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22 February 2024

Joint Standing Committee on the National Disability Insurance Scheme
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Email: ndis.joint@aph.gov.au

Re: NDIS participant experience in rural, regional and remote Australia

The Australian Services Union ('ASU') is a union of 135,000 workers, and we are the union for workers in the social, community and disability services sectors.

People with disability living in remote, rural and regional areas of Australia are not receiving essential NDIS services. Current funding for travel/kilometre allowance is limited with many participants finding their plans do not adequately fund necessary travel costs required to attend meetings with allied health services, medical facilities and other services that connect them to their community and allow participants to lead a fulfilling life.

A recent paper¹ found inadequate travel allowance was a major issue for NDIS package holders. Participants reported inadequate funding for travel allowance had occurred largely due to Local Area Coordinators (LACs) and NDIS planners lack of understanding of the geographical distances between remote, regional, and rural communities.

The lack of clear information around travel/kilometre allowance and access within core supports is causing widespread confusion and ignorance, resulting in the massive shortfall within the transport component of participant plans.

Case A - North East, New South Wales

****Name has been changed to protect identity***

A family in North East New South Wales was faced with a difficult position when the funding for travel (kilometres) was not allocated within their daughters NDIS plan.

Anita is in her 30's and lives in Specialist Disability Accommodation in a regional town. Anita utilises community access services to connect with her community through social outings, shopping, events, exercise and to live her life to the fullest.

¹ The Australian Journal of Rural Health., The experiences of people with disability and their families/carers navigating the NDIS planning process in regional, rural and remote regions of Australia: Scoping review, June 2023 [Online] <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/ajr.13011>

Anita's family made some serious financial decisions and decided to provide a vehicle to the local SDA provider where Anita lives. The family is responsible for all petrol and running costs of this vehicle.

Anita's NDIS package did not include any kilometre/ travel allowance. This meant Anita would either be confined to her SDA service or her family would be responsible for footing the bill for every kilometre used to transport Anita to her outings in the vehicle they provided.

As Anita is on a one-to-one support plan, no travel or associated costs can be shared.

This is an example of huge financial burdens placed on families and people with a disability who are not successful in gaining or maintaining kilometre/travel allowances in their plans.

Case B - Providers transport North Coast, New South Wales

In North Coast New South Wales, providers allocate a Disability Support Worker to drive a van to collect participants from their homes. These costs should be divided amongst the participants they are transporting to, from and during the service provided.

Because of the distance, expenses for travel and kilometres are huge. Sadly, the funding given to participants does not align with the cost associated with them being transported by providers.

Travel costs associated within the time spent at the centre often form part of NDIS plans. However, the costs to and from the providers centre to the participants home are not covered. This means direct invoices are sent to participant families.

Although costs are meant to be split amongst the participants being transported by providers, this does not always happen.

In addition, in some rural, regional and remote locations there is only one provider to choose from and the round trips from the provider to collect participants and drop them home can be hundreds of kilometres and hours of travel. The transport allowance even if it is approved in a plan does not cover these entire travel costs. When there is only one provider there is no choice, control or opportunity for participants to go elsewhere for supports.

The NDIA needs to recognise the integral role of travel/kilometre allowance in core supports and allocate appropriate funding accordingly. Travel allowances should be adequately funded to ensure participants can live their life to the fullest. Without this adjustment, the NDIS may fail in achieving its goal of enhancing the independence, social engagement, and economic participation of people with disability.

Yours faithfully



Emeline Gaske
ASSISTANT NATIONAL SECRETARY