

Platforms and the NDIS

12 ways platforms and the power of the smartphone can deliver for the NDIS

October 2019



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About Mobility

Our mission is to provide the ultimate in Choice and Control for those Disabled and Aged. Mobility empowers people to browse, book and pay for Home Care products and services seamlessly from the convenience of a smart phone.

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Introduction

As one of the most important social reforms in Australian history, the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is the biggest social policy project since Medicare. The NDIS promises to revolutionise disability services and give people with disability more autonomy regarding Choice and Control.

After three years of pilots, the NDIS began its national rollout on 1 July 2016. As with many initial projects, challenges for the NDIS occurred almost immediately. As the overseeing body charged with implementing and maintaining the NDIS, the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) experienced difficulty in implementing the new NDIS MyPlace payment portal, which three years later, is still proving to be challenged in terms of meeting the needs of the market.¹

A year later in August 2017, the NDIA cast doubt on its proposed eMarketplace platform being ready in time for the start of the full NDIS rollout, but remained committed to the idea.²

In March 2019, the Federal Government released the Growing the NDIS Market and Workforce report (the report), which noted that it is exploring options for industry to lead the development of eMarketplaces instead of implementing its own NDIS eMarketplace.³

The report noted that an eMarketplace is a platform that can support information discovery, encourage innovation, and build community capacity with the ambition of facilitating the interaction of supply and demand that is fundamental to an efficient and effective market.⁴

The Federal Government has widely acknowledged that eMarketplaces make it easier for participants to connect with and pay providers and empowers participants as informed consumers.

The report goes on to outline the Government's four key NDIS priorities and initiatives:

1. Optimise the NDIS market and provide information to support investment;
2. Invest to build capable NDIS providers;
3. Fostering a capable NDIS workforce; and
4. Grow the NDIS Workforce.⁵

eMarketplaces, commonly known as Platforms in the technology sector, have become prevalent in the Australian market within the last two years. Currently Airtasker, Uber, Freelancer and Uber Eats are the most commonly used Platforms in Australia. Incredibly, Australian success story Airtasker has grown its user base to 2 million people with only 165 staff members in just seven years.

The Digital Platform Work in Australia survey, commissioned by the Victorian Government in June 2019, found that 13.1% of respondents have, at some time, undertaken a form of digital platform work.⁶ This rate of participation resembles recent survey findings in Europe and is much higher than previous estimates for Australia.

This paper identifies and demonstrates 12 ways that an eMarketplace, or Platform technology combined with the power of the smartphone, is able to assist in the delivery of the NDIS's four key priorities, including outlining the ways in which to focus on creating a more efficient and sustainable ecosystem for all stakeholders engaged with the NDIS journey.

¹ Wendy Williams, "NDIS IT Debacle Blamed on Technical Glitch," Pro Bono Australia. August 31 2016, <https://probonoaustralia.com.au/news/2016/08/ndis-debacle-blamed-technical-glitch/>

² Justin Hendry, "The NDIA is unsure when its eMarketplace will be ready," iNews. August 9 2017, <https://www.itnews.com.au/news/the-ndia-is-unsure-when-its-emarketplace-will-be-ready-470391>

³ Australian Government, Department of Social Services, Growing the NDIS Market and Workforce, March 2019, p. 5.

⁴ Australian Government, Department of Social Services, Growing the NDIS Market and Workforce, March 2019, p. 5.

⁵ Australian Government, Department of Social Services, Growing the NDIS Market and Workforce, March 2019, p. 2.

⁶ Victorian Government, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Digital Platform Work in Australia: Preliminary findings from a national survey, June 2019, p. 3.

Priority 1: Optimise the NDIS market and provide information to support investment

Delivering on the promise of Choice and Control in the NDIS is difficult within traditional organisational infrastructure. Organisations are not geared to provide consumers “self-serve” capabilities in the same manner that Platforms are. To become inherently successful, platforms:

One

Normalise data and bring transparency to fragmented and disparate supply chains in an efficient manner. Whether it be hire cars, rental properties, hotels or restaurants, Platforms unlock excess capacity in a standardised manner that can be surfaced to consumers via an intuitive interface to browse, search, book, pay and fulfil the Demand side.

How Platform technology can create efficiency for the NDIS

Support worker utilisation currently stands at a meagre 58% due to the inefficiencies of the current ecosystem.⁷ Immature Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) in the home care space has resulted in resource optimisation becoming a challenge. Furthermore, interfacing with the NDIS and financial intermediaries adds additional layers of complexity for Providers that can be automated by Platforms.

Two

Understand the importance of being agnostic to both the supply and demand sides of a marketplace. Like Switzerland is to the banking industry, successful Platforms focus on creating a frictionless consumer experience and typically do not take equity positions in supply and demand side businesses.

How Platform technology can create efficiency for the NDIS

For all stakeholders to embrace an NDIS marketplace, a Platform needs to be independent without vested interests in service provision.

Three

Leverage the power of the smartphone to ‘close the loop’ on service delivery, in particular with fraudulent activity. For example, Uber could not be Uber if it did not accurately geo-locate a consumer’s device.

