NDRP Research Funding Policy

**Round 1 Funding 2025**

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NDRP Research Funding Policy

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## Overview

The National Disability Research Partnership (NDRP) funds research activities **by and with people with disability**. Our vision is policy and practice in Australia are transformed by disability-led research. Our purpose is to facilitate collaborative and inclusive disability research that builds evidence for policy and practice to advance the rights of people with disability.

The NDRP’s five-year Strategic Plan has four key goals:

* build a solid foundation
* fund research done by and with people with disability
* strengthen disability research capacity
* mobilise evidence for action.

Our values are:

Inclusion We promote inclusion through non-discrimination, accessibility and support. We continue to learn and improve our ways of working and actions.

Integrity We are open, honest and transparent. We build trust and are open to new ideas and feedback. We are ethical in our approach and committed to our guiding principles.

Respect We listen to and learn from people with diverse perspectives and ways of knowing. We value different experiences and opinions. We respect people, country and culture.

Excellence We are rigorous and strive for excellence in our work by learning, reviewing and evaluating process, outputs and outcomes

Collaboration We work together, collaborate and draw on each other’s strengths to achieve our vision and purpose.

The [NDRP principles](https://www.ndrp.org.au/principles) guide our research approach. These principles draw on the human rights framework of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The NDRP principles are:

**Advance high-quality research that informs disability policy and practice in Australia**

* Promote collaborative research across Australia
* Implement the NDRP Research Agenda
* Build an evidence base that informs Australian disability policy and practice

**Value the knowledge of people with disability in research**

* Respect different sources and forms of knowledge and research
* Support research that gives people with disability real decision-making power
* Support research that involves a wide range of people with disability, including those who are often left out or are not well represented in research
* Make sure people with disability are paid properly for their research work

**Strengthen disability research capacity**

* Build an active and connected community of disability researchers
* Build career pathways for researchers with disability
* Strengthen Australia’s capacity to conduct disability research
* Build capacity in the community to develop and use evidence produced by research

**Share research findings widely in useful and accessible ways**

* Make information available in useful and accessible ways
* Share what we learn with the disability and wider community
* Use a range of new and traditional ways to share research findings.

## Policy Statement

The purpose of the Research Funding Policy is to provide transparent information about how the NDRP governs, supports and monitors its research funding program. This Policy is to enable us to oversee the quality of research we fund, including research outputs, so it is of high quality and effective for use in policy, practice and programs.

## Who this policy covers

This policy covers the NDRP Board, Research Committee, Staff and funded and prospective projects that develop and conduct research.

## About NDRP Research Funding

### NDRP Research Agenda

The [NDRP Research Agenda](https://www.ndrp.org.au/researchagenda) was developed in collaboration with people with disability, their representative organisations and allies, over two years from 2021-2023. The NDRP has been funded by the Department of Social Services between 2024 and 2026 to begin to implement it.

The Research Agenda sets out 12 Research Areas and accompanying topics presented as questions. These were topics that people with disability and their representative organisations said were important and needed research to help improve outcomes for people with disability in Australia.

In addition to the research areas there are five underpinning themes of the NDRP Research Agenda:

* uphold the rights of people with disability
* focus on safety
* address ableism and improve attitudes
* understand intersectionality
* apply a gendered lens.

The NDRP Research Agenda is a living document. While it sets a framework for the areas and topics to be considered for research, is intended to be responsive to the changing priorities of the disability community and can be updated as needed.

### Our approach to research funding

The core business of the NDRP is to fund collaborative and inclusive disability research, conducted within a partnership framework and aligned to our principles. Many policy or practice questions are complex, nuanced and require a multidisciplinary approach to provide practical, useful solutions. Therefore, we aim to fund and actively support a cohesive and collaborative program of research and to strengthen the capacity for disability inclusive research.

This approach involves strategic investment in a range of short, medium and long-term programs of research that address research gaps and are more likely to create the kind of evidence base and collaboration that supports real change. This enables shorter term outcomes to contribute to our overall impact, while longer term research projects are being implemented.

### Open funding rounds

Most of the NDRP research funding is through open funding rounds. We fund different research types, including seed funding for co-designing research, rapid evidence synthesis or translation, longer term discovery projects and horizon scans.

We also fund fellowships for early-career or mid-career researchers with disability and Higher Degree by Research (HDR) scholarships. Higher Degree by Research is a post graduate university degree that involves a supervised research project. These degrees are either a Masters by Research or Philosophy, or a Doctoral degree (either Professional Doctorate or PhD). We support a mentoring program for NDRP fellowship and scholarship holders. We also work with funding bodies, universities and governments to encourage them to fund fellowships and scholarships for researchers with disability.

To be inclusive and transparent, we provide information and guiding materials about our open funding rounds and the prioritisation of the Research Agenda topics for funding before opening for applications. These are available in accessible formats.

