



📷 Nicholas Hill has Aspergers and like countless Australians he has no idea whether or not he should apply for the NDIS. Nicholas hopes to be a professional gardener. PICTURE: STEWART McLEAN

## CAIRNS

# Residents in rural and remote residents reminded to take advantage of NDIS funding

Sherele Moody, The Cairns Post

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🌐 Subscriber only



**EXPERTS** fear thousands of rural and remote residents with disabilities will miss out on the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

There are concerns many people will not sign up because they do not consider themselves disabled, they have not heard of the NDIS or they do not know how to access the scheme.

The NDIS is available to any Australian under the age of 65 who has a physical, intellectual, psychiatric or other disability.

This includes people who become incapacitated through workplace accident, car crash or other means after the Australia-wide rollout ends in mid-2019.

Remote, indigenous and multicultural Australians are the main group of people who could miss out on the \$22b scheme's support, UNSW Social Policy Research Centre Professor Karen Fisher said.

"Research shows people from indigenous or other cultural and language-diverse backgrounds are less likely to use a disability label or use disability services," Prof Fisher said.

She said the NDIS's reliance on would-be clients being able to make in-depth plans could backfire for people with complex needs.

"People who need support paid for by the NDIS, first need support to work out how to use and navigate the scheme," she said.

"People with multiple and complex support needs are an example of this exclusion.

"They may have a variety of needs from a life that could include mental illness, drug and alcohol use, poverty, poor education, criminal justice contact and cultural and language barriers.

"Or they may have particular circumstances, such as living in a remote community, that do not reconcile with the market-based structure of the NDIS."

Queensland Advocacy Incorporated director Michelle O'Flynn said she was worried prisoners and the homeless would also miss out on the support because the NDIS was not flexible enough.

“The point of the NDIS was to provide an individual approach but instead it has been homogenous and does not recognise each person’s unique needs,” Ms O’Flynn said.

“People who are living in boarding houses and hostels, exiting prisons or indefinitely detained in forensic and mental health facilities have not even been considered to date except by advocates.”

Disability Advocacy NSW chief executive officer Mark Grierson said a lack of services was affecting people living outside of cities.

“You have less choice about who can be your carer, who can do the therapy you need,” Mr Grierson said.

“It’s really difficult to find a way of fixing this — it’s just an inherent thing in regional and rural areas.

“We struggle to find people who will work in those areas.”



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