NDRP National Disability Research Partnership

# Annual Report 2025–2026

# From foundations to impact

1 July 2025 to 30 June 2026



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# 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, knowledge and leadership of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 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 everyone who has brought expertise, challenge, creativity and accountability to our research, governance, funding, capacity strengthening and evidence to action work during 2025–2026.

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

- the Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Ageing, our principal funder and partner
- people with disability who lead, co-design, review, conduct and use research
- research participants who share their knowledge and experiences
- Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs) and Disability Representative Organisations (DROs), advocacy organisations and community partners
- our 2025 funded research teams and the people and organisations involved in the 2026 Disability Research Funding round
- our Disability Research Leadership Program applicants, recipients, supervisors and partner institutions
- our Board, Research Committee, advisory groups, review panels and other lived experience contributors
- government, policy and practice partners working with us to make evidence more useful and actionable
- our partners at Australian Policy Online (APO) and Inclusive Futures: Reimagining Disability at Griffith University
- our evaluation partners ACIL Allen and the Sax Institute
- all our research, evaluation, data, university and sector partners
- our outsourced finance, human resources and information technology providers, and our auditor, Andrew, Frewin, Stewart (AFS).

> **"I think one thing that NDRP has done really well is just raised the bar and increased expectations around lived experience being involved in research at every level... your unfair advantage is around the ability to partner and collaborate and convene to continue to lift the bar and demonstrate what good looks like."**
> NDRP Research Committee member

# About this report

## Why this report matters

This report tells the story of NDRP's second year as an independent national organisation. It explains how we moved from building foundations to delivering research, developing research leaders, testing new ways of commissioning research and strengthening the pathways that help evidence reach policy and practice.

It also reflects what we learned. During 2025–2026, NDRP used feedback from people with disability, funded teams, advocacy organisations, researchers, government and independent evaluation to refine how we fund, support and mobilise disability research.

## Who this report is for

We created this report so everyone, including people with disability, researchers, advocates, community organisations, government, policy makers, practitioners, funders and the wider community can see what NDRP has delivered, what we are learning and what comes next.

## Formats available

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


Auslan version


Audio version


Large print version


Screen-reader accessible PDF



Easy Read summary

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.

# About us

The National Disability Research Partnership (NDRP) facilitates and champions disability-led research for the benefit of the disability community.

We create partnerships between the disability community, research and government to support research into issues that matter to our community, so evidence leads to action.

The NDRP is an independent, disability-led not-for-profit organisation, supporting a disability research system that is led by people with disability and trusted by government, researchers, advocacy organisations and the community.

## Our strategic focus areas



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 create the conditions for people with disability to lead and influence research, funding, knowledge mobilisation and decision-making. We use what we learn to improve the systems around disability research, not only individual projects.

**Partnering and collaborating:** We work with people with disability and their organisations, governments, policy makers, universities, researchers, funders and other partners because durable change requires shared effort across systems.

**Advancing research capacity and NDRP's research priorities:** We fund and commission research, support researchers with disability, strengthen inclusive research practice and keep the NDRP Research Agenda connected to the priorities of people with disability and the changing policy environment.

## The impact we are seeking

- NDRP is an enduring national enabler that connects stakeholders to deliver research led by and with people with disability.
- Disability-led and focused research addresses critical issues that matter most to people with disability.
- Researchers and research institutions are better equipped to undertake and support high-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

## Clare Gibellini and Mary Sayers





## From foundations to impact

**2025–2026 was a year of significant growth and delivery for the National Disability Research Partnership (NDRP).**

Building on the foundations established in our first year as an independent organisation, the NDRP expanded its investment in disability-led research, research leadership and evidence use, while continuing to strengthen the systems and relationships needed for long-term change.

Demand for disability research investment continues to be strong. Our 2026 Disability Research Funding round attracted 176 applications and more than $46 million in funding requests, highlighting both the depth of expertise across the sector and the substantial unmet need for disability research funding. At the same time, our first Disability Research Leadership Program attracted 55 applications from researchers with disability, reinforcing the importance of investing in the next generation of disability research leaders.

A key focus this year has been strengthening the conditions that support high-quality disability-led research. Through our funding, capacity strengthening and evidence-to-action work, we have continued to demonstrate that accessibility, genuine co-design and disability leadership are essential to producing research that is relevant, impactful and trusted by the communities it seeks to serve.

