

# National Disability OUTLOOK

## 2023

### FOREWORD

## Hon Bill Shorten MP

Minister for the National  
Disability Insurance Scheme

### INTERVIEWS

## Rebecca Falkingham

CEO of the National  
Disability Insurance Agency

## David Swain

CEO, Endeavour Foundation

### CASE STUDY

## Minds at Play with Jesse Cross

Finding creative ways  
to connect and grow

### MENTAL HEALTH

## Investing in Psychosocial Supports

### ARTS

## Creating an Inclusive Culture

### PLUS

NDIA and  
NDIS News

Information and  
Communications  
Technology

Plan Management and  
Support Coordination

faircountmediagroup

# NOVA Employment FOCUS ON ABILITY



“

Our recruitment process has been made easier by NOVA Employment, providing us with great talent across a wide range of positions. I'd recommend other employers Focus on Ability.

Emma McCulloch - Admin Mgr  
Carnet Western Sydney



032349FOAAD

[www.novaemployment.com.au](http://www.novaemployment.com.au)

Follow NOVA on





15<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL EDITION

**NOVA.**  
EMPLOYMENT

2023

**FOCUS ON ABILITY**  
**SHORT FILM FESTIVAL**

**OVER \$100,000 IN PRIZES**



THE UNDERLYING THEME OF YOUR ENTRY  
SHOULD *FOCUS ON THE ABILITY*  
OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY

FOR MORE INFORMATION

WWW.**FOCUSONABILITY**.COM.AU

ADMIN@FOCUSONABILITY.COM





# Live, learn and work with Endeavour Foundation



“

My new place is great. I'm able to look after my own garden, do my own washing, go grocery shopping, and do dinner parties with my friends,” Grace said.

## I am living independently

Grace lives in a Supported Independent Living home in Queensland.

For Grace, living independently was one of the best decisions she has ever made. Since moving out of the family home, Grace's confidence has blossomed.





“

I love getting out and about with my friends,” Clayton said. “If you like going to the beach and kicking the footy then we’ll get along great.”

## I am learning daily living skills

Clayton attends one of our Learning and Lifestyle hubs.

“You can find me at the beach catching the waves and hanging out with my mates at the local pub on a Friday night,” Clayton said.

Armed with the skills he learned at his Learning and Lifestyle hub, Clayton now enjoys the things he loves the most.

## I enjoy going to work

Meet Tricia.

Tricia works at Endeavour Foundation’s social enterprise on the Sunshine Coast.

Like Tricia, we believe that a job is so much more than a place to work and earn money. Don’t get us wrong, getting a job and earning money are two very important things. But we believe that work should also be a place where you can make friends, learn skills, gain independence, and achieve your goals.



“

I enjoy being a part of my team. They are my friends. I love earning money. I also love wearing my uniform. It makes me feel happy and proud to come to work.”



Endeavour Foundation offers services in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria. Call us today on 1800 112 112 or visit [endeavour.com.au](http://endeavour.com.au).

**NDVR**  
Endeavour  
Foundation

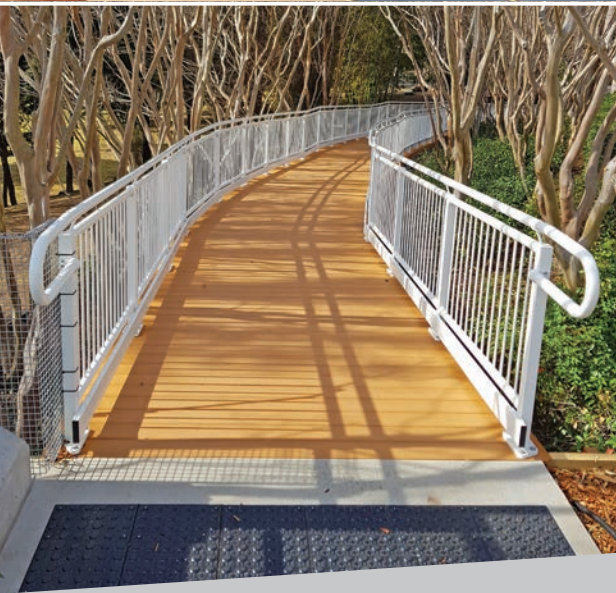




**australianRAMP**<sup>TM</sup>  
& access solutions pty ltd  
'equity of access'

Creating a range of accessibility products  
and services for commercial and  
residential applications

- ✓ We Care
- ✓ We Listen
- ✓ We Deliver
- ✓ Professional
- ✓ NDIS Approved
- ✓ Solution Provider



[www.arasolutions.com.au](http://www.arasolutions.com.au)

1800 010 246





# Placeable is leading Australia's transition to a more able place



## Changing Places Facility



## Full-Service Disability Access Ensuities

- Semi-Permanent • Portable • Flat Packed

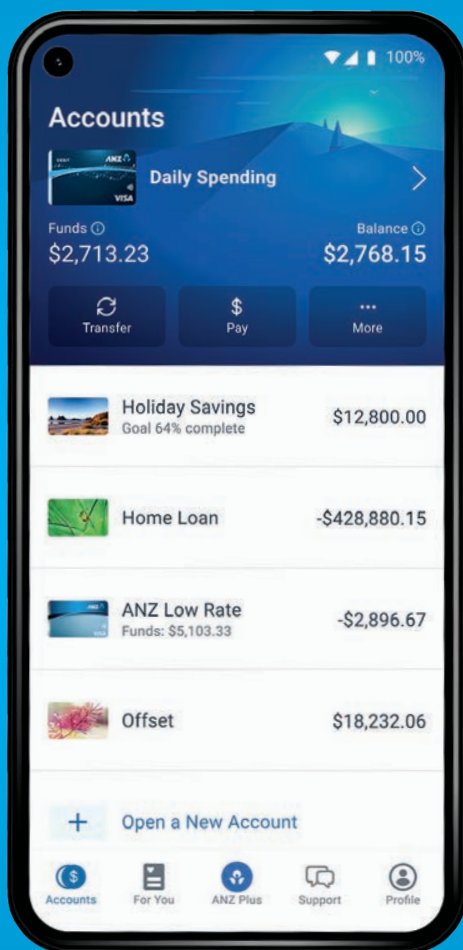


**1800 010 246**  
[placeablesolutions.com.au](http://placeablesolutions.com.au)

[support@placeable.com.au](mailto:support@placeable.com.au)



# A BANKING APP THAT WORKS FOR YOU



“I am legally blind and I like apps when they are accessible and easy to navigate.”  
mishaandvik89Lant



“By far the best banking app I have used.”  
Mahjong



The ANZ App<sup>1</sup> is built with accessibility in mind. Use your phone settings to increase the font size or adjust the contrast to see your balance more clearly. VoiceOver or TalkBack can guide you as you navigate the app. With the ANZ App, you can take care of the day to day without needing to visit a branch or give us a call.

If you're new to ANZ, it's easy to apply for an ANZ Access Advantage account – all you need is your Australian driver's licence or passport, phone and the ANZ App<sup>2</sup>. Job done.

Find out more at [anz.com/accessiblebanking](https://anz.com/accessiblebanking) or [anz.com/anzapp](https://anz.com/anzapp)

1. The ANZ App is provided by Australia and New Zealand Banking Group Limited (ANZ) ABN 11 005 357 522. Super, Shares and Insurance (if available) are not provided by ANZ but entities which are not banks. ANZ does not guarantee them. This information is general in nature only and does not take into account your personal objectives, financial situation or needs. ANZ recommends that you read the ANZ App Terms and Conditions available at [www.anz.com](https://www.anz.com) and consider if this service is appropriate to you prior to making a decision to acquire or use the ANZ App.  
2. Eligibility criteria, terms and conditions apply. Fees and charges apply. See [anz.com](https://anz.com) for more.





# Contents



7

## FOREWORD

Hon Bill Shorten MP, Minister for the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

## INTERVIEW:

### REBECCA FALKINGHAM

CEO of the National Disability Insurance Agency.

## NDIA & NDIS NEWS

A round-up of the latest National Disability Insurance Agency and National Disability Insurance Scheme news.

## SUPPORT COORDINATION

Helping participants who need additional care.

## CASE STUDY: LEAP IN

Plan management — A changing landscape.

## SUPPORT SERVICES

Empowering people to become more independent.

## 12 TECHNOLOGY

New technology poised to transform support coordination.

## CASE STUDY: MINDS AT PLAY

Finding creative ways to connect and grow.

## ACCESSIBILITY

Enhancing accessibility: breaking barriers for individuals with print disabilities.

## EMPLOYMENT

Budget offers employment hope for people with an intellectual disability and families.

## INTERVIEW: DAVID SWAIN

Endeavour Foundation paves the way for job opportunities for those with disability.

## 36 SDA & HOUSING

New housing options opening up new doors.

44

52

54

59

66

68

59



68



# Tunstall



**"Gives a good feeling of safety, knowing at the press of a button assistance is available."**

**- Ms G., VIC**

---

A Tunstall personal alarm means greater **independence, safety and peace of mind**. You and your loved ones will have the confidence that, if you need assistance, **Tunstall is always there**.

[www.tunstallhealthcare.com.au/ndis](http://www.tunstallhealthcare.com.au/ndis)  
1800 603 377

---



# Contents

76



## **HOMECARE** 72

Empowering individuals with disabilities to achieve their goals through home care services.

## **INTERVIEW: AUTISM SPECTRUM AUSTRALIA** 76

Allied Health Assistant model revolutionises autism therapy support in regional and remote Australia.

## **MENTAL HEALTH** 78

Investing in Psychosocial Supports: Closing the Gap.

## **TRAVEL** 82

Enabling inclusive travel experiences: Leisure Options pioneers accessible travel for all.

## **ARTS** 86

More Risk, More Play: Creating an Inclusive Culture.

## **ADVERTISER INDEX** 88



82

# National Disability **OUTLOOK** **2023**

Published by  
**faircountmediagroup** 

Faircount Media Group  
PO Box 16  
Bankstown NSW 1885

**Publisher & CEO**

Ross W. Jobson

**Managing Director**

David Sanis [david.sanis@faircount.com.au](mailto:david.sanis@faircount.com.au)

**Business Development Manager**

Angela Lyos

**Subeditor**

Kym Dunbar

**Writers**

Hayley Abell, Lisa Calautti, Morwenna Collett, Anthony O'Brien

**Art Director**

Erin Rollestone

**Production Coordinator**

Jake Brysha | [production.sydney@faircount.com](mailto:production.sydney@faircount.com)

**Printing**

Newstyle Printing

**Front Cover Image:** Halfpoint from iStock

©Copyright Faircount Media Asia Pty Ltd. All Rights Reserved. Reproduction of editorial content in whole or without written permission is prohibited. Faircount Media Asia Pty Ltd. does not assume responsibility for the advertisements, nor any representation made therein, nor the quality or deliverability of the products themselves. Reproduction of articles and photographs, in whole or in part, contained herein is prohibited without expressed written consent of the publisher, with the exception of reprinting for news media use. None of the advertising contained herein implies endorsement by the Australian Government of any private entity or enterprise. The views expressed in these articles are those of the authors and not necessarily the Australian Government. Printed in Australia.





PROUDLY BUILT IN  
**AUSTRALIA**



**QUANTUM**<sup>®</sup>

#1 FOR REHAB POWER



## Hon Bill Shorten MP

MINISTER FOR THE NATIONAL DISABILITY INSURANCE SCHEME

### **H**ello, and welcome to the 2023 edition of **National Disability OUTLOOK.**

I again have the honour of writing this year's foreword, and since last year's edition there have been a few updates worth talking about.

Looking back at the last 13 months, together we have achieved a lot.

Coming into the role as Minister for the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), I knew just how high the stakes were.

I knew how many people were counting on me and the Albanese Government to put the Scheme on a course correction, to undo the previous Government's mismanagement.

As I said at the National Press Club, it will take time and will require the kind of collective effort we saw during the campaign to fight for the NDIS in the first place.

But just like back then, the Labor Government will work with and for you every step along the way.

### **A decade of the National Disability Insurance Scheme**

The NDIS has just had its 10th birthday, and like many 10-year-olds, the Scheme is on the precipice of a change. It is ready for the next chapter.

When I became Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities in 2007, I saw a side to our great nation that remains the driving force of why I will work to the bone to see the Scheme succeed the way I know it can.

In 2007, I saw an Australia that was unfair, propped up by a support system that was inefficient and unsustainable. An Australia that shut out its fellow citizens from education, employment and housing. An Australia where disability services were on course for a socio-economic catastrophe—the country was paying more and more for worse and worse outcomes for people with disability.

There had to be a revolution to disability support, and it came in the form of the NDIS.

Ten years of the NDIS is a remarkable milestone.

A decade of a world-first reform that is changing the lives of hundreds of thousands of Australians and those closest to them.

On 1 July 2013, four trial sites opened their doors and the NDIS began to deliver its work. Fast forward to 2023 and there are now almost 600,000 NDIS participants who have reported increased freedom and control over their lives to go out in their community, to work, make friends and spend their time as they choose.

Participants like Lynne, who was the first person to get a plan during the Barwon trials—still has her original NDIS plan intact and she is proud to show it off.

Lynne, 63, has Arthrogryposis Multiplex Congenital, a muscle and joint deficiency. One of the leads in the Every Australian Counts Campaign, Lynne is a strong and trusted voice in the disability community, and it is because of advocates like her that we are here today.

Or there is 33-year-old Ben who has Down syndrome—he joined the Scheme during the 2014 NDIS trials in the Hunter region. Around





the time he became a participant, Ben wanted to learn how to 'pull a beer'.

Ben's new NDIS support workers suggested a course and, for 6 months, they helped Ben travel to Gosford every week to complete a Responsible Service of Alcohol course.

Fast forward 9 years, Ben is now a long-serving employee at the Happy Wombat in Newcastle. If you are around, I would definitely head there and see if Ben can make you a coffee or pour you a beer.

It is stories like Lynne's and Ben's that we need to strive for.

I truly believe that the NDIS is the best change politics has delivered in the 21st century and that is why we must work together to ensure it is the best scheme it can be.

### Where we are now

The NDIS was, and remains, a bold initiative. A big, complex, life-changing piece of economic and social policy.

The intent of the NDIS was to value people with disability, not measure their price in a budget.

The intent of the NDIS was to see the whole person not just their impairment.

The intent of the NDIS is to give equity, choice and power back to Australians with disability.

Slowly but surely, I can see us getting closer and closer to the end goal. To restore the Scheme to what we all envisioned.

I knew in June last year that to achieve this, the NDIS and the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) needed to have the right scaffolds in place in order to lift the experiences participants had with the Scheme.

That is why last October I brought forward the independent review of the NDIS.

The NDIS Review panel—co-chaired by Professor Bruce Bonyhady and Lisa Paul AO PSM—is consulting widely and will provide its findings this October on the design, operations and sustainability of the Scheme and will recommend how we build a more responsive, supportive, sustainable market and workforce.

I was clear from the beginning that there were improvements we could make before we received the final report.

Very early on, I learned the saying from those in the disability community; "nothing about us, without us." So I knew the best way to safeguard the integrity of the NDIS was to put more people with lived experience in leadership roles.

One of my first major acts as Minister was to appoint disability advocate Kurt Fearnley as Chair of the NDIA board.

We are lucky to have a leader of Kurt's calibre, leading a board that has half its members being people with disability, and this year the board welcomed its first ever First Nations member.

A culture shift has breathed new life into the NDIA, and I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the contribution of new CEO Rebecca Falkingham and the refreshed executive of the NDIA.

The Labor Government has made it clear it has a laser focus on fraud, and last October we created the Fraud Fusion Taskforce.



As at the end of March this year, there are now 38 investigations underway and an additional 14 matters under preliminary evaluation for investigation. Of these, 14 matters are before the courts under prosecution, with a total alleged fraud value of \$12.9 million.

Tip-offs are increasing. By the end of March, there were significantly more tip-offs. It is clear the entire country wants to protect this Scheme and its participants from people trying to make a dishonest living.

It is infuriating that crooks are stealing from people with disability—every dollar of NDIS funding must go to people with disability.

Another area we could not wait until October to act upon was the warehousing of NDIS participants in hospitals.

Our Government put people and supports in place to make sure participants could go home from hospital with the right disability supports in place.

We have already reduced delays from 160 days to 29 days and saved the hospital system up to \$550 million.

We are tackling another inherited problem too—we have blitzed the

number of legacy NDIS cases at the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT). Seventy per cent of the 4,501 legacy cases waiting to be heard by the AAT by May 2022 have now been resolved.

But as important as these changes are, they are not enough.

### The way forward

The NDIS is undoubtedly working for thousands of Australians, but it is not universally delivering the outcomes for people with disability that we have hoped for.

We are not always seeing outcomes that people with disability have said they wanted to see—stronger social inclusion, greater employment rates, more opportunity for people with disability to participate fully in our communities.

To deliver the outcomes that will change the lives of more Australians with disability and secure the sustainability of the NDIS, we need to deliver systemic reform.

