



**Summer
Foundation**

Reasonable & Necessary Podcast
Hosted by Dr George Taleporos

Exclusive: NDIS Deep Dive with Minister Jenny McAllister

Teaser:

Minister Jenny McAllister: I do think that when we see people living autonomously, independently, with agency in a situation that they've chosen, that really is realising the promise of the NDIS

George Taleporos: There has been a decision made around the support needs assessment tool that will commence in July 2026. What can you share with us about that tool and how it will be used?

Introduction:

George Taleporos: Hi I'm Dr George Taleporos and welcome to Reasonable & Necessary, Australia's premier podcast series on the National Disability Insurance Scheme. Brought to you by the Summer Foundation. Im coming to you from Wurundjeri land and pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging. But before we go any further, please do me a favour and hit the 'like' button, make sure you subscribe to the channel and select the notification bell so you can be notified of future episodes.

On today's episode, we're joined by NDIS Minister Jenny McAllister for her 1st in depth interview on the future of the NDIS. Check it out.

Interview:

George Taleporos: Hi, Minister, welcome to the show.

Minister Jenny McAllister: Hello. Thank you for having me on. It's very exciting.

George Taleporos: It's so good to have you, and can I check, is this really your first official podcast as Minister?

Minister Jenny McAllister: Indeed it is, George, and I am very excited to be on Reasonable and Necessary. It is an excellent opportunity.

George Taleporos: I'm very, very honoured. Do you remember where you were when you found out that you were going to be our minister, and how did you feel, what was your initial reaction?

Minister Jenny McAllister: I was at home with my family. I'd had a long summer as the Emergency Management Minister, and then we'd had a long election campaign,

and I was waiting to find out what I would be spending my next few years on. And I think my first instinct was: this is very exciting because it is very significant and consequential, and this is a big area of work to become involved in. My second thought was: there's going to be a lot to learn. And my third thought really was: the only possible way for me to do this is to get to know the disability community really well. So, the first thing I did really, once I was sworn in, was to get a list from the Department, of the disability organisations, and start phoning through disability leaders.

Because I guess my first instinct was that this is a really important policy area, but it's one that is incredibly important to a movement of people who have fought for the NDIS for a long time, and the best way to approach the portfolio will be through partnership.

George Taleporos: Absolutely. And there's not one of you, there's two of you, right? We've got two NDIS ministers. I don't think you can have enough NDIS ministers myself. But look, why two, and how do the two roles work together?

Minister Jenny McAllister: So I think this reflects the decision to bring disability into the Department of Health and Ageing, and it's a really significant decision. The underlying motivation is that we know that these other big systems, the health system and the aged care system, need to work well for all Australians, and that includes people with disability of course. We also know that a lot of the time people experience some real challenges in moving between these systems. So there's a logic to bringing it together, but also of course there are some differences. There are some very particular characteristics about the support that is required for people with disability. It's different to support that's offered in aged care, and different to healthcare, and I think we acknowledge that. But we think there are opportunities by bringing the portfolios together.

What that means though is that we have a cabinet-level minister in Mark Butler, and an NDIS Minister, which is me. And one of the really nice things about it is that working with Mark is of course terrific. It's one of the things I'm also really excited about in the portfolio. He has a reputation as a reforming minister, and somebody who's deeply passionate about excellent social services. So working with Mark is another really nice feature of the job for me. On a day-to-day basis we work really closely together, and our staff work really closely together, Mark and I talk really regularly. At the moment he's leading on Thriving Kids, and we're going to talk about that a bit later in the show I know. I'm focused on the NDIS and the kinds of things that we want to do to make the system itself as effective and fair and as high quality as it can be for all of the participants. So that's largely the division, and it's going really well from my perspective.

George Taleporos: Great. You said that you have had lots of meetings, and I know that I have met with you twice already and with your advisers a few times. What have you learnt since you've started having those conversations, and as a result, what are your top priorities as our minister?

