



10 steps to excellent NDIS therapy reports



VALID's guide to National
Disability Insurance Scheme
therapist reports for allied
health professionals



About VALID

VALID is the peak organisation in the Victorian disability sector representing people with an intellectual disability. VALID is run by and for people with disability and their families. VALID has particular expertise in networking and providing information to people with disability and families across the state.

VALID is committed to the vision of an Australian nation in which people with a disability are empowered to exercise their rights – as human beings and as citizens – in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. VALID strives to realise its vision through a range of strategies that work to empower people with disabilities to become the leaders of their own lives.

About this resource

This best practice guide on producing excellent therapy reports to inform the development of NDIS plans or plan reviews was developed by VALID advocates with expertise in providing advocacy support to people with intellectual disabilities. It is primarily designed as an information source for therapists as they prepare reports for NDIS participants. It can also be used as an information source for NDIS participants, families, Local Area Coordinators, and Support Coordinators when they are commissioning therapy reports, or to determine whether a report is of a high standard.

Disclaimer

The information in this resource is general in nature and does not constitute advice.

This document is not endorsed by the National Disability Insurance Agency or VALID. VALID does not guarantee outcomes or be held responsible for any planning, plan review or appeal outcomes as a result of using this information. The contents of this entire document do not constitute legal advice and should not be relied upon as such.

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Step 1

Understand that the NDIS is different

Purpose of the NDIS

The purpose of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is to support people with disability to participate fully in the social and economic life of the community. The NDIS does this by providing funding for 'reasonable and necessary' supports that help people with disability achieve their own goals in life.

The NDIS also supports people with disability to have choice and control about what they want to achieve, and where they receive support.

Reports have influence

Evidence based reports from professional therapists (e.g. occupational therapists, psychologists, speech pathologists, and dieticians) with training, skills and expertise are a critical element in determining whether a person with disability will receive NDIS funding for a given support.

Reports have multiple purposes

The primary role of NDIS-funded therapy reports is to provide evidence that assists decision-makers at the NDIS. However, reports also inform the NDIS participant, their families, carers and support workers who help support people implement their NDIS plan.

The NDIS is different – and so the reports needed are different

The NDIS is different to historical disability support systems. It aims to work very hard to build the capacity and independence of people with disability.

Therefore the reports required may be different in scope, content, and level of details than other reports allied health and other professionals are used to providing.

Step 2

Start with plain language

What is plain language?

Plain language is writing designed to make sure the reader understands it as quickly, easily, and completely as possible. It should make information easy to find, read, understand, and use.

Some people with disability have limited literacy, use alternative forms of communication, or do not speak English as a first language or at all.

Plain language information helps make sure that information does not lose its meaning when people struggle with complex concepts, or when information is translated by a family member or a friend or support worker.

Reports should be in plain language

All reports should be written in plain language so that people without specialist expertise can understand key points and recommendations.

A range of people read reports

The range of non-specialist readers that need to understand report recommendations may include:

- NDIS planners who use evidence in reports to inform decision making
- NDIS participants and their families
- NDIS Local Area Coordinators and Support Coordinators, and other therapists, and support workers who help to implement the plan

Writing is in plain language if the language, structure, and design are so clear that the reader can easily:

- Find what they need
- Understand what they find, and
- Use that information

Step 3

Provide evidence for everything

Evidence makes things clear

The NDIS places a high value on evidence of need, and evidence of the effectiveness of a given support or approach. The NDIS does not make decisions based on how well the writer can persuade or argue, but looks objectively at the relationship between need, participant goals, and outcomes.

Link results to goals

Link the therapy goal to the participant's NDIS goal: "To participate in local sporting opportunities and increase my community involvement." Related therapy goal: "10% improvement in external shoulder rotation to increase social participation through sports."

Report the quantifiable progress made against goals: "The observed 20% improvement means attendance at 50% more volunteering activities per week."

Detail methods of service delivery: "3 x 1.5-hour sessions with client and support staff so they can model use of new communication application."

Present a view on the likelihood of the recommended supports improving individual capacity and how you determined this.

State assessment results in plain language

State the quantifiable results of tests and assessments and describe the meaning of results in plain language.

David scored 59 in Sensation Avoiding during the Adult/Adolescent Sensory Profile assessment indicating he is overwhelmed by sensory stimulation – classification 'much more than most people.'

