"Learnings from the National Disability Insurance Scheme Implementation"

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1. Executive Summary

The Australian Catholic University's (ACU) Bachelor of Social Work degree requires students to complete two 500 hour work placements. This final year placement commenced on the 11th of August 2014 at Catholic Social Services Australia (CSSA) in Canberra and ended on the 26th of November, 2014. This placement involved completing a project on the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) which provides lifelong individualised support for people with disability, their families and carers. The main objective of this project is to provide information to CSSA members about the NDIS implementation process which assists them to adapt their service delivery and business models. The research question was, "What are the key issues and responses for the implementation of the NDIS by CSSA's members?"

The methods used throughout this research project include:
- formulating a research question.
- completing a literature review.
- conducting interviews.
- engaging in additional research and analysing the results.

The literature review provides an overview of the history of the NDIS from its beginnings in January 2008 to November 2014. There are still improvements to be made as the NDIS progresses and becomes fully operational by 2019. The consultation process involved holding interviews with four CSSA members, two additional service providers and service users from Canberra. Interviews were completed either face-to-face or via the phone with each interviewee at a different stage of implementing the NDIS.

The findings of the project are grouped into four categories which are:
- the challenges the NDIS has presented to organisations.
- the innovations organisations have produced.
- the opportunities that have arisen.
- advice to other CSSA members experiencing the NDIS implementation process.

The largest response received by interview respondents was in relation to service users, marketing approaches and staff recruitment. The main recommendations for CSSA members are in regards to the ongoing changes to the NDIS and NDIA, sharing ideas with other organisations and having the person with disability at the forefront of practice.

2. Background

This chapter provides a brief outline of Catholic Social Services Australia, Australian Catholic University social work student placement and the NDIS research project. The objective of this research project was to provide CSSA members with information that will support them to adapt their service delivery and business models to effectively implement the NDIS. The main research question was, "What are the key issues and responses for the implementation of the NDIS by CSSA's members?"

Australian Catholic University (Signadou, Canberra)

The Bachelor of Social Work degree requires students to undertake two 500 hour placements in government or non-government settings. This aligns with the Australian Association of Social Worker's (AASW) education and accreditation standards (AASW, 2012). Students must also attend fortnightly classes at the Signadou campus in conjunction with placement. This placement commenced on the 11th of August, 2014 and ended on the 26th of November, 2014.
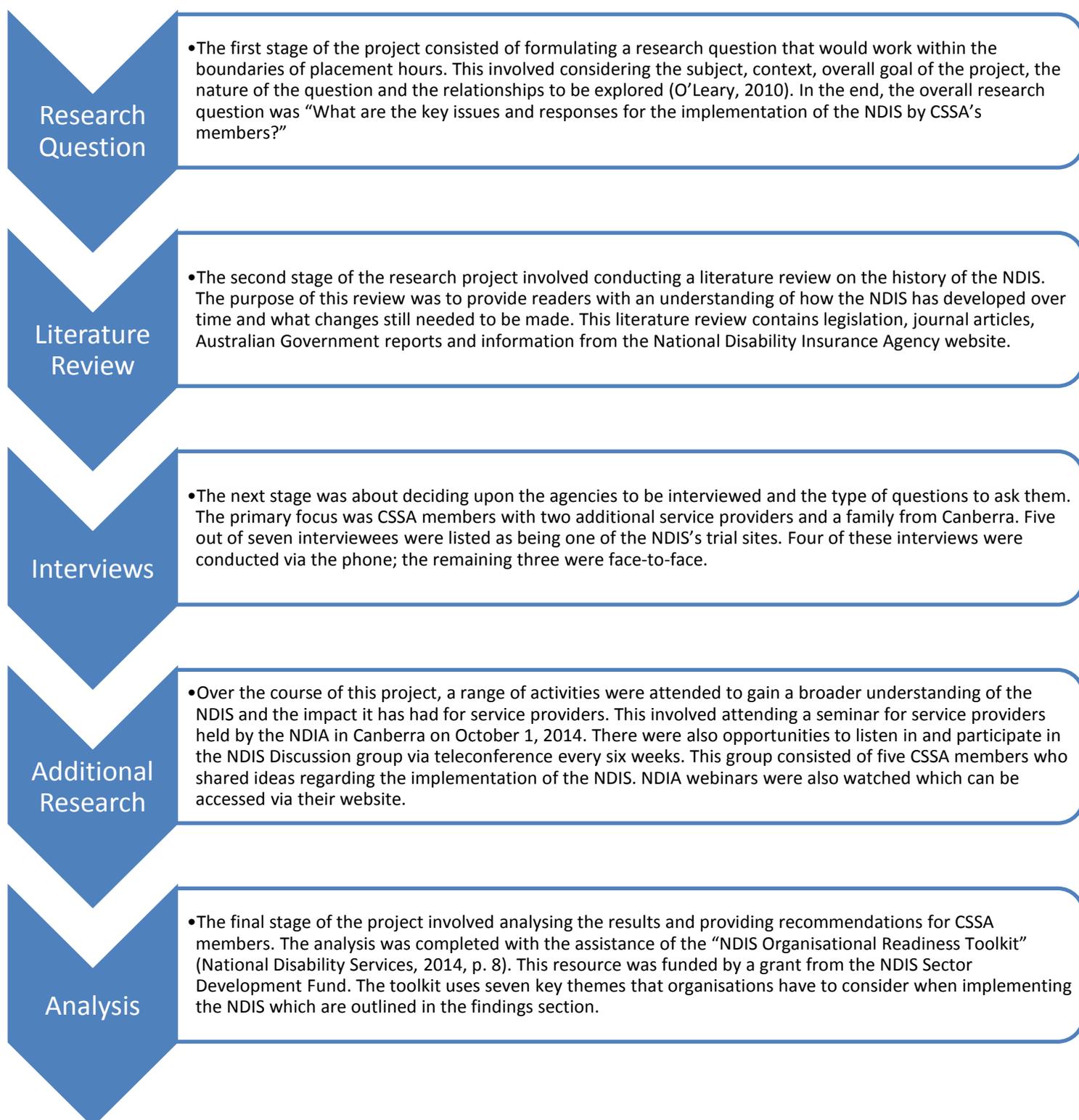
Catholic Social Services Australia