Grant guidelines for each funding round will include more information about the prioritised Research Agenda area.

### Targeted research funding

The NDRP Board may decide to fund a priority topic from NDRP Research Agenda or fund research in response to external context from time to time. We will provide information publicly about the Board’s funding of targeted research and we will be transparent about the process to undertake this research. Procurement of this research may be by an open process or a limited expression of interest.

### Commissioned research

In some circumstances the NDRP may be asked by government or other stakeholders and funders to undertake research on a particular issue of high priority to the stakeholder. Consistent with our Vision and Principles, we can be asked to bring together people with disability, researchers and other stakeholders to conduct collaborative research.

When commissioned to undertake a disability research project, the NDRP can convene and connect the right people, coordinate a multidisciplinary partnership project, manage timelines and deliver outcome reports that are evidence-based, targeted and practical.

We seek to add value by working with the funder to understand the issue in question and get the research question right, draw on its extensive network of researchers and the disability community, and provide oversight of the program. We work with stakeholders who share our values in ways that align with the NDRP principles.

### Our Impact

In our first year we will develop an ongoing monitoring, evaluation and learning framework that covers the impact of the Research Funding program. We will collect data, insights and signals as part of our usual business. Using these, we will monitor and evaluate how the activities that are part of our funding program are contributing to positive change against the areas of our strategic goals. These activities will inform a continuous improvement approach to operations and governance.

### Grant guidelines and information and support activities

For open and targeted funding rounds, grant guidelines are made available in a range of accessible formats.

They include:

* an overview of the grant or funding opportunity
* the NDRP approach to the funding round
* specific information about the funding round
* the grant round topic focus area
* objectives and outcomes
* eligibility
* assessment criteria
* assessment process
* other important information about the grant round.

The NDRP’s research capacity strengthening program provides a range of accessible activities for the people and organisations who might apply for funding. These aim to clarify the requirements for each grant opportunity, mobilise knowledge about relevant research topics and methods, support strategic connections and make the application process accessible. Activities include online information sessions, drop-in sessions and other sessions based on identified needs. We make available Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) and resources to help support applicants interested in applying for NDRP funding.

### Grant applications and administration

We use the SmartyGrants platform to support our grant making activities. It provides an end-to-end grant management system which includes the application form, contract management and reporting for funded projects. We take a design approach to developing, monitoring and improving our grant application and management processes, prioritising accessibility, usability and user experience. This includes user testing before we open funding rounds.

### Active support for funded projects

Once projects are funded, the NDRP team engages members from all funded project teams in a program of research partnership and capacity strengthening.

The aims of this program are:

* to connect projects and teams to each other and build a sense of shared purpose
* to connect projects and teams to key organisations and groups, such as policy makers, regulators, Disability Representative and Disabled Persons Organisations (DRO’s/DPOs) and others advocating for change and other people who are the end-users of research, for
* to mobilise knowledge about how to do research led by and with people with disability that creates evidence for action in policy, practice and programs

We do this by convening meetings, spaces and structures for co-working and peer-learning, making connections, listening and coaching.

### Ethical and responsible conduct of research

Funded projects must take approaches that align with the NDRP principles and values. They must also adhere to the principles and standards outlined in the [National Statementon Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2023)](https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/research-policy/ethics/national-statement-ethical-conduct-human-research)[[1]](#footnote-2). Where research is specifically by and with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples, the [Ethical Conduct in Research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities: Guidelines for researchers and stakeholders (2018)](https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/resources/ethical-conduct-research-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples-and-communities) must be adhered to. This requires research to be conducted in a manner that is culturally safe and controlled by the community.

Both documents explain how ethical principles apply to research across all phases, from planning to communicating findings. Research Agreements for projects funded by us detail the obligations for research teams. These include that findings must be reporting on, even when they are negative. We support and expect research teams to communicate about their projects and research findings in ways that are useful, accessible and appropriate for end-users.

We recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the custodians of their traditional knowledge and cultural expressions, and the importance of Intellectual Property (ICIP) and Indigenous data sovereignty. We will respect relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander laws and protocols that say how knowledge and culture can be shared and used, in the ways we work and support research and when we establish contracts.

Further ethical guidance can be found:

* for co-production of disability-inclusive research, in the resource [Guidance on Ethical Issues in Co-production (2024)](https://www.disabilityinnovation.unsw.edu.au/inclusive-research/guidelines)
* for funded projects specifically for and with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples, in the resources [Keeping research on track II](https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/node/5973) and [A guide to applying: The AIATSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research (2020)](https://aiatsis.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-02/aiatsis-guide-code-ethics-jan22.pdf)

Funded projects must also apply the principles of responsible and accountable research practice as outlined in the [Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (2018](https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/publications/australian-code-responsible-conduct-research-2018))[[2]](#footnote-3). On the same website is guidance including how to define a breach of the code, and how to investigate and manage concerns and breaches. The NDRP shares responsibility for maintaining high research standards with research institutions and the people involved in the research we fund. In keeping with the code, we do not investigate concerns or allegations of breaches. This is the responsibility of the relevant research institution.

