Annual Report 2024–2025

Building on strong foundations

March 2024 to 30 June 2025

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NDRP National Disability Research Partnership



Image: From left: Mary, Clare, and Hon Amanda Rishworth MP, Minister for Social Services (until May 2025).

Contents

Acknowledgements and thank you	**4**
About this report	**5**
About us	**7**
Message from our Board Chair and CEO	**8**
Our people	**10**
Our Board	10
We would also like to thank our Research Committee and staff	13
Our Research Committee	13
Our Staff	13
Year 1 By the numbers	**14**
Our key achievements against our strategic focus areas	**15**
1. Build a sustainable foundation	15
2. Fund research done by and with people with disability	15
3. Strengthen disability research capacity	16
4. Mobilise evidence for action	17
Financial snapshot	**18**
More information	**19**
Contact us	**back cover**

Acknowledgements and thank you

We acknowledge the First Nations peoples of Australia as the Traditional Custodians of the land and waters where we live and work. We pay our respects to Elders past and present and recognise the strength and leadership of First Nations people with disability.

We acknowledge the leadership of people with disability, who lead and shape the work of the National Disability Research Partnership (NDRP). We thank all those who have provided guidance, support and contribution spanning research, advocacy, co-design, and lived experience.

We also thank the many people and organisations who make this work possible:

- The Department of Health, Disability and Ageing, our funder and partner
- Research participants who share their stories
- Partner organisations who collaborate with us
- Our Board and Research Committee members
  - Our research funding Independent Review Panels made up of people with disability, researchers and a wide range of other experiences and expertise
  - Researchers, policy makers, and advocates, government who are building a better disability-led research ecosystem with us
  - Mitchell Partners, our outsourced finance and virtual Chief Financial Officer
  - Our HR, our human resources consultant
  - The Virtual IT department, our IT provider
  - Andrew, Frewin, Stewart (AFS), our auditor.

> “When we make space for people with disability to lead, ask the questions, and shape the research, the impact is deeper and more lasting. This isn’t just about inclusion, it’s about doing better research that leads to real change.”
>
> Professor Sally Robinson, NDRP Research Committee member

About this report

Why this report matters

This report tells the story of our first year as an independent organisation. It explains what we've done, why it matters, and where we're heading next.

Who this report is for

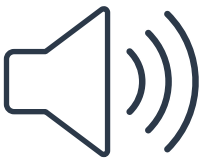
We created this report so that everyone, including people with disability, researchers, advocates, government and the wider community, can see how the NDRP is working to build a better, fairer research system.

Formats available

We've made the report in different formats so more people can use it. You can access:



Auslan video



Audio version



Large print version



Screen-reader accessible PDF

You can find all versions on our website at **www.ndrp.org.au** or contact us to request a copy in a format that works for you.



Image: NDRP staff, from left, Jess, Natasha, accompanied by Nirvana, Sally, Sue, Bethany, Mary and Gillian.

About us

The National Disability Research Partnership 2024–2029 Strategic Plan outlines our vision that “policy and practice in Australia are transformed by disability-led research” and our strategic focus areas which will be the foundation for the organisation over the next five years.

The focus areas are:

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

The roles we are playing

Leading and enabling: We are led and informed by people with disability in everything we do, knowing this leads to the greatest impact in research, knowledge mobilisation and policy and practice.

Partnering and collaborating: We partner and collaborate with people with disability and their representative organisations, governments, policymakers, universities, researchers and philanthropy to achieve our vision.

Advancing research capacity and NDRP’s research priorities: We fund research and keep the Research Agenda current, so it continues to reflect the priorities of people with disability.

The impact we are seeking

In 2024–2025 we worked with ACIL Allen to develop our long-term evaluation plan and impact strategy. This was informed by consultations with the Board, the NDRP team, our Research Committee and representatives from Disabled Persons and Representative Organisations.

The four long term impacts we are seeking are:

- The NDRP is an enduring enabler that connects stakeholders to deliver research led by and with people with disability
- Disability-led and focused research focuses on critical issues that matter most to people with disability
- Researchers and research institutions are better equipped to undertake and support quality, inclusive disability research with greater efforts to address intersectionality
- Research about people with disability is easy to find, understand and broadly used to create better policies, initiatives, and more inclusive communities.

Message from our Board Chair and CEO

From our Board Chair Clare Gibellini and CEO Mary Sayers

The National Disability Research Partnership (NDRP) was established first over four years by the **NDRP Working Party**, then as an independent organisation commencing in March 2024.

Our vision is policy and practice in Australia are transformed by disability-led research. We have had the privilege of seeing what's possible when people with disability lead the work, and our Board and staff are committed to ensure NDRP as an enduring enabler for disability-led and inclusive research, for strengthening research capacity and driving evidence into action. This first year has shown what's achievable when community, government, researchers, advocates, and community come together with purpose. We've developed strong governance, transparent processes and funded our first round of projects on the topic of safety of people with disability.

