

## Hey! Hear me out. Voices of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Mob on the National Disability Insurance Scheme in the Northern Territory.

This project aimed to understand what helps, and what makes it hard for First Nations NDIS participants who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing, to use their NDIS plans in a way that meet their needs and aspirations.

The project was co-designed and led by Jody Barney, a Deaf Birri-Gubba and Urangan woman, whose lived experience, communication expertise, connection to culture and community, were fundamental to the project co-design and permissions to yarn with individuals and families.

This summary presents the key factors shared by participants.



### Who participated?

Using participants own language and modes of communication, Jody yarned with 15 First Nations NDIS participants living in rural and remote communities in the Northern Territory between October and November 2021.

With permission, some family members and key supports were also interviewed.

All participants identified the need for a cultural, local language and/or sign interpreter to support NDIS planning and use. Alongside hearing loss, 13 participants identified experiencing co-occurring health conditions and disabilities.

Many participants experienced challenging life circumstances such as family separation, insecure housing and interaction with the justice system.



## What helped people use their plans.

Participants were more enabled to engage in the planning process and use their plan to achieve desired outcomes when:

- participants were provided with enough relevant cultural and communication supports
- skilled NDIS staff and service providers supported individual communication needs, and used culturally safe - 'proper way' behaviours to engage with families, cultural guardians and advocates.

## What made it hard for people to use their plans.

The persistent discrimination and disadvantage associated with colonisation, and ongoing challenges in access to culturally safe services and support, impact the ability for Deaf or Hard of Hearing mob in the NT to engage with and benefit from the NDIS.

Key challenges experienced by participants included:

- intergenerational trauma
- complex life circumstances where disadvantage and discrimination in one part of life e.g. education, often led to challenges in other areas of life such as health or interactions with the criminal justice system
- limited timely access to culturally safe supports to respond to the challenges of early childhood onset of hearing loss.
- a mistrust of 'white fella' systems, compounded by limited NDIS recognition and understanding of Deaf mob circumstances and needs
- insufficient cultural and communication supports to:
  - understand the NDIS
  - advocate for plans that met individual needs and aspirations
- limited availability of culturally safe and communication responsive services and supports, particularly on Country
- having to move off Country, away from family and culturally aligned supports, was commonly extremely distressing



## What made it hard for people to use their plans continued...

- challenges across and within 'white fella' systems impacting Deaf mob ability to live better lives, connected to Country, family, culture and community.
- when services e.g., Specialist Disability Accommodation and/or Supported Independent Living, were culturally unsafe and communication unresponsive, misunderstanding placed participants at risk of harmful practices, re-traumatising them and their families.

## Challenges experienced by First Nations people who are Hard of Hearing are often different to the challenges experienced by people who are Deaf.

Despite the high prevalence of hearing loss across many communities, people are often unaware that they experience hearing loss.

For those that are Deaf and communicate using sign, people they engage with generally understand they communicate differently. When people are Hard of Hearing, other people often don't know that they have to do something different than they usually do to communicate with them.

Increasing awareness that so many mob are Hard of Hearing is the first step for improving outcomes for this group. It is then important for families, communities and service providers to learn what they can do to improve communication with people with hearing loss.



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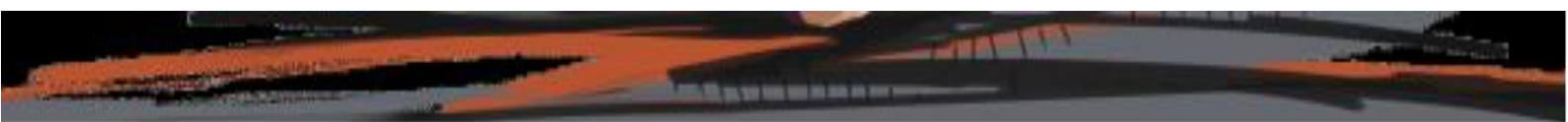


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## What participants and the project team think the NDIS and other stakeholders could do to help participants better use their plans

1. Enhance awareness and understanding of experiences of First Nations people who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing.
2. Enable 'proper way engagement' between the NDIS, individuals, families, communities and services and supports.
3. Recognise the importance of connection to Country, family, community and culture for First Nations people who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing.
4. Recognising the diversity of local sign languages and ways of communicating, resource the provision of sufficient cultural and communication training and supports within participants engagement with NDIS.
5. Promote First Nations led, localised solutions, services and supports.
6. Where First Nations led services and supports are not yet available, improve access to culturally safe, hearing loss communication responsive and trauma informed services and supports.
7. Ensure shared responsibility to improve the way the NDIS interfaces with other systems.
8. Ensure that the needs of First Nations individuals who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing or are at risk of hearing loss are better considered within all strategies to close the gap in inequalities experienced by First Nations communities.





We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands and nations on which this project was implemented and pay our respects to the Elders past, present and future. We acknowledge all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who were involved in this project and pay respects to their families, kin and country across Australia.

**NDRP**

This project was funded by the National Disability Research Partnership. The contents presented however are of the participants and project team and do not necessarily reflect the views of the funder.

## Contact us

Jody Barney, Deaf Indigenous Community Consultancy, [jody@deaficc.com.au](mailto:jody@deaficc.com.au)

Alexandra Devine, The University of Melbourne, [alexandra.devine@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:alexandra.devine@unimelb.edu.au)

Damien Howard, Phoenix Consulting, [damienatphoenix@gmail.com](mailto:damienatphoenix@gmail.com)

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