"Catholic Social Services Australia (CSSA) is the Catholic Church's peak national body for social services in Australia" (CSSA, 2014). CSSA's mission is to foster the work of social services by advocating for a fairer society that encompasses the principles of social justice (CSSA, 2014). CSSA is the peak body for approximately 60 member organisations across Australia and works with churches, the Australian Government and other institutions (CSSA, 2014). CSSA members provide services for a range of people such as families, youth, children, the elderly and people with disability. "CSSA is a commission of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and reports to them via a Board of nine people" (CSSA, 2014). The national office is situated in Canberra with state branches in New South Wales and Victoria (CSSA, 2014).

National Disability Insurance Scheme Project

The NDIS provides lifelong individualised support for people with disability, their families and carers who are eligible for the scheme. The first stage of the NDIS implementation commenced in July 2013 with four trial sites and an additional two in July 2014. Some of CSSA's members were involved in these trial sites and are preparing themselves for the ones to come. The purpose of this research project was to provide CSSA members with information that assists them to adapt their service delivery and business models to effectively implement the NDIS. The focus was on the changes the organisations themselves underwent which left a variety of issues uncovered such as people with a mental illness, carers, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and Indigenous Australians.

3. Method

This chapter describes the methods used to collect relevant information during the course of the project. Five steps were involved and are outlined below:

Research Question
- The first stage of the project consisted of formulating a research question that would work within the boundaries of placement hours. This involved considering the subject, context, overall goal of the project, the nature of the question and the relationships to be explored (O'Leary, 2010). In the end, the overall research question was "What are the key issues and responses for the implementation of the NDIS by CSSA's members?"

Literature Review
- The second stage of the research project involved conducting a literature review on the history of the NDIS. The purpose of this review was to provide readers with an understanding of how the NDIS has developed over time and what changes still needed to be made. This literature review contains legislation, journal articles, Australian Government reports and information from the National Disability Insurance Agency website.

Interviews
- The next stage was about deciding upon the agencies to be interviewed and the type of questions to ask them. The primary focus was CSSA members with two additional service providers and a family from Canberra. Five out of seven interviewees were listed as being one of the NDIS's trial sites. Four of these interviews were conducted via the phone; the remaining three were face-to-face.