To everyone who has been part of this journey so far, thank you. To everyone we haven't yet worked with, we're ready to listen, learn and partner.

Our first year as an independent organisation focused on making sure the voices of people with disability shape every part of our work. We've asked for input from the community at every stage, from what questions are asked, how the research is done, to how research findings are shared and used to create the policies, practices and services that make a real-world difference for people with disability.

We also know our work is just beginning to deliver lasting change. We must stay the course and keep investing in this inclusive model.

In 2024–25, we have built our team, supported our Board, Research Committee and other advisory structures, ensuring the majority were people with disability. We also did all the things needed to set up the operations of a new organisation. We have involved and engaged thousands of people. This includes our Evidence to Action events, our research funding information sessions, through our first research funding round and our capacity strengthening activities. It is when you bring together people with disability, disabled persons and representative organisations (DPO/DROs), researchers, policy makers, governments and other important stakeholders that the magic happens. We want to keep doing more of this to achieve our vision.

We both had the privilege of being selected by the Australian Government to be part of the official government side event at the 18th Session of the Conference of States Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) at the United Nations in New York in June 2025. Together with Luke Nelson and Catherine McAlpine from Inclusion Australia, Robyn Shannon and Hope Peisley from the Australian Government, we were able to showcase the National Disability Research Partnership and the National Disability Data Asset to an international audience and demonstrate the strong commitment to research and data led by and with people with disability in Australia.

As a key initiative of Australia's Disability Strategy, we are working in partnership with the Australian Government and governments across Australia. We are trialling a new way of government commissioning research to ensure it is led by and with people with disability through our Commissioned Research Project on improving transitions to careers for young people with disability. Over the last year we have worked with government to refine their research interests, conduct a lived experience review, and consulted broadly with DRO/DPOs to assist government to fund research that will have direct impact on policy and practice.

We want to thank everyone who has contributed to this work, especially people with disability who bring wisdom, expertise, and accountability to everything we do.

Year 2 will be about growing our reach and impact. Let's keep building this together.



Images: From left, Mary and Clare at the United Nations Conference Of State Parties (COSP).



Our people

The following people and groups have contributed enormously to our first year of work.

Our Board



Clare Gibellini

Chair, Member of Audit, Risk and Finance Committee

Clare (she/her) is a woman with multiple disabilities, including Autism. She works as a passionate advocate for the inclusion of people with a disability in all areas of the community. Clare is also the Co-Chair of the Oversight Council for the Australian Federal Government's first National Autism Strategy, and a member of the National Disability Insurance Agency Independent Advisory Council's Equity and Inclusion Reference Group. She is also the Deputy Chair for the WA Ministerial Advisory Council on Disability. Clare serves on multiple boards and steering committees focused on improving outcomes for people with disability and is a passionate human rights campaigner both in Australia and internationally.



Professor Anne Kavanagh OAM

Founding Director, Chair of Research Committee

Anne is Chair of Disability and Health at the University of Melbourne. Anne is a public health researcher who researches the social determinants of health inequalities. She has a specific interest in the social determinants of health and wellbeing of people with disabilities. Anne's lived experience of disability informs her research.



Chloe Rattray

Independent Director

Chloe (she/they) is a passionate inclusion advocate and PhD student based in Boorloo (Perth). Chloe's research explores the portrayal of queer and disabled stories in children's animated television, emphasising the importance of diverse representation in media. She also works in the not-for-profit sector and academia. In 2022, Chloe was recognised in the Out for Australia 30 Under 30 Awards, which honors young queer individuals who have demonstrated success in their careers and made tangible contributions to the LGBTQIA+ community.

Our people



Dr Emily Steel

Independent Director,
Chair of Audit,
Risk and Finance Committee

Emily is an occupational therapist with a research background in disability-inclusive policy, accessibility, and assistive technology. She has worked as a clinician, manager, and academic in Australia, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and as a Fulbright Scholar in the USA. Emily is an active volunteer in professional and community groups.



Professor Jackie Leach Scully

Founding Director,
Member of Research Committee

Jackie is Professor of Bioethics and Director of the Disability Innovation Institute at the University of New South Wales. Originally a molecular biologist, she spent many years at the University of Basel, Switzerland and at Newcastle University, UK before she moved to Sydney in 2019. Her work in bioethics focuses on the implications of biomedical and life science developments for people with disability. Jackie has been Deaf since childhood, is married to a musician, and has been active in disability rights for over 30 years.