In our funding agreements, we make sure organisations have an obligation to notify us if there is a concern about ethical conduct or research integrity raised. We also encourage any person impacted by or involved in the research to raise concerns with us, which we handle in line with our [complaints policy](https://www.ndrp.org.au/about/complaints-policy).

### Commitment to open access research

The NDRP is committed to open access research that is readily available to the disability community and other end-users of research across policy, practice and programs. Funded projects are expected to provide reports on research/projects in templates provided by the NDRP which are published on the NDRP website. Any research publications from NDRP funded projects, such as peer-reviewed journal articles, must be open access and not behind paywalls. As well as reports and academic publications, funded projects are also expected to share research findings in ways that are useful and accessible to end-users, prioritising the needs of the people with disability who the research is about.

## Roles and responsibilities

### NDRP Board

The NDRP Board has overall governance responsibility for the NDRP research program, and its responsibilities include:

* setting the vision, purpose and values for the NDRP
* providing leadership for the NDRP and the research program
* overseeing the strategic direction of the NDRP and the research program, including selection of priority topics or areas for funding aligned to the Research Agenda
* approving the research budgets and research funding approach
* endorsing the strategic and policy framework for research funded by the NDRP and which are consistent with legal requirements and in line with community expectations
* overseeing risk and adopted risk practices for the NDRP research program
* endorsing the recommendations of the Research Committee for to award funding for research projects.

### NDRP Research Committee

The purpose of the NDRP Research Committee is to provide advice and recommendations to the NDRP Board on:

* the strategic and policy framework for research funded by the NDRP
* the quality and transparency of the NDRP’s funding processes
* research to be funded by the NDRP through open and targeted funding rounds
* funding to strengthen research capacity including fellowships
* commissioned research funding proposals and projects
* monitoring and revising the NDRP Research Agenda over time
* how to influence external funding agencies to invest in disability inclusive research
* how to influence key stakeholders such as universities and government, to strengthen disability inclusive research capacity
* knowledge translation strategies to support the uptake of evidence produced through the NDRP research program.

The Research Committee appoints **Independent Assessment Panels** to assess and score open funding round applications and provide a ranking of applications to the Research Committee who make recommendations to the NDRP Board on research projects to be funded. The Research Committee also oversees the performance of the Independent Review Panels.

View the [Terms of Reference and members of the NDRP Research Committee](https://www.ndrp.org.au/about/our-people/research-committee).

### Independent Review Panels

Independent Review Panels assess and score open round funding applications against the assessment criteria for each grant opportunity.

These panels have members with a broad range of expertise including but not limited to researchers with academic qualifications and experience, people with disability, Disabled Persons/Representative Organisations and other people who are the end users of research.

Each funding round may have several Independent Review Panels overseen by the Research Committee.

### NDRP Staff

The NDRP staff perform the following roles:

* developing the strategic and policy framework for research program for review by the Research Committee and endorsement by the NDRP Board
* implementing communications and engagement strategies that support broad awareness and targeted promotion of the funding rounds to the disability and research communities and sectors
* facilitating the research capacity strengthening program that supports funded and prospective research projects and fellowship and scholarship holders.
* facilitating evidence to action activities to support research that is used in policy, practice and programs
* providing secretariat support to the Research Committee and the NDRP Board so they can effectively govern the NDRP research program
* providing secretariat and other support to Independent Review Panels. This includes activities to assist the Research Committee to select members, such as recruitment, support and upskilling a pool of potential panel members
* administering the research funding and reporting, including reviewing and monitoring the quality of outputs and deliverables.

### NDRP funded projects

Funded projects are required to meet their funding agreement requirements and make a commitment to work in partnership with the NDRP and with other funded NDRP research projects.

## Related Policies and documents

[Research Committee Terms of Reference 2025](https://www.ndrp.org.au/about/our-people/research-committee)

[Research Grant Funding Overview](https://www.ndrp.org.au/research/2025-research-funding#:~:text=Guide%20for%20SmartyGrants.-,Round%201%20key%20documents,-To%20apply%20for)

[2025 NDRP Round 1 Grant Guidelines](https://www.ndrp.org.au/research/2025-research-funding#:~:text=Guide%20for%20SmartyGrants.-,Round%201%20key%20documents,-To%20apply%20for)

[Complaints Policy](https://www.ndrp.org.au/about/complaints-policy)

[Privacy Policy](https://www.ndrp.org.au/about/privacy-policy)

1. [National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2023)](https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/attachments/publications/National-Statement-Ethical-Conduct-Human-Research-2023.pdf). https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/publications/national-statement-ethical-conduct-human-research-2023 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (2018). https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/publications/australian-code-responsible-conduct-research-2018 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)