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Vision loss and the NDIS

A guide for participants, families and carers working out what the NDIS funds for vision impairment and blindness, and how to ask for it.

FOR PARTICIPANTS & FAMILIES

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About this guide

This guide is for people living with vision impairment and blindness, and for the families and carers around them. It is written by Independent Life Disability Supports (InLife), a registered NDIS provider working with families across Victoria.

We wrote it because the NDIS is complicated, and the people who need it most usually have the least time to work it out. We have kept it plain. Where the NDIS uses jargon, we explain it. Where vision impairment and blindness has its own vocabulary, we explain that too.

WHO THIS IS FOR

Three groups of readers

People recently diagnosed with vision impairment and blindness, or told they may qualify for the NDIS. Families and carers supporting someone living with it. Health professionals helping a person prepare an application.

WHAT YOU WILL FIND

Six sections, and the last is yours

What vision impairment and blindness is, and how it affects daily life. How the NDIS works and how to apply. The supports it commonly funds. How InLife works as a provider. Who to call. Pages to fill in and bring to your planning meeting.

A NOTE ON LANGUAGE

This guide is written in English. InLife supports families in Farsi, Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi and English, and this guide is published in eleven languages. Ask, and we will work in the language that suits your household. Interpreters are free at every NDIS meeting, and you never have to ask a family member to interpret their own health conversation.

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THE WORKBOOK IS YOURS

The last four pages are a workbook: your details, a map of your week, and space for your goals. Fill them in and bring this guide to your planning meeting. A planner who can see your week does not have to imagine it.



SECTION ONE

About Legal Blindness

What vision impairment and blindness is, how it affects daily life, and where the NDIS fits in.

What is Vision Impairment?

In Australia, a person is considered legally blind when their best-corrected visual acuity in the better eye is 6/60 or worse, or their visual field is reduced to 10 degrees or less, or there is a combination of vision loss and field restriction with equivalent functional impact. Legal blindness covers a wide spectrum – from no light perception, to useful residual vision that still requires assistive technology and orientation skills to navigate ordinary life.

Vision impairment can be present from birth (congenital), develop in childhood, or arise later from conditions such as macular degeneration, glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy, retinitis pigmentosa, or trauma. Many people who are blind or have low vision do not see themselves as having a medical problem – they see themselves as part of the Blind community, with their own language, technology, sport, and culture. The NDIS funds the supports that make an ordinary life possible, with respect for that identity.

Common signs and symptoms

- Reduced visual acuity that cannot be corrected with glasses or contact lenses.
- Reduced or patchy visual field (tunnel vision or peripheral loss).
- Difficulty reading standard print, screens, or signage.
- Difficulty recognising faces or facial expressions.
- Difficulty with mobility in unfamiliar environments.
- Sensitivity to glare, or difficulty adjusting between bright and dim light.
- Some conditions cause fluctuating vision day to day.

The medical context

- Legal blindness is a functional and legal definition, not a single medical condition – many eye conditions can lead to it.
- Common causes include macular degeneration, glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy, retinitis pigmentosa, cataracts (where surgery is not possible).
- Ophthalmology manages the underlying eye condition; optometry provides ongoing vision care; low-vision specialists fit magnification and reading aids.
- Orientation and Mobility (O&M) specialists teach travel skills – cane technique, route learning, guide dog handling.
- Some conditions are stable, others progressive – the supports needed change with the trajectory.
- Cortical visual impairment (CVI) – vision loss from brain involvement – is increasingly recognised, particularly in children.

VISION IMPAIRMENT IS NOT

Legal blindness does not mean total blindness – most legally blind people have some useful vision. It is not a learning disability. Blind and vision-impaired people work in every profession, including ones that look visual on the surface – coding, music production, design, law, medicine. Many in the Blind community do not see blindness as a deficit; they see it as one human variation that requires adapted tools, not pity.

WHERE TO LEARN MORE

Vision Australia and Blind Citizens Australia publish plain-language information. The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists (RANZCO) is the clinical peak body.