In April, I outlined six reforms that will deliver better outcomes for participants and, in the process, help secure the ongoing sustainability of the Scheme.

We want to focus on helping the NDIA to work better, give participants the choice to have longer plans, moderate Scheme costs, improve independent living, eliminate unethical practices and increase access to supports outside of the Scheme.

To support the delivery of these priorities, the Albanese Government committed a total of \$910 million over four years to improve the NDIS, and to support and safeguard people with disability and the Scheme.

Included is \$142.6 million over two years for the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission, to invest in market quality and safeguards for people with disability.

And \$732.9 million will improve the effectiveness and sustainability of the NDIS and uplift NDIA capability, capacity and systems to better support participants.

Investing in the skills, numbers, specialisation and capability of the NDIA workforce is crucial.

Equipping NDIA staff with the right knowledge and improving NDIA processes and systems will mean the Agency can better understand the needs of participants. It will mean they can nurture better relationships with participants and provide more consistent decisions on NDIS supports and plans.

Reforming the NDIA, which delivers the Scheme, and ensuring every dollar goes to NDIS participants is essential to the success of the NDIS.

Many of the ideas on how to improve the Scheme have come from the disability community and we will continue to bring that knowledge and experience to the table.

The report handed down by the NDIS Review in October will guide the Scheme to be better, all formed by the voices of those in the disability community.

We will work in partnership with the disability community to tackle challenges, because we know there is a shared desire to see the Scheme succeed in line with the disability community's original vision.

We will amplify the voices of people with disability—to ensure reforms are co-designed and to make sure we get them right.



Only then will public trust and confidence in the Scheme be restored, and the NDIS will serve the best interests of participants.

### **Delivering the National Disability Insurance Scheme you deserve**

Australians overwhelmingly support the Scheme, they witness the difference it makes to families, communities and country.

That is why it will take all levels of government and community support to correct the course. To provide an NDIS that is adaptive, enduring and meets the expectations of participants.

The NDIS has literally changed the lives of hundreds of thousands of Australians like them and it saved a disability system from collapse.

The truth is that the NDIS is the difference between a life and a living death for many vulnerable Australians.

And—as a nation—every state and territory and every community has directly benefited—economically and socially—from the NDIS.

The NDIS is something all Australians can be proud of.

It represents what is best about Australia—that we look after each other and, most importantly, look after those who need extra support.

It sees the whole person, not just the impairment, empowering them to participate in the life of our country on their terms.

We are a lucky country. And we should not exclude anyone from the opportunity Australia has to offer because of a disability.

This extends beyond “the right thing to do”, it is the best thing to do for our country, for those with disability and without disability, and for our economy.

Without the NDIS, the costs to Australians would be far greater than today.

At the centre of the NDIS is the understanding that disability could affect any one of us or our family.

And talking of Australian values, there is no greater embodiment than the disability movement.

All of which is a shorthand way of expressing the privilege it is for me to stand beside the advocates of the disability movement—and serve the millions of Australians they represent.

If you are an Australian with disability, let me say this to you.

It is core business of Labor to restore and reform the NDIS. The NDIS is not going anywhere.

We will ensure the NDIS is secure and sustainable as a source of world class, life-changing support—delivering a working disability safety net for the next generation of Australians.

I can promise every Australian who cares about the future of the NDIS that the size of the challenge in front of us is more than matched by the strength of the Albanese Government’s determination to succeed.

I know there is nothing I will ever do that is more important than securing the future of the NDIS, and I assure you I am committed to that task. ●



## **A diversity of experience at a whole new level**

Expand your professional growth with broad experiences, participant diversity and positive life-changing outcomes for Autistic people.

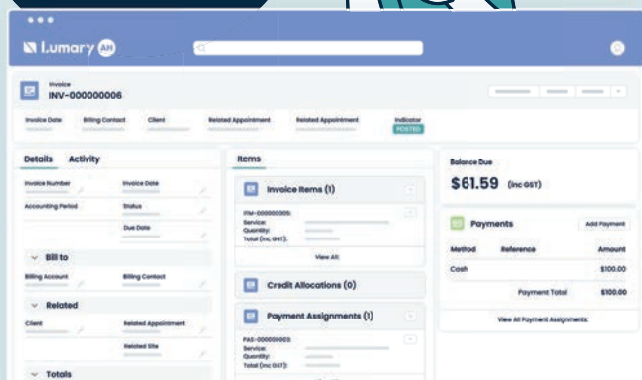
# **Join our team!**

**[autismspectrum.org.au/careers](https://autismspectrum.org.au/careers) | 1800 277 328**

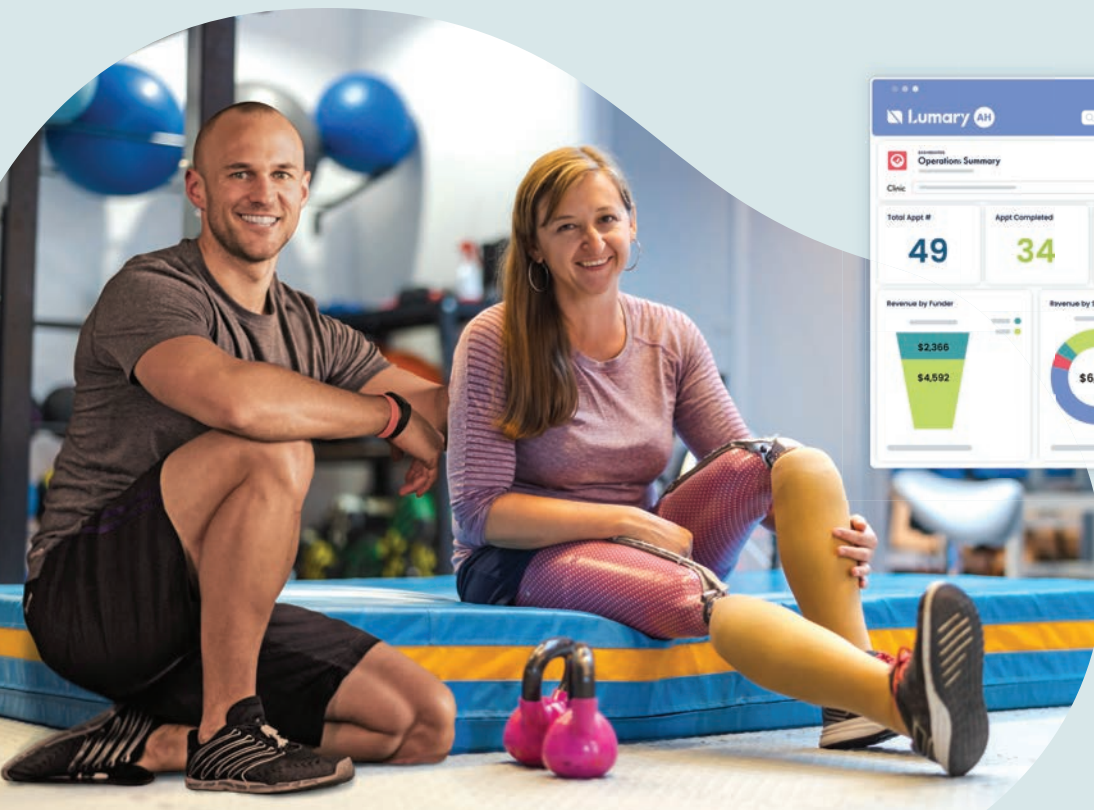
# Unleash The Full Potential Of Your Allied Health Practice!

**NEW  
PRODUCT**

Say goodbye  
to chaotic  
waitlists



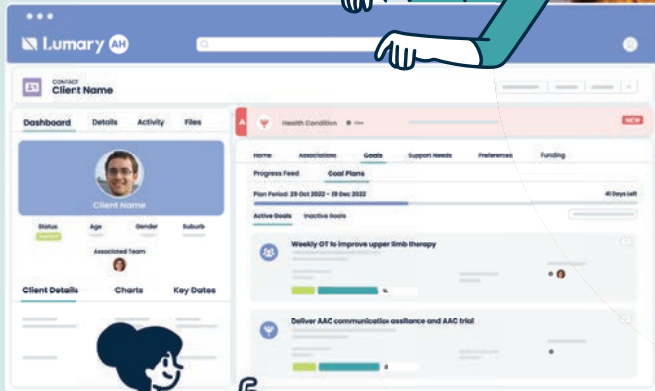
Spend more time  
with clients, less time  
on paperwork



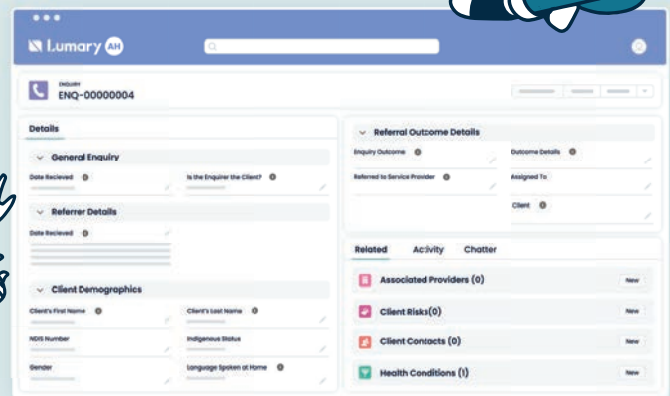
Powerful reporting  
you've never  
seen before



The perfect client  
goal tracker



The easier way to  
onboard clients



Run your  
entire practice  
from one  
place



Better Wellbeing Through Technology

Find out more [www.lumary.com](https://www.lumary.com)





# Rebecca Falkingham

CEO of the National Disability Insurance Agency

18

New National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Rebecca Falkingham, talks to National Disability OUTLOOK as she leads change.

Rebecca has over 20 years' experience as a senior public servant, in all aspects of social policy and service delivery in the fields of family violence, disability, housing, child protection, health, education, justice, climate change and supporting First People's reforms.

She co-led the Victorian transition to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) which was co-designed with the community and people with lived experience.

During her time as Deputy Secretary for the New South Wales Department of Premier and Cabinet, she coordinated the New South Wales transition to the NDIS and the commencement of the NDIS trial site in the Hunter Valley. **By Anthony O'Brien**

**Please share any observations about the NDIA evolving since becoming CEO. It would be great to hear about the growth and successes you have noticed so far.**

The first observation I'd make is that the fundamental purpose of the National Disability Insurance Agency is to serve hundreds of thousands of people with disability. That's why we're working with the disability community to co-design reforms that ensure everything we do is focused on and around participants. That's why, since becoming CEO, I've recruited people with disability to work in leadership positions. And that's why the Agency also has more people with disability in board positions than ever before, including our chair, Kurt Fearnley.

We have made significant progress. For example, we made significant improvements in reducing the backlog in the Administrative Appeals Tribunal, having seen this reduce by approximately one-third through initiatives such as an Early Assessment team and piloting an Independent Expert Review panel. We've also greatly improved hospital discharge





rates by increasing the number of Hospital Liaison Officers and NDIS hospital discharge planners.

The thinking behind initiatives such as these is simple. The Agency wants to deliver equity and value. We want to ensure the NDIS treats participants equitably—no matter where they live or what their circumstances—and ensure the NDIS delivers social and economic value.

I believe the best way to secure the sustainability of the NDIS is to achieve equity and deliver value. In other words, the Scheme's sustainability is a by-product of those systemic virtues. The Agency has been focusing on changes in our organisation, operations and outcomes. Organisationally, we're updating our structure. A key part is making co-design a routine part of our work. Operationally, we want to provide better support to participants so they can manage their plans within budget and to improve their experience and outcomes from the Scheme. We will hold plan managers, support coordinators and providers to account.

**Our priority is to use this investment to deliver stronger outcomes for participants, through a workforce that better understands and reflects the people we support. We have listened to the disability community as to where we can best improve and will implement initiatives to reflect this.**

We're working to ensure the NDIS works in ways that best suit participants. That's why we need to make plans more transparent and flexible.

The impact of these organisational and operational changes—and this goes back to the fundamental purpose of the Agency—must serve people with disability. That, in a nutshell, is where the Agency is heading.

In addition, we're already working through the initial findings of the NDIS Review's *What we have heard* report and are looking forward to receiving the final report in October. We see the NDIS Review as an opportunity to find new ways to become more equitable

and deliver more value. We welcome feedback from the community because we want to keep improving.

**The Budget recently announced \$720 million over four years to improve the NDIA and support individuals with disabilities and the Scheme. What are your immediate priorities in utilising these funds to make positive changes?**

The Federal Budget funding is significant and an important investment in our work alongside people with disability to create a Scheme that works for all participants. Our priority is to use this investment to deliver stronger



outcomes for participants, through a workforce that better understands and reflects the people we support. We have listened to the disability community as to where we can best improve and will implement initiatives to reflect this.

The \$720 million will lift the Agency's capability, capacity and systems. We will deliver more consistent and equitable planning, better and more flexible plans, more independent living, more evidence-based supports, and partnerships with First Nations and remote communities.

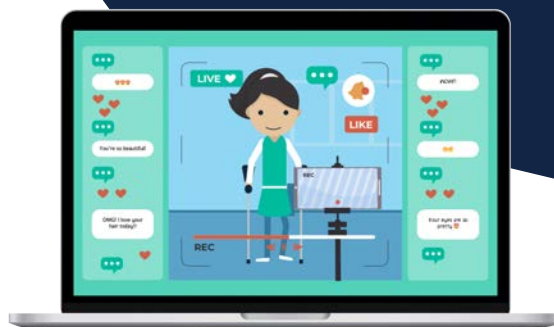
Internally, we need to continue to build a diverse and skilled workforce, including people with disability, as well as people from First Nations and CALD [culturally and linguistically diverse] backgrounds. Externally, everything we do should be in consultation with people with disabilities. They are the experts and deserve an NDIS that works with them and for them.

# Free Online Safety Training

**Equipping people with disability with skills to identify and overcome online risks.**

- Recognise and manage cyberbullying,
- Safe online relationships,
- Protect personal private information,

Developed in collaboration with leading cyber safety experts, ySafe, thanks to funding from The Office of the eSafety Commissioner's Online Safety Grants Program



**Supports available in Greater Sydney and Central Coast**



**Support  
Coordination**



**Accommodation**



**Behaviour and Allied  
Health Services**



**Community Access  
and Self Care**



Access the free training at  
[www.interactionservices.org/online-safety](http://www.interactionservices.org/online-safety)



Interaction Disability Services is a not-for-profit, NDIS-registered organisation committed to supporting and empowering people living with intellectual disabilities.

For more information call **1300 668 123** or visit [www.interactionservices.org](http://www.interactionservices.org)





**What do you consider to be your greatest challenges as you navigate your role and work with the NDIA?**

I'd like to answer by talking about a priority. Our number one priority is trust. We need to earn the trust of people with disability.

Earning trust is harder than it sounds because it isn't organisational. It's personal. You can only earn trust—day in, day out—through hundreds of thousands of interactions between our staff, participants and stakeholders.

The bottom line is this: we need to earn trust one participant at a time.

Policies and service standards are important. That's why we set standards through mechanisms like disability and First Nations and LGBTQIA+ inclusion plans; and that's why we're shifting to a new computer system—PACE. PACE will mean planners have more time to spend working directly with participants to improve their experience and their outcomes. We must prove—through our day-to-day operations—that we are trustworthy.

Earning trust is a priority and, yes, it is a challenge.

**How do you plan to increase your number of NDIA staff with disability? Why is this important?**

There are more people with disability on the Agency's board than ever before, and we're actively recruiting people with disability. To best serve the needs of people with disability we must improve our capability and capacity—and we believe the best way is to recruit more people who understand the needs of Australians with disability and invest in skills development.

This approach is informed by the excellent advice we received from the Independent Advisory Council, as well as feedback from participants. What we've been told, again and again, is the diversity of our workforce should reflect the diversity of the people we serve, including people with disability, First Nations peoples, and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Why is a diverse workforce

important? Simple. The better we understand the lived experiences of participants the better we serve their needs—and the better the outcomes for people with disability.

Skills are critical too. That's why we are investing \$429.5 million to upskill our workforce to ensure we have the know-how to better serve participants. Since joining the Agency I have been impressed by the NDIA staff I've met. The Agency has more than 190 offices across the country. I've been visiting those offices and have been really impressed by the sense of purpose and commitment I've seen. This emphasis on skills development and workforce diversity builds on that purpose and commitment.

**Can you provide some insights into the measures being taken to ensure transparency and flexibility in NDIS plans?**

Participants have told us they want more transparency and flexibility in their plans. That makes sense. We will

# Well Health Care

## Your Choice We Care

As an NDIS registered service provider, our team of professional nurses and qualified disability support workers are highly trained and experienced in providing high quality of care.