Minister Jenny McAllister: Two learnings and some priorities. I've spent quite a lot of time trying to be in the places where disabled people are, and that's meant going to art studios, and sports grounds, and into day programs, and being invited into people's homes, and that has been lovely. One of the things that's been really interesting to me is the degree to which people with disability offer one another support. I probably hadn't been as keenly aware as I am now about the significance of peer support in the lives of many people with disability, and that is really important for me in thinking about some of the other work that we might do in the sector. At a policy level I think my overwhelming response is that we have a lot of work already on foot.

We've got recommendations from an independent review, we have recommendations from the Disability Royal Commission, we have recommendations from the Worker and Provider Registration Taskforce, and we've got a host of other policy questions in front of us. Trying to work with the disability community to make sure that everyone is clear about the areas where we seek to make change so that we can work on them together has been a real priority for me. The way I've been talking about it is that we need to establish a system of supports outside the scheme, and Minister Butler's talked about that a lot, but within the scheme there's three things that I really think we need to work on. The first is making sure that the participant experience is really good, and people are living better lives as a consequence of the supports they're receiving.

The second is making sure that the scheme is safe and operates with integrity. And the third is making sure that the market is working well so that when we talk about choice and choice and control participants have genuinely high quality choices that offer them value from the market, and I think that there are things that we can do there to make the range of choices available to participants better and higher quality.

George Taleporos: That's three very, very important areas that you're going to be working on. I know that when I first heard you speak, I think it was at the DSC Conference – I think you'd been in the job for 48 hours or something – you said that 'nothing about us without us' would guide approach. How will you make sure that people with disability are at the table and central to the decisions that you're making, because it is a key priority for you?

Minister Jenny McAllister: Being appointed for the NDIS as the minister for the NDIS means that I have some really important policy questions to think about, but it actually also means that I need to interact with a movement that has its own political traditions, its own history, and its own achievements, and I need to honour those achievements and that history. So I'm really conscious of the significance of that relationship with the disability movement. Nothing about us without us has been a long-held political proposition. It drove the thinking around the NDIS, but it also drives many other aspects of disability advocacy. I am really interested in how we make that practical and real. There are probably three elements to it that seem to be important. The first is that I personally need to be accountable on this front. I think it's really important for me to be available, accessible, engaged with disability leaders and with the disability community more generally.

Secondly there are some really important institutional arrangements that we should respect and reinforce. I'm thinking here of the role of the disability representative organisations, I'm thinking about the Independent Advisory Committee to the NDIA, I'm thinking about the Reform Advisory Committee which El Gibbs and Dougie have agreed to chair. All of these institutions are really important. I've made time to engage with them so far, and I intend to continue to do that. I think the third really significant area is codesign, and people talk a lot about codesign, but actually doing it is very challenging. It's challenging for governments, but it's also challenging for communities because it requires skill and patience and time, and I'm really pleased that this has been such a focus for the disability community, and for the NDIA over time.

I want to keep working on that and making sure that all of us lift the skills and the commitment and the energy that's dedicated to codesign. It's actually a really challenging but potentially immensely rewarding way to develop policy and program design, and I think that we can get a lot out of it when we do it well.

George Taleporos: As someone that's been involved in a lot of the work, I can't agree with you more about how important it is for the community and for government. So I hope we can do more of that. I want to turn to an announcement that happened very recently, and that is that there has been a decision made around the support needs assessment tool that will commence in July 2026. What can you share with us about that tool and how it will be used?

Minister Jenny McAllister: We want the planning experience to be a positive experience for people, and we've recently announced that we'll be partnering with the University of Melbourne and the Centre for Disability Studies to implement a new tool within a new framework planning approach. So the tool that's going to be used is the Instrument for the Classification and Assessment of Support Needs, which is a very technical name for the term. But really what it is is an opportunity for a structured conversation during the planning process. What we expect is that an individual participant will have a chance to have a conversation using the tool to answer questions about their own circumstances, their own support needs, and their goals, and that will be the foundation for building a plan.