> **“This year has shown both the strength of disability-led research in Australia and how much more investment is needed. We are building the partnerships, capability and connections that will help turn that research into meaningful change.”**
> Mary Sayers, CEO, NDRP

We also took important steps to strengthen First Nations disability research leadership. Our five-year partnership with Girra Maa Indigenous Health Disability Wellbeing represents a long-term investment in First Nations research capability, leadership and infrastructure, supporting First Nations people with disability and researchers to identify and pursue their own research priorities.

Alongside this work, NDRP continued to strengthen its role as a bridge between research, policy and practice. Through funded research, commissioned projects and evidence-to-action initiatives, we have brought together people with disability, representative organisations, researchers and governments to ensure evidence is not only generated, but used to inform decision-making and reform.

An important theme throughout the year has been learning. We have worked closely with researchers, people with disability, advocacy organisations, policy partners and independent evaluators to improve our funding processes, accessibility, support mechanisms and broader contribution to the research ecosystem. This learning has also highlighted the systemic barriers that continue to limit participation and leadership for people with disability within research. While these challenges extend beyond any single organisation, NDRP will continue to use its role to advocate for and support practical change.

The extension of NDRP's current funding agreement to December 2027 provides an important opportunity to build on this momentum. Our focus now is on sustainability: strengthening the case for long-term investment in disability research infrastructure, leadership, capability and evidence mobilisation.

We are proud of what has been achieved together this year. Most importantly, we are seeing growing evidence that disability-led research is becoming more visible, more likely to influence the decisions that affect the lives of people with disability.

We thank the many people and organisations who have contributed to this work, particularly people with disability, whose leadership, expertise and lived experience continue to shape and strengthen everything we do.

> **"The next phase is about turning strong foundations and early impacts into an enduring disability research system, one where people with disability lead, evidence is used, and investment continues"**
> Clare Gibellini, Board Chair, NDRP

# Our people

**NDRP is shaped by people with disability and by people across research, advocacy, policy, government and community who contribute their expertise through our governance, committees, panels, staff team and programs.**

## Our Board

Our Board brings together disability leadership, research expertise, governance experience and government perspectives. Accessible participation and meaningful involvement of people with disability are built into Board and committee processes. During 2025–2026, the Board oversaw a substantial expansion of NDRP delivery, including the 2026 research funding approach, research leadership initiatives, commissioned research, evaluation and planning for NDRP's longer-term sustainability.

The Board of Directors is responsible for setting the strategic directions for the NDRP, and ensuring the good governance of the organisation.

During 2025–2026, we welcomed Alexandra Bignell, Bindi Bennett and Dianne Winkler to the NDRP Board, and farewelled founding directors Professor Jackie Leach Scully and Professor Anne Kavanagh. We acknowledge Anne and Jackie's crucial contribution to establishing NDRP and shaping its early direction.



### 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 Scott Avery

**Independent Director**

**Chair of Nominations Committee (from 1 September 2026)**

Professor Scott Avery is Professor of Indigenous Disability Health and Wellbeing at Girra Maa Indigenous Health, University of Technology Sydney and a proud Worimi man and is profoundly Deaf. A nationally and internationally recognised educator, researcher and policy adviser, Scott's seminal work *Culture is Inclusion* (2018) has shaped national reform across Closing the Gap, Australia's Disability Strategy and the Disability Royal Commission. His work focuses on intersectional policy, culturally grounded methodologies and Indigenous data leadership.



## Professor Bindi Bennett

**Independent Director**

Bindi (she/her) is a K/Gamilaroi woman and Professorial Research Fellow at Federation University. Her research challenges deficit-based understandings of disability, with a focus on neurodiversity-affirming approaches, relational care, and community-led models of wellbeing. Bindi leads large-scale, community-engaged research in partnership with First Nations communities and organisations, co-designing research so it is led by those most impacted and accountable to community priorities. She brings significant experience in workforce development, designing and delivering training, simulation-based learning and practice frameworks that build capability in culturally responsive, inclusive care.



## Alexandra Bignell

**Independent Director**

**Member of Nominations Committee**

Alexandra is an Autistic woman with lived experience of disability, neurodivergence, chronic illness and parenting an Autistic child. These experiences shape how she understands disability, access, participation, policy and systems. Alexandra brings over two decades of governance experience across community, representative and public-purpose organisations. As a Disability Inclusion Advisor in local government, her work focuses on how evidence and lived experience can inform policy, practice and more inclusive communities. She also works across the local government sector, including as Chair of the Australian Local Government Association Community of Practice for Disability Inclusion.



