

Mainstream and community supports

Quick summary: There are many services outside the NDIS that all Australians can use, whether or not they have a disability. Mainstream supports are the supports you can get from other government funded services, like health, mental health and education. There are also many support services available through community organisations, like religious groups and supports from local councils. We call these community supports. Supports that should be funded by mainstream or community supports are not NDIS supports. We can only fund NDIS supports that are related to your disability.

Governments across Australia work together to make it clear what the NDIS and other government services can fund. This guideline explains how we work out what supports are NDIS supports, and what supports should be funded by another service.

Note: When we say ‘disability support needs’, we mean supports you need for the impairments that meet the disability or early intervention requirements, or both.

What’s on this page?

This page covers:

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- [Who is responsible for the supports you need?](#)
- [What NDIS supports will we include in your plan?](#)

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- [Reasonable and necessary supports](#)
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What are mainstream and community supports?

Mainstream and community supports are the supports you get outside the NDIS. These are the supports available to everyone, whether or not they have a disability.

You can get mainstream supports from government funded services. You can also get community supports from other services in your local community.

If you have a disability, these supports can help you become as independent as you can and participate in your community. They can often help you in ways we can't. We know people with disability achieve the best outcomes when they can get the same supports and services as all Australians.

Government and community services must make sure all Australians, including people with disability, have access to their supports. The NDIS was created to work alongside government and community services, not replace them.

Governments across Australia work together to improve the NDIS and other government services. They help make it clear which areas of government are responsible for funding or providing different types of mainstream supports.

This guideline explains how we work out whether supports can be funded or provided by us, or by another service. We work this out based on the laws for the NDIS, the government agreements made when the NDIS was created, and new government agreements in [Disability Reform Ministers Meetings](#).

This guideline also has examples of supports that other government services should provide and examples of supports we may fund.

When we make decisions, we consider the [principles we follow to create your plan](#). These principles explain how we make sure you get the reasonable and necessary supports you need.

The principles also help us make sure the NDIS is financially sustainable. This means we manage our funding so we can meet your disability needs now, as well as your needs and the needs of other people with disability in the future.

What are mainstream supports?

There are many government supports that we all use in our everyday lives. We call these mainstream supports.

Sometimes they're essential supports like health care. Or they're supports that help us get the most out of life, so you can work and study.

You can get most of these supports through mainstream services. Mainstream services are other government services, and include things like:¹

- health

- mental health and psychosocial disability
- early childhood development
- child protection and family support
- school education
- higher education and vocational education and training
- employment
- housing and community infrastructure
- transport
- justice
- aged care.

Everyone in the Australian community uses mainstream supports in some way.

For example, all children are entitled to access schooling. Hospitals also have a responsibility to treat everyone.

Mainstream services may need to adjust their supports to make them suitable for people with disability. These are called reasonable adjustments. They include things like providing ramps for buildings.

For general information about mainstream services, check out [the NDIS and other government services](#).

What are community supports?

Community supports are the supports you can get from community services. For example, you can get supports from community groups, non-government organisations, sporting clubs, local councils, church groups and charities.

Many community organisations offer a range of supports for children, teenagers, families and older people. This includes advice, information and practical help.

Community services may also need to provide reasonable adjustments to make their supports suitable for people with disability. They include things like providing additional help to people with disability, so they can access the same activities as people without disability.

Your local area coordinator, early childhood partner or support coordinator can help you find out what community services are available in your local area. They can also help you connect to these services and explore ways to pursue your goals.

As well as your community, sometimes it's reasonable to expect your informal supports, like your friends and family, to provide the supports you need. Learn more about [informal supports](#).

How do we work out who should fund or provide your supports?

Supports we fund must meet the [reasonable and necessary criteria](#).

One of these criteria is that the support must be an NDIS support.² This means they're supports we can fund, based on NDIS laws.

We can't fund supports that are appropriately funded or provided either:

- by other general systems of service delivery or support services, such as a workers compensation scheme
- under a universal service obligation that mainstream services must provide to all Australians, such as schools and public hospitals
- as a reasonable adjustment under discrimination law, such as making places or venues accessible for you.

We can't fund supports that mainstream and community services should provide, even if the other service system doesn't actually provide it. We can't make up for other organisations and services where it's their responsibility to fund or provide a service you need.

We also can't fund community supports if it's reasonable to expect the community to provide them.³ For example, we usually can't include things like family support services in your plan. It's reasonable to expect community services, like local councils or community support groups, to provide family support services.

When we work out whether we can fund different supports, we must follow the laws for the NDIS. They set out the things we need to consider when we work out who should fund or provide different types of supports.⁴

We can fund supports that are NDIS supports.⁵ See the [list of NDIS supports](#).

There are also some supports the laws say we can't fund.⁶ See the [list of supports that are not NDIS supports](#).