How Legal Blindness can affect daily life

Everyone's experience of Vision Impairment is different. The list below covers areas the NDIS commonly funds support around – it is not a prediction. The conversation with your treating team and the NDIA Planner is what shapes your supports.

MOBILITY

How you move

Travelling independently in familiar and unfamiliar places. O&M training and the right cane or guide dog turn unfamiliar streets into navigable ones.

DAILY LIVING

How you live each day

Cooking, dressing, banking, shopping. Adaptive techniques and a small kit of talking and tactile tools make daily living independent – not dependent.

COMMUNITY AND IDENTITY

How you belong

The Blind community is strong – peer mentoring, sport, advocacy, culture. Many people find identity here, not deficit. InLife respects that frame.

READING AND INFORMATION

How you read

Books, bills, prescription labels, signs. Screen readers, audio library, braille, and magnification cover the full range. There is no information that cannot be made accessible.

WORK AND STUDY

How you earn and learn

Vision impairment does not close career options – coders, lawyers, teachers, musicians, athletes, professors. The right tech setup is the bridge, and JobAccess plus NDIS together usually fund it.

FAMILY AND RELATIONSHIPS

How you connect

Parenting, partnership, friendship – all unchanged by vision loss. Where adaptive parenting techniques help, OT and peer mentors are the right resource.

An ordinary life

A diagnosis of Vision Impairment is not a closed door. The NDIS exists to fund what each person needs to live an ordinary life – to work or study, to spend time with family, to

“Blindness is not the absence of sight. It is a different way of moving through the world — fully, capably, and on your own terms.”

INDEPENDENT LIFE · HOW WE BEGIN EVERY PLAN

What an ordinary life can look like

- participate in their community, to enjoy the things they enjoy.
- What "ordinary life" looks like
- Working in any profession – law, IT, music, teaching, trades
- Studying at TAFE, university, or postgraduate level
- Travelling solo or with family, domestic and overseas
- Cooking, shopping, banking – independently
- Reading widely – audiobooks, braille, screen readers
- Faith and community participation – mosque, gurdwara, church, temple
- Intimate relationships, marriage, parenting
- Sport – blind cricket, goalball, athletics, skiing, swimming
- Music, theatre, comedy, creative arts
- Running a small business

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SECTION TWO

The NDIS basics

What the scheme is, whether you can access it, and how to prepare for a planning meeting.

What is the NDIS?

The National Disability Insurance Scheme funds the supports a person needs because of disability. It is not income support and it is not health care.

THE WORD	WHAT IT ACTUALLY MEANS
National	It runs across the whole country, wherever you live.
Disability	It funds support for intellectual, physical, sensory, cognitive, neurological and psychosocial disability, where the functional impact is substantial and likely to be lifelong.
Insurance	It takes a lifetime view, investing earlier so that less support is needed later where that is possible.
Scheme	It funds what you need to build skills, stay independent and live an ordinary life.

Who runs it

The **NDIA** (National Disability Insurance Agency) makes funding decisions. The **NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission** regulates providers, handles complaints and protects participant rights.

The NDIS in one sentence

It funds “reasonable and necessary” supports so you can live an ordinary life. What that means in practice is the conversation you will have at your planning meeting.

Can I access the NDIS?

The four basic rules

- You are under 65 when you apply.
- You are an Australian citizen, permanent resident, or hold a Protected Special Category Visa.
- You have a permanent disability that substantially affects how you do everyday activities.
- You need support in at least one of: communication, mobility, social interaction, learning, self-care, self-management.

How to apply

- Phone the NDIA on 1800 800 110 to request an Access Request Form.
- Your GP or treating team completes the evidence sections. They are usually the ones who can describe your functional impact.
- The NDIA aims to decide within 21 days of a complete form.

FOR LEGAL BLINDNESS SPECIFICALLY

Permanent legal blindness – visual acuity of 6/60 or worse in the better eye with correction, or visual field of 10 degrees or less – is on the NDIS List B for permanence and typically meets the access test where functional impact on daily activities is documented. The strongest applications include an ophthalmologist letter confirming the diagnosis and prognosis, a recent Functional Capacity Assessment from an OT (low-vision), and an Orientation & Mobility assessment.