### Core Support & Capacity Building

- Assistance with Daily Living Activities
- Community Access
- Allied Health Services
- Support Coordination
- Group Activity

### Community Nursing

- General Nursing Services
- Complex Care Needs
- Palliative Care
- Respite Care

- Short Term Accommodation (Respite Care)
- Medium Term Accommodation
- Supported Independent Living

Please contact [info@wellhealthcare.com.au](mailto:info@wellhealthcare.com.au) for details



### Contact Us

- ☎ 1300-016-777
- 📍 Wheelers Hill, Victoria 3150
- 🌐 [www.wellhealthcare.com.au](http://www.wellhealthcare.com.au)
- ✉ [info@wellhealthcare.com.au](mailto:info@wellhealthcare.com.au)



**We need to do more to improve access and consistency in decision making across the country. We are working with the disability community to fix that. After all, the best way we can improve independent living outcomes is to work closely with participants to co-design a solution.**

see better outcomes for participants if we make it easier to understand, use, and change supports and services. This approach goes hand-in-hand with adopting a lifetime-planning approach to the NDIS. After all, people's circumstances change as they go

through different stages in life. For instance, a participant might need more help when they are a child or when going through life transitions such as entering the workforce, finding a place to live or changing jobs. The NDIS needs to have the flexibility to scale up and

down to match needs. We also need to spend time working with people with disability to co-design a lifetime approach to planning that works—and by 'works' I mean delivers measurable outcomes for participants.

**In what ways will the NDIS support individuals in making independent living decisions?**

We want to adopt a lifetime approach to planning that delivers measurable outcomes. Evidence matters if you're planning for the lifetime of a participant. One of the things I've heard again and again from participants and their supporters is that they want better





home and living advice from the Agency. Participants, families and carers want to know what works, what's value for money and what are and are not considered good practices. They want the best outcomes—and so do people with disability and so does the Agency.

We need to do more to improve access and consistency in decision making across the country. We are working with the disability community to fix that. After all, the best way we can improve independent living outcomes is to work closely with participants to co-design a solution.

We are also testing and evaluating alternative models of contemporary

home and living supports. We're working on a mechanism to enable participant-led innovation to occur. Ideally, we want participants to be able to co-design home and living supports that meet their needs.

### **What specific steps are being taken to improve the quality and effectiveness of services provided to participants by the NDIS?**

As mentioned earlier, the Agency is reforming our organisation, operations, and outcomes to deliver better outcomes for people with disability.

Part of this reform are the six key areas of focus as outlined in the 2023-24 Budget. First, specialised training so staff deliver the planning support participants need. Second, give participants better supports to manage their plans—and make supports more flexible. Third, plan for the lifetime of participants so they have better lifelong outcomes. Fourth, improve supported independent living; this is an area where participants and the community need to see better value and outcomes. Fifth, we want a virtuous cycle where our investments continuously improve because we focus on evidence and measurable improvement. Sixth, crack down on fraud so every dollar that should be spent on better outcomes for people with disability is spent on people with disability.

### **How does the NDIS plan to address the unique needs of First Nations and remote communities?**

The best way to address the needs of First Nations peoples and remote communities is to listen to First Nations peoples and remote communities. That's why co-design is important. If you believe in self-determination—and I do—co-design makes sense. After all, the people living in remote communities are best placed to know what will and won't work.

We want to tap into local knowledge and experience.

In partnership with the First Peoples Disability Network (FPDN), we've established a First Nations Advisory Council. The members of that Council are First Nations people with lived experiences of disability.

We're working with the Council and the FPDN to co-design a new First Nations Strategy.

### **What proactive measures are being implemented to prevent fraud and non-compliant payments within the NDIS?**

We're focusing on fraud because—and this goes back to our fundamental purpose of serving Australians with disability—we want to ensure that every dollar that should be spent on people with disability goes to whom it was intended.

That's why we welcome the Budget commitment of \$48.3 million to hire 200 National Disability Insurance Agency staff and develop ICT [information and communication technology] systems that prevent and detect non-compliant payments.

We will also continue to proactively work with providers to raise awareness of their responsibilities and to educate on how to be compliant when claiming. We will also continue to encourage anyone with concerns about fraudulent activity to contact our NDIS Fraud Reporting and Scams Helpline via phone or email.

### **How do you feel about the future of the NDIS?**

I'm excited about the future of the NDIS and the NDIA. I'm excited because I can see the kind of Agency we're creating. An Agency that is open and listens to people, that is efficient and easy to deal with, that is diverse and treats people fairly, that delivers value and serves the interests of Australians with disability. What that means for participants is this: we will listen to you and treat you fairly—and work with you to make it easier to participate in the community and economy. What that means for providers is this: we will work with you to improve the workforce and deliver value to participants—and we have zero tolerance of misconduct.

I'm not saying the Agency is perfect. It will take us time to earn the trust of participants and deliver the equity and value that Australians expect, but we are heading in the right direction. Fundamentally, the work we are doing is all about putting participants first. ●

# NDIA & NDIS News

IMAGE: Antoni Shkraba from Pexels



24

## National Disability Insurance Scheme early childhood approach changes

As of July, the age of children supported under the early childhood approach has progressively changed to include children aged under nine.

Previously, the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) early childhood approach supported children younger than seven and their families.

However, as of 1 July 2023, the age of children supported will progressively change over two years.

The age change will ensure children and their families are supported by an early childhood partner during and after they transition to primary school.

The change aligns with the World Health Organization's definition of young children, which is zero to 8 years of age.

The NDIS website has now been updated to include the following:

1. The age of children supported by NDIS early childhood partners, includes children younger than nine.

2. Children who are nine and above are supported by an NDIS local area coordination partner.

3. Children younger than six will continue being supported by an early childhood partner if they have:

- a. a permanent disability
- b. developmental delay
- c. developmental concerns.

The NDIS eligibility requirements, or the definition of developmental delay under the early intervention requirements (s25 of the NDIS Act) remains unchanged.

Children aged under six do not need a diagnosis to get support from an early childhood partner where there are concerns about their development.

For more information, you can contact the NDIS by calling **1800 800 110**, emailing [enquiries@ndis.gov.au](mailto:enquiries@ndis.gov.au) or using webchat.

## Changes to pricing arrangements

The National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) has revised pricing arrangements to ensure they reflect broader economic inflationary pressures.

The 2022-2023 Annual Pricing Review is making the changes so appropriate pricing is in place for participants so they can keep accessing high quality supports, while also receiving value for money.

From 1 July 2023, prices for supports delivered by disability support workers and Level 1 Support Coordinators will be increased by 5.3%, including:

- An adjustment to price limits in line with the Fair Work Commission's (FWC's) decision to increase award wages.
- An extension of the temporary loading for a further 12 months at 1% from 1 July 2023 with this ceasing on 30 June 2024.
- The inclusion of paid family and domestic violence leave into the Disability Support Worker Cost Model — up by 0.1% from 1 July to reflect the new entitlements for workers in the industry awarded by the FWC.

NDIS participant plans will be adjusted, with funding to be indexed to account for the pricing changes.

More information can be found on the NDIA website.

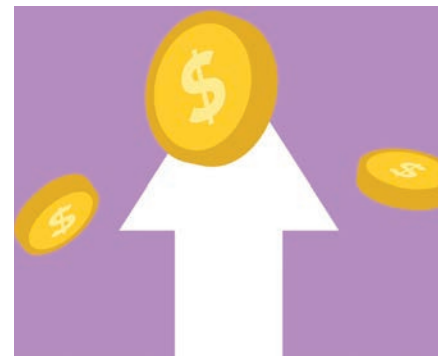


IMAGE: Monstera from Pexels



## National Disability Insurance Agency staff and partners to visit rural and regional Australia

NDIA staff and partners will be visiting rural and regional New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and Victoria until September.

They will be available to discuss a range of topics, including understanding the NDIS which includes early childhood and local area coordination services; applying for the NDIS; using your NDIS plan and understanding funding options.

They will be on board the Services Australia Mobile Service Centre either in person or online.

To find a location near you, visit the Services Australia website, <https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/when-and-where-to-find-mobile-service-centres?context=22651#tas>

## Best goal-setting tools evaluated

An evaluation to identify the best goal-setting tools to measure outcomes in early supports for children and families has been completed by the NDIA.

It will assist the NDIS understand how to better measure outcomes for children and their families who access early supports through the early childhood approach.

The evaluation considered whether the tools were:

- Valid – it measures what it is meant to
- Reliable – the results are stable under different conditions
- Responsive – it is responsive to change
- Acceptable – people who use it will find it suitable.

It will also help the NDIA to design and organise services that lead to better outcomes.

Visit the NDIS website for more information.



IMAGE: Anna Shvets from Pexels

## New COVID support for disability workers

Disability workers who deliver close personal support to NDIS participants and contract COVID-19, and do not have leave entitlements, will be able to receive financial assistance through their employer thanks to a new Australian Government initiative.

The disability workforce payment is being made available to employers through a new \$14.1 million grant program.

The available funding will be at a flat rate of \$450 per worker, where the worker has lost at least eight hours but less than 20 hours of work.

If the worker has lost more than 20 hours of work, funding of \$750 is available.

NDIS Minister Bill Shorten said the disability worker leave grant replaced the High Risk Settings Pandemic Payment and matched funding available to aged care workers.

“Our disability workers also deserve to be supported if they contract COVID-19, provide close personal care to people with disability, and have no available leave,” he said.

“This grant recognises the inherent risks to NDIS participants who receive close personal supports including in disability accommodation settings, and reduces the incentive for workers to continue to provide those supports if they contract COVID-19.”

Disability workers could be paid the High Risk Settings Pandemic Payment through Services Australia if they contracted COVID-19 and had no leave entitlements, up to 31 March 2023.

Payments will be backdated and will provide support towards the costs associated with leave from 1 April 2023 to 31 December 2023.

Workers can request payment from their employer who can seek reimbursement through the new grant program.

Grants are available to individuals where they operate as a sole trader or partnership.

It will be available to registered and unregistered NDIS providers, including sole traders in three month blocks from early in the second half of this year.

“This funding will help disability workers who have no available sick leave to cover the time where they are off work due to being COVID-19 positive,” Minister Shorten said.

If workers get sick, it is important they test for COVID-19 and register the positive case with their State or Territory and retain evidence of their illness.

For more information, visit the COVID Leave Grant page at the Department of Social Services website Disability Worker COVID-19 Leave Grant | Department of Social Services, Australian Government ([dss.gov.au](https://dss.gov.au))



## Enjoy our delicious home delivered meals

The Good Meal Co. is an NDIS Registered Provider that is passionate about sharing the joy of food through our outstanding selection of ready-meals. Every meal on our amazing menu treats your taste buds and all our meals are made with fresh ingredients and served frozen for your convenience:

- ✓ Delicious range of meals suitable for most dietary requirements
- ✓ Large menu includes soups, snacks, main meals and desserts
- ✓ Supportive Customer Service team based in Sydney
- ✓ We deliver to your home nationwide
- ✓ No lock in contracts

Whether you're ordering directly or through a representative, we'll get you up and running quickly so you can start enjoying our delicious meals! Simply register online via our website: [www.goodmeal.com.au](http://www.goodmeal.com.au) or contact our Customer Service Team on **1800 155 255** to register over the phone. We will do the rest.





# Taste the Good Meal Co today for delicious home delivered meals

**T**he Good Meal Co is a registered National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) provider. We are passionate about sharing the joy of food through our outstanding selection of pre-prepared meals and great customer service that will have you coming back for more.

At the Good Meal Co we have been producing and delivering great tasting ready meals around Australia for over 20 years. We specialise in supporting Australians who are NDIS participants and have teams across the business who are experts in this space.

All our meals are made fresh at our site in Emu Plains, at the base of the Blue Mountains in Western Sydney. Meals are packed frozen and delivered direct to your home ready to store in your freezer and are ready to heat and serve. We have a caring and established customer service team to guide and assist you with your orders as well as an easy to navigate website where you are able to self-serve. We deliver to most areas around Australia.

We are proudly Australian made and owned and, where possible, source

locally made ingredients. Two years ago, the Good Meal Co was acquired by SPC—the renowned fruit, baked beans and tomato manufacturer based in the Goulburn Valley, Victoria. They too are passionate about supporting people in need and have established SPC Care as the healthcare division of SPC featuring the brands of the Good Meal Co and SPC ProVital.

The extensive range at The Good Meal Co includes options suitable for breakfast, lunch and dinner as well as soups, snacks and desserts. We have registered dietitians and chefs on staff who work together to bring you healthy meals that not only taste great but are good for you. Of course, being owned by SPC we also offer fruit snack cups as a tasty treat. Our SPC ProVital brand has award winning, easy to open packaging suitable for people with motor skill difficulties. Overall, the Good Meal Co's range caters for many dietary or cultural requirements such as vegetarian, halal and dairy free. The wide variety of meals arrive ready to heat and serve and are a viable and nutritious alternative to cooking from scratch.

## National Disability Insurance Scheme home delivery meal costs

If your NDIS Plan includes 'Assistance with the cost of the preparation and delivery of meals', all you pay upfront is a small co-contribution payment for the cost of ingredients. Your plan will cover the remaining costs of production and delivery. The average cost to you for a main meal is \$2.20. We have no lock in contracts, and you can order at a frequency that suits you—it is your choice.

## Contact us to enjoy healthy meals delivered to your door.

For help and advice regarding our NDIS Meal Delivery Service, please call our wonderful Customer Service Team based in Sydney on 1800 155 255. Our website is constantly being updated with the latest news and is a reliable source of information to get started or source a quote. Website: [www.goodmeal.com.au](http://www.goodmeal.com.au) or email: [enquiries@goodmeal.com.au](mailto:enquiries@goodmeal.com.au)

Do not hesitate. Contact us today to get started ●



# Support coordination: Helping participants who need additional care

Over the past 10 years, the service of support coordination has undergone significant changes in tandem with the evolution of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). **By Anthony O'Brien**

**A**s the scheme progressed, clearer guidelines were established, providing a better understanding of the role boundaries for support coordinators. Aruma is one of Australia's largest disability providers, offering support to 5,500 people with a disability. A spokesperson from Aruma highlights the growth and development of support coordination within the NDIS framework.

"For example, as support coordination is a role unique to the NDIS, there was initial confusion regarding the role of a support coordinator and the role of a case manager.

"Support coordinators assist to connect participants to their chosen provider, but they do not case manage that relationship. The chosen provider and the participant build their own relationship and work

together towards the NDIS goals in the participant's plan."

## What is support coordination?

If you are unfamiliar with the NDIS, support coordination is an invaluable service designed to assist individuals in effectively implementing the various supports specified in their NDIS plan. These supports encompass a wide range of services, including informal,



mainstream, community and funded services.

Support coordination covers a range of activities aimed at facilitating and optimising assistance for individuals. These activities include, but are not limited to:

- Understanding the plan
- Connecting with supports and services
- Designing support approaches
- Establishing supports
- Coaching, refining, reflecting
- Targeted support coordination
- Crisis planning, prevention, mitigation and action
- Building capacity and resilience
- Reporting to the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA).

Support coordinators commonly help by addressing participants' enquiries, which often include the following questions:

1. Does my plan reflect the goals that I discussed with the NDIS?
2. How do I use my funding to make sure it helps me meet those goals and expectations?
3. How do I build a better quality of life for me by implementing the supports in my plan?

## Broad role of support coordinators

Max Raine, the founder of Vega Health, a company that is causing major disruptions in the client-facing industry, says it is common to find individuals who assume multiple roles that were traditionally separate. "Support coordinators, for instance, often undertake the duties of plan managers, advisors, advocates, therapists, and even administrative personnel.

"Unfortunately, the lack of well-defined roles and objectives for each category of caregiver further complicates matters. These complexities highlight the formidable task faced by the government, NDIS, and all stakeholders involved in developing comprehensive policies, systems, and approaches that effectively cater to the diverse needs of individuals.

"Fortunately, recognising this challenge also presents an opportunity for innovative software solutions such

as Vega [<https://vegahealth.io/>] that can offer the flexibility needed to bridge gaps and adapt to the ever-evolving nature of the care delivery."

## Different levels of support coordination

There are three levels of support coordination available to a participant, according to the NDIS. These include *Support Connection*, *Support Coordination* and *Specialist Support Coordination*:

**1. Support connection.** Support connection aims to build a participant's ability to connect with informal, community and funded supports enabling them to achieve the most from a plan and their goals. This support usually involves a minimal service of 6 to 10 hours annually.

**2. Support coordination.** Support coordination will assist participants in building the skills required to understand, implement and use the plan. A support coordinator will work with the participant to ensure a mix of supports is used to increase their capacity to maintain commercial relationships, manage service delivery tasks and live more independently in the community.

**3. Specialist support coordination.** Specialist support coordination is a higher level of support coordination and, once again, the needs of the participant dictate the necessary level of service. This type of support coordination is for people whose situations are more complex and need specialist support. A specialist support coordinator will assist participants in managing challenges in the support environment and ensure consistent service delivery.

According to the Aruma spokesperson, the level of support coordination a participant may receive would depend on their capacity to understand their plans. Also, the amount of time included in a plan for support coordination depends on the participant's specific needs.

