for people who aren't eligible and who risk losing support when funding for existing state and federally run services cease.

The demand driven NDIS model also raises concerns about the sustainability of specialist psychosocial services, particularly in rural and remote areas and in Indigenous communities.

"While the NDIS is an exciting reform for people with disability, its current structure does not fit easily with the lived experience of people with psychosocial disability," said report author [Associate Professor Jennifer Smith-Merry](#) from the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Sydney.

"What this report shows is that people with psychosocial disability have significant problems accessing and being accepted into the scheme, and that plans are not meeting their needs."

"What is significantly worrying is that at full roll out the scheme is only designed to meet the needs of 64,000 people with severe mental illness, yet existing services are being closed and funding moved into the NDIS. This means that many people are going to miss out on the services they need."

The report is based on the experiences of 58 expert stakeholders from across Australia and is funded by the [Sydney Policy Lab](#) which brings together industry, policymakers and researchers to address complex challenges.

Community Mental Health Australia Vice President [Kerry Hawkins](#) is calling on all governments and the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) to listen to the gaps and solutions raised by stakeholders from the community managed mental health sector.

“The report reinforces the gaps the sector has been identifying including that people with psychosocial disability are not engaging, not applying or withdrawing from applying, that the criteria are creating barriers, and support to access the NDIS is lacking,” said Ms Hawkins.

“While we acknowledge that the National Disability Insurance Agency has initiated a new pathway for participants with face-to-face interviews and consistent support for participants to develop plans, and that a process for people with psychosocial disability is being examined, there is certainly a lot of work to be done.

“The solutions highlighted in the report include a separate stream for psychosocial disability with recovery orientated language and practice, high-level leadership on psychosocial disability within the NDIA and alternate funding models for those not eligible for the NDIS. These would be a good start.

“It is through positive engagement from everyone involved that we can address the gaps and ensure that people both in and outside of the NDIS receive the support they need”.

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