Additional Research
- Over the course of this project, a range of activities were attended to gain a broader understanding of the NDIS and the impact it has had for service providers. This involved attending a seminar for service providers held by the NDIA in Canberra on October 1, 2014. There were also opportunities to listen in and participate in the NDIS Discussion group via teleconference every six weeks. This group consisted of five CSSA members who shared ideas regarding the implementation of the NDIS. NDIA webinars were also watched which can be accessed via their website.

Analysis
- The final stage of the project involved analysing the results and providing recommendations for CSSA members. The analysis was completed with the assistance of the "NDIS Organisational Readiness Toolkit" (National Disability Services, 2014, p. 8). This resource was funded by a grant from the NDIS Sector Development Fund. The toolkit uses seven key themes that organisations have to consider when implementing the NDIS which are outlined in the findings section.

4. Literature Review

This chapter provides a timeline of the development of the NDIS from January 2008 to November 2014.

The NDIS is a result of an ongoing inquiry into disability care in Australia. From 2008 to 2009, the Australian Government asked for input regarding a new "ten year national policy framework for improving life for Australians with disability, their families and carers" (Department of Social Services, 2014). The response was significantly overwhelming which led to the Productivity Commission's inquiry which resulted in 23 public hearings and over 1,000 submissions which is "…the largest community response in its history" (National Disability Insurance Agency [NDIA], 2014d, p. 3; Productivity Commission, n.d.). An NDIS would mean that disability service providers would have to apply a range of changes to their work. It also provides a lot of opportunities for disability service providers to improve their practice and approaches to service provision.

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) gave their approval and it was decided by the Select Council on Disability Reform to have the NDIS in force by 2013 which was a year ahead of schedule (NDIA, n.d.-a). In 2012, the Australian Government's Federal Budget promised to fund the NDIS while Tasmania, South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory signed up to the July 2013 trial (NDIA, n.d.-a). The NDIS bill was introduced by Prime Minister Julia Gillard on November 29, 2012 (Australian Associated Press, 2012). Four months later, the *National Disability Insurance Scheme Act 2013* came into effect (NDIA, n.d.-a; Australian Government ComLaw [AGCL], n.d.). This Act outlined the functions of disability service providers with their role to either manage funds or provide supports for people with disability (AGCL, n.d.).

In July 2013, NDIS trial sites commenced in Tasmania, South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales (NDIA, n.d.-b). In September 2013, the NDIA released their terms of business which can be found on their website[1]. During the transition to the NDIS, a grants program was established for disability service providers (NDIA, n.d.-c). One of these grant programs included 68 interviews with disability organisations from Australian and overseas (Laragy, Ramcharan, Fisher, McCraw, & Williams, 2013). The main issues that arose from these interviews included financial difficulties and tensions regarding work hours (Laragy et al.). A summary of the common themes can be found in the original literature review on the CSSA website.

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[1] See, http://www.ndis.gov.au/document/288

In 2014, the NDIA Board released their strategic and corporate plan; a toolkit was also released to assist organisations with the implementation process (NDIA, 2014d). The toolkit references seven areas of practice that organisations need to consider before signing up to the NDIS. These areas are: "strategy, corporate governance, clients and market focus, financial sustainability, people and capability, information and knowledge management and quality management and improvement" (National Disability Services, 2014, p. 8). Each Australian state has its own set of requirements yet all providers have to be registered and approved by the Australian Government (NDIA, 2014d). In July 2014, new trial sites opened in the Barkly region in the Northern Territory, Perth Hills in Western Australia and the Australian Capital Territory (NDIA, n.d.-b).

In October 2014, the NDIA released its first annual report since the NDIS commenced in 2013[2]. As of the 30th of June 2014, there are, "approximately 1,350 NDIS registered service providers" which offer a range of supports for each trial site (NDIA, 2014a, p. iv). Registered service providers can expect to see an "efficient price…by the NDIA from 1 July 2016" (NDIAa, 2014, p. 54). The NDIA also plans make changes to its technology and communication systems and provide further opportunities for registered service providers to be involved in the disability support market (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 - NDIA Annual Report Key Performance Indicator (NDIA, 2014a p. 61)

Increased participation of providers in the disability support market	• Work is progressing on a market action plan to identify and prioritise areas of work to grow the market and help it make the transition to a competitive basis has been developed and is in the early stages of implementation. • Funding under the Sector Development Strategy has been provided to NDS for a range of activities to support provider understanding of capacity to engage with and transition to the NDIS.