Support coordination is a funded service within an individual's NDIS plan and serves as a capacity-building support. It aims to assist participants

in understanding how to effectively utilise their funding within their plan, work towards their NDIS goals, and establish connections with providers and supports. It plays a crucial role in empowering participants to navigate the community and build their confidence in coordinating their supports. This includes conducting research and identifying providers who can offer the specific services they require. The key function of an NDIS support coordinator is to build the capacity of the NDIS participant, their family, guardian or nominee to understand their NDIS plan and how to make the most of their NDIS funding.

Aruma's support coordinators, according to a spokesperson from the disability support provider, aim to achieve this [capacity building] by working with the participant (and/or their family, guardian or nominee) on all aspects of implementing their NDIS plan to make sure they have every opportunity to choose and control how their funding is spent to meet their NDIS goals.

## How do support coordinators assist individuals navigate the National Disability Insurance Scheme?

As Aruma support coordinators assist the participant, family, guardian or nominee to implement the participant's plan, they are assisting individuals to understand the NDIS and how to select and connect with the best supports available to meet their NDIS goals.

The Aruma National Support Coordination Team comprises 57 members who are currently providing assistance to NDIS participants. Their support extends across various regions, including South-East Queensland, NSW, ACT, and multiple locations in Victoria.

At Aruma, support coordinators are sourced from diverse backgrounds and disciplines. Many have previously been supporting workers who are wanting to have a broader impact for people with disabilities. Many have social work, youth work or other community sector backgrounds. Some are looking for a career change where they feel they can make a difference in their community.

Aruma emphasises that exceptional support coordinators bring a deep commitment to the human rights of individuals with disabilities. They also



**Self-management involves taking control of their NDIS funding and granting a participant the freedom and autonomy to determine which supports to procure in order to pursue their plan objectives. It encourages participants to think creatively about how they use their funds to best meet their needs.**

have a belief in an individual's right to autonomy and self determination to access the supports needed to live their life how they choose to.

### **How support coordinators may work with plan managers**

When a participant has plan managed funds included in their NDIS plan, their support coordinator may collaborate with their selected plan manager to ensure accurate billing and payment of funds, and regular checks on funding balances. As well as the other services, the participant may select a plan manager to help them manage administration of their plan like paying invoices and keeping track of available funding.

Moreover, the collaboration between support coordinators and plan managers has significantly enhanced the overall experience and outcomes for NDIS participants over the years. Aruma says support coordinators collaborate with a range of stakeholders to ensure effective implementation of the participant's NDIS plan and operation of the NDIS budget available.

According to the Aruma spokesperson, plan managers are one of the services a support coordinator may collaborate with if the participant has NDIS funds which are plan managed.

One significant advantage of a support coordinator collaborating with a plan manager is their ability to handle invoices and payments for NDIS

services provided by external service providers on behalf of the participant. Additionally, they ensure that both the participant and support coordinators stay informed about funding balances, ensuring that the participant's supports remain within their NDIS budgets throughout the duration of the plan.

### **What exactly does plan management entail?**

As per the NDIS<sup>1</sup> website, plan management is when a provider supports participants to manage funding in their NDIS plan. These providers are known as plan managers.

Think of a plan manager as a bit like an NDIS registered bookkeeper, who is responsible for directly receiving and settling invoices from other providers such as a speech therapist, occupational therapist, supported travel agent or psychologist. These payments are processed by accessing funds from relevant budget categories through the NDIA portal. Additionally, plan managers are obliged to provide monthly reports, upon request, outlining the current budget totals and the allocation of expenses.

### **Different options for managing plan financials**

However, it would be remiss not to highlight that there are options other than relying on plan managers. These alternatives include entrusting the NDIA with managing a participant's invoices and opting for self-management. A few years back, self-management received a boost with the introduction of the 'my NDIS app' by the NDIA. This application assists participants in embracing a do-it-yourself approach to managing their funding.

### **Agency-managed option**

By opting for this alternative, a participant's service providers can directly claim their expenses from the NDIA. If participants select the agency-managed option, most of the paperwork will be taken care of on their behalf, and the NDIA will handle the participants bookkeeping and maintain records of expenditures.

To monitor NDIS funding budget and review the claims made by providers against funding, participants can access



their NDIS account through the 'myGov' portal. However, it is important to note that if they choose the agency-managed option, they can only utilise services from NDIA-approved providers.

### Self-management can enable participants to shape their support journey

Self-management involves taking control of their NDIS funding and granting a participant the freedom and autonomy to determine which supports to procure in order to pursue their plan objectives. It encourages participants to think creatively about how they use their funds to best meet their needs.

However, before diving headlong into self-management, the NDIS recommends speaking with a local area coordinator or NDIA planner. Participants can also talk to someone who is self-managing about the experience or connect with a self-management peer support group<sup>2</sup>.

Self-managing NDIS funding empowers participants with control, independence, and adaptability when it comes to organising and financing their supports. According to the NDIS<sup>3</sup>, by choosing to self-manage their NDIS funding, participants will experience:

- Choice in deciding what supports they purchase in line with what is included in their plan, who provides these supports and how they are delivered.
- Flexibility to use any provider that will best help a participant to pursue their plan goals.
- Capacity to employ or contract staff directly or have someone employ staff on their behalf.
- Ability to negotiate the costs of supports so they get the best value for money and to use savings to buy more or better-quality supports.
- Control over and responsibility for NDIS funding so they can manage their own budget for the duration of the plan.

### Responsibilities of a self-manager seeking empowerment

With freedom also comes responsibility, and if a participant decides to take on the role of self-manager, it is important to understand the responsibilities that

come with it. The responsibilities as a self-manager include:

- Purchasing supports that align with the goals outlined in the NDIS plan.
- Establishing clear agreements with service providers regarding the supports they will receive, including the manner of provision and payment.
- Managing the funding in a way that ensures the cost of support provides value for money and can be covered within the budget.
- Making payment requests and ensuring timely payment for the supports received.
- Keeping track of invoices and receipts to demonstrate that they have used their NDIS funding to pay for the supports.

- Fulfilling obligations as an employer if staff are directly employed.
- Demonstrating how they have used the funding towards pursuing the goals aligned to the plan reassessment.

At the end of the day, self-management of NDIS funding offers participants the opportunity to exercise control, independence, and adaptability in achieving their plan objectives. It provides a range of benefits such as choice, flexibility, and the ability to negotiate costs, empowering participants to make informed decisions about their supports. Also, by understanding and embracing the responsibilities involved in self-managing their NDIS funds, participants can effectively pursue their goals and demonstrate progress at plan reassessment. ●

1. <https://www.ndis.gov.au/participants/creating-your-plan/ways-manage-your-funding/plan-management#:~:text=A%20plan%20manager%20will%20help,other%20community%20and%20government%20services.>

2. <https://www.ndis.gov.au/participants/using-your-plan/self-management#:~:text=Self%20managing%20your%20NDIS%20funding,and%20how%20they%20are%20delivered.>

3. <https://www.ndis.gov.au/participants/using-your-plan/self-management#:~:text=Self%20managing%20your%20NDIS%20funding,and%20how%20they%20are%20delivered.>



## YOUR LIFE, YOUR CHOICE

### REALISE YOUR POTENTIAL WITH CONNECTABILITY

ConnectAbility support people to achieve their goals of independence in Community Living (SIL/SDA) homes located across the Hunter. Locations and home types to suit your lifestyle. It is all about you.

If you have accommodation in your NDIS plan, or if you are interested in applying for accommodation funding, we would love to talk to you about your life goals. All houses are staffed according to the residents needs. ConnectAbility can also provide coordination of supports and assist you with community activities so you get to live your dreams, be independent and enjoy being a part of your community.

If you are interested in living an independent life, please contact our friendly staff.



# Australia's leading NDIS plan manager delivers more for Members.

## We do things differently.

- ✓ Tailored and personal advice for Members from a team with lived experience
- ✓ Smart connections to providers with capacity
- ✓ Monthly *Member Budget Health Check*
- ✓ Real time 24/7 access and tracking of NDIS info and budgets on the L! app
- ✓ A huge library of FREE disability and NDIS-related resources
- ✓ Exclusive L! Member Benefits Club with special provider offers.



# Leap in!

Join today,  
claim tomorrow.

📞 1300 05 78 78  
📱 [leapin.com.au](https://leapin.com.au)





# Plan management: A changing landscape



Leap in! CEO  
Andrew Kiel

**P**lan management plays a crucial role in the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) ecosystem. A valuable intermediary service, plan managers support NDIS participants with the financial management of their plans, enabling them to exercise choice and control over their budgets and support arrangements.

There has been a significant shift in plan management, with an increasing number of participants choosing to utilise a plan manager rather than have the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) manage their plan.

According to the latest NDIS Quarterly Report, over the past two years, the proportion of participants who use a plan manager increased from 47% to 59%.

Many participants who entered the scheme in more recent years have chosen to use a plan manager for most or some of their supports compared with participants who joined the scheme earlier. This is a key driver of the increase in the number of participants with plan managers.

In March 2023, the number of participants with approved plans reached 592,059, marking a 4% rise compared to the previous quarter, which



translates into an increase of 21,179 participants since December.

In the third quarter of 2022–23, of the \$8.9bn in payments, \$1.0bn was self-managed (12%), \$4.5bn was managed by a plan manager (51%), and \$3.3bn was NDIA managed (37%). At the same time, fees paid to plan managers for their support services were \$127m or 2.8% of the payments they facilitated.

This growth demonstrates the trust and confidence participants place in plan managers to handle their NDIS budgets effectively and efficiently.

As the role of plan managers continues to mature, some have

extended the benefits of the service beyond financial administration. The new benchmark for plan management is to provide ongoing support, guidance and information to participants on how to ensure they are complying with NDIS rules and helping them navigate the complexities of the NDIS.

“Very early on, we recognised the importance of intermediary roles within the NDIS and the integral role plan management plays. The core function of plan management is the claiming and payment of invoices on behalf of NDIS participants. However, we believe it is about so much more,”

says Andrew Kiel, CEO of Leap in! Australia.

“The NDIS is transformative and for many, it is complex and intimidating. Our very first conversations with participants uncovered the opportunity for plan management to provide more than bookkeeping support; what was missing was system navigation and help to decode the NDIS,” Kiel explains.

“Plan management has continued to evolve significantly over the past few years, responding to the changing needs and requirements of NDIS participants.





## Driven by a customer experience focus

“We are constantly striving for excellence by seeking opportunities for continuous improvement and innovation. For us, this means actively staying up to date with changes in NDIS policies and regulations, investing in professional development and adopting best practices in plan management.

“Investing in technology, information and resources combined with the development of a team of plan managers, many with lived experience themselves, has proven to be a unique and powerful mix,” Kiel says.

“There has been a natural extension for us into member support in the form of helping clients prepare for their NDIS plan meetings. Then, once they’ve got their plan, we set our members up to track and manage their budgets and then regularly touch base with them to see how they are going.

“Sometimes it can be overwhelming for people who are new to the NDIS. It’s why we regularly connect with them. Some may not have yet activated their plan and need assistance. It’s here that we provide a tailored service that supports their individual needs and circumstances,” says Kiel.

“Our goal of confident and empowered members who are getting the support they want on their terms remains consistent; however, it’s really exciting to see our sector striving to meet evolving expectations of the standard of services available aligned with wider, mainstream customer experiences in categories such as banking, insurance and travel,” he says.

It is also encouraging to see sector technology developments being recognised in mainstream technology awards, like the Deloitte Tech Fast 50 Awards.

“For us, technology has enabled significant operational efficiencies, scalability and created capacity, all at a time when plan management as an intermediary service has been under significant pressure,” Kiel says.

“Most importantly, we’ve been able to develop technology in an integrated way that supports and prioritises what our customers want. Our app and digital platforms uniquely help people with goal setting, plan creation and tracking, budget management and provider

connection in one single place. And participants can choose which members of their family and support crew they want to share different information with. When they give us a call to check in, or they meet with their LAC [local area coordinator], all the information they need is in one place.”

With their professional expertise and dedication, plan managers can empower participants, improve financial management and facilitate access to a broader range of service providers. “Less than half the providers our customers use are registered with the NDIS and that’s great. It shows that they are exercising their choice and control as consumers and using product and service providers who meet their needs,” says Kiel. “Our experience is that the vast majority of NDIS participants are incredibly conscious of the responsibility that comes with managing their budgets and are committed to getting the best value possible.”

The cost-effectiveness of plan management is part of this ‘value equation’ and further highlights its significance in the NDIS landscape, ensuring that participants receive quality support while maximising the use of their allocated budgets.

Leap in! was established to help people with disability to navigate the NDIS with confidence. As a registered plan manager, Leap in! provides proactive support to help their members get the most from their NDIS plan.

Today Leap in! is Australia’s leading NDIS plan manager, supporting tens of thousands of Australians across the country with their NDIS planning and budgeting. They specialise in supporting their members at each step of the NDIS process—from preparing for a first NDIS plan, setting and tracking goals, connecting with local supports and services to managing budgets and paying providers.

Purpose-led, Leap in! has a free NDIS planning and budgeting app that is available via the Google Play Store, App Store and on the Leap in! website. The organisation also readily makes a comprehensive range of helpful resources available to all people with disability and their families to help them understand the NDIS, manage their plans and achieve their goals. ●

“As a social enterprise powered by technology, we embrace this evolution and continually strive to enhance our services. For us, this is beyond the financial administration aspects and towards capacity building, training and ongoing support to our members.

“A recent report by Disability Intermediaries Australia highlights the tremendous value for money offered by plan management. Comparisons with other sectors, such as financial services and healthcare, demonstrate the cost-effectiveness of plan management services provided by Leap in! and similar organisations.”



IMAGE: FG Trade from iStock

# Disability support services empowering people to become more independent

Disability support service provider, Vana Care founded by Managing Director Jesse Trout and Jason Wisniewski who is the Chief Operations Officer, is empowering people with disabilities to become more independent through its dynamic support services. **By Anthony O'Brien**



Jesse Trout  
Managing Director,  
Vana Care



Jason Wisniewski  
Chief Operations  
Officer, Vana Care



person-centred support to clients with disabilities. Operating across Adelaide and South Australia, Vana Care offers comprehensive disability support services.

Jesse Trout, Co-founder and Managing Director of Vana Care says, “Vana Care puts the ‘human’ in ‘human first!’” Here is a snapshot of the range of services Vana Care offers:

- 1. Support Coordination.** Vana Care’s super-friendly team of support coordinators are a participant and their family’s trusted guides on the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) journey, helping them access the right supports and services to make their goals a reality.
- 2. Community Access.** Vana Care supports participants to engage in exciting social and recreational activities, discover new hobbies, and connect with their community like never before.
- 3. In-Home Support.** Here the Vana Care team can lend a helping hand with daily tasks, household chores and personal care. They aim to make a participant’s home life easier and more enjoyable.
- 4. Supported Independent Living.** Vana Care’s tailored supported independent living services support participants create the perfect living arrangement and provide the assistance they need to thrive.

The Vana Care Managing Director adds, “At Vana Care, we’re all about celebrating individuality, fostering genuine connections, and ensuring the needs of participants are at the

forefront of everything we do. Our team is known for their warm hearts, big smiles and dedication to creating a positive impact in your life.”

“So, if you’re looking for disability support that’s as unique as you are, join the Vana Care family! Let us be your partners in making dreams come true. Reach out to us today and discover the joy of a human-first approach to disability support. Get ready for an incredible journey together.”

Clients can benefit from a flexible support system provided by Vana Care, ranging from as little as 3 hours to 24 hours a day. The assistance covers a wide spectrum of tasks, such as personal care, household chores, grocery shopping, park visits, attending appointments, basic fitness, learning new sports, and more.

### Interaction offers specialist care for Prader-Willi Syndrome

Interaction Disability Services was founded in 1979 by a group of parents to maximise the responsible independence for people in Western Sydney who had an intellectual disability. Early efforts focused on the transition of participants from the family home into an intensive skill development program supported by families and volunteers. Empowering people through education and community networks, participants were then transitioned to independent accommodation with minimal assistance.

From humble beginnings, Interaction has expanded to provide NDIS funded services in:

- Supported accommodation
- Behaviour and allied health services

**A**s someone who has family members with disabilities, this writer personally understands their aspirations to live independently. However, achieving this goal often necessitates the support of friends and family. This is where the role of disability support service providers such as Vana Care and Prader-Willi Syndrome (PWS) specialist Interaction Disability Services comes to the fore.

### Vana Care puts the human in human first

Vana Care strives to enable independent living by providing compassionate and

**With us, participants take charge of their destiny, tailoring services to align with their individual preferences, goals, and aspirations. Our collaborative and person-centred approach ensures that participants receive comprehensive support, fostering their overall wellbeing, independence and quality of life.**

- Support coordination and specialist support coordination
- Community access and self-care
- Community activities and events.

Interaction is recognised as a service provider of choice for individuals with PWS. In 1992, Interaction established Australia's first accommodation model specifically for three adults with PWS. In 1993, this residential model was internationally recognised by the International Prader-Willi Syndrome Organisation as best practice for individuals with PWS. This model continues to receive quality accommodation support from Interaction.

