

# National Standards for Disability Services

Full version

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## Introduction

The National Standards for Disability Services (National Standards) will help to promote and drive a nationally consistent approach to improving the quality of services. They focus on rights and outcomes for people with disability.

The National Standards were first produced in 1993. They have been revised to reflect current language, philosophies and service models, particularly the move towards individualised supports and person-centred service delivery.

In 2010, people with disability, their family & carers, service providers and advocates provided feedback on the 1993 National Standards with comprehensive consultation led by the Disability Studies and Research Centre of the University of New South Wales. Consultation focused on awareness and use of the standards, language, meaning, relevance and utility.

Based on this feedback, the National Standards were revised with a draft version tested nationally in 2012. People with disability, family, friends & carers, service providers, advocacy organisations and quality bodies informed the development of the revised National Standards.

As well as this version, there is also an Easy English version of the National Standards. There are a number of companion resources including an Evidence Guide, a Conversation Tool and Stories to support awareness and application of the National Standards. In time, additional resources will be developed.

## An overview of the National Standards

### Six National Standards

There are six National Standards that apply to disability service providers.

1. **Rights:** The service promotes individual rights to freedom of expression, self-determination and decision-making and actively prevents abuse, harm, neglect and violence.
2. **Participation and Inclusion:** The service works with individuals and families, friends and carers to promote opportunities for meaningful participation and active inclusion in society.
3. **Individual Outcomes:** Services and supports are assessed, planned, delivered and reviewed to build on individual strengths and enable individuals to reach their goals.
4. **Feedback and Complaints:** Regular feedback is sought and used to inform individual and organisation-wide service reviews and improvement.
5. **Service Access:** The service manages access, commencement and leaving a service in a transparent, fair, equal and responsive way.
6. **Service Management:** The service has effective and accountable service management and leadership to maximise outcomes for individuals.

### Definitions

This section lists a number of common terms and describes how they are used within the National Standards.

**Continuous improvement** – the term ‘continuous improvement’ describes the ongoing effort of an organisation to improve services, systems, processes or products to maximise benefits for its clients. The process of continuous improvement relies on evidence-based information to support the organisation’s success in achieving its goals and outcomes. This also means adapting to changing needs of the community or people using services.

**Cultural competency** – the term ‘cultural competency’ describes individuals and organisations with a set of behaviours, attitudes, knowledge, skills, practices and processes which enable effective work in cross-cultural settings. It is more than cultural awareness. It means that individuals and organisations are proactive, rather than responsive, regarding cultural diversity to ensure effective and relevant service delivery or supports.

**Dignity of risk** – the term ‘dignity of risk’ promotes each person’s autonomy and self-determination to make their own choices, including the choice to take some risks in life.

**Family, friends and carers** – the term ‘family, friends and carers’ recognises the importance of connection with family and friends, as well as the caring roles played by family, friends and carers. The word ‘family’ is inclusive of partners or significant others as well as parents, siblings, children and other family members.

**Individual** – the term ‘individual’ is used to describe the person who uses a service or support. This is primarily people with disability who use a service or support. The word ‘individual’ may also mean a family member or carer, for example, in the case of people using respite services. ‘Individual’ is used instead of words such as ‘consumer’, ‘client’ or ‘service user’.

**Outcomes** – the term ‘outcomes’ describes the impact or result of a service or support, such as an improvement in an individual’s wellbeing. ‘Outcomes’ can be distinguished from ‘outputs’. Outputs describe the delivery of services or supports, such as the provision of training. Outcomes can be short-term (such as an individual being involved in service planning) through to long-term (such as an individual finding employment after completing a course).

**Minimal restriction** – the term ‘minimal restriction’ or ‘minimal intervention’ recognises any restrictions on choice and control should be minimal and evidence based. Clear information should be provided to people with disability, their families and carers so that restrictions are transparent and easily understood.

**People with disability** – it is recognised that not all people with disability use services and supports and so the term ‘people with disability’ is used to refer to people with disability in the community generally.

**Person-centred** – the term ‘person-centred’ describes service and supports that are centred on an individual and their strengths, needs, interests and goals. Person-centred service delivery ensures that people with disability lead and direct the services and supports they use.

**Quality management** – the term ‘quality management’ describes the systems and processes an organisation has in place to monitor, review, plan, control and ensure quality of services, supports or products.

**Reflection** – the term ‘reflection’ refers to activities that individuals, teams and organisations undertake to learn from practice and action. This can be undertaken formally or informally as part of professional development or quality management.

