

# Ombudsman Communiqué

## Roundtable with Disability Peak Bodies

The Commonwealth Ombudsman recently met with national disability peak bodies including Children and Young People with Disabilities Australia (CYPDA), Disability Advocacy Network Australia (DANA), Inclusion Australia, National Ethnic Disability Alliance (NEDA), People with Disability Australia (PWDA) and First Peoples Disability Network (FPDN).

The Ombudsman was interested to hear directly from peak bodies about the issues faced by disability communities and their experiences engaging with government services and complaint mechanisms.

The discussion covered a range of topics related to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA), the ACT education sector and the accessibility of complaint pathways, including barriers experienced by First Nations and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) peoples.

Participants noted issues experienced by their members relating to NDIA processes, including:

- delays in decision-making and plan approvals
- plan reductions and reassessments
- risks of potential harm to participants when services are reduced or ceased
- barriers in accessing the scheme
- poor communication with participants and providers.

Participants discussed broader systemic issues including:

- automated decision-making processes
- discretionary decision-making frameworks within agencies
- ACT education sector complaints about issues affecting students with disability.

In discussing complaint processes, attendees highlighted the:



- need for multilingual and accessible complaint information to let people know they can make a complaint
- complexity in the complaints landscape and uncertainty about which agency or oversight body is responsible for certain issues
- difficulty in making complaints where the issue is not a single action, but a lack of clear process and accountability for the foreseeable impacts of decisions
- importance of accessible complaint pathways for organisations advocating on behalf of individuals
- need to raise awareness to increase understanding of the Commonwealth Ombudsman's role and services among disability communities
- need for enhanced data and insights about complaints that reflect the experiences of First Nations and CALD communities.

The Ombudsman highlighted existing mechanisms the Office has in place to support individuals in the disability community and their representatives in raising and resolving issues, including:

- the Ombudsman's power to initiate own-motion investigations into systemic issues
- opportunities for organisations to raise systemic issues with the Office
- the Office's dedicated First Nations complaint phone line
- the availability of free interpreter services to support complainants making a complaint in their preferred language.

The Ombudsman noted that stakeholder engagement and information sharing can help identify emerging issues and trends in complaints data, supporting the Office's oversight role.

Participants emphasised the value of ongoing engagement between disability peak bodies and the Office, including opportunities to share case studies, systemic concerns and insights from their communities.

The roundtable concluded with the Ombudsman thanking participants for the discussion and encouraging them to get in touch about any issues in the future.