How Platform technology can create efficiency for the NDIS

Fraud has become increasingly prevalent. Beginning 1 January 2020, home care agencies in the United States of America that provide personal care services must have an Electronic Visit Verification (EVV) solution in place or risk having their Medicaid claims denied.⁸ EVV requires a support worker to sign on and off using an app that geo-locates the support worker to ensure they are on-site. It also provides a method to alert the relevant stakeholders should a support worker not attend a home visit as scheduled.

⁷ National Disability Services, Australian Disability Workforce Report, July 2017, p. 15.

⁸ Taylor Mallory Holland, “Electronic Visit Verification: What Home Care Agencies Need to know,” Samsung Insights. May 17 2019, <https://insights.samsung.com/2019/05/17/electronic-visit-verification-what-home-care-agencies-need-to-know/>

Remove the friction from the payment process, providing a seamless method to interact between the supply and demand sides of a transaction whilst mitigating the money risk for both parties.

How Platform technology can create efficiency for the NDIS

Due to the arrear's nature of funding participants, the latency in reimbursements causes strain on service providers and their cash flow. Platforms trigger transactions and invoicing in real-time, providing the opportunity to dramatically speed up money flow, whilst providing a new level of transparency to the when, where and how of product/service delivery.

Furthermore, Platforms will become even more powerful once the NDIA opens up Application Programming Interface (API) access to the NDIA MyPlace Portal so that real-time queries and transactions can be processed.

Five

Encourage 'hyper-local' service delivery, which can dynamically match supply and demand within very close proximity to maximise the utilisation potential.

How Platform technology can create efficiency for the NDIS

This minimises wastage, maximises response times and potentially reduces the travel costs for Providers and support workers between shifts. Additionally, this helps servicing of what is commonly termed "thin markets" which have proven problematic due to the limited quantum of supply and demand in primarily regional areas.

Priority 2: Invest to build capable NDIS providers

Transitioning from a largely block funded not-for-profit (NFP) disability services sector into a consumer directed care model has seen a large number of Providers leaving the NDIS due to the austerity measures the NDIA has on fees permissible to be charged to Participants.⁹ Many NDIS Providers find themselves between a rock and a hard place, without the capital to develop the necessary smarts to drive efficiencies whilst also not being able to charge sufficient fees to warrant investment.

In order to be economic under the NDIA's tight pricing caps, Providers need to optimise their supply chains and introduce large scale productivity gains.

Platforms can deliver NDIS Providers material productivity gains via:

Six

Private Market Places which are commonplace in the digital advertising sector. Private Market Places enable invited supply and demand sources to trade in isolation from the larger market. Private Market Places can offer a Software as a Service (SaaS) low cost and low risk engagement model, removing upfront capital investments that often prevent technology adoption and therefore the ability to unlock productivity gains.

How Platform technology can create efficiency for the NDIS

Private Market Places allow NDIS Providers to run their operations on a third-party Platform privately, safe in the assurance that their contributed clients and workers cannot be seen by the larger Platform ecosystem. Scheduling support workers, capturing timesheets, generating invoices and Quality and Safeguards reporting can all be automated using Platforms without the risk of exposing an NDIS Provider's clients or workers to external parties.

Seven

Public Market Places delivering the ability for the end consumer to search, compare and book an organisation's resources electronically and without double handling or dealing directly with the customer. Public Market Places are very prevalent in the travel sector with the likes of Booking.com, Trivago, Webjet and many others.

How Platform technology can create efficiency for the NDIS

Many Providers operate large full time and part time labour forces which prove challenging to operate flexibly in the home care sector where jobs are often in one-hour shifts and require extensive travel from client to client.

Public Market Places allow NDIS Providers to expose their excess capacity to new customers they would not deal with otherwise. As previously mentioned with the support worker utilisation rate at 58%, Public Market Places provide a strong opportunity for Providers to increase yields from their existing workforce.¹⁰

Public Market Places are also a tremendous opportunity for NDIS Providers to deliver a consumer shopfront to what are often B2B focused organisations. For a NDIS Provider that may only cater to Agency Managed Participants, Public Market Places provide the opportunity to take on-demand new business from Plan Managed Participants, Self-Managed Participants and private pay customers looking for care.

⁹ Macmillan, Jade. "Disability providers to get helping hand amid warnings of failure." ABC News, March 30 2019, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-03-30/disability-providers-to-get-helping-hand-back-from-the-brink/10955856>

¹⁰ National Disability Services, Australian Disability Workforce Report, July 2017, p. 15.

Priority 3: Fostering a capable NDIS workforce ⁸

Many people would assume that workforce Quality and Safeguard training is better served through traditional in-person training models that are expensive to facilitate and deliver, however the rise of eLearning provides a unique opportunity for the disability services sector.

The sophistication of eLearning has matured significantly over the past five years and is now commonplace in all areas of commerce from teaching people to drive multi-million-dollar mining equipment through to the delivery of healthcare.

The National Disability Services (NDS) Australian Disability Workforce report July 2017 found that 43% of workers were part-time permanent with a further 41% casual leaving only 12% full time.¹¹ With the large casualisation of the workforce and high levels of attrition, it may often be cost prohibitive for NDIS Providers to invest in on-premise, in-person training of support workers.