George Taleporos: How will the assessment convert into a budget, because ultimately we're going to end up with a budget?

Minister Jenny McAllister: Our intention is to work with the disability community on the implementation arrangements for the tool, and the consortia, the University of Melbourne and the Centre for Disability Studies, will be helping us with that too. There's a lot of policy work to go, but we think the tool provides a good foundation for understanding people's support needs, and then being able to build a budget that can respond to those.

George Taleporos: And will the community be involved in coming to that outcome?

Minister Jenny McAllister: When we came to the portfolio, a number of people said to me that they thought it was really important that the community be involved in

the development of the framework planning arrangements. So we've been really careful to make sure that there is time for this to happen. Now that we've confirmed the procurement for this tool, we're going to be able to work with the disability community to make sure that we can really ground truth it and road test it before we begin. I think the other thing to know is that even when use of the tool commences, it won't be for all participants all at once. It'll be a staged rollout over a number of years that will allow the NDIA to incorporate some of the lessons just as they go to make sure that we're getting good outcomes for participants through this new approach.

George Taleporos: I think that will be really important and valuable so that we can learn from any problems that arise, and also recognise that whenever you introduce something new that there could be issues. So let's make sure that we do it carefully and take the time that we need. I'm very pleased that you pushed that out to next year because we were all quite nervous about the introduction being sooner than that. So thank you for your advocacy around that. It's really necessary and helpful.

Minister Jenny McAllister: Well George, the advocacy actually came from the disability community to me, and I am really grateful for the way that so many of the DROs have worked with me in the time since I came into the portfolio. I think we've established a trusted way of working together, and I really appreciate the work that they do talking with community, and then bringing those thoughts, and those ideas, and those priorities to me as a representative of the government. That's what I hope it will look like for the remainder of the term and while I'm in this portfolio.

George Taleporos: 100%. Thank you, Minister. I'd like to talk to some of the announcements that Minister Butler made, and the first one was about the growth of the NDIS. Currently I think the NDIS is growing at around 12%, and he said that he wants to move the growth down to five or six percent. How does the government plan to get there?

Minister Jenny McAllister: It's really important that the scheme is sustainable. One of the points that I think is made very well via the independent review of the NDIS. In sustainability is linked to scheme longevity, and we want the NDIS to be around for a long term. So we came to government, the scheme was growing at around 20% per year. That's plainly not sustainable. It's now growing at I think something like 10.8%, and our goal is to get it to 8% in the coming years. The point Minister Butler was making is that a mature scheme should probably be growing at around five or six percent. That's not a fixed number, but based on population growth, and growth in price and inflation, that would seem about a reasonable number. He's clear that that's work that we need to do in the future with the states and territories, with community. But I think he was just pointing to the fact that there is more that we can do, but that he's determined that we're going to do it together.

George Taleporos: I know that when people heard further reductions in the growth that there was a bit of nervousness, and some people were worried that this will lead to cuts to supports. What would you say to those participants and families?

Minister Jenny McAllister: I think the really important thing to remember is that the scheme will continue to grow. So even under any scenario that we can imagine, the scheme will continue to grow. We do want to make sure that people have the supports that they need, those reasonable and necessary supports that give your podcast its title. But we also want to make sure that it's sustainable, and part of that is about making sure that the NDIS isn't the only lifeboat in the ocean, that there is a system of support sitting outside the NDIS that can support the disability community, including the millions of people who live with disability but are not themselves on the scheme.

George Taleporos: So what you're saying is that you expect that the growth will slow down because of the other lifeboats, and so people can access mainstream services and won't need the NDIS. Is that how we will get to that five or six percent?