## Louise Gates

**Government Appointed Director**

**Member of Nominations Committee**

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.



## Associate Professor Lorna Hallahan

**Independent Director**

**Chair of Audit, Risk and Finance Committee (until 30 June 2026)**

**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 Lorna has contributed as a peer-recognised leader in state and national policy advice. During 2025, she has been appointed to The Independent Advisory Council of the NDIS and the Australian Research Advisory Committee.



## Keran Howe

**Independent Director**

**Chair of Research Committee (from 1 October 2026)**

Keran is a social worker who has worked as a leader in the fields of health and disability over many years. 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.



## Professor Anne Kavanagh OAM

**Founding Director**

**Chair of Research Committee (until 30 June 2026)**

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.



## Professor Jackie Leach Scully

**Founding Director (until 30 June 2026)**

**Acting Chair of Research Committee (July to September 2026)**

**Member of Research Committee (continuing)**

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.



## Luke Mansfield

**Government Appointed Director**

**Chair of Nominations Committee (until 30 June 2026)**

**Chair of Audit, Risk and Finance Committee (from 1 September 2026)**

Luke (he/him) has extensive senior leadership experience across government and is currently a First Assistant Secretary in the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing, working in Ageing and Aged Care. Luke previously led on implementation of Australia's Disability Strategy 2021–31; the National Autism Strategy; and establishment of additional community-based foundational disability supports across Australia. He was awarded a Public Service Medal in 2025 for outstanding public service through advocacy to disability reform.



## 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 honours young queer individuals who have demonstrated success in their careers and made tangible contributions to the LGBTQIA+ community.



## Dr Emily Steel

**Independent Director**

**Chair of Audit, Risk and Finance Committee (until October 2025)**

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.



## Dr Dianne Winkler

**Independent Director**

**Member of the Research Committee (from 1 September 2026)**

Dianne brings over 30 years' experience in the disability sector, spanning clinical practice, research, policy influence and organisational leadership. Her early career as an occupational therapist working with people with severe brain injury gave her a deep understanding of the systemic barriers faced by people with disability. She is CEO and founder of the Summer Foundation and has driven legislative reform, including a successful campaign to amend the National Construction Code for better housing accessibility.




NDRP Board members and CEO Mary Sayers. Back row, from left to right: Alexandra Bignell, Lorna Hallahan, Mary Sayers, Clare Gibellini, Chloe Rattray, Louise Gates, Emily Steel, Professor Scott Avery and Luke Mansfield. Front row, from left to right: Professor Jackie Leach Scully, Keran Howe and Professor Bindi Bennett.



From left to right: Professor Ronika Power, Macquarie University and supervisor of Hannah Vogel; Hannah Vogel, NDRP Disability Research Leadership Program recipient; Mary Sayers, NDRP CEO; and Aaron Saint-James, NDRP Disability Research Leadership Program recipient.

# Our Research Committee and advisory structures

The Research Committee provides expert advice to NDRP on research priorities, funding approaches, inclusive research practice, quality, impact and alignment with the NDRP Research Agenda. During 2025–2026, the Committee supported learning from our 2025 Seed Funding, the design and assessment of the 2026 funding round and the development of NDRP's broader research capacity and evidence to action work.

During 2025–2026, we commenced recruiting for new members of the Research Committee to replace members who had stepped down and to continue to bring the mix of disability leadership, research, policy and practice expertise needed for NDRP's next phase. Three new members commenced from 1 October 2026.

> **"Being part of the NDRP research grant review panel was a valuable and rewarding experience. The clear guidance, diverse perspectives and respectful, collaborative discussions supported well-informed decisions. Reviewing innovative and impactful proposals was both inspiring and professionally enriching."** Independent review panel member, 2026 Disability Research Funding Round

## Our Research Committee

- Professor Anne Kavanagh – Chair (until 30 June 2026)
- Professor Jackie Leach Scully – Acting Chair (July to September 2026)
- Keran Howe – Chair (from 1 October 2026)
- Basim Alansari (from 1 October 2026)
- Dr Kate Davies
- Dr Elroy Dearn (until December 2025)
- Dr Alexandra Devine
- Professor Helen Dickinson
- Professor John Gilroy
- Dr Jade McEwen
- Dr Claire Quilliam (from 1 October 2026)
- Professor Sally Robinson
- Tahlia-Rose Vanissum
- Robbi Williams (until April 2026)
- Dr Dianne Winkler (from 1 September 2026)
- Wayne Wright (from 1 October 2026)

# Independent funding review panels

Ensuring research is led by and with people with disability requires structural embedding, including through our grant guidelines, the assessment criteria, our capacity strengthening and our independent review processes. Our research funding decisions are strengthened by the people who contribute their time, knowledge and expertise to NDRP's assessment and advisory processes.