Platforms can create efficiency for the NDIS by:

Eight

Providing online delivery of certified training from Registered Training Providers (RTO's).

Vendors already exist for the NDIS that have produced high quality training material across:

- Induction to the NDIS and Disability services sector
- Manual Handling
- Infection Control
- Mealtime Planning
- Medication Management
- Supporting NDIS Choice & Control

Nine

Delivering more economic methods to build a capable NDIS workforce.

Platforms can deliver training content in a manner that enables workers to:

- Consume professional training content from the convenience of a smartphone or PC
- Gain relevant qualifications remotely, avoiding costly in-person curricular delivery
- Interact with professional training content in a gamified and interactive manner
- Progress through what can be exhaustive training at their own pace, in their own time
- Be quantitatively assessed on their competence in the curricular in real-time

Ten

Future-proofing the NDIS workforce's capabilities for continuous improvement.

Platforms facilitate an agile method to deliver new procedures in care best practice quickly and cost effectively, whilst ensuring that a workforce is perpetually competent. Furthermore, Platforms speed up the feedback loop between the entire ecosystem with real-time reviews and ratings, delivering a voice for Participants and support workers alike.

¹¹ National Disability Services, Australian Disability Workforce Report, July 2017, p. 8.

Priority 4: Grow the NDIS Workforce

The Federal Government estimates 1 in 5 new jobs will come from the home sector with an estimated additional 90,000 full time jobs required in Australia within the next five years.¹²

NDIS and Home Care Providers in general are struggling to source a sufficient amount of support workers in 2019, let alone being able to fuel this exponential forecast increase in demand.

The Digital Platform Work in Australia report, commissioned by the Victorian Government in June 2019, found that:

- 7.1% of Australians are finding work through Platforms;
- The most common digital platform workers include students, temporary residents, people with a disability, and those who do not speak English at home;
- Almost half (46.5%) began in the last 12 months and over 60% began less than 2 years ago;
- Average hours worked is 10 hours per week; and
- Four in five current Platform workers (80.7%) report that digital platform work makes up less than half of their total annual income.¹³

These report findings indicate a typical casualisation of the workforce more commonly known as the 'gig economy'.

Eleven

Platforms leveraging the hyper growth in the gig economy have the potential to unlock significant areas of new workforce, creating efficiencies for the NDIS, which include but is not limited to:

- Stay at home parents
- Tertiary students
- Retirees, given almost a third of the population are currently aged 50 or above. Of these, 29% of those still working think they'll never retire¹⁴
- People over 50 struggling to retain employment¹⁵
- Unpaid carers
- All unemployed Australians

Twelve

Demarcation between different care disciplines is also a significant opportunity to grow the NDIS workforce. Cross-pollination of competencies between disability, aged and child-care has the potential to drive efficiencies in thin markets and areas of high demand where one person can operate across many federally funded programs including the NDIS and Aged Care Home Care Packages.

How Platform technology can create efficiency for the NDIS

This seems common sense however, of the 9% of workers in residential aged care that have a second job only 0.2% of these are in disability. Likewise, in community aged care 16% of workers have two jobs and only 2% of the 16% are in disability.¹⁶ Many of these people are actively seeking more work in their relevant sector. By training home care workers across both Disability and Aged Care disciplines, the total pool of available support workers becomes much larger and therefore the productivity gains enjoyed by Platforms grows available workforce capacity exponentially.

¹² Tillett, Andrew. "NDIS will require 90,000 more workers as \$22 billion scheme rolls out." Australian Financial Review, March 22 2019, <https://www.afr.com/politics/federal/ndis-will-require-90-000-more-workers-as-22-billion-scheme-rolls-out-20190322-p516mm>

¹³ Victorian Government, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Digital Platform Work in Australia: Preliminary findings from a national survey, June 2019, pp. 3,5.

¹⁴ Attwood, Alan. "Why Boomers can't talk about the 'R' word." Sydney Morning Herald, April 13 2019, <https://www.smh.com.au/money/super-and-retirement/welcome-to-the-minefield-that-is-21st-century-retirement-20190409-p51c98.html>

¹⁵ Council of the Ageing Victoria, "Older Workers Face Systemic Discrimination," September 4 2019, <https://www.cotavic.org.au/news-items/media-release-older-workers-face-systemic-discrimination/>

¹⁶ National Disability Services, Australian Disability Workforce Report, July 2017, p. 23.

Conclusion

The NDIS is an unprecedented opportunity for all Australians. The wholesale migration to a Consumer Directed Care (CDC) service delivery model through the NDIS offers participants more control over the types of care and services they access including who delivers the services, where and when.

The challenges in delivering CDC are quite significant and large in number, a byproduct of which is the mass fragmentation of care delivery across Australia.

Platforms offer the potential to optimise the current market ecosystem, provide consistency across Government initiatives and programs, systemise Quality and Safeguards governance to care delivery and leverage the hyper growth in the gig economy to unlock significant areas of new workforce to meet the increasing service demand.



Looking for more information?

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