We also follow agreements between state, territory and federal governments.⁷ These include:

- the [Applied Principles and Tables of Services](#). This government agreement sets out the responsibilities of the NDIS and other services for different types of mainstream supports

- government agreements and new government policies agreed in [Disability Reform Ministers Meetings](#).

Remember, all supports we fund must meet **all** the [reasonable and necessary criteria](#) before we can include it in your plan.

Who is responsible for the supports you need?

We have separate pages that set out who is responsible for funding different types of mainstream supports. These include:

- [health](#)
- [mental health and psychosocial disability](#)
- [early childhood development](#)
- [child protection and family support](#)
- [school education](#)
- [higher education and vocational education and training](#)
- [employment](#)
- [housing and community infrastructure](#)
- [transport](#)
- [justice](#)
- [aged care](#).

What NDIS supports will we include in your plan?

When we work with you to create your plan, we decide what supports meet the [reasonable and necessary criteria](#). If a support meets all the criteria, including that it's an NDIS support for you, we'll include it in your plan.

If you already have a plan, you may be able to use your funding for the NDIS supports you need.

This means you might not need a plan change to buy specific types of supports.

Learn more about [what supports you can buy with your NDIS funding](#).

How can we help you get support from a mainstream or community service?

We'll help you link to mainstream and community services that can help you pursue your goals. This is often the best way to work towards your goals, as it helps you connect with and be part of your community. Your early childhood partner, local area coordinator or support coordinator can tell you about mainstream and community services that could help you build your independence and take part in your community.

They can also help you connect to these services, and coordinate the supports you get from us and other services.⁸

Local area coordinators and early childhood partners also work with mainstream and community services to help them be more inclusive of people with disability. For example, they can help mainstream services better understand and meet the needs of people with disability.

To find out more, talk to your planner, early childhood partner, local area coordinator, support coordinator, or [contact us](#) for advice.

What if a support can be funded by both the NDIS and another service?

There are some supports that can be funded or provided by both us and other services. For example, some therapies may be available both under Medicare and under the NDIS for some participants.

When we work out who is more appropriate to fund or provide the support, we think about why you need the support.

For example, if you need physiotherapy to recover from surgery, this is probably a Medicare service.⁹ We can't include physiotherapy in your plan for this reason.

But we may include physiotherapy in your plan if:

- you need it due to the regular impact of your disability, and not for a health condition,¹⁰ and
- it meets all the [reasonable and necessary criteria](#).

Many Australians also need clinical treatment like psychology to help with mental health issues like schizophrenia, anxiety and depression. You can get these services through Medicare and the mental health system.

We don't fund clinical services for mental health treatment purposes. [Your treating health professional](#) can give you advice on the types of treatments available.

However, we may fund supports that focus on your functional ability and long-term recovery. For example, we may fund psychology or occupational therapy supports that help you go about your daily life, study, work, and take part in your social life and community.¹¹

We focus on supports that are directly related to helping you manage or reduce the functional impact of your disability. This could include social and communication skills development, regular help with medication and symptoms, and behaviour intervention and support.

In rare situations, you may be eligible for the same support under both the NDIS and another service. If so, there are a couple of things to remember:

- If you claim a support from another service, you can't use your NDIS funding to claim the same support as well.
- It doesn't matter whether you use the support funded in your plan first, or the support from another service first.

What if you don't agree with our decision?

If a support is not an NDIS support because it's appropriately funded or provided by a mainstream or community service, we can't include it in your plan.

There are lots of ways we might be able to help though, so talk to us if you're in this situation. We can help you at any time. For example, we can consider if a different support is more appropriate before we approve your plan.

If another government service should provide the support, we can help you connect with that service.

We'll give you written reasons why we made the decision. You can [contact us](#) if you'd like more detail about the reasons for our decision.

If you don't agree with a decision we make, you can ask for an internal review of our decision.¹²

You'll need to ask for an internal review within 3 months of getting your plan.¹³

Learn more about [reviewing our decisions](#).

Reference list

- ¹ NDIS (Supports for Participants) Rules Sch 1.
- ² NDIS Act s 34(1)(f).
- ³ NDIS Act s 34(1)(e).
- ⁴ NDIS (Supports for Participants) Rules rr 3.5-3.7, Sch 1.
- ⁵ NDIS Act s 34(1)(f).
- ⁶ NDIS Act s 10(4), (9).
- ⁷ NDIS Act s 118(2)(a).
- ⁸ NDIS Act s 13.
- ⁹ NDIS (Supports for Participants) Rules r 7.5(c).
- ¹⁰ NDIS (Supports for Participants) Rules r 7.4.
- ¹¹ NDIS (Supports for Participants) Rules r 7.6.
- ¹² NDIS Act s 100.
- ¹³ NDIS Act s 100(2).