Our 2026 Disability Research Funding round was supported by independent panel assessment across nine review panels involving 38 individual reviewers, including a dedicated First Nations Panel. Panels were deliberately formed to reflect different expertise, with panels that brought together disability, community, research, policy, practice and sector expertise. Panel composition was designed to bring different perspectives to decisions about research quality, disability leadership, inclusion, policy and systems impact, feasibility and alignment with NDRP's Guiding Principles. Where an additional First Nations lens was needed, targeted First Nations review provided advice on matters including First Nations leadership, cultural safety, community governance and Indigenous Data Sovereignty.

We also piloted an Intellectual Disability Advisory Group, made up of people with intellectual disability, to review plain language and Easy Read information about selected applications and provide advice to the relevant assessment panels. We look forward to embedding the learning of this pilot into future funding rounds.

We thank the independent reviewers, panel chairs, advisory group members and others who contributed to these processes. Their expertise and careful consideration are an important part of ensuring NDRP's investment decisions reflect the quality of the research, the knowledge and leadership of people with disability, and the potential for evidence to make a difference.

# Disability Research Leadership Program

In 2025–2026, the National Disability Research Partnership (NDRP) launched its inaugural Disability Research Leadership Program (DRLP), investing in the next generation of researchers with disability and strengthening pathways into research leadership. The program recognises the expertise and contribution of researchers with disability while addressing structural barriers that can limit opportunities to progress in research careers.

## Designed with researchers with disability

The program was informed by consultation with current and former higher degree research students with disability. Their experiences highlighted the need for more flexible financial support, accessible professional development, stronger peer connections and improvements in institutional support.

## Introducing our inaugural cohort

Announced in February 2026, the first cohort includes 14 Master's by Research and PhD researchers from universities across Australia. Originally designed to support eight participants, the program was expanded in response to the strength of applications received.

## 2026 Disability Research Leadership Program recipients

- Aaron Saint-James
- Alison Devitt
- Claire Dorling
- Hannah Vogel
- Katie Price
- Kim Andreassen
- Mark Hanson
- Matthew Jackman
- Mikala Sedgwick
- Samantha Lilly
- Sarah Poiner
- Stephen Murnane
- Tania Rose
- Tara Pattenden

Their research spans First Nations disability experiences, intellectual disability, mental health, relationships, inclusive education, accessible travel, the arts and other areas central to improving policy and practice.

## Building capacity for lasting change

The inaugural program is an important step in NDRP's commitment to strengthening disability-led research capacity. By investing directly in researchers with disability, NDRP is supporting their leadership, research careers and opportunities to influence the evidence that shapes Australian disability policy and practice. Learning from this first cohort will inform future investment in disability research leadership and capacity strengthening.

# Our staff

NDRP remained a small national team while substantially increasing delivery during 2025–2026. Staff worked across research funding, policy research (commissioned and rapid policy research), research capacity strengthening, evidence mobilisation, stakeholder engagement, accessibility, communications, evaluation and organisational systems. The team continued to use flexible and accessible ways of working and to bring lived experience and disability expertise into program design and delivery.

- Mary Sayers – Chief Executive Officer
- Sue Tape – Deputy Chief Executive Officer (from November 2025) and Head of Evidence to Action
- Dr Bethany Devenish – Head of Policy Research
- Catherine Raffaele – Research Programs Manager (from December 2025)
- Gillian Mason – Head of Research Programs (until October 2025)
- Jess Rosenthal – Engagement and Events Coordinator
- Tamara Shadlow – Communications Consultant
- Keira O'Reilly – Project Support Officer (from January 2026)
- Sally Belford – Communications Lead (until July 2026)
- Natasha Brake – Operations Lead (until June 2026)