IF YOUR APPLICATION IS DECLINED

You can ask the NDIA for an **internal review** (a section 100 review) within three months of the decision. If you are still dissatisfied, you can apply to the **Administrative Review Tribunal** on 1800 228 333 or at art.gov.au. The ART took over this work from the AAT in October 2024, so older letters and websites may still use the old name. Many decisions are changed at the internal review stage once stronger evidence is supplied, so it is worth gathering evidence before you escalate.

Before the planning meeting

The planning meeting is where your first plan gets built with the NDIA. It runs about ninety minutes. Going in prepared changes what comes out.

ONE

Write your goals

Big and small. Where do you want to be in twelve months? In five years? Goals are written in everyday language, not medical terms.

TWO

Map your day

Use the workbook at the back of this guide. Note where help would change things, and be specific about the hard parts of the day.

THREE

Gather evidence

Functional Capacity Assessment, GP letters, hospital discharge summaries, allied health reports, current medication list.

FOUR

Bring someone

Family, an advocate or a support coordinator. You can ask for a free interpreter, and you should if English is not your first language.

EXAMPLE GOALS

Goals are written in everyday language, not medical terms. The NDIA accepts goals like "I want to be able to make my own breakfast" or "I want to volunteer at the local library."

At the planning meeting

The meeting is run by an NDIA planner or a Local Area Coordinator. Both can build your plan with you.

What they will ask

- Your personal details and how you would like to be contacted.
- Which community or mainstream supports you already use: GP, hospital, family, church, mosque, gurdwara, temple.
- Your safety at home and in the community.
- Your goals, for the next twelve months and beyond.
- The kind of support that would help you reach them.

What you can do

- Take your time. Pause, think, ask for the question again.
- Use pictures, photos or other communication aids.
- Have family or a support person speak on your behalf.
- Ask for an interpreter, at no cost to you.
- Decline to answer anything that feels invasive.

BRING THIS GUIDE

The workbook pages at the back are designed for this meeting. Filled in, they give the planner a coherent picture of who you are and what you need, without you having to hold it all in your head on the day.

“Reasonable and necessary” supports

Your plan is built from supports the NDIA considers reasonable and necessary. Reasonable means fair, taking into account what is already available to you. Necessary means you need it to live an ordinary life or work toward your goals.

A support must meet all six tests

- Related to your disability, not general living costs.
- Value for money, judged against the alternatives.
- Likely to be effective and beneficial, with evidence behind it.
- Takes into account informal supports: family, carers, community.
- Most appropriately funded by the NDIS, not by health, education or housing.
- Not a day-to-day living cost everyone has, such as rent, food or ordinary internet.

WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE FOR LEGAL BLINDNESS

For vision impairment, the NDIS commonly funds Orientation and Mobility training (one of the highest-value supports for independent travel), assistive technology (screen readers, magnification, braille displays, GPS, smart glasses), white canes and electronic travel aids, training in adaptive techniques (braille, computer skills, daily living), allied health (OT low-vision, sometimes psychology for adjustment), and support workers for community access and shopping where needed.

Three ways to manage your funds

At the planning meeting you choose how your funding is paid out. You can change this at any time during the plan, and you can use a different method for different parts of your budget.

OPTION ONE

NDIA managed

The NDIA pays your providers directly. No paperwork for you, and no invoices to check. You can only use registered providers.

OPTION TWO

Plan managed

A plan manager processes invoices and tracks your budget. You can use both registered and unregistered providers. Plan management is funded by the NDIS on top of your other budgets, at no cost to you.

OPTION THREE

Self managed

You pay providers yourself and claim back from the NDIA. The most flexibility, including on price, and the most administration.

THIS IS YOUR CHOICE, NOT YOUR PROVIDER'S

Each option suits different households, and no provider should push you toward one. Ask your planner or Local Area Coordinator to talk you through the trade-offs, and change it later if it is not working. InLife works under all three.

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SECTION THREE

Your supports

The therapies, equipment and support workers the NDIS commonly funds for vision impairment and blindness.