Minister Jenny McAllister: I think we're clear that there's more thinking to be done about the overall growth trajectory of the scheme. But in the short term the focus is on making sure that foundational supports are in place. That was an agreement that the National Cabinet reached some years ago, and we're really keen to take that forward. Minister Butler's speech a couple of weeks ago now spoke about Thriving Kids. It's the place where the states and territories said that they too wanted to start looking for opportunities to provide better supports for children outside of the scheme. And again, this responds to the findings of the independent review of the NDIS. They told us, and they heard I think from many in the community, that the current system of individualised supports doesn't work all the time for all children, and might indeed have some unintended consequences in terms of the way that children are experiencing school, or experiencing other aspects of their social life.

And so the goal in establishing a second tier, another layer of support, is to make sure that we're offering families a more straightforward, easier, timely way to access support, because we know that we can do better for many of these children.

George Taleporos: Thank you, Minister. I think that there's a real need for an understanding about what's been proposed, and also to address a question that I'm hearing, how will we make sure that kids don't fall through the cracks between the two systems? How do we make sure that doesn't happen? Because I think that Minister Butler said that it will be established very soon, but that's a lot of work, and people are concerned that it might not happen on time, and in the meantime some people could miss out.

Minister Jenny McAllister: Minister Butler described it this way, he says, "We don't want anyone to fall between two stools", and he went on to talk about the fact that we don't want to make significant changes to access until we've got these other systems in place. But you're right that it's really ambitious. Minister Butler's speech talked a bit about some of the levers that the commonwealth might be able to use to put a system in place, and he was talking a little bit about some of the Medicare arrangements, some of the primary health facilities that could be used to provide support to kids. But we know the states and territories have a role to play here too.

They've been thinking carefully about the kinds of capabilities they've got in their jurisdictions, and we're keen to work with them to set up an ecosystem of supports that can work really well for kids, and also for their parents.

George Taleporos: Yeah, that will be very important. Thanks, Minister. I might turn now to the important issue of people being forced to live in group homes. I know you met recently Ben and visited his house, and he was stuck in a group home for over 20 years. Maybe you can tell Ben's story.

Minister Jenny McAllister: Yeah. I was so grateful to Ben and Colleen for having me over to their place. It was a really terrific visit. I think some of your listeners will have seen Ben and Colleen talking about their story in an Australian newspaper recently as well. But essentially Ben did spend a lot of years living in a home with I think with three or four other residents. I don't think he liked it very much, and he worked with Milparinka to explore a different kind of living option for himself. He now lives with Colleen, she's his flatmate, they live in a unit block that's got about 17 units, and Ben also receives some other support from some of the support workers who are on site in that same building. It was really nice being with them together. They talked a lot about what they enjoy about one another's company, how they spend time playing music, cooking, talking, and when we finished our conversation Ben was off down the markets to do some shopping.

It was really obvious to me that this had been a really positive change for him. He'd worked with a provider to set up the circumstances that were really going to help him grow in the direction that he wanted to grow, and have some of the independence that he really craved. And I was just really happy to see that working out so well for him, and also very grateful to him for being willing to talk with me so openly about it, and to invite me into his house. I do think that there are lots of things that we can do to make these arrangements more available for people. Choice and control means that people will have different preferences, I know that, but I do think that when we see people living autonomously, independently, with agency in a situation that they've chosen, that really is realising the promise of the NDIS, and I was extremely happy to be able to be there and have that conversation with Ben and Colleen about how it was going for them.

George Taleporos: And there are thousands of people like Ben who want to get out of group homes, or want better options. You would've read the Moving Out, Moving On report by the Summer Foundation. It really outlines some practical things that can be done. What were your thoughts on that report?

Minister Jenny McAllister: I've been really grateful for the work of the Summer Foundation. I've had a couple of opportunities to meet with some of the researchers from Summer Foundation, and I know that you're connected there too, George. It's a really important contribution because these are questions that go to big structural issues: what kinds of support are services offering, what kinds of physical accommodation is available to people, how does the NDIA interact with all of these systems, and how do other government systems support independent living. I am very interested in exploring these further. Home and living is one of the

most important things for a person, and I think there are lots of opportunities to do good work here.