### **Promoting choice and flexibility in service provision**

According to Wisniewski, Vana Care strives to break away from the conventional, one-size-fits-all approach to disability support services and instead provides NDIS participants with the freedom to design their own personalised support plan.

"With us, participants take charge of their destiny, tailoring services to align with their individual preferences, goals, and aspirations. Our collaborative and person-centred approach ensures that participants receive comprehensive support, fostering their overall wellbeing, independence and quality of life," he says.

"With Vana Care, NDIS participants experience a positive and empowering journey towards a brighter future."

Jesse Trout cites the incredible journey with Vana Care of "a super cool 11-year-old boy with a big dream to conquer the golf course."

"This kiddo was a golf enthusiast who spent hours glued to the TV, marvelling at the golfing pros. The only thing holding him back? His anxiety had kept him cooped up in his house for over a year. Talk about a major challenge!"

"But fear not! Enter one of our extraordinary Vana Care superheroes, who was ready to rock the world of this young champ."

"They quickly formed a bond, spending quality time together and having an absolute blast. And guess what? Within a mere month, the incredible team member worked some magic and assisted this young individual in summoning the bravery to venture beyond their familiar boundaries and onto an actual golf course. Now, that's what we call an outstanding achievement, a perfect hole-in-one," he exclaims.

"And that's not all! Now, this fearless golfer doesn't stop at just swinging clubs. He's become a true activity enthusiast, diving into swimming, perfecting his golf skills and embracing all the fun that his local community has to offer. You can't keep him away from the excitement and adventure anymore."

In the words of Wisniewski, "This fantastic tale reminds us of the power of friendship, determination, and a touch of Vana Care magic. We're here to help dreams come true, one swing at a time, and to support our amazing clients in reaching new heights of happiness, confidence and pure awesomeness. Get ready to tee off into a world of endless possibilities!"

Since its establishment in 2021, Vana Care has successfully assisted numerous individuals with disabilities in achieving their dreams of living independently. Another satisfied client, Cole, previously faced limitations in his daily activities. However, after teaming up with Vana Care and being paired with his support worker, Abbi, Cole now leads a more independent lifestyle. He even dedicates his time to volunteer work with a local charity called Treasure Boxes and frequently engages in



**Disability support  
with a human approach**  
[www.vanacare.com.au](http://www.vanacare.com.au)





workouts at the gym. When asked about his experience with Vana Care, Cole enthusiastically nodded and smiled, expressing his enjoyment and gratitude for the opportunities he now has.

Jesse Trout shared the organisation's profound dedication to their work. "Hearing success stories like Cole's serves as a powerful inspiration to continue expanding our reach and making a positive impact on the lives of more individuals with disabilities. With the right support network, Vana Care believes that anything is possible."

### **Vana Care approach to delivering holistic care and support**

Vana Care wholeheartedly embraces a positive and holistic philosophy when it comes to caring for individuals with disabilities affirms Wisniewski. "We prioritise our clients wellbeing and work closely with them, their support network, and allied professionals to develop personalised care plans that cater to their unique needs and aspirations."

"Our collaborative and person-centred approach ensures participants receive comprehensive support, fostering their overall wellbeing, independence, and quality of life. With Vana Care, NDIS participants experience a positive and empowering journey towards a brighter future!"

As a disability support services provider, Vana Care recognises the significance of collaboration and actively seeks the input of NDIS participants, their families, and other stakeholders to tailor its services according to individual goals and preferences.

"We listen attentively to participants needs, working closely together to co-design personalised care plans that reflect their unique aspirations."

"By fostering open communication, we ensure that their voice is heard and that the support we provide aligns with their specific goals and preferences. Together, we create a collaborative environment where everyone's input is valued, resulting in services that truly meet individual needs."

For its part, Interaction places great importance on consultation with participants and their families/carers in issues that relate to their interests, supports or choices. Brett Thompson, Interaction Disability Services Chief



## CELEBRATING potential

At Rocky Bay we look beyond a diagnosis to celebrate your potential in all its amazing uniqueness.



**Rocky Bay**  
HEALTH + COMMUNITY

rockybay.org.au  
your partner in possibility





Executive Officer (CEO), says, “We have been providing supports to people with disability and their families for more than 40 years and our commitment to person-centred principles directly shapes the participant experience of our service.”

### **Promoting person-centred care and collaboration at Interaction**

For its part, Interaction places great importance on consultation with participants and their families/carers in issues that relate to their interests, supports or choices. Thompson says, “We have been providing supports to people with disability and their families for more than 40 years and our commitment

to person-centred principles directly shapes the participant experience of our service.”

He continues, “In terms of clinical supports, our Behaviour & Allied Health Services team makes an active effort to work collaboratively to ensure that our practitioners and participants benefit from our various clinical perspectives.

“Our practitioners demonstrate a deep understanding of the NDIS Practice Standards, Rules and Practice frameworks. Interaction practitioners collaborate on ways to improve the delivery of our overall services to ensure that person-centred principles continue to be at the core of the participant experience.”





At Interaction, every functional assessment report and behaviour support plan includes a person-centred profile that places the needs and preferences of participants at the centre of their supports. These profiles are developed in direct consultation with participants and their support networks. Furthermore, all plans require formal consent from key parties, and easy-to-read documentation is sent to every participant at the beginning of their plans. Thompson adds, “This focus on inclusivity further emphasises our commitment to person-centred care, and highlights some of the processes that have allowed us to successfully consult with participants in the development

of their behaviour support plans to a standard well above industry norm.”

Participants who utilise Interaction’s Support Coordination and Community Access and Self-Care supports are involved in the initial selection of staff who deliver their supports. Participants are matched with a dedicated support coordinator or support worker who helps to deliver supports as required. “Our Community Access Supports are tailored to the exact needs of each participant,” Thompson offers.

“Participants in our accommodation services are supported to find a place to live or matched with housemates. Our supported accommodation options are tailored to meet the specific needs of each individual. Our goal is to make sure participants receive the right kind of support, where and when they need it.”

### **Effectively navigating the intricate aspects of the National Disability Insurance Scheme**

Vana Care excels in manoeuvring through the intricate aspects of the NDIS, guaranteeing individuals seeking support a seamless and accessible experience.

According to Jesse Trout, “Our team of knowledgeable experts is deeply familiar with the complexities of the NDIS framework and the eligibility criteria.

“We take pride in simplifying the process for our clients by offering clear guidance and unwavering support throughout. Whether it’s managing paperwork or facilitating communication with the NDIA [National Disability Insurance Agency], our commitment lies in ensuring a stress-free and smooth journey for every participant.”

Vana Care is dedicated to upholding the highest standards of service quality and adhering to rigorous practices within the NDIS, says Wisniewski. “We have implemented a comprehensive quality management system that encompasses regular internal audits, continuous staff training and ongoing initiatives for improvement.

“Our committed team undergoes consistent professional development to remain updated with the latest industry guidelines and standards. Furthermore, we actively seek feedback from participants and their families to ensure their satisfaction and continually enhance our services.

“With our unwavering commitment to excellence, Vana Care continually delivers the highest quality of care and support in line with the best practices of the NDIS.”

To play a part in the ever-evolving landscape of disability support, Interaction is involved in the National Disability Services’ (NDS) National Quality Safeguarding Community of Practice and Sydney Quality Network. Interaction’s CEO, Brett Thompson, is a member of the NDS CEO Forum and the NDS State Committee.

Thompson says, “The themes through the Disability Royal Commission clearly demonstrate people with disability have not felt heard as the decision makers in their own lives. To ensure that Interaction’s operations reflect the wants and needs of our participants, we have regular engagement with the Interaction community in various forms.”

Interaction prioritises stakeholder engagement through various committees and initiatives. The Stakeholder Engagement Committee comprises participants, parents, and select staff, and convenes bi-monthly to provide invaluable feedback on ongoing projects. The Practice Review Committee, facilitated by an Interaction staff member, meets monthly and includes several participants to gather input on Interaction’s practices, policies and procedures. To ensure representation across all levels, a Board Observer with autism has been appointed, actively participating in Board Meetings and offering valuable insights from their lived disability experience.

In 2019, Interaction conducted a comprehensive brand review to align its materials with participants’ needs. External market research gathered valuable feedback from participants and their families, leading to improved imagery, clear messaging and engaging content. Independent research confirmed the positive impact of these updates, fostering stronger connections with participants and their families.

With Interaction’s organisational focus on supporting the rights of people with intellectual disability to access NDIS supports in the way they choose. Thompson says, “We are committed to supporting every individual in how we can play a part in meeting their needs.” ●



42

# Aruma always puts ‘You. First’

It’s easy to see why Aruma is one of Australia’s leading disability service providers.

**B**ut what makes them truly like no other is that they live by the words ‘You. First’.

5,500 adults and children with a disability. Upholding their human rights—and the human rights of all people with a disability—is at the centre of all the provider does.

While Aruma is a big organisation, it focuses on providing individualised support to its customers. And tailor supports right from when customers join and throughout their journey with Aruma—as they grow, develop and change.

## So, what services and supports does Aruma offer?

The first question to ask yourself is, ‘what is it that I am after?’

Maybe you want to find a new home or get a job? How about learning to cook or giving surfing a go?

The staff at Aruma are all ears. The services offered include:

- **Home and living.** Everybody wants to find a place to call home, and Aruma has a range of services such as supported independent living (SIL) and specialist disability accommodation (SDA) to help you with that.
- **School leaver employment supports.** If you are about to finish school or have just left school, Aruma can help you get ‘job ready’ and learn heaps of new skills!
- **Supported employment.** Aruma owns and runs eight businesses that employ people with a disability so there might be a job with your name on it!
- **Positive behavioural support.** Aruma can help you understand why a child or adult with a disability may engage in inappropriate, challenging or unsafe behaviours, and work with you to find a solution.
- **Support coordination.** Aruma’s Support Coordinators go the extra mile to unlock the potential of your National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) plan. Plus, they are the local experts who can connect you to disability services that are right for you.
- **Children’s services.** These range from early childhood intervention, short-term accommodation (respite) and positive behavioural support, to name a few.
- **Assistance with daily life.** These supports are the skills you use in everyday life. Like cooking, cleaning, using money, catching public transport, the list goes on! Aruma can help you with this too.



- **Social and community participation.** Under the NDIS, social and community services are about supporting people with a disability to take part in their community. Aruma can help you try new things and meet new people.
- **Short-term accommodation (respite).** Aruma has a number of welcoming short-term accommodation properties for people with a disability across New South Wales, Victoria and the ACT, for when people with a disability need a break
- **Therapeutic Supports.** Aruma offers supports for children and adults including speech pathology to help improve communication skills and relate to others, and occupational therapy to help build confidence and independence

## Let's take a deeper dive into Aruma's home and living services...

Whether you are moving out, need a change of scenery or want extra support, Aruma has many NDIS home and living options.

### Supported Independent Living

SIL is an NDIS support eligible people with a disability receive in their home of choice. It's available 24 hours a day and can be shared with other housemates.

Aruma offers support with day-to-day tasks like cleaning, cooking, personal care, going to appointments, taking medication, learning new hobbies and catching public transport.

They can even help match you to the right home sweet home and flatmates too!

Aruma regularly talks with their customers living in SIL homes across New South Wales, Queensland, the ACT and Victoria about how they are going in their homes.

Sometimes these conversations reveal a need to move to a more suitable home and Aruma's dedicated staff will put plans in motion to make this happen.

Here are a few scenarios:

- Working with the NDIS to get a funding review.
- Aruma's occupational therapists reassess a customer's home and

develops an updated plan based on their needs.

- Undertaking another customer-matching process to find a more suitable mix of housemates, based on changes in circumstances or needs.
- It may even mean working with another provider to find a more suitable home and supports to ensure the customer is truly able to live the life they choose whether that's with Aruma or elsewhere.

### Specialist Disability Accommodation

SDA is a home designed with the accessible features people with a disability need to live more independently. These homes are tailored for people with high-support needs.

In some SDA homes, you may be sharing with a few people. While in others, you can live on your own.

Aruma can guide you on your eligibility and find you the best housing option, from an established home to a new build. They can also provide the supports you need in your new SDA home too!

### Individualised Living Options

Individualised living options are a flexible NDIS support package designed so you can live how and where you want.

You can live with a friend, a mentor or on your own, while getting all the formal and informal supports you need. There are so many options and it is totally up to you!

Aruma will work closely with you to find out what you need. This is called 'Exploration and Design'. Then the next step, 'Implementation', is to help you to make it happen!

### LOOKING FOR SOMETHING ELSE?

That is just a taste of Aruma's Home and Living Services. Whether it is a place to stay while your long-term house gets sorted or working with you to create exactly what you need, Aruma has got you covered! You get a dedicated Customer Engagement Manager to make it easy and to guide you every step of the way.

## Did you hear Aruma is expanding specialist disability accommodation in Mackay?

Aruma is growing supports for even more people with a disability in Queensland.

In 2023, it is working with first-time SDA developers, Leben Homes, to offer accessible, high-physical support apartments in Mackay.

Leben Homes has built four impressive SDA apartments in the Mackay suburb Mount Pleasant. Aruma has joined SDA provider Inhab to provide support for up to eight eligible NDIS participants to move into these fit-for-purpose apartments.

Aruma is also expanding into Cairns in 2023, where it is teaming up with partners to offer six SDA homes and community supports in the area.

Aruma CEO, Dr Martin Laverty, highlighted the ongoing issue of low availability of social housing in areas like Mackay and Cairns. In early 2023, according to the Queensland Council of Social Services, there were 50,000 people across Queensland on the social housing waitlist.

"With such high demand and low availability of social housing in areas like Mackay, Aruma is thrilled to expand our services in an area in need, particularly in SDA housing, which is so specialised and caters for some very vulnerable people in our community," Dr Laverty said.

"It makes sense to do what we can as a disability provider in working with our partners to help fill vital social housing gaps like we're seeing in Mackay."

### Hungry for more?

We don't blame you. Reach out to the Aruma team on **1300 538 746** or [enquiries@aruma.com.au](mailto:enquiries@aruma.com.au)

You can also head to Aruma's website at [www.aruma.com.au](http://www.aruma.com.au) ●





# New technology poised to transform support coordination

A leading technology thought leader says the most significant National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) technology trend in 2023 will have a direct impact on plan managers and support coordinators through the introduction of a new information and communications technology business system. This system has been named PACE. **By Anthony O'Brien**

**T**he NDIS Provider Digital Access (PRODA) system presently serves as a secure platform for accessing various online government services, including the NDIS Myplace provider portal. Plan managers and providers, such as support coordinators, use PRODA to review participant plans and budgets as well as to raise service requests.

PRODA is being replaced with a new system, PACE, that is being trialled in

Tasmania<sup>1</sup>. According to the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA), PACE will eventually replace the current business system, portal and payment systems<sup>2</sup>. PACE is being designed to be more user-friendly and to make it easier for NDIA staff and partners to do their job, giving them more time to deliver a quality experience for participants and providers.

The NDIS says the new PACE features allow registered providers, plan managers,

support coordinators, psychosocial recovery coaches and participant-endorsed providers to view sections of a participant's plan with their consent<sup>3</sup>. This is a significant change for support coordinators since it allows them to access a participant's budgets and allocations for all agency managed, plan managed and self-managed participants (with consent) whereas previously they could only access agency managed participant budgets.



## A fresh face for an established charity: Solve-TAD transforms into Freedom Solutions Australia

After 48 years of dedicated service, Solve-TAD, a charity organisation that creates innovative and custom assistive technology solutions for people living with disabilities, has rebranded as Freedom Solutions Australia. The new name, logo, and brand identity reflect the organisation's values, mission, and commitment to providing personalised, modern, and effective assistive technology solutions to its clients.

Freedom Solutions Australia, with its 25 staff and 250-strong team of volunteers, is primarily comprised of retired engineers and tradies, and has been creating and modifying equipment for people living with disabilities to help them achieve their functional goals and live independently since founded by George Winston in 1975.

"We are excited about the fresh look of our organisation and the opportunities it presents," said Andrew Every, Chairman of Freedom Solutions Australia. "As we continue to embrace generational volunteering and the importance of community service, we are confident that our new brand identity will help us bring

our organisation into the future. The NDIS has forever changed the way organisations such as ours serve our communities and we are changing as a result. One thing that will never change is the power of clever ideas to change the lives of people living with disabilities. We're confident that our fresh look will support us supporting people living with disabilities."

Freedom Solutions Australia's life-changing equipment includes custom bicycles, musical tables, beds, camper stairs, and ladders that empower people with disabilities to do their daily tasks independently. Freedom Solutions Australia is grateful for its community partners and donors who support their fantastic work in different communities, helping them create a better future for people with disabilities.

Contact: **1300 663 243** or  
[www.freedomolutions.org.au](http://www.freedomolutions.org.au)

**freedom  
solutions**  
australia

45

John Warner, founder and director of eTrack, an NDIS CRM and Practice Management software, sees this change as an indication that the NDIA recognises the ongoing importance of support coordinators. "Instead of viewing the support coordinator's role as temporary, this empowers them," he says. "Support coordinators will be able to view complete plan budgets and allocations of all participants who have provided consent."