For David, Sensation Avoiding means that he slaps his face in very brightly lit rooms, and removes his clothing if dressed in most synthetic fabrics. Behaviours like these help David avoid or distract himself from unpleasant feelings resulting from sensations that he finds intolerable.

Step 4

Make clear, strong recommendations

Recommendations are vital

Recommendations are the most important part of therapy reports because they explain to the NDIS exactly what supports the participant will need included in their plan.

Reports with clearly visible recommendations, ideally at the beginning of the document and with very clear headings, are the most helpful.

Link recommendations to goals

Effective reports directly link the recommended NDIS funded supports with the NDIS goals of the person with disability.

An increase of 25% in gross motor skills will improve body coordination and strength, and increase ability to manage daily household tasks. Related NDIS goal: “To increase my independence in my home and in my community.”

Specify quantities

Be specific about the recommended quantity of each type of the support or item recommended (e.g. how many hours of therapy, the specific model of wheelchair) to make it easy for the NDIS to identify and translate into line items from the NDIS Price Guide.

Bruce requires funding for 80 hours for a psychologist to complete a Functional Behaviour Assessment to inform development of a Behaviour Support Plan, which is required to help Bruce meet his NDIS goal “to improve my relationships with others by reducing harmful responses to stressful situations.”

A HW5T Sports Manual Wheelchair will facilitate an active role in the local basketball team to help meet the goal “to increase my social participation, improve my fitness and open up volunteering and paid opportunities.”

Step 5

Understand ‘reasonable & necessary’

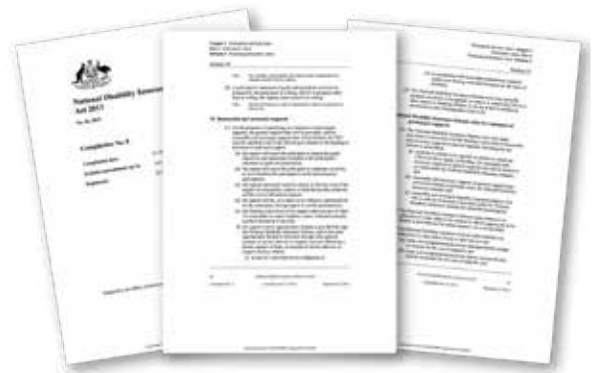
Reasonable and necessary supports

The NDIS only funds supports for NDIS participants that are ‘reasonable and necessary’.

The term ‘reasonable and necessary’ is defined via six criteria in Section 34 of the NDIS Act 2013.

Funding for any type of support (including therapy) will only be approved by the NDIS if requests meet **all** six criteria. Supports must:

1. Be goal-related
2. Facilitate social and economic participation
3. Be value for money
4. Be effective and beneficial (i.e. best practice)
5. Not be more appropriately provided by family or the broader community
6. Not be more appropriately funded by other service systems (e.g. health, justice, education.)



How to explain Reasonable and Necessary

Reasonable means what’s fair and sensible.

Necessary means that you really have to have it because of your disability.

Support means something you need to help you.

Together, ‘reasonable and necessary’ support means that you need to have some extra help because of your disability, it needs to be fair and sensible, and you really, really have to have it.

Step 6

Explicitly respond to the reasonable & necessary criteria

Therapy reports must include specific details against each reasonable and necessary criterion

1. Supports must be goal-related

An excellent report will detail how the recommended supports/items will help the NDIS participant to achieve their NDIS plan goals, and when available, provide objective results of the therapy provided in the past 12 months.

Jenny requires 10 hours of speech therapy at the beginning of her plan, to enable the speech pathologist to develop new communication exercises to be used by other informal and paid support workers. This supports her NDIS goal “to maximise my ability to communicate clearly with my family, friends, and local community.”

2. Supports must facilitate social and economic participation

Improvements in mobility over the next 12 months increase Malana’s chances of achieving her goal of full-time employment within the next two years.

3. Supports must be value for money

The report should contain information on how the therapy is value for money. For example, how the supports/items will increase independence and reduce reliance on formal supports in the future. Strong reports justify why other apparently faster or cheaper options have not been recommended to achieve the therapy goals.

Specialist psychologist support will ensure sufficient progress through the first year of Jonah’s Behaviour Support Plan. This will open up the possibility of using therapy assistants in the future.