George Taleporos: Thank you so much, Minister. I know that Colleen and Ben, with the arrangements that they have, Colleen has her rent subsidised through Ben's NDIS plan. How can we make sure that with the review that's currently occurring of the NDIS support lists and the in and out lists ensure that people can use their funding effectively, because on the list rent is on the out list. So do you have any thoughts on what can be done for improved flexibility of these? I know it's currently causing quite a lot of difficulty in the community.

Minister Jenny McAllister: On the specific question that you ask, which is really about how do we facilitate different models of independent living, I am really open to a conversation about this, but I think that there are lots of interesting things we can do. We've got good researchers helping us explore those, and we've got good services wanting to explore these models with enthusiastic NDIS participants. That's a good situation, and I'm keen to lean into that, understand more, and be part of finding new ways for people to live fulfilling and independent lives. On the more general question of the lists, you'll know that there's a review underway at the moment of the way that those Section 10 lists are operating.

I think we're really keen to hear from the disability community about how those changes have been experienced practically on the ground, and we're open to thinking about changes that will make sure that people are using their budgets in ways that really help them deliver on their own goals and their own plans.

George Taleporos: That will be excellent, because I know that if you make the right changes to those lists people will be able to save money and get better outcomes. So I really hope that we can get some good outcomes from the current review. Thanks, Minister. I'd like to move to a very hot topic, and that is pricing. What are your views on NDIS prices, and what can we expect around how prices are set into the future?

Minister Jenny McAllister: I talked a little before about the importance of markets in the NDIS. One of the principles of the scheme is that participants will be able to use their budgets to purchase services that suit them, and I think we expected that that would produce high quality services and innovative services. That's partially been fulfilled, but in other areas we may not see it in the way that we entirely expected, and I think that if we think about those markets, pricing is one of the levers we have, regulation is another lever, commissioning is another lever that we have to improve the overall quality and range of services available to participants. We've obviously just been through the annual pricing review, and the Board made a set of decisions about pricing this time round, and in doing that they made a few observations.

The first was that they don't want to see NDIS participants paying more than other Australians for the same kinds of services. That's a really important principle for them, and it makes sense to me. The second is that they do see over time value in moving to differentiated pricing. So, a pricing model that might recognise when a

particular service is delivered in a way that delivers a higher-quality outcome, and they're interested in exploring what kinds of pricing arrangements could reward quality in the market. And thirdly, to that end, they think they need a bit more information about some of the provider models that are presently in place. So, your listeners may have heard a bit about the quality trials that are underway.

The NDIA is working with some SIL providers, and soon some therapy providers, so that we can get good information about what really are the cost drivers in the supports that they're providing, and how can we make sure that the pricing system that's in place delivers quality supports, and rewards quality in the market. I think the final thing to say is that there's obviously an ongoing conversation around independent pricing. We're interested in exploring that. But for the time being the NDIA remains responsible for pricing, and in the coming months we can expect them to publish a work plan which will set out some of the things they're going to be examining as part of their pricing work in the next few years.

George Taleporos: That'll be interesting. Any insights on what we can expect there?

Minister Jenny McAllister: I'll leave it to the Board to publish their plan, George. I'm not going to get ahead of the –

George Taleporos: Fair enough. That's another podcast, right, Minister?

Minister Jenny McAllister: Well, you'll just have to invite me back. [laughs]

George Taleporos: Absolutely. The Provider and Worker Registration Taskforce was headed up by one of my favourite people in the world, Natalie Wade, recommended a self-directed support registration category so that we can continue to choose who supports us, and not be forced to use registered providers. What are your views about this recommendation in the report, and what commitments are you making around upholding choice and control in the NDIS?