**Service and supports** – the term ‘service and supports’ describes the distinction between ‘services’ (such as specialist and mainstream service delivery) and ‘supports’ (which are other measures that a person may use to live a full life such as brokering and mentoring). For simplicity, the National Standards refer to disability organisations, organisations and agencies as ‘service providers’. An individual may use more than one service provider.

## The framework for the National Standards

This section describes the framework for the National Standards which promotes person-centred approaches and is based on principles related to Human Rights and Quality Management.

### Promoting person-centred approaches

The National Standards reflect the move towards person-centred approaches whereby people with disability are at the centre of planning and delivery. As outlined by the Productivity Commission in its report on [Disability Care and Support](#) “The intention of person-centred approaches is to maximise, as much as reasonably possible, the capacity for people with disabilities to take control of their lives.”

Person-centred approaches ensure that individuals are in the centre of service design, planning, delivery and review. Individuals shape and direct service and support arrangements to suit their strengths, needs and goals with the support of families, friends, carers and advocates.

### The Human Rights principles

Australia has agreed to uphold human rights set out in a number of international treaties and declarations, including the [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#). The National Standards draw on these and in particular the principles within the *Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, which was developed by the United Nations.

An additional principle has been added to strengthen the focus on partnerships, consistent with the [National Disability Strategy](#). This emphasises the importance of people with disability participating in decisions that affect their lives along with family, friends, carers and advocates. The National Disability Strategy promotes active participation in decision making to safeguard and advance the human rights, wellbeing and interests of people with disability.



The Human Rights principles are:

- respect for the inherent dignity, independence of persons and individual autonomy, including the freedom to make one's own choices;
- non-discrimination;
- full and effective participation and inclusion in society;
- respect for difference and acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity;
- equality of opportunity;
- accessibility;
- equality between men and women;
- respect for the evolving capacities of children with disability and respect for the right of children with disability to preserve their identities; and
- active partnerships between services and people with disability, and where appropriate, their families, friends, carers and/or advocates.

### **The Quality Management principles**

These principles describe core features of a service focused on quality for people with disability. The principles emphasise the involvement of people with disability, as well as family, friends, carers and advocates in monitoring and reviewing services and supports. They also emphasise taking a long-term view of how the service or support contributes to the person's life.

The Quality Management principles are:

- focus on outcomes for people who use services and supports;
- provide leadership;
- involve individuals and staff;
- use a process approach;
- take a systems approach;
- encourage continuous improvement;
- make evidence-informed decisions; and
- engage in collaborative partnerships.

Each standard is made up of the same basic elements.

### **Rights for people**

This is a new element of the National Standards. It highlights individual rights that each standard promotes or supports. This reinforces the Human Rights principles which cover all the standards.

### **Outcomes for people**

This is a new element of the National Standards. It describes what an individual using disability services or supports should experience through the effective achievement of each particular standard.

### **Standards for service**

The Standards for service give an introductory statement of the requirements involved for services to achieve each standard.

### **Indicators of practice**

The Indicators of practice provide guidance on the activities and ways of working that should be in place to support the standard. They describe what services need to do in order to meet each standard and what individuals, family and carers can expect. The *National Standards for Disability Services Evidence Guide* includes examples of evidence that services may use to assess whether and how they are meeting each standard.

## Standard One:

### Rights

The intent of this standard is to promote ethical, respectful and safe service delivery which meets, if not exceeds, legislative requirements and achieves positive outcomes for people with disability. The Human Rights principles are relevant across all the standards and each standard supports the achievement of basic rights. This standard has a focus on particular rights such as self-determination, choice, privacy and freedom from discrimination.

The standard recognises people's inherent right to freedom of expression and the right to make decisions about and exercise control over their own lives. It reinforces the fundamental right of people with disability to have respect and dignity. This includes the dignity of risk - the right to choose to take some risks in life.

The standard acknowledges the risks of harm, neglect, abuse or violence which some people with disability may face when using services or supports. The standard highlights the roles for services and supports, families, friends, carers and advocates in reducing these risks. The standard promotes individual rights and individual and service responsibility.

The standard emphasises the importance of:

- dignity and respect;
- freedom of expression;
- self-determination;
- choice and control;
- confidentiality and privacy;
- freedom from discrimination, exploitation, abuse, harm, neglect and violence;
- the role of families, friends, carers and advocates in the safeguarding of rights; and
- comprehensive systems to prevent or promptly respond to any breaches of rights.

## Rights for people

I have the right to exercise control and choice when I use services or supports. I also have the right to dignity of risk and to be free from discrimination or harm.