Step 6

Explicitly respond to the reasonable & necessary criteria...continued

4. Supports must be effective and beneficial

The report is clear on why the recommended supports/items are best practice and are the best option compared with other alternatives.

Therapy assistants may not be used in place of clinical specialists for Jonah in the next 12 months due to severe behaviours of concern, which must be addressed directly by qualified senior therapists.

5. Supports cannot/should not be more appropriately provided by family or the broader community

The report discusses why the goals cannot be reached by utilising the unpaid assistance of family, friends or community members.

Jenny's family members are engaged in full-time work, and it is beyond a reasonable expectation to expect them to provide the support that is required.

6. Supports cannot/should not be funded by other systems

The report discusses the reasons why other mainstream systems like health, justice, and education cannot provide the recommended supports/items.

Sophie requires a hearing aid full-time and so it is not appropriate for her school to fund this support.

Step 7

Therapies must achieve outcomes

Focus on outcomes

The NDIS focuses on the outcomes each plan should achieve for the participant. Therapy reports must specify the anticipated **quantifiable** outcomes of the interventions recommended.

State the risk of no support

Reports should detail the risk of not providing the recommended supports, and if relevant, include sound rationale for how the individual's impairments might worsen without them.

Lack of regular physiotherapy will lead to loss of mobility resulting in decreased social and economic participation within 12 months.

Identify measures of success

Excellent reports will include a 'success statement' for each therapy goal. List the expected outcomes of strategies that you either plan to use in therapy sessions or teach others to implement.

The therapy will allow Mindy to wash and dry her dishes, vacuum, and take out the bins.

Therapy goals should be outcomes-focussed, measurable, and include the frequency and method of how you will monitor progress.

An OT will teach Jwalia and his support staff how to use the new equipment he requires including a daily ten-minute stretch routine to improve Jwalia's hand function.

Document restrictive practices

Any restrictive practices in place for the NDIS participant should be well documented. Include the name of the practitioner overseeing Positive Behaviour Support strategies, and explain how proposed therapies will be integrated into a whole-of-life strategy that will reduce restrictive practices over time.

Step 8

Stay within scope

Keep to your area of expertise

Therapists should avoid undertaking assessments or making assertions that are outside their field of expertise. All assessments completed, evidence provided, and recommendations made should be specific to the profession of the therapist submitting the report.

Therapists should read (with consent) all available reports prepared by other therapists involved with the participant. These can add context and act as a safeguard to better ensure that proposed goals and strategies are part of an integrated therapeutic approach for the NDIS participant.

Provide best practice evidence

Ensure that all recommendations are based on valid, reliable and rigorous tests/tools and that the supports/items recommended are generally considered good practice in your field.

Reference to previous improvements as a result of therapy goals is often helpful.

Therapy report process

Detailing the process leading up to the therapy report can help demonstrate that you have been thorough and transparent when exploring the range of options available.

Items such as a list of people consulted, their relationship to the NDIS participant, time taken in consultations, other reports considered, and the methods and tools used to guide the report process are all helpful.

You can also discuss and list other strategies that you have determined are not appropriate for your client.

[1-hour interview conducted with Jane Eyre, Team Leader at Best Ever Services to complete assessment using the 'Disability Support Training and Resource Tool.'](#)

['Sensory Assessment 2014' by Dr Leonard McCoy.](#)

Step 9

Focus on readability

Use a structured template

Many therapists have their own established formats or templates for report writing. Many professions have specific report writing standards, and/or guidance for therapists on how to write reports.

The NDIS have not provided standard templates for therapists to use for NDIS related reports. While this can give freedom to therapists - allowing each discipline and individual to cater to their own preferences - it also means the NDIS is currently receiving reports with a high level of inconsistency.

Write to the purpose of the report

The NDIS needs to be able to quickly identify the key information in your reports – the recommendations and their evidence – to assist their funding decisions.

Best practice indicates that reports written in a way that assists decision-makers at the NDIS are the most helpful to the NDIS participant.

Note: Detail the functional impairment/s rather than simply providing a diagnosis.

Helpful headings

Company name

Therapist name

Therapist qualifications

Type of report

Date of report

Name of client

Client DOB

Client address

Client contact details

NDIS participant number

Date of assessment

Client context: a snapshot of relevant information about the individual to give the NDIA some context. E.g. the living situation of the client; their job; likes and dislikes; important relationships; life goals; NDIS plan goals; safety concerns; disability diagnoses; health issues.