Warner and his team have got to know many eTrack users and are acutely aware of the enormous responsibility, effort, qualifications, skill and experience that is required to be a good support coordinator. Warner continues, "We welcome any change that empowers support coordinators and have prepared the eTrack software to interface with PACE and provide this information. eTrack will automatically create new plans, update plan start and end dates, and display participant

funding budgets and allocated forecasts. It has a full audit trail and user control of updates."

The eTrack solution is all-in-one software designed to streamline operations for support coordinators and other NDIS providers, where users can efficiently manage participants, contacts, plans, time, budgets, case notes, invoices, compliance, staff, documents and emails. eTrack's holistic approach replaces the need for multiple software applications and can provide dashboards across all your business operations.

### Support coordinators seek plan management functionality for streamlined operations

Another trend Warner has noticed is that more support coordinators using eTrack are asking for plan management functionality. "It appears they realise that eTrack can largely automate plan management



John Warner, founder and director of eTrack, an NDIS CRM and Practice Management software

operations and so provide their own plan management," Warner observes.

To assist this, eTrack is providing a smartphone 'App' to enable participants to approve provider invoices and an interface with PACE to make claims from the NDIS and pay providers.

"By combining support coordination, plan management and participant approvals of provider invoices into one seamless, holistic eTrack system, participants significantly benefit from the single point of contact of a highly qualified and experienced support coordinator with access to all their information."

Warner views this move by support coordinators to add plan management to their services as an opportunity to significantly improve efficiencies in the NDIS and welcomes this change as it indicates that the highly regarded support coordinators are here to stay."

### **Vega Health revolutionises care with a ground-breaking platform and QR code integration**

Max Raine is a director at Vega Health, which is making waves in the NDIS client-facing solution space by driving significant disruption. Vega is revolutionising the way NDIS participants access care. The groundbreaking platform, Vega Health (<https://vegahealth.io/>), seamlessly

integrates the complete formal and informal care ecosystem onto a centralised platform, empowering NDIS participants with unprecedented control over their healthcare journey. With Raine's guidance, Vega Health is challenging industry norms and establishing fresh benchmarks for client-centric NDIS solutions.

According to Raine, the concept of Vega emerged shortly before the COVID-19 pandemic. "During that time, I actively engaged with support coordinators, other service providers, and participated in various Facebook groups. In total, I sought input from a diverse group of approximately 80 individuals, including nurses, NDIS participants, individuals residing in care facilities, as well as friends and family of participants.

"Through these conversations, I discovered that there were significant communication frustrations, when I delved deeper into the integration issues among the various components.

"It became evident to me why there were communication logjams,

considering the numerous moving parts involved for participants, support coordinators, care workers, and more. The lack of seamless coordination among the moving parts posed significant challenges for participants.

"There are clinical based solutions that help teams with invoicing, tracking, compliance, audits but no software that brings all parties together—the support coordinators, participants, support workers as well as informal supports such as family and friends all on the one platform that is transparent.

"Therefore, we have developed Vega that aims to provide a platform, where all parties can access information and where there is the ability to grant and revoke access to the platform."

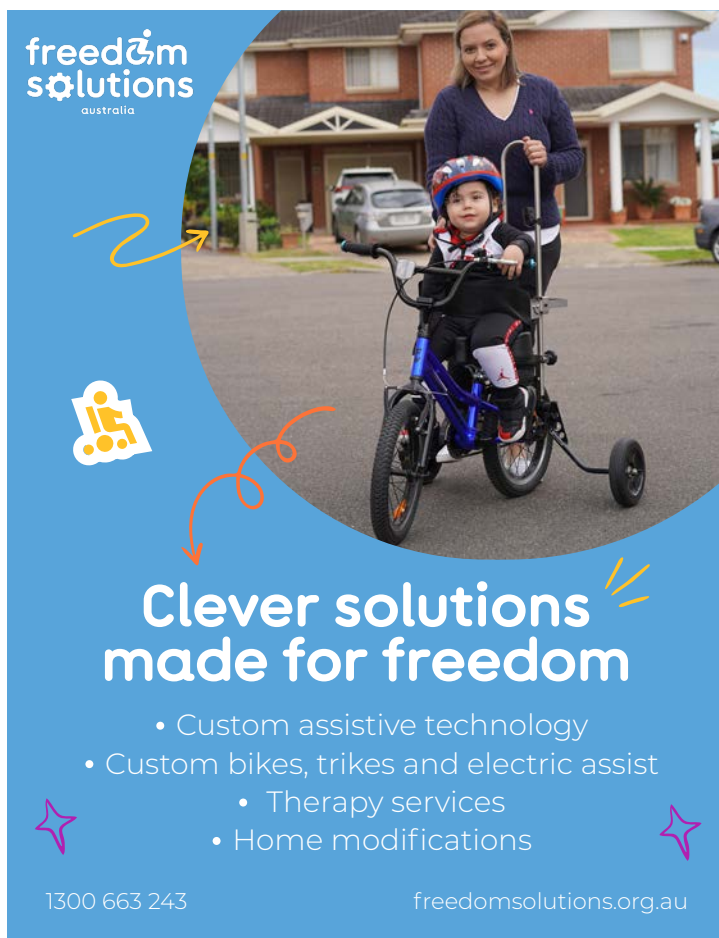
Raine says, "Support coordinators, on behalf of a participant, can add plan managers to the platform. We provide every participant with a QR code so that anyone in a care capacity can scan that and instantly have access to a centralised care feed that the whole care circle can see.

"We are striving to ensure that this system is designed with utmost simplicity in mind, recognising the presence of older parents, who may not be frequent technology users, among the participants' care circle".

According to Raine, the utilisation of QR codes may not be a novel technology, but it remains largely underutilised in the context of the NDIS. Raine says that "QR codes are revolutionising the way things work." Additionally, support coordinators play a vital role in promoting the adoption of Vega. Raine explains that "by onboarding a single support coordinator, we can potentially connect anywhere from 30 to 300 participants. Each participant can then invite between 3 and 12 individuals to join their care circle. This creates a powerful network effect."

### **Addressing challenges in the National Disability Insurance Scheme sector**

According to Joseph Mercorella, CEO and Co-founder of Lumary, the NDIS is undergoing significant disruptions, driven by various trends and challenges. "In such a dynamic landscape, it is crucial for service providers to adapt and find effective solutions," he says.



**freedom solutions**  
australia

**Clever solutions made for freedom**

- Custom assistive technology
- Custom bikes, trikes and electric assist
  - Therapy services
  - Home modifications

1300 663 243      [freedom-solutions.org.au](https://freedom-solutions.org.au)



"At Lumary, we are addressing these challenges head-on with innovative solutions designed to empower NDIS service providers."

Lumary is a leading global provider of care and practice management solutions for healthcare providers focused on the disability, aged care, allied health and autism therapy sectors. "Our core customers include disability service providers, support coordinators, aged care providers and allied health professionals," Mercorella says. "We are dedicated to staying ahead of the curve in technological advancements and innovation to ensure our customers receive the best possible solutions and support." Lumary stands out as the sole software solution in the market that harnesses the remarkable power of Salesforce as its platform.

"This foundation allows us to provide a quantifiable benchmark standard for our customer base," Mercorella explains.

To showcase the positive impact of Lumary's solutions on NDIS service providers, Mercorella provides a compelling example. "For example, the implementation of Lumary's software by I Can Jump Puddles, a support coordination and NDIS services provider, led to significant growth in their client base and services offered." This success story exemplifies how Lumary's innovative software can drive positive transformations for NDIS service providers.

"Our software streamlines administrative tasks, automates processes, and enhances data management, enabling providers to focus on delivering quality care while effectively scaling their operations."

Mercorella says Lumary differentiates itself from other software providers in the NDIS sector in several ways. "We are people focused and we do this by prioritising both our internal and external stakeholders, building long-term relationships with our customers that span over 15 years. This strategic approach positions us as a trusted technology partner."

### Meeting increased demand

Mercorella highlights the substantial surge in demand for NDIS services, creating significant challenges and mounting pressure for service providers. "Our software streamlines operations

## Five ways to boost productivity for your allied health practice

Lumary provides valuable strategies that can benefit allied NDIS providers

- 1. Operating from a single source of truth.** By centralising data and information, service providers can streamline their operations, reduce errors and enhance productivity.
- 2. Changing the resource management approach.** Adopting efficient resource management strategies, such as optimising staff schedules and leveraging technology, can improve productivity and ensure the effective utilisation of resources.
- 3. Streamlining onboarding processes.** Implementing streamlined onboarding processes, including automated documentation and integration with HR systems, can expedite the onboarding of new clients and staff, enhancing operational efficiency.
- 4. Improving service provision for clients.** Using Lumary's software solutions, service providers can create tailored care plans, track client goals and preferences, and collaborate effectively with clients and their families, resulting in improved client satisfaction and outcomes.
- 5. Enhancing the billing process.** Streamlining the billing process through automation and integration with financial systems can improve accuracy, reduce the administrative burden and ensure timely payments.



## NDIS SC+PM CRM Software

Participants  
Providers & Contacts  
Plans & Budgets  
Case Notes  
Time & Expenses  
Invoicing & Uploads  
Documents  
Emails  
Compliance

**100% Australian**  
Cloud + Mobile App  
NDIS Portal + **PACE** Interface  
Unlimited Clients & Invoices  
Pay monthly. No contract  
Import all your data  
Get going in an hour  
23 years of development  
Early pioneers of NDIS systems

*"eTrack reduced invoicing from 25,000 clicks & 2 weeks effort to a few clicks & 30 minutes. **Simply Brilliant.**"*  
Jeff Clark - Keystones Counselling & Coordination

For a **DEMO** and **FREE TRIAL** please contact  
[info@etrack.com.au](mailto:info@etrack.com.au) 0413 155 513 [etrack.com.au/ndis](http://etrack.com.au/ndis)  
Quote 'OUTLOOK23' for **Free Data Import**

and enhances efficiency, enabling service providers to scale their services and meet the growing demand for NDIS services.”

He believes person-centred care lies at the heart of the NDIS, aiming to empower individuals and prioritise their unique needs. “Lumary’s software supports the NDIS emphasis on person-centred care by allowing service providers to create tailored care plans, track client goals and preferences, and facilitate collaboration with clients and their families.”

Data management is a critical aspect of the NDIS and as the sector grows, so does the need for comprehensive solutions. “As the need for data management and reporting grows, Lumary’s software provides comprehensive capabilities for managing client records, care plans, progress notes and financial information. Real-time reports ensure compliance with NDIS requirements and enables evidence-based decision making,” Mercorella adds.

### Facilitating collaboration

Effective collaboration is essential within the NDIS ecosystem, involving service providers, support coordinators and funding bodies, Mercorella notes. “Lumary’s software promotes seamless communication and coordination among stakeholders, enabling secure data sharing, care plan coordination, and real-time updates for service providers, support coordinators and funding bodies.”

According to Mercorella, service providers often utilise multiple software systems, which can lead to duplication of work and operational inefficiencies. “Our software solutions offer integration capabilities, which reduces duplication of work and improving operational efficiency by facilitating seamless data flow between different software systems used by NDIS service providers.”

Also meeting regulatory requirements is a significant concern for NDIS service providers. Mercorella explains, “Lumary’s software incorporates built-in compliance features, such as NDIS pricing rules, document management, and audit trails, assisting service providers in meeting regulatory requirements and maintaining transparency in their operations.”

### Ensuring the sustainability for future generations

In the May Federal Budget, The Minister for the NDIS and Minister for Government Services, the Hon Bill Shorten, announced that getting the NDIS back on track by improving outcomes for participants and ensuring the sustainability of the Scheme for future generations as priorities.

Mercorella says Lumary’s software services and solutions will play a vital role in helping achieve the Minister’s objective of ensuring the long-term sustainability of the NDIS for future generations. Lumary accomplishes this by offering sustainable and scalable software solutions to NDIS service providers. “Our products enable service providers to streamline their operations, increase efficiency, and effectively manage the growing demand for NDIS

services. By automating administrative tasks and offering comprehensive data management capabilities, Lumary’s solutions empower service providers to focus on delivering quality care while maintaining compliance with regulatory requirements.”

Looking ahead, Lumary is committed to continuously improving and evolving its solutions, says Mercorella. “We are working on developing new capabilities and features to further support and empower the NDIS community.

“Our development strategy focuses on bringing more out-of-the-box and best-practice capabilities to our software from day one. By listening, learning and simplifying the digital transformation process, we aim to make our customers’ lives easier and more effective in delivering quality care to NDIS participants.” ●

1. <https://www.nds.org.au/news/tasmania-announced-as-ndia-trial-site-for-new-business-system>

2. <https://www.ndis.gov.au/news/8070-progressing-towards-our-new-information-and-communication-technology-ict-business-system>

3. <https://www.ndis.gov.au/media/5326/download?attachment> PB NDIS test in Tasmania Provider Information Pack.pdf





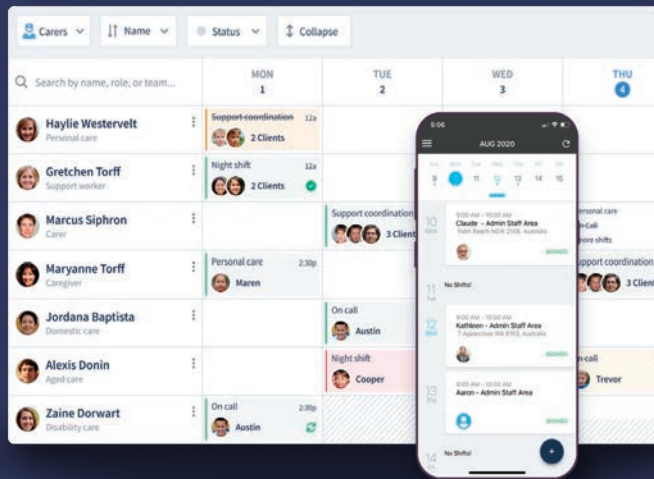
# ShiftCare



"Shiftcare has been one of my favourite apps to use in terms of work and scheduling."



"ShiftCare has improved the service delivery, reporting and record keeping for my business immeasurably"



## Meet the #1 software for NDIS providers.

✓ Rostering

✓ Mobile app

✓ Payroll &  
Invoicing

✓ Care  
Management

FOLLOW US



[shiftcare.com](https://shiftcare.com)

02 8311 3547  
[sales@shiftcare.com](mailto:sales@shiftcare.com)



# Be alert but not alarmed : How to protect yourself against scams

Heard the saying 'If it looks too good to be true, it probably is'? When it comes to scams, this definitely rings true.

**S**cams are attempts by criminals to purposefully mislead you to get access to your money or personal information. Everyone is a potential target because scammers do not discriminate, and will target people of any gender, age-group or socio-economic background.

It is natural to be curious and check out the message that needs your 'urgent' attention whether it is an investment 'opportunity', claims of an unpaid bill or an SMS from a 'family member' asking for money from an unfamiliar number. However, that is

exactly what gets people hooked into scams, which are increasingly common and tricky to spot as scammers become more sophisticated with their tactics.

## The impact of scams on people with disability

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) reported that people with disability lost over \$33 million to scams in 2022, with an increase in losses up 71% on the previous year<sup>1</sup>.

The convincing efforts from scammers typically target people with disability with fake low risk investment

opportunities, romance scams, remote access scams and threats to life and wellbeing if funds are not paid quickly.

People with disability were more likely than the general population to specify 'other payment' as the method of payment. \$13.4 million was reported lost to other payment methods in 2022. Some people with disability specified that they made payment to the scammers by taking actions such as transferring house ownership, or multiple bank and cryptocurrency transfers, debt owing, superannuation fund, or paid by cheque.



## 5 things you can do to protect yourself against scams

When you receive communication from someone asking for your personal or banking details, demanding urgent action or offering you something that seems too good to be true, stop and check the legitimacy before responding. Here are some of the steps you can take:

- 1. Use a family code word.** To protect yourself against family impersonation scams, which are commonly known as 'Hi Mum' or 'Hey Dad' scams, have a code word that only you and your family have discussed in person. Tell no one. If you receive a message claiming to be from a loved one, you can ask for the family code word to see if it's legitimate.
- 2. Pause and verify before acting on an SMS, email or phone request.** If an email, call or SMS seems unusual, stop before acting (e.g. clicking on links, opening attachments or following any payment instructions).
- 3. When in doubt, stop and call an official number.** Be extra alert if you receive a phone call out of the blue about problems with your computer and remote access is requested, or you are asked to install software in order to access your device remotely. Hang up, even if they mention a well-known company.
- 4. Verify investment opportunities.** Always check opportunities are legitimate with trusted and registered advisors and question 'out of the blue' urgent offers from someone you have only met online. Make your own reasonable enquiries and check if a financial adviser is registered via the [ASIC](#) website and check [ASIC's list of companies you should not deal with](#). If the company that is asking for your investment is on the list, do not deal with them.
- 5. Stay alert.** If it does not seem right, hang up, delete, report or exit the message. Do a bit of digging before proceeding. Try searching for the caller or sender and look for online reviews or reports. One way to stay on top of the latest scams is to subscribe for email [alerts](#) from ACCC's Scamwatch.