Keran Howe OAM

Founding Director

Keran is a social worker who has worked as a leader in the fields of health and disability over three decades. As both a practitioner and a person with a disability she has been involved in advising government on policy reform representing issues related to community health, women's health, violence prevention and the rights of people with disabilities. Keran has served on a number of boards related to housing and disability and as Chair of the Victorian Disability Advisory Council and Co-Chair of the Australian Disability and Carers Advisory Council



Associate Professor Lorna Hallahan

Independent Director,
Member of Audit,
Risk and Finance Committee

Lorna has been a leading social work academic for two decades, specialising in teaching professional ethics and in research related to disability policy. She has been a disability advocate since the late 1980s, when she was a founding staff member at Queensland Advocacy. Since completing her PhD in disability theory and spirituality in 2005, Lorna has contributed as a peer-recognised leader in state and national policy advice. She contributed to the development and evaluation of the trial of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and more recently as the Senior Research Advisor at the Disability Royal Commission where she also authored a socio-cultural history of disability in Australia. During 2025, she has been appointed to The Independent Advisory Council of the NDIS and the Australian Research Advisory Committee. Lorna is an experienced director of for-purpose organisations and in 2024 gained certification in Governance for Social Impact from the Social Impact Centre.



Louise Gates

Government Appointed Director

Louise is the Acting Deputy Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). Louise leads the Deputy CEO Group and provides broad oversight of the Community Services Group, Data Governance & Integration Group, Population Health Group and the First Nations Health & Welfare Group. The Group also oversees the production of the Institute's Flagship reports, Australia's Health and Australia's Welfare. Louise has extensive experience across several federal and state organisations including the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the NSW Ministry of Health. She has a Bachelor of Science with First Class Honours, a Masters of Statistics and Masters of Global Health/ Infectious Diseases.



Luke Mansfield

Government Appointed Director

Luke has extensive senior leadership experience across government and is currently a Group Manager at the Australian Government Department of Social Services. He has lead responsibility for implementation of Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-31; the National Autism Strategy; and establishment of additional community-based foundational disability supports across Australia. He also leads coordination of Australian Government responses to the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of people with disability and is the government co-chair of the National Disability Data Asset Council. He was awarded a Public Service Medal in 2025 for outstanding public service through advocacy to disability reform.

We would also like to thank our Research Committee and staff

Our Research Committee

Professor Anne Kavangnah – Chair

Dr Kate Davies

Dr Elroy Dearn

Dr Alexandra Devine

Professor Helen Dickinson

Dr Jade McEwen

Professor Sally Robinson

Professor Jackie Leach Scully

Tahlia-Rose Vanissum

Robbi Williams

Our Staff

Mary Sayers – Chief Executive Officer

Sue Tape – Head of Evidence to Action

Gillian Mason – Head of Research Program

Bethany Devenish – Commissioned Research Project Manager

Sally Belford – Communications Lead

Natasha Brake – Operations Lead

Jess Rosenthal – Engagement and Events Coordinator

Tessa De Vries – Strategic Adviser (until January 2025)

Images: (upper-left): Chloe and Lorna,
(upper-right): Anne and Luke,
(lower-left): Louise, Nirvana and Natasha,
(lower-right): NDRP staff and Research Committee members.









Year 1 By the numbers

93
Research applications received

15
Funded projects (Round 1)

60+
Researchers or contributors with disability

30+
Advocacy organisations engaged

Communications

168,000+
impressions across social media

Event participation

1,200+
total registrations across 3 events

24 July 2025: *Mobilising Research for Policy Impact*

86% rated the event excellent or very good

1 May 2025: *Exploring Knowledge Mobilisation*

100% rated the event excellent or very good

5 December 2024: *Enabling the Elimination of Restrictive Practices*

81% rated the event excellent or very good

Connections we have built

41% of people registering for events are researchers

37% of registrations are people with disability

All state and territory governments

26 Independent panel review members for Round 1

50 speakers, facilitators and note takers

Our followers

2,908 subscribers to our newsletters

3,216 followers on social media

10,920 unique website visitors; 53,807 page views

> "This is the first time we've felt like real partners in research, not just people being asked for feedback."
>
> Disability Peoples' Organisation leader at December 2024 event

Our key achievements against our strategic focus areas

1. Build a sustainable foundation

- Established the NDRP as an independent, nationally recognised not-for-profit organisation.
- Secured Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) status for long-term sustainability.
- Developed Stakeholder Engagement, Membership, and Communication Strategies.
- Deepened collaboration with government, advocates, researchers and policy makers.
- Initiated our first commissioned research project with Government.
- Worked with Disability Representative Organisations, including through the Disability Advocacy Network Australia (DANA), who led the project on creating long term partnerships between advocacy organisations and researchers.

2. Fund research done by and with people with disability

- Opened the first NDRP open research grants round aligned to the topic of safety of people with disability.
- Embedded accessibility from the start in forms, templates and review processes.
- In our first funding round, we invested in 15 projects that directly address priorities from the NDRP Research Agenda. This round focused on seed funding, supporting teams to co-design and synthesise evidence with people with disability before moving into full-scale research.
- By funding the earliest stage of the research process, we're:
  - building the skills, confidence, and relationships that make inclusive research possible
  - ensuring research questions reflect the real priorities of the disability community
  - laying the groundwork for projects that are more likely to influence policy, services and systems.

