



Australian Government
Department of Social Services

National Standards for Disability Services

Conversation tool

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National Standards for Disability Services- Conversation Tool

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The document must be attributed as the National Standards for Disability Services.

Purpose

This Conversation Tool is for workers and teams who have contact with people with disability using services or supports and/or their family members, friends, carers or advocates.

The Conversation Tool is a companion document to the National Standards for Disability Services. Other resources include an Easy English version, an Evidence Guide and short Stories that describe good practice.

The Conversation Tool can be used to:

- Promote awareness of the National Standards.
- Get feedback from people using your service or support.
- Identify changes or improvements.
- The Conversation Tool highlights how the National Standards can be used across your service to:
 - Reflect on practice.
 - Focus on quality.
 - Support participation.

Talking about the National Standards – why they matter

The National Standards for Disability Services have been updated to help promote quality disability services. Using the National Standards will support service providers to check the quality of the services and supports they provide, and find ways to improve them. The National Standards focus on rights and outcomes for people with disability.

People with disability play an important role in monitoring the quality of services and the supports that they receive. Service providers have a responsibility to test and use different ways to get feedback on how satisfied people are with their services and supports. Feedback shows opportunities for service and practice improvement. A range of options should be available for people with disability, families, carers and advocates to participate in your service.

The National Standards stress how important this is. Your quality management might include formal processes as well as informal conversations. This tool can support your conversations.

It has four sections, which you can refer to at different times depending on your focus:

- **Raising awareness** – ideas how you and your service can promote the National Standards.
- **What the National Standards mean in practice** – prompts for talking about what the National Standards can mean to people.
- **Conversation dynamics** – things to think about when you are talking about service quality and standards.
- **Beyond the conversation** – how to use the National Standards and your conversations to shape better practice.

Raising awareness of the National Standards

In your service:

Your service can do a number of things to promote awareness of the National Standards, both for people using your service and staff, such as:

- Promoting the National Standards and how they relate to your service. This could be through brochures, newsletters, posters or your website.
- Using relevant National Standards as a reference point when seeking feedback on areas of service provision.
- Agreeing on language to describe what the National Standards mean for your services and supports.
- Exploring the National Standards and Indicators through team meetings, or planning forums.
- Using methods such as reflection or role-play to explore how the standards can apply to different elements of practice.

In your role:

In your role, you can support people to understand the National Standards and how the National Standards relate to their experience of service or support. This helps you and your service to get feedback from people about their experiences, and opportunities for improvement. Things you can do include:

- Explaining the National Standards and what they mean in practice.
- Checking how people understand the information, and what expectations they may have.
- Providing information on the National Standards, in a form that meets people's communication and language needs (an Easy English version is available, alternative translations).
- Provision of information in community languages when providing information in formats that meet a person's individual needs.
- Responding to the cultural and linguistic needs of individuals.
- Talking with other staff about the National Standards and what they mean for your work.

TIP: You might focus on some standards at particular times and in different ways depending on your role. This means you might focus on certain standards relevant to your role, whilst other people will look at different standards. It is important to remember that your service needs to address all the standards.

What the National Standards mean in practice

Each National Standard includes a number of concepts that can seem abstract.

You can find out how people understand the National Standards, and what matters to them. You know the people you work with and how best to communicate with them.

It may be best to focus on one standard at a time, or to discuss a standard that is relevant, for example, the Individual Outcomes standard when you are developing or reviewing a plan. You might talk about the standards one-on-one or when you meet with a family, or perhaps during a group forum or an individual planning meeting.

This is a great opportunity to find out what people think and feel, and what they expect of you and their services and supports. While you might want to do this informally, you should also be prepared to respond to information or feedback that you didn't expect. This includes thinking about how you might document feedback, and explaining this to the people you speak with.

The questions on page nine assume that you already have a relationship with the people you work with, and that you have started to talk about the National Standards and service quality.

The questions can be used as a starting point – you can reword them to suit the way you communicate, and who you are communicating with. The point is to understand how people interpret each standard, what is relevant for them, and listen to what they say about their service experiences. This is a way to find out how services and supports can improve over time.