Minister Jenny McAllister: It's really important that the NDIS operate in a way that is safe for participants, and that it operate with integrity, and we do hear that the limited number of registered providers presents challenges on both fronts. So I am really interested in the work that's been done by the Provider Worker Registration Taskforce, and also in the consultative work that the Commission is doing about what they might do to implement those arrangements. I know that the question about mandatory registration can be sensitive for parts of the community, and I think the taskforce did some very clever thinking about what might be possible for people who are self-organising. That won't be for everybody, but I think the taskforce have given us some very good options to consider for how we might react or appropriately respond to that preference, because we know that for some participants having choice and control in that area is very, very important to them.

George Taleporos: 100%. I think you're my fourth minister that I'm interviewing, and I always ask ministers about [unclear] 00:35:35 of young people in residential aged care. There has been some progress in that area, but there was a target that

by 2025, which is now, there'd be no young people being forced into residential aged care. There's still 200 young people entering residential aged care every year? Do you have any strategies around that?

Minister Jenny McAllister: This is a really important area of reform, and I do think we have seen really good progress. Particularly for people under 45 we are seeing some very, I think, encouraging improvements. So I think the most recent data has just 11 people under 45 in aged care, and that's a very good outcome. The new Aged Care Act creates some new tests that will make it very difficult for a person under 50 to be admitted into an aged care facility at all, and I think that we will see further progress as a consequence of that legislation. We'll keep reporting on this, it is a really important area of policy. If there are any unintended consequences from those legislative reforms we then of course have a chance to come back round and make any further adjustments. But this is an area where we do need to retain focus, and I think it's really pleasing that we have seen the progress that we have.

George Taleporos: The new Aged Care Act that you spoke of has a part of it that says that if the person is at risk of homelessness that they can go into aged care. Is there a risk that that might be a backdoor for pushing more people in?

Minister Jenny McAllister: I don't expect so, but as I said, we'll keep monitoring this data, we'll keep watching it carefully, and if we do see an unintended consequence of that kind, then we'd make the adjustments that were necessary. Our policy intent remains as it has been, that we do want to see young people living in appropriate living environments, and we don't think aged care facilities meet that test.

George Taleporos: Absolutely. I agree with you on that for sure. Minister, we've covered a lot of ground. I do want to ask you, there are many NDIS participants and family members that are listening, and providers, even NDIS staff, apparently they love our show, what's your message to them about the future of the NDIS with you as our minister?

Minister Jenny McAllister: I am really optimistic about this scheme, and I am very, very honoured to have been entrusted with stewarding it as the minister. This year's an incredibly important achievement for Australia. It's also a world-leading achievement to have a scheme of this kind. And we have to look after it and protect it, and make it the very best that it can be. My hope as the minister is that I will be able to work closely and in a deep and real way with the disability community to make that happen. I think my final message really is a thank you because people have been incredibly welcoming to me in my new role, people have been patient when I haven't known the answer to things or I had to seek information, they've been generous, and it's been a really – a source of genuine gratitude and appreciation from me that people have been so willing to work with me over the last few months.

George Taleporos: Minister, you have been very open and very willing to meet with myself and other advocates, and I've been very impressed by your ability to listen, and also follow-up when we've raised concerns with you.

I really, really appreciate your time. And I also want to wish you the best of luck. I think you've got a really important job in front of you. I think that you're the right person for the job. I've been very impressed by the way you've been working with the community, and I want to thank you deeply for your work.

Minister Jenny McAllister: Thank you, George. That is terribly kind of you, and thank you for your advocacy too, and actually for all the advocates out there who turn up every day and speak up for their community. That is an incredibly important job to take on, and a big responsibility, and I acknowledge that and appreciate it too.

George Taleporos: Thank you, Minister. I hope this will be the first of many conversations with you for our audience. I look forward to you coming back in the near future.

Minister Jenny McAllister: Thank you. Happy to do so, and pleased to be here today too.

George Taleporos: Have a great day .

Minister Jenny McAllister: You too, George.

Outro:

George Taleporos: That's all we have time for on today's episode of Reasonable & Necessary. As you know, we love your feedback so please, share your thoughts or questions in the comments section below. Thanks for listening and until next time, stay well and reasonable.