



NDIS FOR SUPPORT COORDINATORS

# Psychosocial Recovery Coach

What you need to know about the role

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# 5 takeaways



## The participants

The NDIS will eventually support 64,000 Australians suffering from severe mental illness (psychosocial disability).



## The support

From 1 July 2020, participants with a primary psychosocial disability can get funding for a 'Psychosocial Recovery Coach'. This is a new role within the NDIS.



## The skills

Psychosocial recovery coaches are part mental health worker, part support coordinator. They combine 'lived' and 'learned' experience.



## The purpose

The job of a recovery coach is to give hope to participants with psychosocial disability and support them on their unique journey towards recovery.



## The recovery

'Recovery' doesn't mean 'cured'. Rather, it means reaching an optimal state of wellbeing – however participants define it for themselves.



# Overview

## The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) wants to offer better support for Australians suffering from severe mental illness, such as schizophrenia, depression and bipolar disorder.

Some people are experiencing such serious and prolonged mental ill health that it will likely affect them – and the way they interact with society – for life. This is known as ‘psychosocial disability’.

Joining the NDIS is a major challenge for these people. Getting the right plan is another. Many also struggle to receive the help they need because often the NDIS and mainstream mental health services aren’t properly aligned.

In an effort to fix the system’s flaws, the NDIS recently made several improvements. Among them is a newly created support: the ‘Psychosocial Recovery Coach’.

### Recovery coaches – frontline mental health workers for the NDIS

Recovery coaches are part of an NDIS push to employ more specialists with experience in mental health. Think of them as the new frontline support staff who work at the interface between mainstream mental health services and the NDIS. They exist, so that less people with severe mental illness slip through the cracks of the system.

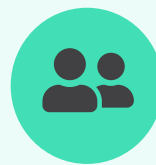
The changes are the NDIA’s response to years of criticism and calls for reform from peak disability organisations, mental health advocates and researchers.

Psychosocial recovery coaches take a completely new role in the complex web of NDIS services and funding for them has only become available on 1 July 2020. No wonder much of this new line item remains shrouded in mystery.

What’s the purpose of recovery coaches? How are they funded? Who can become one? This document seeks to answer the most pressing questions.

### The psychosocial disability pathway

In 2019, the NDIA created a special pathway to help people with a primary psychosocial disability enter the NDIS more easily. The NDIS expects it will eventually support a total of 64,000 participants with a primary psychosocial disability.



**37,500** Australians were in the NDIS at the end of June 2020 because of a primary psychosocial disability. They represent 10% of all participants.



**13%** of all Australians who joined the NDIS between March and June 2020 had a primary psychosocial disability. That's a higher share than in previous quarters on average (9%).



# 1. What is psychosocial disability?

When someone's mental health is severely shaken over a long period of time, the NDIS calls it a psychosocial disability.

'Psychosocial' merges the words psychological and social. It describes the relationship between a person's mental health and their social behaviour.

People living with a psychosocial disability have long-term problems to function in society, often as a result of trauma.

Some live transient lives without a fixed address and disconnected from services that could help them. They may have a history of drug or alcohol abuse. They may suffer from periods of memory loss, confusion, depression, anxiety, psychosis, suicidal thoughts and/or violent behaviour.

## Joining the NDIS:

People whose fragile mental health has turned into a long-term condition may qualify for the NDIS.

However, it can be challenging to assess whether someone with a psychosocial disability is eligible for NDIS support. This is because mental illness can fluctuate in intensity. Many people with psychosocial disability have times where they function relatively well. At other times just getting out of bed can be a struggle.

For the NDIS, psychosocial disability is not about a diagnosis, it is about the functional impact and barriers that someone living with a mental health condition is facing.

# 2. Why is the NDIS making changes?

Mental health organisations have been demanding for years that the NDIS step up its support for people with severe mental illness.

They said NDIS officials weren't empathetic enough when talking to people with psychosocial disability, lacking real understanding of mental health issues and failing to spread hope by labelling psychosocial disability as 'permanent'.

Mental health organisations also criticised that the NDIS focused too much on support and not enough on rebuilding lives. Experts agree that making more funding available for 'capacity building' would help more mentally ill people recover and reclaim their lives.

In creating the role of a Psychosocial Recovery Coach, the NDIA is heeding this advice now. It's also following recommendations from the Disability Reform Council.

### 3. What is the purpose of a recovery coach?

The role of a psychosocial recovery coach is to lead NDIS participants with a primary psychosocial disability on a path of hope that they can regain control over parts of their lives and find new meaning and self-worth.

It's about helping people with psychosocial disability set goals, establish routines, and

build their capacity to take even small steps towards living a more balanced life that feels meaningful to them (for example, moving out of a psychiatric hostel and into a place of their own).

Recovery coaches combine tasks of a support coordinator and a mental health worker. They are the personified link between the NDIS and mainstream mental health services.