# Year 2 by the numbers

## 1 July 2025 to 30 June 2026

### Research investment and demand

**12,679**
views of the 2026 Disability Research Funding round information and frequently asked questions webpage

**1,141**
registrations across 2026 Disability Research Funding round launch and information sessions

**176**
applications submitted to the 2026 Disability Research Funding round

**$46.27m**
approximately requested through the 2026 funding round, against an envelope of up to $5 million ex GST

**15**
2025 Seed Funding projects supported through delivery, final reporting and knowledge mobilisation

### Stakeholder reach

**1,102**
not for profit organisation stakeholders in NDRP's engagement database

**1,105**
government stakeholders in NDRP's engagement database

**2,033**
university and higher education stakeholders in NDRP's engagement database

### Research leadership and capacity

**96**
registrations across two national DRLP applicant information sessions

**55**
applications to the first Disability Research Leadership Program higher degree research stream

**14**
recipients announced for the inaugural Disability Research Leadership Program

### Knowledge mobilisation

**1,880**
registrations across NDRP Evidence to Action activities in 2025–2026

**90%**
of feedback received rated our 2025–2026 Evidence to Action events 4 or 5 out of 5 overall

**198,838**
LinkedIn campaign post impressions

**4,713**
NDRP YouTube video views




Chelsea Aquilina and Associate Professor Sarah Knight, members of an NDRP 2025 Seed Funding research team, at Australia's Disability Strategy National Forum in Adelaide, February 2026.



Dr Tess Altman and Madeleine Gay from the Policy and Research team at Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA), members of an NDRP-funded 2025 Seed Funding research team, presenting their research at the NDRP poster session.




Mary Sayers, CEO of the National Disability Research Partnership, addressing attendees at Australia's Disability Strategy National Forum in Adelaide, February 2026.

# Our key achievements against our strategic focus areas



Strategic focus area 1:
**Build a sustainable foundation**



Strategic focus area 2:
**Fund research done by and with people with disability**



Strategic focus area 3:
**Strengthen disability research capacity**



Strategic focus area 4:
**Mobilise evidence for action**



# Strategic focus area 1: Build a sustainable foundation

## What we did

- Moved beyond establishment to strengthen the systems, evidence, partnerships and sustainability.
- Engaged regularly with DPOs, DROs, advocacy organisations and community partners to inform our research and capacity strengthening priorities
- Deepened government engagement across Australia
- Established an MOU with Girra Maa Indigenous Health at UTS Sydney and held the first Leaving our Research Footprint First Nations Gathering
- Implemented an integrated engagement database and strengthened stakeholder systems to support engagement, delivery and reporting
- Focused on accessibility, inclusive governance and the meaningful involvement of people with disability across all aspects of NDRP's work.

## Our pathway to impact

The independent *Pathway to impact evaluation of the National Disability Research Partnership: Interim evaluation report* found that:

- Stakeholders highly value partnering with the NDRP.
- NDRP's focus on trust-building has been effective, with most stakeholders reporting confidence in the organisation and recognising its commitment to valuing the knowledge and expertise of people with disability.
- Early impacts are emerging, with most stakeholders reporting increased collaboration in disability research across organisations and sectors.
- Around half of stakeholders reported forming new connections and partnerships through engagement with the NDRP.

## Looking forward

- NDRP's existing funding agreement with government extended to December 2027
- Continuing to be an advocate for sovereign First Nations disability research
- Securing future government funding for the NDRP for the next four years
- Deepening and diversifying our partnerships including with governments across Australia, end users of research and continuing to engage strongly with the disability community and their representative organisations.
- Publishing the NDRP interim evaluation and the evaluation of the first phase of the commissioned research pilot.



"This need to happen more often, we need to come together to strengthen this in First Nation space" and "It was wonderful to meet people and learn from the collective yarning. We are all in the space for different reasons and in different capacities. I loved the collective approach of bringing our gifts together to understand how we can advance our aspirations together." Attendees at the Girra Maa Indigenous Health and NDRP Leaving our Research Footprint event

"Trust is built in the way they present and engage. They are a cohesive workplace that is respectful, and inclusive. Often research funding bodies are not very helpful or supportive, and don't give meaningful feedback or guidance. The NDRP has given that support in a way that is accessible and personable." DRO representative, NDRP interim evaluation

"It really did feel like a true partnership with government. The department put in a lot of effort to making it work for us. They did a lot of internal consultation to narrow down from a really big topic." Respondent to the Commissioned Research Phase 1 external evaluation

# Strategic focus area 2: Fund research done by and with people with disability

## What we did

- 2025 Seed Funding projects finalised reporting and commenced knowledge mobilisation.
- Applied lessons from 2025 research funding round to strengthen future funding rounds.
- Launched the 2026 Research Funding Round, attracting 176 applications seeking $46.3 million and highlighting strong unmet demand for disability research funding.
- Continued to use the NDRP Research Agenda to guide research investment
- Progressed the commissioned research program from research refinement through to procurement for critical research on career pathways for young people with disability.
- Initiated the Rapid Policy Research Collaboration to generate timely, disability-led evidence on emerging disability reform priorities.