## Contact your bank immediately if you have:

- Shared your banking details in response to a suspicious phone call, email or SMS.
- Accidentally clicked on any suspicious links or downloaded any attachments and are concerned about the security of your online banking.
- Noticed any unusual transactions on your accounts.

## And remember

Your bank will never:

- Contact you to ask for confidential information like bank details, PINs, one-time-passwords for payment or other banking passwords.
- Ask you to transfer funds to another 'safe' account.

## Government Resources

You can find further information through these external sources.

- Report wider concerns to [Scamwatch](#).
- Learn about the different [types of scams](#), how to [protect yourself from them](#) and sign up for alerts from the ACCC's [Scamwatch](#).
- Get help to be secure online via the [Australian Cyber Security Centre](#).

*If you think you've been a victim of a scam or want to learn more about how ANZ is protecting customers' from cyber scams, visit our security site: [anz.com/security](https://anz.com/security)*

1 Australian Competition and Consumer Commission "Targeting Scams – Report of the ACCC on scams in 2022" <https://www.accc.gov.au/system/files/Targeting%20scams%202022.pdf>



### IMPORTANT INFORMATION

The information set out above is general in nature and has been prepared without taking into account your objectives, financial situation or needs. Before acting on the information, you should consider whether the information is appropriate for you having regard to your objectives, financial situation and needs. By providing this information ANZ does not intend to provide any financial advice or other advice or recommendations. You should seek independent financial, legal, tax and other relevant advice having regard to your particular circumstances.



52

# Finding creative ways to connect and grow

Just when Jesse Cross was thinking there might not be a place for him in the interactive virtual gaming space his brothers are so enjoying, the creative teenager came up with an idea that not only provided an innovative solution, it landed him the promise of his first paying job. **By Anthony O'Brien**

**J**esse, 17, who has autism and is supported by the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), feels he is too mature for Minecraft, a game which his younger brother Alexander loves. He also struggles emotionally with the Dungeons and Dragons (D&D) game his older brother Zach enjoys.

Both Alexander, 14, and Zach, 21, who also have autism and are NDIS participants, access the virtual gaming programs through their NDIS funding with a company called Minds at Play.

The start-up provider launched early in the pandemic to support kids and young adults with autism and other disabilities to learn communication

and social skills through interactive online games.

From four players in mid-2020, it has grown to support more than 200 players around the country.

"The boys both love it, they find it a fantastic way to communicate and meet other people like themselves, in the safe environment of our home and (they)



**“It’s amazing for their confidence, their social skills and for making friends. They’re talking to other kids with disabilities their age, they’re making friendships, learning how to communicate with other people. They’re learning while having fun.”**

plan on continuing until the end of time I think,” says the boys’ mum, Tegan.

“It’s amazing for their confidence, their social skills and for making friends. They’re talking to other kids with disabilities their age, they’re making friendships, learning how to communicate with other people. They’re learning while having fun.”

Tegan discovered the programs at a Berri Barmera online Expo hosted by the National Disability Insurance Agency to help people in the South Australian Riverland region connect with providers by offering new social and community participation supports, tailored to the local community.

“It’s a struggle to find ways to spend NDIS money in a rural area that fits the boys’ goals and helps them grow and improve their way, so that’s why I went to this expo,” Tegan says. “By far the program that stuck out the most was Minds at Play.

“We encouraged our boys to have a go and both Xander and Zach love it.”

But for Tegan’s middle son, Jesse, the programs on offer were not quite the right fit.

“D&D and Minecraft are not really my perspective,” says Jesse, who is in his final year of school and describes himself as a “gamer, coder, streamer person”.

“I felt kind of bored because I couldn’t do anything and my brothers were having all the attention. I felt a bit left out.” So, Jesse began thinking about a solution.

He wondered if Minds at Play might consider running a program through Scratch – the virtual coding space where Jesse enjoys using his great coding skills to create and play his own custom-built games with other like-minded people.

“Scratch is basically a children’s coding-based game-maker,” Jesse says. “I like the flexibility it gives me, it’s a lot more interesting for me.”

At first, it seemed Jesse might code and play alongside others. But then he took his pitch further.

“Jesse came to us and told us, ‘I am good at Scratch. I know how to teach this thing and this is something I can do’,” Minds at Play director and co-founder, Dwayne Fernandes recalls. “Being then 16 and pitching an idea like this to us, that is pretty spectacular.”

Fast forward a few months and Jesse is now putting the finishing touches on lesson plans for a Scratch program he will teach—and be paid for—during the next school holidays.

“I’m anxious and nervous, but also very pumped,” Jesse says.

Not only is Jesse anticipating his first pay cheque, his coding lessons will also contribute credits towards his high school leaving certificate, the South Australian Certificate of Education.

Jesse’s high school has jumped on board to support Jesse’s endeavour with valuable feedback and teaching lesson-planning skills.

“If we didn’t have NDIS plans, the boys would never have met Minds at Play and Jesse would not have this amazing opportunity,” Tegan says.

“We are so grateful for the NDIS support and how it is supporting Jesse and all of our children.” ●

1. <https://mindsatplay.com.au/>

2. Waters, Darren (April 26, 2004). “What happened to Dungeons and Dragons?”. BBC News. Retrieved 7 July 2022.

3. Jahromi, Neima (October 24, 2017). “The Uncanny Resurrection of Dungeons & Dragons”. The New Yorker. Retrieved 7 July 2022.

4. <https://www.minecraft.net/en-us/about-minecraft>

5. Walton, Mark (25 November 2012). “Minecraft In Education: How Video Games Are Teaching Kids”. GameSpot. CBS Interactive. Retrieved 15 December 2012.

## What is ...?

### Dungeons & Dragons

First published in 1974, Dungeons & Dragons is a fantasy tabletop role playing game where participants create their own characters and embark on imaginary adventures with other players. A Dungeon Master serves as the game’s referee and storyteller, as well as playing the role of the inhabitants in the game world. The players (or characters) form a party and interact with the setting’s inhabitants and each other, solving problems, exploring, gathering treasure and engaging in battles. Together the party confronts the various challenges presented in the game world and use communication and problem solving to manage situations in gameplay.<sup>2,3</sup>

### Minecraft

Minecraft is a computer game where players can explore a blocky, almost infinite 3D world. Players can manipulate the world around them by building structures and earthworks. They can also discover and extract raw materials, craft tools and items, and build simple machines. The game has different playing modes, and players can connect online with others to collaborate on challenges together. In survival mode, players find and use resources to build and maintain health while fighting computer-controlled mobs. Creative mode gives players unlimited resources and the ability to fly so that they can focus on creating elaborate worlds. Minecraft has been used in educational settings to enhance learning about history, computer programming and computer aided design.<sup>4,5</sup>

## Minds at Play

“Minds at Play recognises the challenges often associated with engaging children, youth and adults with disabilities. Our gaming sessions aim to offer a safe environment in which players can have a positive social experience, while playing a well-established social and fantasy-based game involving role playing and self-awareness.”<sup>1</sup>

Minds at Play uses popular games such as D&D and Minecraft to assist with important skills like teamwork, collaboration and conflict resolution. Participants can gain self-confidence while making new friends.



# Enhancing accessibility: Breaking barriers for individuals with print disabilities

In a thought-provoking interview with National Disability OUTLOOK, Emma Bennison, Chief Innovation Officer at Life Without Barriers, delves into the concept of print disabilities and emphasises the value of information accessibility. **By Anthony O'Brien**



**M**oreover, Bennison's expertise aided the Faircount Media team in implementing these insights to enhance the accessibility of the National Disability OUTLOOK website.

## Transforming lives: Introducing Life Without Barriers

Life Without Barriers, a national social purpose organisation, is committed to transforming lives for the better. As one of Australia's leading community service providers, it offers a diverse array of services encompassing disability support, mental health aid, foster care, and programs assisting refugee and asylum seeker settlements.

As Chief Innovation Officer at Life Without Barriers, Bennison is dedicated to creating change to ensure people with disability have full and equal access to services and employment opportunities.

She says, "One of our major targets is that 15% of our employees comfortably and openly identify as people with disability at all levels of the organisation. And we have a strong commitment to disability leadership. So, we want to make sure that people with disability are contributing to the strategic decision making of the organisation."

## Understanding print disabilities

According to Vision Australia, a print disability is a difficulty or inability to read printed material due to a perceptual, physical or visual disability<sup>1</sup>.

The reasons for print disability vary but may include:

- Vision impairment or blindness
- Physical dexterity problems such as multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's disease, arthritis or paralysis
- Learning disability, such as dyslexia
- Brain injury or cognitive impairment
- Literacy difficulties
- Early dementia.

## The importance of information access

Bennison highlights the crucial role of information access in various aspects of life. Access to information empowers individuals to make informed choices about their lives, manage finances, understand bills, operate household appliances and read product labels, among other essential tasks. In the

context of disability, the significance of information access is magnified, as it ensures that individuals who rely on alternative formats can access disability-related publications and resources.

"It's crucial for people to have access to information to make informed choices about their lives," Bennison says.

"These are everyday choices such as accessing information about what bills they have coming in to manage their finances, going into a shop and reading product labels or accessing dosage information on medication packaging.

"Accessing that kind of information is a human right. And if you don't have access to it, you're seriously disadvantaged.

"When it comes to a publication such as Disability Access that talks about service provision, employment options and tell stories from the view of people with disability—it's critical that people with disability can also access it."

## Challenges faced by individuals with print disabilities

People with print disabilities encounter various challenges when accessing printed or even online materials. Bennison identifies touchscreen devices as one obstacle for individuals who are blind or vision impaired, as the screens often lack the necessary accessibility features.

Websites that do not comply with accessibility guidelines also pose difficulties for individuals using screen readers, as buttons may not be labelled correctly and images may lack proper descriptions. According to Bennison, social media platforms also present accessibility issues, especially "where people post on social media and forget to describe their photos and videos, which means many people are excluded from participating in important conversations with friends, family and the community, as well as accessing critical information."

## Print disabilities and employment opportunities

Part of Bennison's role at Life Without Barriers includes ensuring there are employment opportunities for people with disability within the organisation, at all levels, and encouraging other businesses to do the same.

Emma Bennison,  
Chief Innovation  
Officer, Life  
Without Barriers



Technological advancements have opened doors for improved accessibility. For instance, the availability of screen readers on smartphones has made access to information easier, says Bennison. Additionally, audiobooks have become more widespread, benefiting both people with print disabilities and the general population.

"I recently completed my MBA and, during that process, I realised how much the studying experience has transformed for blind people since I first pursued my undergraduate degree back in the early 90s.

"When I was first studying, accessibility to books meant they were read onto cassettes by volunteers. Obtaining those cassettes was a tedious task and I rarely had access to complete textbooks—instead I received limited chapters relevant to my research.

"I always say to people, I wake up every morning, I literally thank God that we've got the technology that we've got. I've got a phone that has a screen reader on it for example. I can access enormous amounts of information very easily these days. But as I said, it's only if that information is presented in a format that I can use. Audiobooks are just one example of how making information more accessible benefits everyone."

Bennison continues, "And that's really the point. Information should be accessible to everyone. There is no downside to making content available to all audiences, which goes for websites as well.



## Revolutionising accessibility: NVDA empowers the visually impaired with free technology

In 2006, Michael Curran, a vision impaired man from Brisbane, posed a fundamental question: why should he and others with vision impairments pay exorbitant amounts for the same technological access as their sighted peers?

Joined by his friend Jamie Teh, both of whom were blind, they embarked on a remarkable journey to develop NVDA—a free and open-source screen reader that would allow blind and vision impaired people to stay connected via the internet and have the same education and employment opportunities that others have at no cost. Interestingly, Emma Bennison, Chief Innovation Officer at Life Without Barriers is on the board of NVDA.

Curran says, “I was passionate to provide a completely free option for those in similar situations to myself.”

This innovative solution revolutionised the landscape by eliminating the need

for blind and vision impaired individuals to choose between exclusion or the financial burden associated with screen readers. With the advent of NVDA, blind and vision impaired individuals gained the ability to access education, secure employment opportunities and embrace independence without constraints.

The impact of NVDA has been profound, fostering a highly engaged community of over 250,000 people across more than 175 countries. Furthermore, the software has been translated into over 55 languages, ensuring its accessibility to individuals worldwide.

“It used to be that screen reader software was more expensive than the computer itself,” says Teh. “We are extremely proud that NVDA is able to provide equal access to technology and opportunities to people with blindness and vision impairment

“When considering the progress we’ve made, especially in terms of website accessibility, it’s truly remarkable how much easier it is to access information and books today.

“It’s important to acknowledge that we have come a long way. Many organisations have made their public-facing materials accessible but overlook the accessibility of their internally crucial documents. For instance, I might receive a funding contract that is not accessible.

“This highlights a subtle but significant oversight. There is a shift in recognising clients with disabilities but there is still work to do to consider people with disabilities as our colleagues, leaders and partners.

“There is an underlying assumption that people with disabilities are not leadership material.”

### National Disability OUTLOOK: A case study

Late last year, Faircount Media, the publisher of National Disability OUTLOOK approached Life Without Barriers about whether the organisation would place an advertisement in the publication.

Executive Lead of Communications and Media at Life Without Barriers, Tabatha Feher says the organisation’s first response was an enthusiastic yes; “however, through consulting with people like Emma and others in our organisation with lived experience of disability, we achieved a much greater outcome.

“Building strong relationships is a guiding principle for us. When we work with other organisations, we do so in a way that partners with purpose,” Feher says.

“So, before we decided whether we want to advertise in this publication, we needed to make sure that it aligned with our values. Accessibility is a core commitment for our organisation, so it was important to us that Faircount shared that dedication.”

When Life Without Barriers reviewed the website, staff found it required significant accessibility modifications.

“We could have chosen to avoid a frank conversation about accessibility, we could have chosen to go elsewhere but instead, we approached Faircount Media to discuss the possibility of making the magazine accessible.



"Pleasingly, they were incredibly excited by this opportunity and appreciative that we had taken the time to work through this issue with them," Feher says.

Feher, Bennison and the Life Without Barriers team have embarked on a close collaboration with Faircount Media to work towards comprehensive accessibility for both the website and the publication.

"Faircount Media's efforts to enhance the accessibility of the experience have far exceeded our expectations," Bennison comments.

"Of course, there will always be room for improvement, but seeing an organisation with this level of commitment is heartening.

"It's a fantastic outcome for our organisation, other service providers, the publication and its readers. I was impressed and thankful for Faircount Media's commitment," says Feher.

### Putting accessibility into action

Jake Brysha, the Administration and Production Coordinator at Faircount Media, who is spearheading the initiative to enhance the accessibility of the National Disability OUTLOOK website, acknowledged the valuable assistance provided by Bennison and the Life Without Barriers team in educating him about the obstacles faced by individuals living with vision impairments.

He also discovered that when it comes to website accessibility, there are numerous measures that businesses can implement. "Emma pointed out how some businesses or government bodies do deliver on their word, but also how some businesses fall short of this," Brysha explains.

"Taking all this into consideration, I worked on updating our website [nationaldisabilityoutlook.com.au](http://nationaldisabilityoutlook.com.au) to increase accessibility, and once I was satisfied with my tests, I asked Emma to quality control my work."

Brysha continues, "We had a discussion to assess the areas that met the required standards, identified areas needing further improvements to ensure we can reach all people who might benefit from our publication."