## 4. Is recovery from mental illness possible?

When the NDIS speaks about ‘recovery’, it doesn’t mean ‘cured’.

### The Recovery Model

The ‘recovery model’, as mental health practitioners call it, has become a standard approach in mental health care in many countries. It follows a broad new understanding in the way health professionals treat people with mental illness.

Up until the mid-1970s it was widely believed that people with schizophrenia, bipolar and other mental disorders would be doomed to live with their condition for the rest of their lives. Several studies show that this assumption is incorrect and that it is possible to recover from mental health issues – maybe not fully, but at least in a way that allows a person to re-engage with society.

For the NDIS, ‘recovery’ means achieving an optimal state of personal, social and emotional wellbeing. This can differ from person to person, so every recovery journey will be unique. Participants may be making progress in their recovery, even as they may experience periods of unstable mental health and relapse.

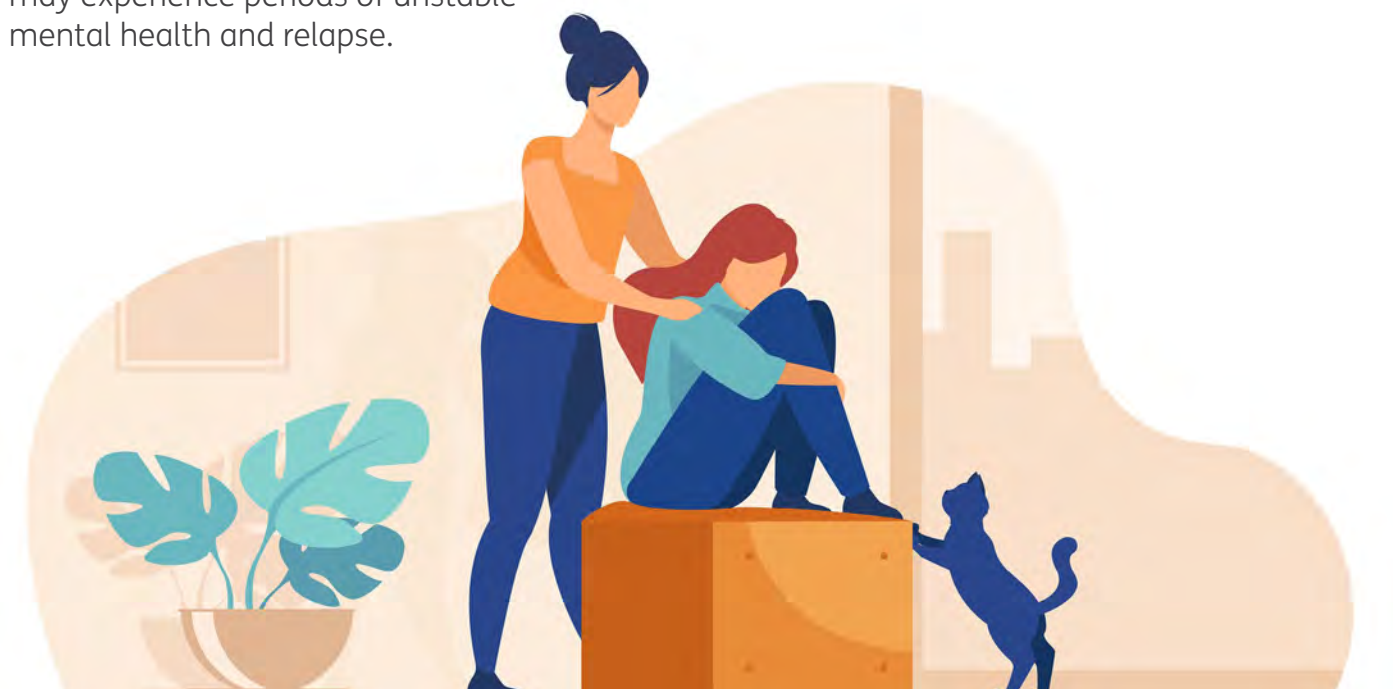
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*Recovery is about achieving an optimal state of personal, social and emotional wellbeing, as defined by each individual, whilst living with or recovering from mental health issues.*

– NDIS

”

With the help of a recovery coach some participants may for the first time in years feel validated again. Some may discover their creative side and begin to participate in arts classes or venture out into the community on their own without being crippled by anxiety.



## 5. What are the tasks of a recovery coach?

It is up to each psychosocial recovery coach how they want to work with a participant.

The NDIS, when it created the new psychosocial pathway, emphasised that any support must be flexible to reflect the often episodic nature of mental illness. This means recovery coaches can work out individually with their participants what type of support they need, and when.

They can, for example, arrange for a participant to receive more hours of support during crisis periods and less support when things are going well.