## Our pathway to impact

The NDRP interim evaluation found:

- Funding rounds were independently recognised as accessible, inclusive and rigorous, with applicants valuing NDRP's supportive approach to capability strengthening, co-design and inclusion.
- Established clear standards for disability-led and inclusive research through funding requirements, toolkits and capacity-building activities.
- Enabled researchers to adopt more accessible and inclusive research practices through a strong focus on genuine co-design.

*Commissioned Research* Phase 1 external evaluation found:

- The model delivered with strong fidelity to NDRP principles and was experienced as fair, transparent and accessible.
- NDRP's layered consultation, strong accessibility practices and independence from government were identified as key strengths underpinning the model's credibility.

## Looking forward

- Supporting collaboration across the 19 disability-led funded research projects on NDRP priority areas, including safety and accessible communities, to strengthen shared learning and impact.
- Launching Rapid Policy Research Collaboration findings on:
  - safety for people with disability
  - future psychosocial disability support needs
- Publishing a review of the 2026 Research Funding Round to identify how funded and high-quality unfunded disability-led projects can contribute to disability policy and reform and inform future research capacity strengthening.



> **“…NDRP clearly undertook due diligence throughout the screening process. It also felt like NDRP was genuinely walking the talk by involving external screeners with lived and living experience of disability in this important work.”** External screener for 2026 Research Funding Round

> **“When I look at the quality of research that the NDRP puts out – personally I know that has to be done with good frameworks. The proof is in the pudding.”** DRO representative, NDRP interim evaluation

> **“Huge outcome for us, looking around, I don’t know that there has ever been focus groups with this many tactile Auslan users. We had to book 14 interpreters to have people with deaf blindness contributing to research in this way, it is a powerful outcome to have that documented.”** Researcher, NDRP interim evaluation



# Strategic focus area 3: Strengthen disability research capacity

## What we did

- Selected 14 higher degree research students with disability for the Disability Research Leadership Program (DRLP).
- Launched *Co-design Partnerships: A Mutual Exchange* with Disability Advocacy Network Australia.
- Delivered Communities of Practice for funded teams and DRLP participants to support collaboration and shared learning.
- Partnered with Griffith University to launch Citizen Researcher Essentials, a research micro-credential for people with disability.
- Delivered the Let's Talk About Disability Data event in partnership with the National Disability Data Asset.
- Delivered a range of information activities and events to support the 2026 research funding round.
- Partnered with the UNSW Centre for Disability Research and Policy on a resource to promote inclusive ethics and barriers to disability-led research.

## Our pathway to impact

The NDRP interim evaluation found:

- The first round of the Disability Research Leadership Program (DRLP) attracted 55 applications, demonstrating strong national demand for flexible, disability-led research career support.
- DRLP participants reported that NDRP recognition and support strengthened both their motivation to pursue research careers and their connection to the disability community.
- Stakeholders highlighted that NDRP's commitment to disability leadership and genuine co-design is embedded across applications, partnership and co-design toolkits, communications, and accessible meeting practices.
- NDRP's accessible and inclusive approach has enabled people with disability, including new and emerging researchers, to engage in research and take on more meaningful roles.

## Looking forward

- Selection of the DRLP Fellowships for post-doctoral disability researchers
- Facilitating communities of practice and supporting capacity strengthening across the 19 disability-led funded research and the DRLP
- Applying insights from NDRP funding rounds to strengthen future programs, while developing resources and guidance to advance disability-led research across the NDRP and the wider research funding sector.
- Building on the Citizen Research Essentials micro-credential pilot with Griffith University, supporting more people with disability to develop research knowledge, skills and confidence, and using evaluation findings to inform future delivery.