Summary

For CSSA members, this literature review indicates that there is still progress to be made in terms of ensuring the NDIS works effectively and inclusively. There are still issues to be ironed out and new trial sites which will inevitably present their own challenges. It is important to keep in mind that the NDIS aims to be fully operational across Australia by 2019. In the meantime, having knowledge of the NDIS's history provides an understanding of how far services have come and what needs to improve.

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[2] See, http://www.ndis.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/annual_report_2013_2014.pdf

5. Consultation

This chapter provides a brief description of the agencies that were interviewed, where they are located and their involvement with the NDIS. These interviews were held over the course of September to November either via the phone or face-to-face. In the end, 10 CSSA members were contacted with four agreeing to an interview. Interviews were also conducted with two additional registered service providers and service users from the ACT. Information was also shared by the NSW/ACT NDIS Discussion Group which met by teleconference twice during this research project.

CSSA Members (interviews)

CatholicCare Canberra & Goulburn (ACT/NSW)
CatholicCare Canberra & Goulburn is a not-for-profit agency that caters for people from all ages which includes a variety of service areas (CatholicCare Canberra, n.d.). They have been with the NDIS since July 2014 and have incorporated the CHOICES website into their practice. The CHOICES website allows participants to navigate the NDIS funding process and the types of services that are available for people with disabilities[3]. This interview was conducted face-to-face in the ACT with an employee from CHOICES.

Centacare North Queensland (QLD)
Centacare North Queensland offers services for people with disabilities (referred to as DiverseAbilities) in 10 different locations. DiverseAbilities offer programs in regards to respite, community, self-directed supports and children and parents (Centacare-Catholic Diocese of Townsville, 2014). The NDIS will be in Queensland by 2016 with preparations underway for its implementation. This interview was carried out via the phone with the DiverseAbilities Program Manager.

CatholicCare Northern Territory (NT)
CatholicCare Northern Territory predominantly provides counselling and other services to people in nine different locations (CatholicCare NT, 2012). They were involved with the NDIS as a Personal Helpers and Mentors (PHaMs)[4] provider. They have been with the NDIS since July 2014 with the Barkly region being the main trial site (NDIA, n.d.-b). This interview was done via the phone with the Senior Manager for the alcohol and drug program.

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[3] See, http://www.catholiccarechoices.org.au/
[4] See, https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/mental-health/programs-services/personal-helpers-and-mentors-phams

CatholicCare Wollongong (NSW)

CatholicCare Wollongong provides services for children, youth, families, the elderly, and people with disability (CatholicCare [CC] Wollongong, n.d.). People with disability can access individualised services and advocacy (CC Wollongong, n.d.). This agency will officially become part of the NDIS by July 2016 (NDIA, n.d.-b). This interview was done via the phone with the Aged and Disability Services Manager.

Additional Service Providers (interviews)

L'Arche Genesaret (ACT)

L'Arche is a non-government organisation that provides supported accommodation for people with intellectual disabilities. The L'Arche Canberra community is known as L'Arche Genesaret and currently houses 13 adults who have lived in the same community for over 30 years (L'Arche Australia, 2013). L'Arche Genesaret have been with the NDIS since July 2014. This interview was conducted face-to-face in the ACT with L'Arche's community leader.

St Laurence Community Services (Vic)

St Laurence is a non-profit organisation which provides a diverse range of services for "…more than 27 sites across regional Victoria." (St Laurence Community Services [SLCS], 2014a). St Laurence uses the MyPlan initiative which provides support for people with disability in different domains of life such as independence and community participation (SLCS, 2014b). St Laurence has been with the NDIS since July 2013 and this interview was held over the phone with the Chief Executive Officer.

Service Users (interview)

Mowbray Family (ACT)

The Mowbrays were the first family in the ACT to transition to the NDIS (Boddy, 2014). They have four children with disabilities and had been with the NDIS for three months. This interview was conducted face-to-face with Trish and Glenn Mowbray in Canberra.

NSW/ACT NDIS Discussion Group (teleconferences)

The NSW/ACT NDIS Discussion Group meets every six weeks by teleconference to provide reports on their progress with the NDIS and to share information with other CSSA members. The members who attended these discussions were: Marymead, CatholicCare Hunter-Manning, CatholicCare Canberra/Goulburn, CatholicCare Sydney, CatholicCare Wollongong, and CatholicCare Broken Bay.