TIP: You will find your own questions that suit your role and the people you work with – you might already talk about personal interests and life goals. The important thing is to find a way to focus on what is relevant, and use the conversation to get feedback.

Conversation dynamics

It is important to create the right environment for conversations to take place.

In your service:

The culture of the service can support effective conversations about quality. For example, a service focused on quality, openness and transparency will encourage an open approach to positive and negative feedback. It will treat feedback as an opportunity to reflect on practice and identify potential service improvements. Similarly, a service focused on action acts on opportunities for improvement.

Your service can foster this by:

- Establishing and supporting clear participation and feedback processes.
- Supporting staff and people using services or supports to have a say.
- Making sure that this is fed into review, planning and implementation.
- Providing updates on how a person's input has been considered and used.
- Giving clear guidance on how the National Standards will be used to review services and supports, and your role in any review.

TIP: The National Standards for Disability Services Resource Package includes an Evidence Guide, with examples of evidence that could be used to show how a service is meeting each standard.

In your role:

You can support individuals to consider the National Standards and what they mean, such as:

- Finding everyday opportunities to seek feedback through the National Standards.
- Supporting an equal dynamic in conversation between people with disability, families, carers and advocates and staff and management – this means supporting the right of people with disability to access supports of their choice when interacting with their service, for example support from a family member, friend, carer or advocate.
- Meeting the specific communication, cultural and linguistic needs of people so they can participate in conversations.
- Ensuring that the physical environment is not a barrier to connecting with people and talking about personal experiences – this might mean thinking about private spaces for conversation.

TIP: Provision of adequate support can require additional effort but will make sure that the conversation is effective. Staff need to be aware of power imbalances between themselves and individuals e.g. leading questions. Adequate planning and review will make sure that supports are available at the right time.

Topics of interest

Rights

- When you think of rights, what do you think of?
- What rights are important to you?
- How do you think the service supports your rights?
- Do you feel like you can talk freely?
- How in control do you feel about your supports and services?
- Do you feel supported to try new things?
- How could we better support your rights?

Participation and Inclusion

- When you think of participation/inclusion what do you think of?
- What interests do you have, such as learning, work, sport, social activities?
- Can you tell me how the service supports you to follow your interests?
- Are we helping you to do things you want to do?

Individual Outcomes

- What does the term 'individual outcomes' mean to you?
- How do you think the service supports you to reach your personal goals?
- Do you have a say in the services or supports you use?
- How could we better support you to connect with your community?

Feedback and Complaints

- When you are thinking of giving feedback or making a complaint, what do you think of?
- Do you think that you can give feedback (positive or negative) on the services or supports you use?
- How could we better support you to provide feedback?

Service Access

- What does the term 'service access' mean to you?
- Do you think that the service is fair, for example, in how people start using a service or it provides supports?
- How can the service make sure that it is fair and follows its own guidelines?
- Did you feel welcomed when you started using this service? Can you tell me about that?
- Did you get all the information you needed to understand which services you could use? How could this have been improved?

Service Management

- What does the term 'service management' mean to you?
- Do you think that the service is managed well?
- How satisfied are you that the staff know their duties and are helpful and supportive?
- Do you have a say on how the service is running?
- How could the service be improved?

Beyond the conversation

The main purpose of quality conversations is to reflect on practice, to plan for improvement, and then to act on improvements. This can shape improvements in your own service as well as across the sector.

Recording and responding to actions arising from any conversations about the National Standards and the quality of services or supports is essential.

You and your service can make this work in a number of ways:

- Using a collaborative approach to deciding actions - keep a feedback loop going.
- Including short and longer-term actions for areas for improvement – this means you can celebrate success along the way.
- Considering examples of good practice that you can adopt.
- Thinking about other relevant services and community members you could work with.
- Talking with other people in the sector about good practice.
- Always looking for opportunities to apply the National Standards to what you are doing or trying to achieve.
- Keeping a focus on the person with disability as the primary partner - the National Standards are ultimately about people's quality of life and service experience.

TIP: You could start with the Stories provided in the National Standards for Disability Services Resource Package and think about further examples of good practice, or the good practice you see in your service. What about areas for improvement?