



# Value Added: Volunteer-Supported Services and the Challenge of the NDIS

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The Department of Health and Human Services funded Interchange Incorporated to commission this research project. Subsequently, Interchange Incorporated engaged the University of Melbourne to undertake the research. Interchange Incorporated and the Melbourne Humanities Foundation Small Grants Scheme also funded components of the project.

# Volunteer-Supported Services and the Challenge of the NDIS

## Overview

This research explores the landscape of volunteering in disability services in Victoria in the context of the implementation of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

We considered the complex and varied role of volunteer-supported organisations, including:

- the various **volunteer-supported operating models** currently funded
- **the infrastructure required** to deliver services safely and reliably; and
- the **outcomes** associated with volunteering and their alignment with the ILC framework.

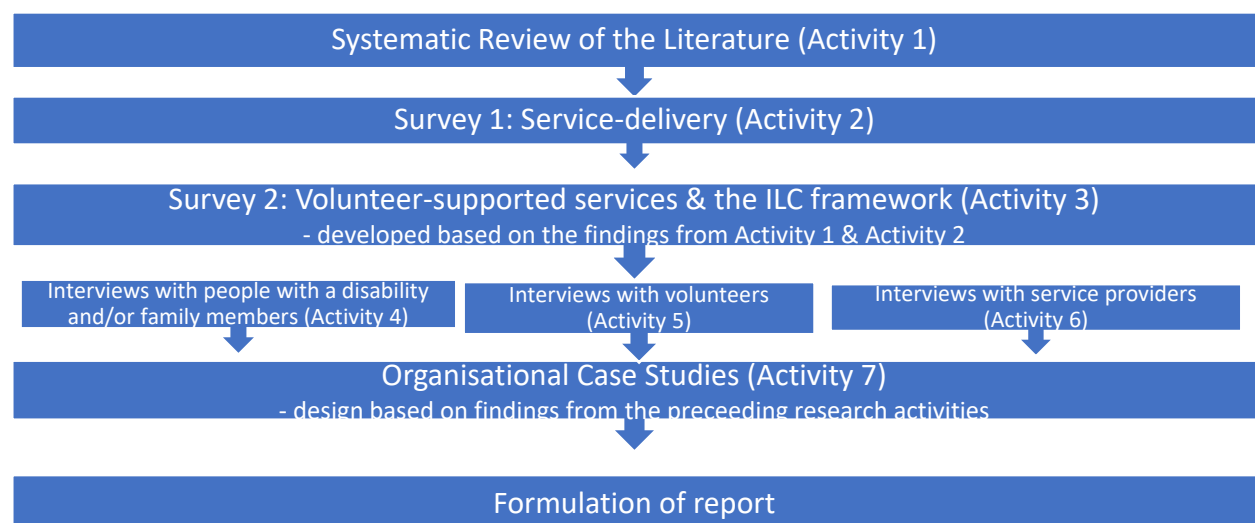
## Aims

The six research questions guiding this research were:

1. What range and type of volunteer-supported service models does the DHHS (and other funded models) currently fund, and are there any additional service models operating?
2. What models of volunteerism have evidence of outcomes and how are these outcomes measured?
3. How do the volunteer activities in a given model support the social and economic participation of people with disability, help people with a disability to achieve their personal goals and live an 'ordinary life'?
4. What benefits does a given volunteer program have that could not be achieved with fully paid staff and what impact on the person with a disability is attributable to the volunteer's involvement?
5. Among current volunteer-supported service models, which models align or do not align with the outcomes of the NDIS Individual Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) framework?
6. In the case of volunteer-supported service models with demonstrable benefits to people with a disability but not currently aligning with the outcomes of the ILC framework, what modification of models would be necessary in order to align with the outcomes of the ILC framework or conversely, what modification of the ILC framework might be considered?