## Outcome for people

I can make choices about the services and supports I use, and how I use them. When I use a service or support, I am respected and safe.

## Standard for service

The service promotes individual rights to freedom of expression, self-determination and decision-making and actively prevents abuse, harm, neglect and violence.

Indicators of practice	
1:1	The service, its staff and its volunteers treat individuals with dignity and respect.
1:2	The service, its staff and its volunteers recognise and promote individual freedom of expression.
1:3	The service supports active decision-making and individual choice including the timely provision of information in appropriate formats to support individuals, families, friends and carers to make informed decisions and understand their rights and responsibilities.
1:4	The service provides support strategies that are based on the minimal restrictive options and are contemporary, evidence-based, transparent and capable of review.
1:5	The service has preventative measures in place to ensure that individuals are free from discrimination, exploitation, abuse, harm, neglect and violence.
1:6	The service addresses any breach of rights promptly and systemically to ensure opportunities for improvement are captured.
1:7	The service supports individuals with information and, if needed, access to legal advice and/or advocacy.
1:8	The service recognises the role of families, friends, carers and advocates in safeguarding and upholding the rights of people with disability.
1:9	The service keeps personal information confidential and private.

## **Standard Two: Participation and Inclusion**

The intent of this standard is to promote the connection of people with disability with their families, friends and chosen communities. It also requires that services work together with individuals to enable their genuine participation and inclusion.

This standard recognises the role that services can play in enabling the contribution and inclusion of people with disability and their valued participation in the community including work and learning. In meeting this standard, services will actively support and encourage individuals to connect with family and friends and to feel included in their chosen communities. This should be based on an individual's interests, identity, heritage and aspirations. Importantly, the focus on 'valued role' needs to be one of the individual's choosing. Services will also work with the wider community to promote participation and inclusion.

The standard emphasises the importance of:

- promoting a valued role for people with disability in public and private life;
- connection to family, friends and chosen communities;
- economic and community participation and associated benefits to the individual and the broader community;
- participation based on an individual's interests, identity, heritage, preferences, goals and aspirations (which may change over time); and
- the role of family, friends, carers, advocates and other organisations in promoting participation and inclusion.

## Rights for people

I have the right to participate in my chosen community. I also have the right to decide how I have contact with family, friends and community.

## Outcome for people

I follow my interests, with the support of my services, family, friends, carers or advocates.

## Standard for service

The service works with individuals and families, friends and carers to promote opportunities for meaningful participation and active inclusion in society.

Indicators of practice	
2:1	The service actively promotes a valued role for people with disability, of their own choosing.
2:2	The service works together with individuals to connect to family, friends and their chosen communities.
2:3	Staff understand, respect and facilitate individual interests and preferences, in relation to work, learning, social activities and community connection over time.
2:4	Where appropriate, the service works with an individual's family, friends, carer or advocate to promote community connection, inclusion and participation.
2:5	The service works in partnership with other organisations and community members to support individuals to actively participate in their community.
2:6	The service uses strategies that promote community and cultural connection for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

## Standard Three:

### Individual Outcomes

The intent of this standard is to promote person-centred approaches to service delivery whereby individuals lead and direct their services and supports.

Services used by people with disability are expected to be flexible and tailored to each individual's strengths and needs and deliver positive outcomes. This includes an individual's disability as well as the need for service providers to competently recognise and respond to issues related to age, gender, culture, heritage, language, faith, sexual identity, relationship status and other relevant factors.

Achieving individual outcomes requires collaboration between the individual and service provider to ensure active choice and decision-making. This means joint effort based on mutual respect rather than the service making all the decisions. A focus on individual outcomes includes individuals and services working together to review progress against planned and measurable outcomes.

The standard also recognises the potential role, with the individual's consent, of families, friends, carers and advocates in planning, delivery and review. It encourages active dialogue between an individual, their family, friends, carers and/or advocates and a service regarding the nature of the service or supports provided while focussing on the minimal restrictive options.

The standard emphasises the importance of:

- people with disability leading and directing their supports with support from family, friends, carers and advocates (with consent);
- service planning, implementation and review being based on individual strengths, needs and life goals;
- collaboration and dialogue,
- responsiveness to diversity; and
- options.

### **Rights for people**

I have the right to lead and direct decisions about my life and how the services I use support me.

### **Outcome for people**

I use services and supports which build on my strengths and support me to reach my life goals.

### **Standard for service**

Services and supports are assessed, planned, delivered and reviewed to build on individual strengths and enable individuals to reach their goals.

