

# Disability Advocates Slam Plans to Outsource NDIA Services



The NDIA announced on Friday that international outsourcing company Serco would deliver contact centre services for the next two years in Melbourne and regional Victorian locations.

The contact centre is often the first point of contact that participants and providers have with the National Disability Insurance Scheme, and the NDIA said it was critical the centre was “able to provide fast, accurate and effective advice to callers”.

“This approach is in line with the NDIA’s commitment to continuously improve so that the NDIS offers participants a quality experience that makes a difference to their lives; which encourages a vibrant provider market that will progressively be deregulated; while ensuring that the scheme is financially sustainable,” the NDIA said.

“The use of external partners is not a new approach for the NDIA. A large proportion of NDIA work is already done in partnership with the private sector, for example a large number of service providers and Local Area Coordinators operate as representatives of the NDIA on the ground in local

communities.

“This partnership approach with the community and private sector has proven to be an effective and efficient means of ensuring the delivery of high quality services to NDIA participants. Sourcing our contact centre services from Serco will give ongoing flexibility, responsiveness and value for money.”

The NDIA added that under the partnership arrangement, Serco’s staff would be fully trained and “no services or data will go offshore”.

But the announcement has faced severe backlash from disability advocates, who have questioned the reputation of Serco.

The company has previously been investigated (but later was cleared) of fraud in the UK and [agreed to pay back the government £69 million](#) (A\$126 million) in 2013 over fraudulent tagging contracts.

Greens disability rights spokesperson Senator Jordon Steele-John, said he was appalled the NDIA was engaging with Serco.

“Serco are an unscrupulous private organisation with a long history of predatory market capture, persistent poor performance delivering public contracts and a dehumanising approach to caring for people,” Steele-John said.

“People in the disabled community have been warning about lobbying by [Serco with regards to the NDIS](#) for years and their worst fears have now come true.

“The last thing disabled people need when trying to interact with the NDIA is to be treated as a commodity.”

Council for Intellectual Disability senior advocate Jim Simpson, told Pro Bono News that people with disability needed to feel confident when they contacted call centres.

“Getting on the phone and talking to someone who you haven’t met to talk

about often personal issues, is daunting at best for people with disabilities,” Simpson said.

“What is vital is that a call centre is run by an organisation that people with disabilities and their families have confidence in. This way, they are much more likely to feel confident making those calls and talking openly with the person at the other end of the phone.

“So we’re just shocked that this contract has been given to Serco to run these NDIA call centres.”

A flabbergasting decision.

The first consideration should have been whether people with disability and their families would be confident in the provider. [@ainehillbilly](#) [@advocacynsw](#) [@Adv4Inclusion](#) [@carlyfindlay](#) [@OnTopicAus](#) [@Graemeinnes](#) [@JoWat](#) [@gemcarey](#)  
[https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/apr/23/outsourcing-ndis-contact-centres-to-serco-an-accident-waiting-to-happen?CMP=Share\\_iOSApp\\_Other...](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/apr/23/outsourcing-ndis-contact-centres-to-serco-an-accident-waiting-to-happen?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other...)

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Simpson said he had two main concerns with Serco running the call centres.

“One is in light of Serco’s controversial public history in relation to things like [prisons and immigration detention](#). People with disability and their families are going to be very cautious about trusting this organisation,” he said.

“And secondly, irrespective of the rights and wrongs of their controversial history, Serco doesn’t have established relationships in the disability community in Australia. So it’s not an organisation that people know and have any basis for feeling that it will understand disability issues and be sensitive in it.”

He added that this could cause a “major impediment to the engagement between people with disability and the NDIS”.

For Simpson, people employed in disability services need to have a personal history of contact with people with disability.

“They need to be very sensitive in their communications. They need to have very flexible communication skills to adapt to the communication needs of people who may ring in,” he said.

“Plus they need time and that’s always one of our worries with contracts for things like call centres, is that one of the one of the requirements for a profit making organisation like Serco, will be that their staff get through a certain number of calls in every hour.

“And that counts against taking the time that may be needed to have a useful conversation most particularly with people with intellectual disability, but also for a range of other people with disability and their families as well.”

Serco’s transition to become NDIA’s new contact centre supplier will commence from June.

Luke Michael is a journalist at Pro Bono News covering the social sector.