## Method

We conducted our research in a sequence of investigations, as outlined below:



## Findings

Key findings from the research included:

- We identified **seven models of volunteer-supported programs** in the disability sector:
  - social-support and community participation
  - supported activity
  - skills development
  - out-of-home support
  - practical support
  - organisational support
  - advocacy
- Most volunteer-supported program models **aligned with one or more outcomes of the NDIS ILC framework**. However, two volunteer-supported program outcomes did not align with the ILC Framework:
  - positive physical and mental health
  - outcomes for family members/ carers of people with a disability
- The **four most frequently reported ILC Framework Activity Outcomes that aligned with volunteer-supported programs** were:
  - **Individual capacity** – increased motivation, confidence and empowerment
  - **Connections and Relationships** – increased connections, relationships, support networks, opportunities for active participation and feelings of belonging in the community
  - **Individual Capacity** – Increased skills and capacity
  - **Community Capacity** – more inclusive behaviour within communities
- **Without funding for infrastructure, critical supports** like recruitment and selection, support and development, workplace safety and wellbeing, volunteer recognition, quality management and continuous improvement **will be at risk**.
- Research participants believed that **volunteer-supported services were not sustainable under current NDIS funding** arrangements. They stressed the need for NDIS funding models to reflect the actual cost of sustaining a program involving volunteers.
- The uncertainty around the foreshadowed changes to funding arrangements and increased regulatory controls have already caused a **reduction in volunteer-supported programs**. It is expected that **more volunteer-supported programs are likely to close** if action on funding guidelines is delayed.
- The value volunteers bring to people with a disability, their families and carers is **unique and distinct from the support offered by specialists and paid staff**. Reported benefits include:

○ genuine friendship	○ increased community connections
○ empathy	○ fun and innovation
○ personalised support	○ information sharing
○ diverse skills	○ respite
○ enhances skills and knowledge	○ increased confidence
○ passion and enthusiasm	○ no conflicts of interest
○ enriching, meaningful relationships	
- A **skilled Volunteer Coordinator can foster benefits** to people with a disability, and their carers and families by successfully recruiting, training, managing and matching volunteers.
- There is a significant **link between supporting family units and the outcomes of people with a disability**. This link demonstrates the vital contribution volunteers can have to the broader family unit, which can build capacity to better support a family member with a disability.
- All identified **volunteer-supported program models would benefit from support** to better define their programs, collect and analyse data and translate findings into policy and operational improvements.

## Conclusion

- The **development of a taxonomy of volunteer services** will help to guide more informed discussion about the place and value of volunteer services in the community care sector.
- Being able to define the outcome and activity of volunteer programs will provide a better vehicle to inform policy development, develop and refine **funding mechanisms, manage quality, and safeguard volunteer services** in the disability sector
- **Ongoing funding of the infrastructure needed to enable volunteers** to be recruited, trained, matched and supported to work with people with disability and their families, as well as the **costs associated with delivering these services**, is necessary to ensure sustainability and growth of volunteer supported programs. This will support safe and sustainable volunteering that promotes choice, control and quality of life for people with disability.
- **Volunteer-supported services are already reporting a reduction of programs** as a result of uncertainty introduced by the NDIS implementation. More volunteer-supported programs are likely to close if action on funding guidelines is delayed.
- If funding does not extend to volunteer-supported programs, there is a **substantial risk to people with disability, their families and carers**. A paid workforce cannot simply substitute this support.

## Priority recommendations

The report makes eight recommendations (see p. 5). The three priority recommendations were:

1. Government (Commonwealth, State and Local) **use the seven models identified in this report to inform policy developments, develop and refine funding mechanisms, manage quality and safeguard volunteer services** in the disability sector.
2. Government (Commonwealth, State and Local) **appropriately fund volunteering including the infrastructure** needed to enable volunteers to be recruited, trained, matched and supported to work with people with disability and their families, to support safe and sustainable volunteering that promotes choice, control and quality of life for people with disability.
3. NDIS plans **allow participants the choice to access service through both paid or volunteer programs**.

## Limitations of report

This research provides a **snapshot of a point in time**. The NDIS policy framework continues to evolve to meet the needs of people with a disability, their carers and families.

Our research activities and analysis were undertaken against:

- the NDIS-ILC Outcome Framework: Discussion starter (National Disability Insurance Agency, 2016b);
- the Information Linkages and Capacity Building Commissioning Framework (National Disability Insurance Agency, 2016a); and
- the earlier version of the NDIS-ILC Policy Framework (revised) (National Disability Insurance Agency, 2019).