Allied health for Legal Blindness

Allied health is the clinical layer of your supports – therapies and assessments delivered by registered professionals. For Vision Impairment, the disciplines most commonly funded are: Allied health is funded under Capacity Building – Improved Daily Living.

ORIENTATION & MOBILITY

O&M Specialist – getting around

The single most important support for many people with vision impairment. Teaches cane technique, route learning, public transport use, and travel in unfamiliar environments. Often funded under Capacity Building.

OPTOMETRY

Optometrist – vision care

Ongoing low-vision assessments, prescription of magnification and tinted lenses, glare management. Often Medicare-funded for the clinical exam, with NDIS funding the assistive devices.

PSYCHOLOGY

Psychologist – adjustment and confidence

For people newly losing vision or facing progressive loss, adjustment counselling, peer connection, mood and anxiety support. Often time-limited but high-impact.

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

OT (Low Vision) – daily living

Home environment assessment, lighting and contrast modifications, kitchen and bathroom adaptations, technology setup, adaptive techniques for cooking and self-care.

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY SPECIALIST

AT Trainer – screen readers and braille

Training in JAWS, NVDA, VoiceOver, ZoomText, refreshable braille displays. The right training is the difference between owning the technology and using it.

SPEECH PATHOLOGY

Speech (where needed)

For participants with co-occurring conditions affecting communication – for example, deafblind participants or those with cortical visual impairment. Not routine for vision impairment alone.

A NOTE ON FUNDING CATEGORIES

Allied health is funded under Capacity Building, Improved Daily Living, and is given to you in hours. You can use any registered allied health provider you choose. Hourly rates are capped by the NDIS price limits, so a provider cannot charge you above the cap. InLife coordinates allied health; we do not deliver it, and we are not registered for therapeutic supports.

Equipment commonly funded

The NDIS funds disability-related equipment under Capital, as assistive technology. These are the items most often funded for vision impairment and blindness.

EQUIPMENT	WHAT IT IS FOR
Long white cane	Primary mobility aid – detects obstacles, identifies cane user to others.
Electronic travel aid (e.g. WeWalk, smart cane)	Cane with ultrasonic and GPS – detects head-height obstacles and provides navigation.
Screen reader software (JAWS, ZoomText)	Reads screen content aloud and provides keyboard navigation. NVDA and VoiceOver are free.
Refreshable braille display	Tactile braille output paired with phone or computer – essential for many braille users.
Video magnifier (CCTV) / portable magnifier	For participants with useful residual vision – magnifies print, photos, prescription labels.
Talking watches, scales, thermometers	Independent daily living – tells the time, weighs food, checks temperature.
GPS navigation device or app	Pedestrian and public transport navigation. Often integrated with screen reader.
Home modifications	Tactile markings, contrasting paint, improved lighting, removal of trip hazards.

How a request works

- An occupational therapist or other clinician assesses the need and writes a report.
- The report, with quotes where required, goes to the NDIA.
- Low-cost items can come straight out of an existing budget. Higher-cost items need the assessment and approval first.

Home modifications

Minor home modifications cost up to \$20,000 and do not change the structure of the home. **Complex** modifications go beyond that, or affect the structure, and the NDIS funds a building construction practitioner to work alongside your home modification assessor. Neither is the same thing as Specialist Disability Accommodation, which is a separate funding stream for purpose-built housing.

Support workers, the everyday backbone

Support workers help with the daily tasks that disability makes harder: personal care, getting to appointments, cooking, medication prompting, community access, staying connected.

Most participants have a named team of three to five workers across the week. The right team feels like a small group of familiar people who know how you like things done, not a roster of strangers.

What good looks like

- The same workers week after week, not whoever is free that day.
- Workers who speak your home language at the door.
- Respect for your faith, dietary practice and household norms.
- Trained on your specific clinical needs before the first shift.

And what you should expect

- Backup workers you have met and approved in advance.
- Shift notes shared within 24 hours, in plain language.
- One escalation point when something is wrong.
- The right to change your team without having to explain why.