<b>Indicators of practice</b>	
<b>3:1</b>	The service works together with an individual and, with consent, their family, friends, carer or advocate to identify their strengths, needs and life goals.
<b>3:2</b>	Service planning, provision and review is based on individual choice and is undertaken together with an individual and, with consent, their family, friends, carer or advocate.
<b>3:3</b>	The service plans, delivers and regularly reviews services or supports against measurable life outcomes.
<b>3:4</b>	Service planning and delivery is responsive to diversity including disability, age, gender, culture, heritage, language, faith, sexual identity, relationship status, and other relevant factors.
<b>3:5</b>	The service collaborates with other service providers in planning service delivery and to support internal capacity to respond to diverse needs.



## **Standard Four:**

### **Feedback and Complaints**

The intent of this standard is to ensure that both positive and negative feedback, complaints and disputes are effectively handled and seen as opportunities for improvement. To meet this standard, service providers are required to have clearly communicated and effective systems in place to address and resolve issues raised by individuals, families, friends, carers and advocates.

This standard recognises that robust and timely feedback, including compliments and complaints, is a key driver for continuous improvement. Services should have a range of opportunities to seek feedback from individuals ranging from day to day feedback, formal consultation & engagement, regular satisfaction surveys or consumer groups.

In addition, this standard recognises that people need to feel safe to make a complaint or provide negative feedback. This includes being able to access independent mechanisms for complaints, appeals or disputes without fear of adverse consequences or loss of service. The standard also includes being able to have access to advocates and independent information, support, advice and representation.

The standard emphasises the importance of:

- clear and regular communication about how to provide feedback including how to make a complaint;
- the use of feedback and complaints to continuously drive service improvements;
- regular, proactive and inclusive feedback systems;
- effective complaints management and resolution;
- transparent dispute management; and
- access to independent information, support, advice and representation to ensure people are able to provide feedback or make a complaint.

## Rights for people

I have the right and freedom to give positive and negative feedback about all aspects of my supports and services and expect to see improvements as a result. I also have the right to independent advice and support to provide feedback or make a complaint when I need it.

## Outcome for people

I have a range of ways to speak up about my supports and services and play an active role in working out how things will improve. I know how to access independent support and advice when providing feedback or

## Standard for service

Regular feedback is sought and used to inform individual and organisation-wide service reviews and improvement.

Indicators of practice	
4:1	Individuals, families, friends, carers and advocates are actively supported to provide feedback, make a complaint or resolve a dispute without fear of adverse consequences.
4:2	Feedback mechanisms including complaints resolution, and how to access independent support, advice & representation are clearly communicated to individuals, families, friends, carers and advocates.
4:3	Complaints are resolved together with the individual, family, friends, carer or advocate in a proactive and timely manner.
4:4	The service seeks and, in conjunction with individuals, families, friends, carers and advocates, reviews feedback on service provision and supports on a regular basis as part of continuous improvement.
4:5	The service develops a culture of continuous improvement using compliments, feedback and complaints to plan, deliver and review services for individuals and the community.
4:6	The service effectively manages disputes.

## Standard Five:

### Service Access

The intent of this standard is to ensure that access to services and supports is fair, equal and transparent so that, individuals are supported when services are not available and barriers to access are identified and removed. The standard applies across service entry or commencement, service use and, where relevant, exit or leaving a service processes.

Access to services and supports is dependent on a range of factors, including location; an individual's identified needs; and the resource capacity of a service.

This standard recognises that individuals should be supported to understand criteria and processes regarding access to, and use of, a service. This also includes clear explanations when a service is not available to an individual and referral to alternative service options.

The standard emphasises the importance of:

- accessible information to respond to diversity of need;
- transparent and consistently applied service commencement and leaving a service processes;
- information provision and active referral when a service is not available;
- the value of partnerships with other agencies and relevant community members to enable referral; and
- regular reviews to identify and respond to any potential barriers to access.

## Rights for people

I have the right to access services based on fair and equal and transparent criteria, and support for referral when a service is not available.

## Outcome for people

I understand what the service offers; access to the service is fair and equal and I am supported with other options when I can't access a service.

## Standard for service

The service manages access, commencement and leaving a service in a transparent, fair and equal and responsive way.

Indicators of practice	
5:1	The service systematically seeks and uses input from people with disability, their families, friends and carers to ensure access is fair and equal and transparent.
5:2	The service provides accessible information in a range of formats about the types and quality of services available.
5:3	The service develops, applies, reviews and communicates commencement and leaving a service processes.
5:4	The service develops, applies and reviews policies and practices related to eligibility criteria, priority of access and waiting lists.
5:5	The service monitors and addresses potential barriers to access.
5:6	The service provides clear explanations when a service is not available along with information and referral support for alternative access.
5:7	The service collaborates with other relevant organisations and community members to establish and maintain a referral network.