> "Today is just the beginning of many important conversations. Let's continue to work together, prioritising the voices of people with disability and ensuring the evidence we gather drives action toward a safer, more inclusive society."
>
> Clare Gibellini, our Chair at Evidence to Action event

> “Involving people with disability as just research subjects doesn’t fundamentally change the power structures … We need them involved in determining the research questions, collecting data, interpreting findings, and shaping conclusions.”
>
> Professor Helen Dickinson at Evidence to Action event

3. Strengthen disability research capacity

- Delivered workshops, sessions and mentoring to support research teams wishing to apply for NDRP research funding.
- Developed funding guidelines and resources to support inclusive research.
- Creating a connected community. Our first 15 funded research projects aren’t working in isolation. Through regular check-ins, shared tools, and collaborative problem-solving, they’re becoming part of a growing network, a community of practice that will strengthen disability research for years to come.
- Whether it’s a first-time project lead or an experienced researcher, we’re seeing greater confidence to lead and collaborate in ways that reflect the priorities of people with disability.
- By building these skills across the sector, we’re creating the conditions for more inclusive, influential, and sustainable research. Whether it’s a first-time project lead or an experienced academic, we’re seeing greater confidence to lead and collaborate in ways that reflect the priorities of people with disability.

> “Thank you so much for all of the thought and care that has gone into providing feedback to unsuccessful applicants (such as myself). It is a continuation of the wonderful approach that was taken throughout the application process in the webinars and drop-in sessions. A model for grant bodies that should be copied across the research funding sector!!”
>
> Researcher

4. Mobilise evidence for action

- The NDRP deepened our partnership with the Analysis & Policy Observatory (APO) to improve the accessibility and availability of disability research. APO is a free, public online library. Together, we are building and maintaining the Disability Research Collection on APO, a dedicated space for high-quality, policy-relevant disability research, with a focus on research by and with people with disability.
- This year we:
  - launched monthly newsletters highlighting new and relevant research in the Collection
  - improved tagging and search functions so research is easier to find
  - with APO to ensure disability-related terms in their Public Policy Taxonomy reflect the social model of disability and NDRP's Guiding Principles
  - started promoting the Collection to new audiences, including researchers, advocates, and students completing their PhDs.
- In December 2024, May and July 2025, our Evidence to Action events brought together people with disability, researchers, policy makers, and advocates to explore how research can drive real-world change. These national online gatherings showcased disability-led research, built cross-sector connections, and shared practical tools for getting evidence into policy and practice.
- Evidence to Action is more than what happens on the day. Each event is the result of months of collaboration between speakers, facilitators, note takers, and the NDRP team. From shaping the program to delivering keynote talks, panels, provocations, and breakout rooms, and then debriefing afterwards, we work together to design experiences that are inclusive, engaging, and outcome focused.
- By blending high-quality content with thoughtful design and delivery, these events don't just share evidence, they connect people, spark ideas, and inspire action. The result is a growing network of people ready to turn disability research into lasting change.

> "Embedding an evidence base into policy reform means creating sustainable change. People with disability and their lived experience need to be at the centre of all reform."
>
> Government speaker Evidence to Action event

Financial snapshot

March 2024 to June 2025 results

Total Income	$14,335,728
Total Expense	$1,561,669
Surplus	$12,774,059

Income	
Government Grant Funding	$13,957,075
Interest Income	$373,382
Other Income	$5,271

Expenses	
Accessibility costs	$59,119
Administration expenses	$13,701
Employee benefits expenses	$729,241
Professional fees	$367,701
Research expenses	$269,200
Systems expenses	$58,115
Other expenses	$64,592



More information

Questions

Who can apply for NDRP funding?

- Research must be by and with people with disability in partnership with researchers, advocates, and other organisations.

How do you choose which projects to fund?

- Our Independent Review Panels made up of a wide range of expertise and experience, with the majority being people with disability to advise the Research Committee on projects that are inclusive, high-quality, and useful for policy or practice. The Board makes the final decision on research funding based on the advice of the Independent Review Panels and the Research Committee

Where can I find out more about your work?

- You can visit our website, sign up for our emails, or follow us on social media. Or contact us, our details are on the last page.

Things to read

Our Strategic Plan

- Shows the big changes we are working towards.

NDRP Research Agenda

- Lists research priorities developed with the disability community.

Easy English resources

- We have Easy English versions of key documents.

Event Proceedings

- Includes what we heard and learned at our Evidence to Action events.

Contact us

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NRS: **https://www.accesshub.gov.au/about-the-nrs/nrs-call-numbers-and-links**