6. Findings

This chapter provides an overview of the findings based on the research. Each agency was at a different stage of implementing the NDIS when they were interviewed which impacted on their responses. The data is split into four sections which include:

1. The challenges organisations have found implementing the NDIS,

2. The changes organisations have undergone;

3. The opportunities the NDIS has provided; and

4. Advice for CSSA members going through the same process.

Each organisation had different reasons for becoming a part of the NDIS. The main reasons included:

- Service users need the NDIS now and in the long-term;

- Agencies will lose their funding if they do not join the NDIS;

- Two of the CSSA members interviewed were identified as trial sites for 2014.

Challenges

This section discusses the challenges agencies have found with implementing the NDIS. The main challenges were in regards to service users and strategic planning which are listed below.

Strategy
- Adopting a person-centred approach to practice.
- Not having a clear understanding of the full scope of the NDIS.

Service Users
- Service users now have a choice in regards to service provision and funding.
- Organising safeguards for service users who are managing their own funds and those with impaired decision-making capacity.
- Providing support to people with disability who do not meet the NDIS's criteria.
- Communicating the NDIS to people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- The only way service users can access their plan is online which makes it difficult for those who are not technologically savvy.

Miscellaneous
- Transitioning from block funding to a fee-for-service model.
- Providing confidential client information to the NDIA.

Innovations & Opportunities

This section provides an overview of the innovations organisations have undergone or are planning to do as they implement the NDIS. The table is grouped into seven key themes which were taken from the "NDIS Organisational Readiness Toolkit" (National Disability Services, 2014, p. 8)[5]. The table also outlines the opportunities the NDIS has given organisations in regards to those seven key themes.

Table 1 - Innovations & Opportunities

	Innovations	Opportunities
1. Strategy	CSSA members had to modify their strategic plans in order to adopt a person-centred approach to practice. Strategic meetings were held monthly in order to identify what's needed in the future for the agency e.g. resourcing, staff. Discussions were also held regarding other types of services CSSA members can offer e.g. day programs.	The advantage of the NDIS is that it supports CSSA's members' values and mission.
2.Corporate governance	CSSA's member's employees have to adopt a risk management approach when they are providing flexible supports. For instance, a person providing physiotherapy in a home situation may be asked to lift some furniture in addition to their work. Interviewees also mentioned having to undergo a governance review to ensure their services meet the needs of their clients.	CSSA have the opportunity to update their service delivery and business models.
3. Clients and market focus	CSSA members conducted a review of their services and changed their marketing approach to become person-centred if it was not already. Employees had to become articulate in their understanding of the NDIS and be able to communicate this to service users. Employees also had to establish a working relationship with their service users as they now have to deliver services according to the person's needs. Some CSSA members have designed new websites specifically tailored towards people with disability and marketed via social media sites such as Facebook. Information sessions were also held for carers and discussions held with other organisations going through the NDIS	The NDIS has given CSSA members new marketing opportunities and the chance to improve their ability to explain their service provision more effectively to service users. People are now more aware of the lack of resources in remote areas. Additional service providers mentioned it was beneficial for them to explore the unmet needs and goals of their community. Families have the chance to think about the future in a positive way. For both additional service providers, they have had an increase in the number of service users.

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[5] See, http://www.nds.org.au/asset/view_document/979323127

Table 1 - Innovations & Opportunities

	implementation process. Service users can train their own support worker team e.g. physiotherapist, behavioural management.	Service users can have their plans reviewed every 12 months and they can change immediately if something unexpected happens to a carer such as illness or death. Flexible support provides service users with additional help in the home as well as therapeutic support.
4.Financial sustainability	CSSA members have had to make sure their pricing is in line with the NDIA's and purchase the supports needed for their service users. There have been adjustments made in relation to shifting from block funding to a fee-for-service model and organising individual budgets for service users. There is planning regarding what staff can be billed for.	CSSA members commented on how clients now have the option to control their funds instead of the organisation. There is also funding for unexpected expenses that arise due to the NDIS. There are new business opportunities to explore in relation to potential service users.
5. People and capability	The biggest change for CSSA members in regards to staff is that people with disability can now choose their own support worker. One of the CSSA members mentioned how each staff member now has a profile on their website for service users to choose from. Service users can also change service providers if they so desire. Job descriptions had to be altered which resulted in some employees becoming redundant. The lead up to the NDIS caused an increase in workload for staff and opportunities to extend their professional development. Employees also have to be prepared to assist carers in the home as well as deliver the services offered by their agency.	CSSA members have the chance to connect service users with workers that have common interests. CSSA members have hired more staff and have attracted qualified health professional jobs. CSSA members have also built relationships with other stakeholders going through the NDIS implementation process.
6. Information and knowledge management	CSSA members have been installing new client management systems which are more accessible for clients. Most of the CSSA members have chosen to use VisiCase[6]. Information recording has also reduced for some due to consumer feedback and participation. There was dialogue from the NDIS Discussion Group about providing tablets for workers to record progress notes out in the field using their mobiles to record work hours.	CSSA members now have access to new information technology (IT) methods and their new IT systems can be used elsewhere.