> **"The discussions enriched my understanding of different approaches and priorities. ...range of innovative and impactful proposals was both informative and inspiring, and it contributed to my professional development."** Independent panel member for 2026 Research Funding Round

> **"The university I'm at doesn't really do inclusion well. When the university sent out the NDRP fellowship application and it was easy to read, easy to action and the team, the response, the feedback and the acceptance on a grant panel was offered. I finally felt that maybe the decision to do my PhD was a good one. I'd been regretting it for an awfully long time."** Disability Research Leadership Program member, NDRP interim evaluation

> **"The NDRP sets the precedent by modelling excellence. The process makes applicants really think about what they're doing because the NDRP has clear values and upholds excellence, tokenistic gestures won't cut it. It's the first time an independent body has set a really high bar."** Researcher, NDRP interim evaluation



# Strategic focus area 4: Mobilise evidence for action

## What we did

- Funded and maintained the APO Disability Research Collection as national infrastructure for finding and using disability research, improving tagging, categorisation and discoverability.
- Delivered activities that brought together people with disability, advocacy organisations, researchers, policymakers and government to address practical questions about how evidence is framed, shared and applied.
- Hosted 6 Evidence to Action events on topics including accessible and inclusive communities, research for policy impact, and collaborative approaches to research.
- Developed and tested resources for funded research teams, including templates and guidance on plain language summaries, key messages, final reporting, storytelling, media engagement, policy framing, and evidence-to-action planning.
- Supported the launch of the 2025 Seed Funding research projects.

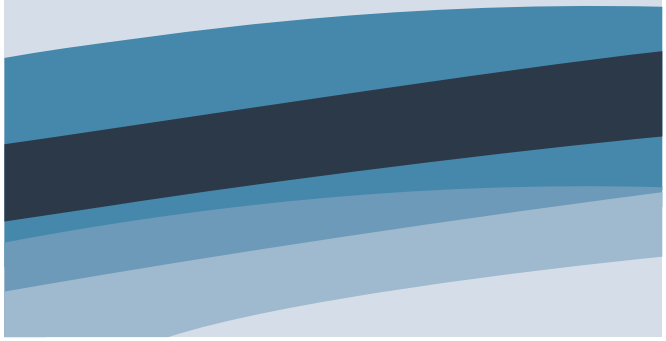
## Our pathway to impact

The NDRP interim evaluation found:

- The APO Disability Research collection has had significant attention: from May 2024 to June 2026, it received 97,578 views and 40,198 downloads across 49,556 unique users.
- Government stakeholders stated that they have been involved in the development of the Evidence to Action series to ensure alignment with policy objectives. The event on disability data was very well-received for addressing an important gap in the sector.
- A strong majority of research and community stakeholders believed there was more effective and accessible research because of the NDRP

## Looking forward

- Further embed knowledge mobilisation across research funding, commissioned research, funded team support, stakeholder engagement and communications.
- Strengthening relationships, timing, accessible communication, policy understanding and opportunities for researchers and evidence users to work together throughout the end-to-end research process
- Creating enduring partnerships and relationships between policy makers and other evidence users and the disability research ecosystem.
- Strengthening how NDRP captures and communicates evidence use and influence, moving beyond measures of participation and reach to better understand how research contributes to changes in policy, practice and research systems.



Question: What did you find most helpful about the session?

> **"The incredible info and resources sent out before the session. We have A LOT to learn from NDRP about how to do this type of activity well."**
> Evidence to Action event attendee May 2026

> **"For me, evidence to action is about making sure research doesn't just sit in a report. It's about bringing people together, understanding the decisions that need to be made, and connecting research with the people who can use it to make a difference. That work needs to start well before the research is finished. At NDRP, we're building those connections between researchers, people with disability, communities, policymakers and practitioners so that the evidence we invest in has a real opportunity to influence decisions, improve practice and deliver meaningful change."**
> Sue Tape, Deputy CEO and Head of Evidence to Action, NDRP

# Financial snapshot

## 1 July 2025 to 30 June 2026 results

| Category | $ |
|---|---|
| Total income | 531,724 |
| Total expenses | 2,799,509 |
| Surplus/(deficit) | (2,267,785) |
| **Income** | |
| Government grant funding | 0 |
| Interest income | 495,099 |
| Other income | 36,625 |
| **Expenses** | |
| Accessibility costs | 102,115 |
| Administration expenses | 17,432 |
| Employee benefits expenses | 1,100,297 |
| Professional fees | 429,133 |
| Research expenses | 607,028 |
| Systems expenses | 59,670 |
| Scholarship expenses | 154,451 |
| Evaluation expenses | 140,362 |
| Other expenses | 189,021 |

### Understanding our financial results

NDRP received its Australian Government funding in advance, with the grant income recognised in the previous reporting period in accordance with applicable accounting standards. As a result, no new government grant income was recorded in 2025–2026, and NDRP continued to deliver its funded activities using resources received in earlier years. The resulting accounting deficit reflects the planned use of funding recognised in the previous reporting period. This approach aligns with NDRP's multi-year funding arrangements, under which expenditure is incurred progressively as research projects and other activities are delivered.

