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TALKING ABOUT THE NASC

(NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND
SERVICE COORDINATION AGENCY)



TALKING ABOUT . . .

THE NASC (NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND SERVICE COORDINATION AGENCY)

This short paper has been written to provide a platform for a Community Conversation about Needs Assessment and Service Coordination. It is designed to offer brief, but important information and thoughts on the topic which will enable all who participate in the conversation to have a common starting place. It is not intended to answer all the possible questions about NASC, or to provide clarity for individual situations, it is offered in the spirit of 'a conversation starter'.

INTRODUCTION

NASC services play a significant role in our current formal disability support service structure. Their role is significant because all disabled people who receive government funded support through the Ministry of Health, are required to access this support through a NASC service.

There are 15 NASC services for younger people (people under the age of 65 years) across the country, most with different names, but all are contracted to the Ministry of Health to undertake the same four functions. Even though each organisation is contracted to deliver the same core functions, they do not all deliver these in the same way.

The NASC service does not deliver the formal, paid 'hands on support' that people receive, rather, they determine eligibility for these services, including the nature and level of services to be received and then coordinate the services that will be provided.

It is very important to recognise however, that as important as funded services and supports are, if disabled people are to live 'a good life' they will require much more than just paid, formal supports. Any person who lives their life totally or largely dependent on paid, formal supports will always remain living on the fringes of community isolated from society.

For people to attain the 'good life' they will require a strong network of committed people who are present in their life, not because they are paid to be present but because they want to be there and do so out of friendship, love and freedom of choice.

THE FOUR CORE CONTRACTED FUNCTIONS OF ALL NASCS

1. Eligibility

The first role of a NASC is to determine whether the person's disability / diagnosis fits the Ministry of Health's **eligibility** criteria, which is:

"A person with a disability is a person who has been identified as having a physical, psychiatric, intellectual, sensory, or age-related disability (or a combination of these), which is likely to continue for a minimum of six months and result in the reduction of independent function to the extent that on going support is required" (Ministry of Health)

In a real sense this is the gate keeping function of the NASC. Their role here is to ensure that only people who meet the Ministry's mandate are able to gain access to the formal paid service system.

2. Facilitated Needs Assessment

The second core function of a NASC service is to **determine need**. They do this by undertaking an assessment process that could be called any of the following:

- Needs Assessment
- Reassessment
- Early Reassessment; Review
- Self assessment.

Regardless of which name is used, the essence of the action remains the same – to gather information about the support needs you have as a result of your disability.

With all the good intent in the world to undertake assessments which look at people's needs in the widest sense of the term, what most often happens in practice is that the assessment is reduced to looking at people's needs in terms of possible paid service solutions. As a result people are often assessed, not on their actual needs but on the basis of what the formal service system has to offer as a response at the time. Such an approach to needs assessment seldom identifies very important areas of need such as loneliness, isolation, lack of opportunity, etc. as these needs, while very real to the person can seldom be met through the paid service system.

3. Service Co-ordination

Through the service coordination process a NASC will look to determine which of a person's **assessed needs can be met** by government funded services and which [could] be met by other possibilities. It is also used to identify, plan and review any current support package a person has in place.

There are significant possibilities for the service coordination process to engage with people around their local networks, neighbours, communities and explore options to assist people to increase their connection with freely given support, however this is rarely an active part of service coordination. What service coordination almost always focuses on is 'which disability related needs can we link with a funded service option and which can we not do this for?' Increasingly this question is being influenced by the fourth function of NASC, namely budget management.

4. Budget Management

As with all Ministries, the Ministry of Health has a capped annual budget. The NASC is the Ministry's primary tool to **manage that budget**, and all service coordination decisions that involve the allocation of paid formal supports (which is the majority) have to be weighed against budget decisions.

In practice, what this looks like is the NASC is held primarily responsible by the Ministry for resource allocation which is a key component of service coordination. A range of **'tools'** have been developed to aid the NASC and the Ministry to manage the budget, such as the:

- Support Package Allocation (SPA) tool
- Delegations for sign off authority
- National NASC Reviewer and 'high cost package panels'
- Residential pricing tools such as the Allocation Resource Tool (ART)
- Transparent Pricing Model (TPM).

Some concluding thoughts

Is it possible that we have given too much of our power and authority over to the formal service system?

There are many people who need 'good quality paid support' to live the good life, however for many their only relationships outside of immediate family are through paid relationships. Is this really how we want our loved ones to experience life?

The NASC has a significant role to play when we need to gain access to formal paid disability support services but it needs to be kept in perspective. No NASC (or any service) can 'coordinate supports' to meet a person's every need so perhaps we need to rethink our expectations of what a NASC (and the service system) can provide for us or our loved ones.

The NASC service is contracted by the Ministry of Health to undertake the four functions outlined above. When we understand the NASC role, its possibilities and its limitations we are better placed to be in a position to make the most of its resource without distorting its ability to meet our needs.

Some questions to start with

- How do I understand what the 'good life' looks like for me (or for my loved one)?
- Am I clear on what sort of life I want for myself (or my loved one)?
- If it is true that paid formal support cannot meet all of my (or my loved one's) needs, what do I need to learn more about that might increase our chances of success in the 'good life'?
- Assuming the issue of eligibility is resolved, do I understand that what information I give at the time of assessment will be critical when it comes to service coordination and budget management?
- If I do need good quality paid supports, how can I use the NASC process most effectively?
- What would it look like if I was in a partnership relationship with my NASC service?
- What are the issues we're facing in our community, and what can we do to begin to address these issues for the good of all our disabled citizens?