Reason for referral: assessment, increasing behaviours of concern, strategies to reduce self harm.

Step 10

Be appeal ready

Plan reviews and appeals

Therapy reports provide key evidence to the NDIS to assist them in making decisions about the type and extent of a therapy or support.

If a support is not approved in a plan, or an NDIS participant does not believe they have been provided with adequate support (e.g. sufficient hours, consumables or the desired assistive technology), the participant can request to have their plan reviewed.

If an internal review does not resolve the claimed gap in support, participants can then appeal the decision at the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT).

In these situations, the NDIS participant may then use the therapy report as part of their evidence when requesting a review with the NDIS, or appealing a decision made by the NDIS at the Administrative Appeals Tribunal.

AAT processes

If an NDIS participant applies to have an NDIS decision reviewed by the Administrative Appeal Tribunal (AAT), and the case requires a therapist's opinion, you are likely to be called as a witness to explain your report. In this case, you may be cross-examined by NDIS lawyers.

Therefore, when writing reports therapists need to be aware of the possibility they may need to appear as an expert witness, and so be confident and willing to defend - including in the unlikely event of a Federal Court challenge - the information and recommendations made in reports that have been provided to the NDIS.

Ideally participants should clarify this requirement with a therapist before engaging their services, although many won't know about these processes until they need to use them.

Glossary

Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT)

An independent body that reviews decisions made by the Australian Government. In the NDIS, the AAT is the place where decisions are reviewed when there are unresolved disagreements between the NDIS and the participant.

NDIS (National Disability Insurance Scheme)

A national scheme designed to help improve disability services and provide greater control and decision making to people with disabilities in Australia. The NDIS supports people with a permanent and significant disability that affects their ability to take part in everyday activities.

In this document NDIS is used to mean both the National Disability Insurance Scheme and the NDIA – the Agency that runs the scheme and employs the staff.

NDIS plan

An official document from the NDIA that states the goals, individual circumstances, and approved funding the participant will have access to.

NDIS Price Guide

A document produced by the NDIS detailing the maximum price the NDIS will pay for a given, defined support.

Necessary

Necessary means something a person needs to participate in the community. Necessary means it is something a person must have, meaning it is not a ‘want’ or a luxury.

Participant (or NDIS participant)

An NDIS participant is a person with disability who has applied for, and has been approved to, receive support from the NDIS.

Reasonable

Reasonable means something that is fair and sensible.

Reasonable and necessary support

A funded support or item that is needed by a person with disability to be included in the community, and that is fair for them to have.

Therapist

A person whose job it is to treat a particular type of psychological or physical condition, usually with a particular type of therapy (e.g. physiotherapist, occupational therapist, psychologist, speech pathologist, dietician). In Australia, a therapist is usually registered with or is a member of a professional association.

Therapy

Therapy is a method of treatment and rehabilitation generally separate from the use of drugs or surgery.

Checklist

This checklist may be useful for participants and therapists to complete as part of report preparation.

What is the purpose of your report? (Check all that apply)

- ☐ To help someone access the NDIS
- ☐ To give further evidence to the NDIS about why the person may need the support
- ☐ To show that other supports are not sufficient
- ☐ Other

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☐ **The evidence of need is**

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☐ **The evidence of the effectiveness of the proposed therapy is**

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☐ **The recommendations include specific items of support hours/instances of support**

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The recommended supports meet the NDIS reasonable and necessary criteria:

- ☐ The recommendations link back to the participant’s goals
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- ☐ The recommendations facilitate social and economic participation
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- ☐ The recommendations are value for money
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- ☐ The recommendations are effective and beneficial (i.e. best practice)
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- ☐ The recommendations should not be more appropriately provided by family or the broader community
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- ☐ The recommendations should not be more appropriately funded by other service systems (e.g. health, justice, education.)
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☐ The recommended supports allow the participant to work towards reaching their goals and provide tangible outcomes

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☐ The report was written with the knowledge that it may need to stand up to official questioning if the participant in question decides to appeal any NDIS decisions

Notes

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This image shows a full page of white paper with horizontal dotted lines, typical of primary school writing paper. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



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