# More information

## Questions

### What does NDRP fund?

NDRP funds and commissions research aligned with the NDRP Research Agenda and Guiding Principles, with a strong focus on research led by and with people with disability and on evidence that can inform policy and practice.

### How does NDRP decide what to fund?

Funding decisions use published criteria, independent assessment and moderation, input from people with disability and relevant expertise, advice from the Research Committee and final governance decisions by the Board. The process is designed to combine quality, disability leadership, accessibility, strategic alignment and policy or practice relevance.

### How does NDRP support inclusive research?

NDRP combines funding requirements with practical support. This includes accessible application processes, Communities of Practice, partnership guidance, capacity strengthening, support for accessible outputs, and expectations that evidence to action is planned from the start.

### Where can I find disability research and evidence?

The APO Disability Research Collection provides a free public collection of disability research and evidence. NDRP also shares funded research outputs, accessible summaries, event proceedings and evidence to action resources through its website and communications channels.

### How can I get involved?

People can subscribe to NDRP updates, attend Evidence to Action and capacity strengthening activities, follow funding opportunities, engage with research teams and contribute to consultation and partnership opportunities as they arise.

### Things to read and watch

- NDRP Strategic Plan 2024–2029, NDRP Research Agenda and Guiding Principles
- NDRP Co-designing resources
- Subscribe to our YouTube channel to keep up to date with the latest videos
- *The impact of investing in research co-design*, a synthesis by Dr Ellen Skladzien drawing together learning from NDRP's 2025 funded research projects
  - Read the Executive Summaries of the 2025 Seed Funding projects
  - *Research Report: Barriers within Bars*
- APO Disability Research Collection
- Pathway to impact evaluation of the National Disability Research Partnership: Interim evaluation report

# Contact us

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## Accessibility statement

NDRP is committed to accessible and inclusive communication.
If you need this report in another format, please contact us.



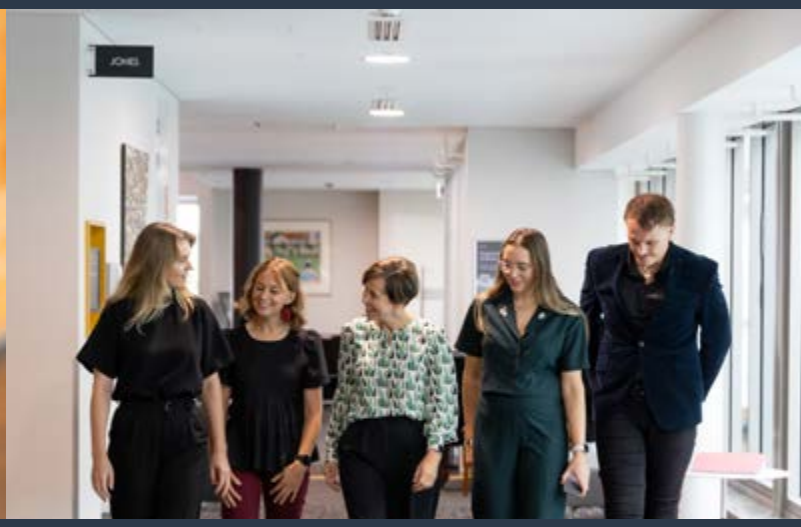

Senator the Hon Jenny McAllister speaking at the NDRP launch event in Sydney, February 2026.



Professor Scott Avery in conversation with another attendee at the NDRP launch event, February 2026.



An assistance dog accompanying attendees at the NDRP launch event.



From left to right: Dr. Jess Moulton, Katie Price, Minister Jenny McAllister, Hannah Vogel and Aaron Saint-James at the NDRP launch event, February 2026.






Left: Dr. Kelsey Chapman speaking at the NDRP launch event in Sydney, February 2026. Right: Minister Jenny McAllister and Mary Sayers, CEO of the National Disability Research Partnership, at the NDRP launch event in February 2026.


NDRP
National Disability
Research Partnership