THE INLIFE MEET-AND-APPROVE PROMISE

No worker meets a participant for the first time on a shift. You meet them, you decide, then we roster. That holds across every plan we deliver.

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SECTION FOUR

Why InLife

How we roster, how we match workers to households, and what we commit to.

How InLife is different

Plenty of providers fill shifts from a rotating casual pool drawn across several agencies. For someone living with vision impairment and blindness, that is the wrong shape. We roster deliberately instead: a named team around each household, and no worker on a shift the household has not already met and approved.

CONSISTENCY

The same workers

A named team who know your routine, your preferences and your clinical needs. No strangers on a Tuesday because somebody called in sick.

LANGUAGE

Your language at the door

Our team works in Farsi, Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi and English. Workers are matched to the language your household actually speaks, including the language you fall back on when you are tired or unwell.

ONE POINT OF CONTACT

No call trees

One phone number and one email, both reaching the managing directors. No agency switchboard, and no "someone will get back to you".

RECORDS

Written so you can read them

Every shift note and every report written in plain language, and a monthly summary of what has been used, copied to your support coordinator.

REGISTERED, AND VERIFIABLE

InLife is a registered NDIS provider, regulated by the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission, covering Core supports, Module 1 high-intensity daily personal activities and Module 2A behaviour support plan implementation. Every registration group is public on the Commission's provider register. We do not deliver therapeutic supports or Specialist Disability Accommodation, and we will tell you so rather than stretch to fit.

How we match workers to households

Matching is the part most providers skip. We treat it as the most important conversation we have with a new household.

ONE

Language

The languages spoken at home, including the one a person reaches for in moments of stress or confusion.

TWO

Gender

Cultural and personal preferences about who delivers personal care, taken as a requirement rather than a preference.

THREE

Cultural fit

Faith observance, dietary practice, household norms and family hierarchy.

FOUR

Clinical competency

The specific skills the person's support requires: medication, transfers, mealtime management, seizure response.

FIVE

Geography

Close enough that workers arrive on time and stay reliable over a long placement.

SIX

You decide

We shortlist, you meet them, you approve. Only then do we roster. If it is not working, say so and we change it.

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SECTION FIVE

Resources & next steps

Where to turn, how plan reviews work, your rights, and the words the NDIS uses.

Where to turn

About the NDIS

ORGANISATION	HOW TO REACH THEM	WHAT THEY DO
NDIA	1800 800 110 · ndis.gov.au	Access decisions, plan reviews, general NDIS enquiries.
NDIS Commission	1800 035 544 · ndiscommission.gov.au	Complaints about providers and workers, conduct, restrictive practices.
Administrative Review Tribunal	1800 228 333 · art.gov.au	External review of NDIA decisions after an internal review. Took over from the AAT in October 2024.
Disability Advocacy Network	1300 365 085 · da.org.au	Independent advocacy when you feel unheard.
TIS National	131 450	Free interpreting, in more than 150 languages.

For Legal Blindness specifically

ORGANISATION	HOW TO REACH THEM	WHAT THEY DO
Vision Australia	1300 847 466 · visionaustralia.org	National service provider – O&M training, technology library, audio library, peer support, employment.
Blind Citizens Australia	1800 033 660 · bca.org.au	National peer-led advocacy and information service. Run by and for blind and vision-impaired people.
Guide Dogs Australia	1800 484 333 · guidedogs.com.au	Guide dogs (free to clients), O&M services, technology training. State-based delivery.
NextSense (formerly RIDBC)	1300 581 391 · nextsense.org.au	Children and adults with vision or hearing loss – early intervention, education, cochlear and hearing services.
Retina Australia	1800 999 870 · retinaaustralia.com.au	For inherited retinal conditions – retinitis pigmentosa, Stargardt's, choroideremia.
Blind Sports & Recreation Victoria /.	blindsports.org.au	Goalball, blind cricket, blind tennis, swimming, athletics – pathways into adapted sport.

Reviewing your plan

About two months before your plan ends you will be contacted to begin a reassessment. This is your chance to reshape supports around the year you have actually had.