## **Standard Six:**

### **Service Management**

The intent of this standard is to ensure that services are managed effectively and efficiently. It requires services to be person-centred and to ensure flexibility to respond to individual strengths and needs. It also requires services to promote a culture of continuous improvement as a basis for quality service delivery.

A range of systems and processes are required to support quality service provision and these are reflected in the standard. The standard refers to the active involvement of people with disability, families, friends, carers and advocates in service and support planning, delivery and review. Support for organisational learning and skills development is considered integral to a culture of quality service delivery and continuous improvement. This includes support and training for staff and volunteers. Additionally, service delivery that is reflective in practice and based on contemporary evidence will support the best possible outcomes for individuals.

Adherence to workplace related legislative and regulatory frameworks is an expectation within the standard. This will support accountability through sound governance and enable services to be delivered in a safe environment by appropriately qualified and supervised personnel.

The standard emphasises the importance of:

- sound governance and management in all aspects of service planning, development and provision;
- clear communication to staff, people with disability and other stakeholders;
- continuous improvement and evidence based practice;
- a range of methods for active participation of people with disability and their family, friends, carers and advocates in planning, delivery and review at the individual, service and organisational levels; and
- compliance with workplace related legislation and regulation including Work Health Safety, human resource management and financial management.

## Rights for people

I have the right to services and supports that are effectively managed, regularly reviewed, accountable and contemporary.

## Outcome for people

My strengths and needs are effectively supported through soundly managed services.

## Standard for service

The service has effective and accountable service management and leadership to maximise outcomes for individuals

Indicators of practice	
6:1	Frontline staff, management and governing bodies are suitably qualified, skilled and supported.
6:2	Practice is based on evidence and minimal restrictive options and complies with legislative, regulatory and contractual requirements.
6:3	The service documents, monitors and effectively uses management systems including Work Health Safety, human resource management and financial management.
6:4	The service has monitoring feedback, learning and reflection processes which support continuous improvement.
6:5	The service has a clearly communicated organisational vision, mission and values which are consistent with contemporary practice.
6:6	The service has systems to strengthen and maintain organisational capabilities to directly support the achievement of individual goals and outcomes.
6:7	The service uses person-centred approaches including the active involvement of people with disability, families, friends, carers and advocates to review policies, practices, procedures and service provision.

## National Standards for Disability Services – Summary table

### The Human Rights principles overarch all the National Standards

1. Rights	2. Participation and Inclusion	3. Individual Outcomes	4. Feedback and Complaints	5. Service Access	6. Service Management
<b>Rights for people</b>					
I have the right to exercise control and choice when I use services or supports. I also have the right to dignity of risk and to be free from discrimination or harm.	I have the right to participate in my chosen community. I also have the right to decide how I have contact with family, friends and community.	I have the right to lead and direct decisions about my life and how the services I use support me.	I have the right and freedom to give positive and negative feedback about all aspects of my supports and services. I also have the right to independent advice and support to provide feedback or make a complaint when I need it.	I have the right to access services based on fair and equal and transparent criteria, and support for referral when a service is not available.	I have the right to services and supports that are effectively managed, regularly reviewed, accountable and contemporary.

<b>Outcomes for people</b>					
I can make choices about the services and supports I use, and how I use them. When I use a service or support, I am respected and safe.	I follow my interests, with the support of my services, family, friends, carers or advocates.	I use services and supports which build on my strengths and support me to reach my life goals.	I have a range of ways to speak up about my supports and services and play an active role in working out how things will improve. I know how to access independent support and advice when providing feedback or making a complaint.	I understand what the service offers, access to the service is fair and equal and I am supported with other options when I can't access a service.	My strengths and needs are effectively supported through soundly managed services.

<b>Standards for services</b>					
The service promotes individual rights to freedom of expression, self-determination and decision-making and actively prevents abuse, harm, neglect and violence.	The service works with individuals and families, friends and carers to promote opportunities for meaningful participation and active inclusion in society.	Services and supports are assessed, planned, delivered and reviewed to build on individual strengths and enable individuals to reach their goals.	Regular feedback is sought and used to inform individual and organisation-wide service reviews and improvement.	The service manages access, commencement and leaving a service in a transparent, fair and equal and responsive way.	The service has effective and accountable service management and leadership to maximise outcomes for individuals.

### The Quality Management principles underpin all the National Standards