

NDIS & Me Steps to Plan

Life Stages – Older adult

What is usually in an NDIS plan for this life stage?

NDIS plans for older adults will usually include some similar goals to young adults, (see separate fact sheet), so goals could still include: developing and maintaining independence skills, including living away from the family home, finding and keeping employment, being involved in community activities, staying healthy and fit, and maintaining social skills, friendships and other relationships.

However, plans for older people will also to reflect the changes that people experience more as they and their family carers age. For example, older people with Down syndrome may retire from work, may experience bereavement, and may have changes to where they live and who they live with. People with Down syndrome also experience the physical changes of ageing sooner than other people, and have a higher incidence of Alzheimer's at a younger age. Older people may also need mobility equipment and home modifications. So, NDIS plans for older adults should take into account these changes and the likelihood that people will need more support.

Parents can also include a goal to help increase their knowledge, skills and capacity to plan for the future and support their son or daughter as they age.

What kinds of goals can we include in the plan?

You will link your goals to your age, what you are doing in your life and what you want to do. You should be thinking about the skills and support you need at home, at work, community activities, sports, and your interests. You should think about some long term goals for the year and some shorter term goals that can be achieved during the year.

Down Syndrome Australia has developed some resource on ageing that can help with thinking about this stage of life.

Here are some ideas to help you think about goals and the support NDIS could provide:

Living arrangements, home and daily living

You can include goals in your NDIS plan to help you live more independently, whether you live in the family home or in your own place. A goal as you get older could be to stay in your own home as long as possible.

Supports can include people to help you learn skills to look after yourself and your home, home modifications, home safety and security, help with personal care if you need it and help around the home such as cleaning, doing your laundry and gardening. People can get some of these kinds of supports even if they are living in the family home.

If a person needs specialised housing the NDIS may be able to help with these costs. Here is some information on how the NDIS helps people with their living arrangements: <https://www.ndis.gov.au/housing>

The NDIS can also fund what it calls ‘assistive technology’ (AT). Depending on the supports you need, it can be anything from home and car modifications, wheelchairs, and talking kitchen appliances to an app to remind you when to do daily tasks. See the separate AT fact sheet for more information and ideas.

Life changes – Bereavement

Support workers can be a great practical source of help when a person and family is grieving. Taking the lead from the family or other carer/supporter, and using some of the resources available on grief, they can help the person to understand what is happening. They can also help them to maintain their daily routines and adjust to new situations, such as changed living arrangements, if that is what is needed.

Planning ahead for this, people with Down syndrome can include support in their NDIS plan to help set up a Circle of Support or Microboard so that they and their families have more people involved in planning for and providing a safe, secure future.

Healty eating

You can include health related goals in your NDIS plan. While the NDIS won’t cover medical and hospital services or medications, you can have supports in your plan to help you be healthy.

Goals such as maintaining a healthy diet, or losing weight can be included in a broader goal about being or staying healthy and fit.

NDIS can fund “Individual advice to a participant on managing diet for health and wellbeing due to the impact of their disability” This includes consultations with a dietician and developing a diet plan. NDIS can also fund group sessions with a dietician.

Support workers can help with learning health food choices, putting together a healthy food plan, going shopping and helping to cook healthy meals. They can help people go to a cooking course, but the cost of classes won’t be covered.

Keeping fit

You can include fitness in your NDIS plan. It can be part of a broader goal to become or stay fit and healthy (which might also cover healthy eating), or it can be a more specific goal such as increasing skills in sporting activities. A broader goal gives you more flexibility to try different sports and activities and change them when you want to.

Expert advice: If a person needs expert advice about exercise due to the impact of their disability, they may be able to get expert advice from an Exercise Physiologist or other therapist, such as an individualised exercise plan. This could be people starting to experience or trying to prevent musculo-skeletal problems such as painful knees or hips, or people working to improve their balance to prevent falls. They may also be able to get personal training or have a therapy assistant, other support worker or carer trained to help them with their exercise program.

Support workers can help with fitness goals such as getting to the gym or sports, doing other exercise classes, or going walking or swimming. Classes will usually accept the Companion Card too, so that support workers can go along for support at no cost. Most gyms are happy for support workers to help people do their gym program.

Staying connected

This is an important NDIS goal for older people with Down syndrome. This broad goal could cover support to go out to social activities, be part of a craft or hobby group, club, women's group or Men's Shed, go to church, to fitness activities, local events, the local senior citizens' centre or be a volunteer, helping other people. Support workers can also help people to visit family and friends, and keep in touch with them including on social media, phone calls or Facetime chats.

Support workers can help with thinking about the things the person would like to do, looking at what's available, making a plan, helping to make connections and then ongoing support for the person to be involved and connected. There are some good resources to help them, including:

- Your community newspaper - local papers are full of events and activities. Grab a Texta and circle the ones that look interesting then look them up or give them a call.
- Local government - Some of the best ways to find out what is available in your community are to look at your local council's community directory, or call them to see what is available, and go to your local library, seniors' centres and libraries to find out what is available.
- Beyond Blue has a very good booklet called Connections matter. It is full of ideas and links to help older people stay socially active. It would be a great resource for family carers and support workers to help a person think about and plan their social connection activities. <http://resources.beyondblue.org.au/prism/file?token=BL/1366>

Looking after your health

The NDIS won't cover medical and hospital services or medications, but you can have supports in your plan to help you look after your health. For example, your health related goals could be part of a broader goal about staying fit and healthy. You could also have a goal to learn to look after your own health more.

Think about some home modifications you might need, such as handrails, to reduce the risk of falls, and ask for these in your plan. You may also decide you need other equipment to help to do things and get around safely, such as using a walker.

Support workers can help people to understand and manage their everyday health. This could be helping people to use reminders to take medication, supporting them to go to medical appointments and keep their health records up to date.

Support workers can also help while the person is in hospital. This is not to do the work that hospital staff should be doing, but because they know the person well, they can help the person to understand what is happening so they are less anxious, and to help them with communication. They might also continue to do some of their regular household support tasks while the person is in hospital.

Looking after your mental health

As with physical health, it is health services that are responsible for health and medical care when someone has a mental illness. However, if a person's ongoing mental health condition is affecting the level of support they need, their NDIS plan should provide the overall level of support the person needs such as support workers to help with daily living activities, going to appointments, and helping them to regain their interest in staying connected, active and in life generally.

Supporting a person with dementia

When a person has dementia, their support needs increase and their NDIS plan should be reviewed and changed to make sure they get the level of help they need. If the person doesn't have a scheduled plan review meeting for some time, you can ask for a review as soon as possible.

Training for parents

Parents can also include a goal to help increase their knowledge, skills and capacity to plan for the future and support their son or daughter as they age. This is called 'Training for parents'. This could include:

- Attending Down Syndrome WA workshops for parents of adults with Down syndrome
- Attending workshops about Circles of Support and similar
- Attending other workshops and buying resources
- The whole family attending Down Syndrome WA Family Camps or events – to learn skills and develop support networks

Notes