Supporting Statement for NDIS Planners: The Case for Mendis as a Disability-Specific Mental Health Support for Men

Overview

Mendis is a peer-led support program tailored to men with disability, delivering both group-based and individual coaching focused on identity, resilience, emotional regulation, and social connection. It is designed to fill a critical gap in service provision - where male participants often fall through the cracks of traditional mental health or community support.

Why It Matters: The Research on Men, Disability, and Mental Health

1. **High Rates of Suicide and Self-Harm in Men with Disability**
    - Men account for around **three-quarters of all suicides** in Australia.
    - People with disability are **4x more likely** to experience high or very high psychological distress than those without disability.
    - The intersection of **male gender and disability significantly increases suicide risk**, particularly where there is identity loss, isolation, or trauma.
2. **The Power of Belonging and Peer Support**
    - According to *The Lancet Psychiatry* (2020), **peer support groups reduce relapse rates and hospitalisation** for mental health conditions.
    - *Beyond Blue's* 2023 findings indicate that **men are more likely to seek help** when it's through **informal or peer-based models** than formal clinical settings.
    - A 2021 study in *Psychological Services* confirmed that **group-based interventions significantly increase emotional wellbeing and perceived self-worth** in men experiencing disability-related depression.
3. **Addressing a Gendered Gap in Support**
    - While psychosocial supports for women have expanded through tailored programs (e.g. maternal mental health, trauma-informed care), **equivalent male-focused programs are lacking**, especially for those with disability.
    - **Mendis was designed specifically to fill this gap**, recognising that male identity, purpose, and belonging need targeted support.

Alignment with NDIS Legislative Framework and Operational Guidelines

Mendis meets the NDIS 'Reasonable and Necessary' criteria:

- **Directly related to the participant's disability**: Emotional dysregulation, social withdrawal, and identity loss are common impacts of psychosocial and neurological disabilities.
- **Not a day-to-day living cost**: It is a structured, purpose-built support with measurable outcomes.

- **Effective and beneficial**: Supported by international and local peer-reviewed research.
- **Value for money**: Group formats provide high-impact support at a lower cost than frequent clinical interventions or acute crisis support.

Economic Value and Hospital Avoidance

According to *Mental Health Australia* and *Productivity Commission data*:

- The **average hospitalisation cost for mental health-related admissions** is **$1,800-$2,500 per day**.
- Participation in structured peer-support reduces hospitalisations by **24-38%**, depending on disability type (*Australian Health Review, 2020*).
- Early intervention through programs like Mendis may save the system **tens of thousands per individual annually**, while improving long-term independence and reducing reliance on more intensive supports.

Summary: Why Mendis Deserves Inclusion in NDIS Plans

✅ **Evidence-based**: Grounded in global and Australian research on male mental health and peer-based interventions.
✅ **Gender-responsive**: Designed to meet the unique psychological and social needs of men with disability.
✅ **Disability-specific**: Supports identity, functioning, and community participation across multiple disability types (including FND, ABI, ADHD, psychosocial disability).
✅ **Economical**: Provides high-value outcomes with potential cost-savings to the NDIS and broader healthcare system.

Mendis is not a generic men's group. It is a purpose-built, trauma-aware, disability-specific mental wellbeing support, uniquely positioned to help prevent crisis, reduce isolation, and build resilience in a vulnerable and under-supported demographic.

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