Table 1 - Innovations & Opportunities

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[6] See, http://www.connectingup.org/visicase

Table 1 - Innovations & Opportunities

7. Quality management and improvement	CSSA members now have to share their data with the NDIA as required by their terms of business[7].	At the writing of this report, New South Wales is the only state to have quality assurance and safeguard working arrangements in place for NDIS participants[8]. CSSA members (excluding NSW) have the opportunity to provide feedback to the NDIA regarding what should be included in these arrangements.

Advice

This section offers advice to CSSA members from the organisations that were interviewed and are in the process of implementing the NDIS.

Planning

- Set aside time to plan for the NDIS implementation as it is a long and thorough process.
- Ask for feedback from service users in relation to what agencies can do to improve practice with the assistance of the NDIS.
- Provide regular feedback to the NDIA as they are requesting it and are always evaluating their work (NDIA, 2014a).
- Embrace the changes and the new opportunities the NDIS presents.
- Attend NDIA pre-planning workshops as they become available.

Staff

- Expect an increase in administration work.
- Consider hiring staff whose job description is specifically in regards to the NDIS.

Strategy

- Be very clear about your organisation's mission, vision and purpose.
- Make sure you understand the NDIA's business model and your own.

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[7] See, http://www.ndis.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/terms_of_business_registered_providers.pdf
[8] See, http://www.ndis.gov.au/providers/quality-and-best-practice-framework

Summary

Agencies have decided to sign up to the NDIS in order to keep their funding and to support people with disability who need it in the long-term. The main challenges agencies face with the NDIS include strategic planning and ensuring service users are informed and supported during the implementation process. Agencies are introducing new ideas into practice as they implement the NDIS such as new strategic plans, governance reviews, new websites and client management systems. The opportunities the NDIS has presented include updating service delivery and business models, increase in service users and staff, new IT systems and providing feedback to the NDIA. There is also advice provided in relation to planning for the NDIS, staffing, and strategy.

7. Recommendations

The following recommendations are for CSSA members and the national office in regards to the NDIS implementation process.

CSSA Members

The critical areas for CSSA members to consider are:

- Be prepared to modify your strategic plan in order to apply the NDIS to practice.
- Engage in the marketing process by adopting different methods of advertising.
- Consider hiring a person whose role is specifically for the implementation of the NDIS e.g. NDIS Project Officer.
- Consider the possibility of purchasing a new client management system in order to meet NDIA's reporting requirements.

CSSA members are advised to:

- Be aware of the progress still to be made with the NDIS and be open to changes that will occur over time.
- Continue to share innovations with CSSA members and other organisations that are also in the process of implementing the NDIS.
- Consider service provision from the perspective of the person with disability and how their needs and goals can be met by your organisation.

CSSA National Office

The CSSA national office can support CSSA members in the implementation process by:

- Providing bimonthly updates on the NDIS to CSSA members.
- Organise and facilitate teleconferences with CSSA members to share information and experiences regarding the NDIS implementation process.
- Asking for feedback from CSSA members on what the national office can do to support them as they implement the NDIS.

<u>NDIS Links</u>

Australian Government Department of Social Services - https://www.dss.gov.au/

CSSA website - http://www.cssa.org.au/

Joint Standing Committee on the NDIS -
http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/National_Disability_Insurance_S
cheme

NDIS Accelerator program - http://sse.org.au/learning-programs/ndis-accelerator/

NDIS Act (Cmwlth) 2013 - http://www.comlaw.gov.au/Details/C2013A00020

NDIS website - http://www.ndis.gov.au/

NDS Organisational Readiness toolkit - http://www.nds.org.au/projects/article/175

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