In late December 2018, the NDIS ILC investment Strategy (National Disability insurance Agency, 2018) was released. At the time of preparing this report, the NDIS ILC program guidelines and the 2019 National Information Program (NIP) grant round were released (Australian Government, 2019).

The analysis of the current data set against the 2019 program guidelines is beyond the scope of the current project. However, the data provided in this report provide the basis for such analysis, which could inform further policy developments.

## Recommendations

1. Government (Commonwealth, State and Local) **use the seven models identified in this report to inform policy developments, develop and refine funding mechanisms, manage quality, and safeguard volunteer services** in the disability sector.
2. Government (Commonwealth, State and Local) **appropriately fund volunteering including the infrastructure** needed to enable volunteers to be recruited, trained, matched and supported to work with people with disability and their families to support safe and sustainable volunteering that promotes choice, control and quality of life for people with disability.
3. NDIS plans **allow participants the choice to access service through both paid or volunteer programs.**
4. That procedures and guidelines governing the **NDIS individualised planning system acknowledge how many people with disability live in the context of a family**, and how the role of a volunteer might assist a family unit more broadly to support the quality of life of the participant with disability.
5. Government (Commonwealth, State and Local) **policy acknowledge the social and economic benefits that volunteers provide** to people with a disability and their families in a way that is unique and distinct from support received by paid services. Benefits include:
  - increased access to information;
  - increased knowledge, skills and confidence to participate in social and economic life; and
  - fostering enriched relationships.
6. Government (Commonwealth, State and Local) **support services that offer volunteer programs to develop monitoring and assessment mechanisms** to monitor and evaluate their operations effectively and enhance reporting to funding bodies.
7. Government (Commonwealth, State and Local) **acknowledge volunteer supported services as a critical component of servicing the disability sector** and as providing highly valued support that is separate and distinct from services provided by paid staff.
8. Government (Commonwealth, State and Local) **include information and resources in induction and training** for key roles (NDIS planners, LACs, Support workers, etc) to outline the benefits of volunteers in the disability sector and how to source volunteers.

The full report can be found at: <https://www.interchange.org.au/blog/>



## Examples of participant feedback

- “Already our volunteer match program has **reduced by 50% in areas where NDIS has rolled out**. NDIS is inconsistent in its application of 'rules', many children being told by NDIS that they cannot get funding under [the heading of] increased social and community participation - which is where volunteering needs to be funded under NDIS.”
- “Volunteers offer their time in a way that enhances and encourages the people with disabilities back into the community. There is no monetary gain for them by listening to their stories while the volunteer spends hours in a car getting them to and from their medical/ specialist appointments in the larger cities. They do it because **they want to make a difference and they care.**”
- “We have found that **volunteers’ motivation, enthusiasm and commitment** is the main difference from paid staff.”
- “As an organisation, we do not have the funding to pay staff to coordinate social connection programs. We nurture and train volunteers of all abilities to coordinate the programs, thus increasing their confidence, skills and opportunities in life. **People with disabilities as volunteers have a better understanding than our paid staff** as to the needs of other people with disabilities.”
- “The people who are supported by volunteers really appreciate it, because they know, in many cases, the **volunteers are the only people who are there because they want to be, not because they’re paid to be**. So, the connection they have with their volunteers is a much more genuine and more relationship based, rather than transactional based relationship.”
- “(Being involved in a volunteer-supported program) increases participant’s sense of self-worth, because they’re not mixing with just people with disabilities, or they’re not mixing just with workers. They’re mixing with **people who want to be a part of their life, and not receive any [financial] benefit from it.**”
- “There needs to be a line item in the NDIS pricing guide that specifically allows participants to choose to have **funded in their NDIS plans the recruitment, screening, matching and support of volunteers** by volunteer program staff.
- “The NDIS funding model needs to be **better adapted to funding a mix of paid staff and volunteer-based support** for participants”
- “The ILC framework completely ignores what it takes for a volunteer-involving organisation to run a volunteer program”

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