Questions worth bringing

- What worked? What did not?
- Which goals did you reach, and which need more time?
- Where did you underspend or overspend, and why?
- Are your funding categories the right shape?
- Has your clinical picture changed?

Reasons to ask early

- A hospital admission or a significant clinical change.
- You need more support hours than the plan funds.
- Equipment you did not know you needed at the start of the year.
- A change in informal supports, such as losing a primary carer or moving house.

BRING EVIDENCE, NOT ARGUMENT

Shift notes that show the gap, allied health reports, hospital letters. Your support coordinator can help you build the case. InLife will provide every shift note and report you need, and we do not charge you for asking.

Your rights, and raising a concern

As an NDIS participant you have the right to

- Decide what supports you receive, and from whom.
- Be treated with dignity and respect.
- Receive supports that are safe and culturally appropriate.
- Get information in your preferred language.
- Make a complaint without losing supports.
- Choose someone to act for you: a nominee, an advocate or a guardian.
- An interpreter, at no cost.

If something is wrong

About a decision	NDIA · 1800 800 110
About a provider or worker	NDIS Commission · 1800 035 544
About InLife specifically	admin@independentlife.au, which reaches both managing directors
To appeal an NDIA decision	Internal review first, then the Administrative Review Tribunal · 1800 228 333
Independent advocate	Disability Advocacy Network · 1300 365 085
Interpreter	TIS National · 131 450

COMPLAINING IS PROTECTED

Raising a complaint is a legally protected action. No provider may reduce your support, treat you differently, or end your service because you complained. That is enforced by the NDIS Commission, and it applies to us as much as to anyone else.

The words the *NDIS* uses

ARF	Access Request Form. What you submit to apply.
ART	Administrative Review Tribunal. Reviews NDIA decisions after an internal review. It took over from the AAT in October 2024, so older paperwork may use the old name.
Core	The flexible budget covering daily personal care, community access and consumables.
Capacity Building	Funding to build skills: allied health, support coordination, employment supports.
Capital	Funding for equipment and home modifications. It cannot be moved to other categories.
FCA	Functional Capacity Assessment. A clinician's report on what you can and cannot do day to day.
LAC	Local Area Coordinator. An NDIA partner who can build your plan with you.
NDIA	National Disability Insurance Agency. Makes the funding decisions.
NDIS Commission	NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission. Regulates providers and handles complaints.
Plan manager	A third party who processes invoices and tracks your budget for you.
SC	Support Coordinator. A funded role that helps you put your plan into practice.
SDA	Specialist Disability Accommodation. A separate funding stream for purpose-built housing. It is not a home-modification threshold.

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SECTION SIX

Your workbook

Pages to fill in and take with you. Your details, your week, and your goals.

About me

Take this page to your planning meeting. The planner will want to know who you are before deciding what supports you need.

MY NAME

DATE OF BIRTH

MY ADDRESS

THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO ME

CULTURAL BACKGROUND

MY SPECIALIST OR TREATING TEAM

NDIS NUMBER

PHONE

PERSON HELPING ME

MY LANGUAGES

MY GP

EMERGENCY CONTACT

My week

Sketch a typical week as it is now, and mark the points where help would change things. The gaps are the argument.

Monday

MORNING

AFTERNOON

EVENING

OVERNIGHT

Tuesday

MORNING

AFTERNOON

EVENING

OVERNIGHT

Wednesday

MORNING

AFTERNOON

EVENING

OVERNIGHT

Thursday



YOUR WORKBOOK

AFTERNOON

My week, continued

EVENING

Friday

OVERNIGHT

MORNING

AFTERNOON

EVENING

OVERNIGHT

Saturday

MORNING

AFTERNOON

EVENING

OVERNIGHT

Sunday

MORNING

AFTERNOON

EVENING

OVERNIGHT

My goals

Three things you want, and what would have to be true for you to do them. Written in your words, not clinical ones.

My top three goals for the next twelve months

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

Three things I need to be able to do them

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

QUESTIONS TO ASK ON THE DAY

What did you fund, and why that amount? Which budget does each support come from? What happens if my needs change mid-plan? Who do I contact if something is not working? When does this plan end?