**According to the NDIS, a recovery coach should:**

- ✓ develop recovery-enabling relationships, based on hope
- ✓ build a participant's recovery skills and personal capacity, including motivation, strengths, resilience and decision-making
- ✓ collaborate with mainstream mental health providers to ensure their work is recovery-oriented
- ✓ engage with the NDIS and support participants with their plan, documents and reports.

## 6. What should recovery coaches be good at?

Psychosocial recovery coaches need to be experienced in working with psychosocial disability and know how to use empathy, understanding and sensitivity to build a trusting bond between participants and the NDIS.

To work as a recovery coach, you need to have skills to help people have more confidence in themselves. Your job will be to instill in very vulnerable and potentially traumatised people a belief that they have a place in society. You will give them courage to pursue their hopes and ambitions beyond diagnosis.

**Among other things, they should be good at:**

- ✓ listening
- ✓ asking clarifying questions
- ✓ identifying goals
- ✓ empowering and building self-directing skills
- ✓ reflecting, evaluating and learning



For a full description of tasks and guidelines, go to [www.ndis.gov.au/media/2479/download](http://www.ndis.gov.au/media/2479/download)



## 7. What's the difference between a recovery coach and a support coordinator?

Psychosocial recovery coaches are playing a new and important role in the NDIS. They are as much mental health worker as NDIS and government system navigator.

Recovery coaches receive funding from a participant's capacity building budget under the support coordination category. This may appear confusing.

Psychosocial recovery coaches are different from support coordinators in that they bring knowledge and skills in psychosocial recovery and mental health. They know how to navigate the NDIS and services in mainstream mental health.

Given support coordination is an element of the recovery coach role, the NDIA will generally not fund both types of supports in a participant's plan.

According to the current NDIS Price Guide, psychosocial recovery coaches earn less per hour than support coordinators (Level 2).

Hourly rates for weekday psychosocial recovery coach services currently amount to \$80.90 compared to \$100.14 for support coordination services (Level 2). However, it is expected that the NDIS will provide significantly higher amounts of funding for recovery coaching.

## 8. Who can work as a recovery coach?

A psychosocial recovery coach should have experience with mental illness, trauma recovery and psychosocial disability. The NDIS distinguishes between recovery coaches with 'learned experience' and 'lived experience'.

There's a long list of desirable competencies the NDIA would like to see in a recovery coach. They include demonstrated knowledge of psychosocial recovery work as well as trauma-informed practice. That said, recovery coaches will need to keep learning on the job and arrange 'structured supervision' to hone their practical skills.

The NDIA recommends the following minimum qualifications:

### Learned Recovery Coach

- ✔ Certificate IV in mental health, community services, other related health fields or similar training, and/or
- ✔ Two years of experience in mental-health related work.

### Lived Recovery Coach

- ✔ Certificate IV in Mental Health Peer Work or similar training, and/or
- ✔ Two years of experience in mental-health related peer work.

For a full list of desired competencies, go to [www.ndis.gov.au/media/2479/download](http://www.ndis.gov.au/media/2479/download)

## Conclusion

The reform package that includes the new role of a psychosocial recovery coach is a much-needed step towards making the NDIS fairer and more inclusive. However, bringing it to life will require fast and determined action from support coordination companies.

In theory, tens of thousands of Australians with serious mental health issues can now hope to find their feet more easily, as the NDIS begins to mobilise an army of skilled and empathetic recovery coaches.

### Where is the supply?

The reality will be more complicated. Funding intricacies and uncertainty over supervision and registration duties could diminish the incentive to quickly build the necessary mass of new recovery coaches.

For example, hourly rates for weekday psychosocial recovery coach services currently amount to \$80.90 compared to \$100.14 for support coordination services Level 2.

Australia needs experts fast who can help participants with a primary psychosocial disability use their funding more effectively.

These participants already have a poor track record of spending all of their available funding – not because they are overfunded, but because many are struggling to understand the scheme and to access the services they need. Historically, 54% of average annualised NDIS budgets for this disability group have remained underutilised.

### What support coordinators should do now:

#### Support coordination companies

In order to resolve the issue, we would recommend support coordination companies to urgently consider expanding their services – either by adding new staff that already have the skills to work as recovery coaches or by equipping existing support coordinators with the required mental health knowledge and capabilities so they'd become suitable for the new role.

#### Sole traders

It's not yet clear how easy it will be for sole traders in support coordination to move into psychosocial recovery coach roles, as they may need to become registered providers before they can even start to offer their support to agency-managed participants.

An alternative would be to proactively broaden a participant's choices by asking the NDIS to change the type of management assigned for recovery coach services from agency management to plan management or – where the disability allows – to self management. This would allow participants to choose unregistered providers.



*Australia needs experts fast who can help participants with a primary psychosocial disability use their funding more effectively.*



# Who is Provider Choice?

We are NDIS experts. We provide plan management services and easy-to-use technology for all NDIS participants.

If you have any plan management questions or queries, please get in touch with:

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