At the time of writing this article, National Disability OUTLOOK has successfully developed an accessible

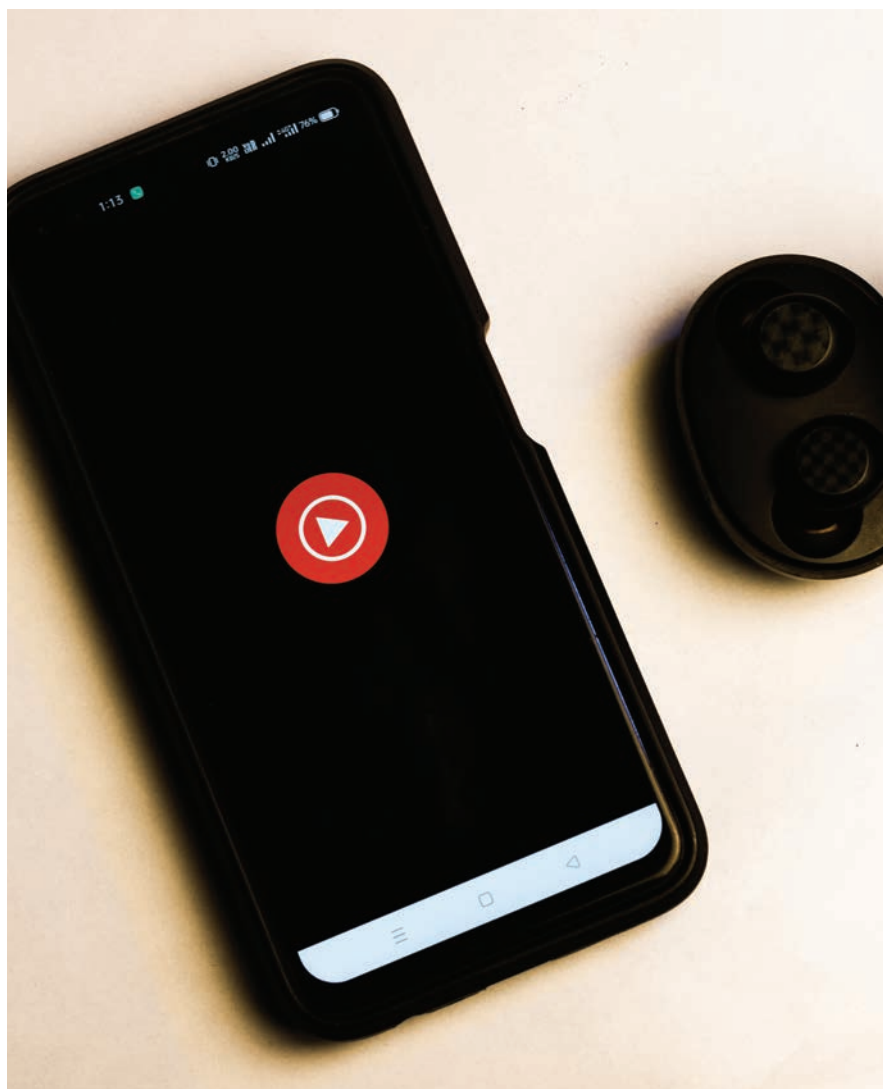


IMAGE: Sanket Mishra from Pexels

version of its website. This includes implementing features such as alt text for images, detailed descriptions for infographics, optimised formatting for screen readers, and simplified navigation to ensure all content is easily accessible.

"In time, we plan on having a full redesign of the website that seamlessly incorporates accessibility, function and aesthetics, as well as ensuring that anyone can access the digital versions of the publication," advises Brysha.

According to Brysha, collaborating with Bennison has been incredibly inspiring. "Emma has been brilliant at bridging the gap between where we were, where we are, and where we will be shortly.

"She also pointed out that while lack of accessibility is a failing of many businesses, it's not necessarily something that will take long to fix or implement. For myself, I had the updates online and ready for testing within about two weeks of the initial call.

"Finally, I would encourage all businesses who would like to improve accessibility to just get started.

"For people with vision impairments, it doesn't feel nice when they're promised accessibility that never seems to be delivered," Brysha says.

"Small efforts go a long way, but no effort feels like a false promise. It was fun to put this together, and I'm ecstatic that I can help deliver something that should be the basic standard." ●

1. <https://www.visionaustralia.org/business-consulting/print-accessibility/what-is-print-disability#:~:text=A%20print%20disability%20is%20a,Parkinson%27s%20disease%2C%20arthritis%20or%20paralysis>



# Creating Employment Without Barriers

**The care sector is one of the fastest-growing employment markets in Australia.**

Together, we have the capability to lead the way in creating employment for people with disability – without the barriers that have remained in place for far too long. If we lead the way, we can ignite governments and corporate employers to follow.

Life Without Barriers has committed to a goal of having 15% of our total workforce, at all levels, comfortably identifying as having lived experience of disability within the next three years.

## Will you join us?

Learn more about our Access Inclusion and Employment Plan by searching **Life Without Barriers AIEP** or **[www.lwb.org.au](http://www.lwb.org.au)**

## LIFE WITHOUT BARRIERS





# Budget offers employment hope for people with an intellectual disability and families

In a major win for individuals with intellectual disabilities across the country, the Australian Government budget unveiled in May has earmarked substantial funding for a diverse array of initiatives focused on supported employment. Inclusion Australia<sup>1</sup>, the respected national peak body for intellectual disability, has hailed this groundbreaking announcement as a turning point for the funding of a range of measures on supported employment. **By Anthony O'Brien**

Catherine McAlpin,  
CEO of Inclusion  
Australia



David Swain,  
CEO of Endeavor  
Foundation



Corene Strauss,  
CEO of the  
Australian  
Network on  
Disability



Supported employment for people with disability is typically provided by Australian Disability Enterprises, also known as sheltered workshops. Providers can legally pay employees as little as \$2.75 per hour under the current system, with many people with an intellectual disability having no pathway to explore open employment.

The government has now committed \$54m over 4 years, which includes:

- \$35m over 3 years to establish a fund for supported employment providers to evolve business models.
- \$11.7m over 4 years for a targeted disability employment advocacy service and information program for supported employees.
- \$6m for the evaluation of existing and new initiatives and trials, including the new Structural Adjustment grants, to build a robust evidence base to inform ongoing policy development.
- \$1.1m for research to establish a Disability Employment Centre of Excellence.

Catherine McAlpine, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Inclusion Australia says, "It's great to see signs that people with an intellectual disability are being heard by the government. This investment is an important first step in changing the conversation about employment for people with an intellectual disability."

She continues, "We are particularly pleased to see the \$11.7 million investment in advocacy and information

services. This much needed support will help people with an intellectual disability and families navigate the complex employment pathways they face. We also hope it will mean that people with an intellectual disability will have more opportunities to be part of the reform process and co-design a way forward with government."

### Time for mainstream employers to do some heavy lifting

David Swain, the visionary CEO of Endeavor Foundation, has shed light on the transformative power of employment, extending far beyond financial gains. "The satisfaction derived from having a job and being self-reliant, rather than dependent on external funding, is immeasurable. In fact, being a net contributor to society further enhances this sense of accomplishment."

Swain continues, "I want to acknowledge that there is ongoing debate regarding disability services in supported employment, and it is crucial that we focus on assisting individuals in transitioning into mainstream employment.

"We must strive for improvement in this area. Instead of attributing the lack of opportunities in mainstream employment solely to the organisations that provide employment, training and development for individuals, we should direct our attention to mainstream employers.

"It is essential to approach them and inquire, "What steps are you taking to be inclusive? Are you actively welcoming individuals with disabilities?" For a considerable period, providers of supported employment have carried

a significant burden in promoting disability employment. It is now time for the broader community to join in and create pathways by opening their doors."

Swain adds that success stories should not always be about grand innovations or individual achievements. "In my opinion, true success lies in the less glamorous aspects as well.

"When I reflect on success stories within the Endeavour Foundation, we have implemented a model that involves progressing individuals from disability social enterprise to supported hosted employment, supported independent employment, and eventually mainstream employment.

"We have witnessed this transformation within our own organisation. People who were initially part of our disability social enterprises are now employed in our support centre office, and some have reached a point where they no longer require any employment support.

"These stories are truly inspiring. I believe that every disability services provider should strive to implement similar changes within their own organisations. It's not just about talking the talk; it's about walking the walk and actively making a difference."

### Australian Network on Disability empowers leading organisations to champion workplace inclusion and accessibility

Corene Strauss, CEO of the Australian Network on Disability (AND), Australia's peak body for disability inclusion, says, "Most of Australia's leading



organisations and brands, such as Qantas, NAB, and the Reserve Bank, are all our members. And they sign up to become a member to learn how they can improve their practices and systems to include people with disabilities as employees and customers.”

According to Strauss, AND focuses on three core activities, “Firstly, we prioritise building the capability of employers by equipping them with essential tools, resources, and a dedicated team to support their progress. This support empowers them on their journey towards their goals.

“Secondly, we emphasise the importance of connection. We facilitate connections between employers themselves and individuals with disabilities. We promote a collaborative environment by fostering a network where they can learn from one another, share ideas, and exchange insights.

“Lastly, we engage in checking. Here, we focus on assessing the maturity of employers’ efforts and comparing them to other organisations in terms of their

inclusivity journey. This benchmarking process helps employers gauge their progress and identify areas for improvement.”

### **Introducing the accessibility and inclusion index: A roadmap for continuous improvement**

The benchmarking piece is exciting. To this end, AND has developed an index that provides organisations with insights into their progress in becoming accessible and inclusive for people with disabilities. This user-friendly tool is a roadmap for continuous improvement, aiding essential business functions in achieving greater disability confidence and maturity.

Participation in the Index is confidential, ensuring anonymity when comparing results against aggregated data. The Quick 10, a 10-question quiz, offers a snapshot of an organisation’s access and inclusion practices, providing valuable insights and guidance for further advancement. The Quick 10 is available to members and non-members, offering a free preview of the Index.

By engaging in the Index, organisations can assess their current accessibility maturity, identify areas for improvement, foster knowledge sharing across different functions, prioritise actions, benchmark against peers, and potentially be recognised as Top Performers at the annual Awards Night. In early June, AND named Australia Post its top performer at its latest awards night.

Strauss adds, “The index measures and scores them against how they’re doing around their information communication technology. How accessible are their premises? How accessible are their marketing communications?

“All these documents that you produce, can everybody read them? We assess them against their recruitment processes. You know, putting job ads out and saying you require a driver’s licence when it’s got nothing to do with the job. It already puts a barrier up, as an example.

“Basically, we assess [employers] against nine areas, and then they get a score which is then benchmarked against other organisations.





**epic**<sup>®</sup>

Your disability employment specialist

## **Looking for work?**



EPIC Assist helped Ron find his dream job welding metal for door hinges.

**We help people with a disability, injury, mental health condition, or health condition find and keep a job they love.**

We have service centres spread across QLD, Northern NSW, and TAS.

For personalised support on your employment journey, **get in touch with EPIC Assist today.**

#### **CONTACT EPIC**

 **13 EPIC** (13 3742)  
 [hello@epicassist.org](mailto:hello@epicassist.org)  
 [epicassist.org](http://epicassist.org)

#### **CONNECT WITH US**



Jodi Schmidt,  
HSSO CEO



Strauss recommends that employers who are not performing well in terms of workplace inclusivity take the first step by educating themselves and their staff on matters related to disabilities. By doing so, they can cultivate a more inclusive work environment. "Joining organisations like the Australian Network on Disability and tapping into government resources such as Job Access can provide valuable support, particularly for smaller organisations.

"Regarding the initial question about employing a person with a disability, it is crucial to understand workplace

adjustments. By incorporating discussions about necessary adjustments into the interview process, employers create a positive experience for both parties involved, whether it's for individuals with low vision, hearing impairment, or those who are wheelchair users."

Strauss adds, "Also, get informed about what's happening in the disability sector, especially with the Royal Commission. We expect there will be many recommendations for employers to consider and adopt."

### **Recognising individual needs: Technology's role in creating an accessible workplace**

According to Strauss, technology is a remarkable tool for creating an accessible workplace. However, she advises that it is crucial to recognise that each person's disability is unique. "It's a common misconception, for example, that individuals who are blind solely require a screen reader. However, being blind doesn't automatically mean a screen reader is the right solution. Different individuals with disabilities have varied technology needs.

"It's the same with wheelchair users and people with intellectual disability.

People have very low expectations around people with intellectual disability, but never assume that because they all have their talents."

Strauss suggests that if anyone has doubts about the accessibility of their organisation for employees and customers, they should visit AND's website (<https://and.org.au/>) and take the Quick 10 assessment. "This brief evaluation only takes a few minutes and provides valuable insights into the level of accessibility. It can serve as a guide for prioritising necessary improvements and addressing specific focus areas."

### **New report exposes urgent demand for expansion of health care and social assistance workforce**

A new report titled *The Big Care Shift*, released by the Human Services Skills Organisation (HSSO) and The Demographics Group, reveals that health care and social assistance jobs have grown faster than any other workforce in the country, dominating and surpassing sectors like retail.

According to the report (which uses the latest release of census data), the fastest growing job on the Australian continent in 2021 was the job of aged or





disabled carer which jumped 95,212 net extra jobs to 227,535 jobs—a huge shift.

Healthcare and social assistance sectors have been the greatest contributor to labour growth in Australia since the 1990s and have added 600,000 net extra workers over the last decade. It is the largest employing sector at 15% of the workforce. This growth is forecast to continue to grow faster than any other sector over the coming years due to increasing demand in aged care, disability support through the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), allied health and community services.

The report raises questions about the scale and expansion of this workforce. If the sector is growing at this rate based on demand for services, are we doing enough to support the sector? The consensus is no.

HSSO CEO, Jodi Schmidt says attracting and retaining quality workers to meet increasing demand is the number one challenge facing the care and support sectors in Australia.

“Confronting this challenge requires a coordinated and collaborative effort. Employers, unions, governments, workers, and training organisations need to work collectively to focus our effort, so we have the greatest impact for the people who rely every day on the services delivered by the care and support sector.

“There is no silver bullet, we need to invest time, effort, and resources to raise awareness of the scale of this challenge, ensure that this work is appropriately valued, and improve the experience and career opportunities for workers to build a high quality and sustainable care and support sector,” says Schmidt.

“The Albanese Government has established a care and support task force and charged it with putting together a strategy that addresses holistically not just the issues for workforce, but workforce regulation, pricing that will impact supply and demand.”

According to Schmidt, the primary factor that holds importance in job quality within the labour market is often assumed to be the level of pay. “While research confirms that pay is indeed a significant aspect, it is not the sole determinant,” she says. “However, it is also the quality of the work.”

## EPIC Assist’s support empowers Sharon to thrive at Coles Marsden

For over 33 years, EPIC Assist (EPIC) has provided disability employment services, assisting individuals with disabilities, injuries, mental health conditions, or other health conditions in searching for, preparing for, and maintaining meaningful employment.

Sharon, an employee at Coles Marsden for nearly 24 years, is a testament to EPIC’s commitment. She works 12 hours per week, divided into three 4-hour shifts. During one of these shifts, EPIC Support Worker Andrew Price supports Sharon while she works independently for the other two shifts. Sharon’s primary responsibility involves handling product returns, meticulously sorting through trolleys of returned goods and restocking them on the shelves. Additionally, she ensures proper rotation of bread products based on their expiration dates.

Sharon’s joy in her job shines through her interactions with customers, and she values her connections with colleagues and managers, who have become an integral part of her work experience.

Sharon says, “I help customers find things on the shelves; they ask me all the time for help.” Looking ahead, Sharon aspires to increase her hours and days at Coles.

Andrew Price describes their typical Tuesday routine. “There are two to six shopping trolleys piled high of products to be returned to the shelves. Sharon knows the store and where everything goes so well.

“I help her with the product returns, and we work our way around the store. Sometimes there are items at the bottom of the trolley that belong back at Aisle 1, which we have passed, so we split up, and Sharon directs me where to go. I end up doing a bit of running around as well.”

EPIC’s ongoing support enables Sharon to sustain long-term employment, offering her various benefits such as increased confidence, stability, income and independence. Sharon’s enduring presence at the store extends its positive impact on the local community and bolsters the business.

Schmidt adds that current labour market research highlights the importance of flexibility in attracting and retaining talent. Additionally, the organisation’s reputation and external factors play a role in the value proposition. However, internal factors, particularly the relationships within the organisation, have a significant impact on whether individuals choose to stay in a job and find it fulfilling. “So internal factors, like who are the people that you’re working with will be the largest contributors to whether they stay and whether they enjoy the job. It comes down to their relationship with their supervisor, their colleagues, the workers that they’re working with and in many instances of disability, it is the bond with the client, as well as the leadership within the organisation they work.”

She says, “Then there’s organisational factors. Rostering, workload, whether you’re getting training, whether there’s opportunities for career pathways and what the culture of the organisation is.”

Schmidt emphasises that there is a range of economic issues occurring, marked by the rising cost of living. These transformations greatly affect individuals and shape their choices concerning employment and work arrangements. Furthermore, following the COVID-19 pandemic, people’s expectations and preferences regarding their jobs have undergone a profound change.

As a result, Schmidt suggests that “employers in the disability sector need to consider their value proposition in order to attract employees, as labour shortages are prevalent across all industries.” ●

1. <https://www.inclusionaustralia.org.au/budget-offers-employment-hope-for-people-with-an-intellectual-disability-and-families-but-concerns-remain-over-ndis-budget-targets/>



# Just being a good service provider is not good enough

Life Without Barriers  
Chief Innovation Officer  
Emma Bennison



IMAGES: Supplied

**L**ife Without Barriers is a national disability service provider that focuses on delivering great services to the people it serves across the country. However, their purpose to change lives for the better goes beyond service delivery, with a focus on disrupting barriers and working in partnership with people with disability to create better outcomes.

"Delivering great services is our key focus, but it must not be the only thing we do," Chief Executive of Life Without Barriers, Claire Robbs says.

"We have a responsibility to partner with people and advocate for changes

to systems, policies and structures that may prevent people from having equitable opportunity.

"We want every aspect of our society to be inclusive and one of the most direct ways of having an impact for current and future generations of people with disability is to disrupt the barriers they face in accessing meaningful employment."

## **Committed to improving employment outcomes for people with disability**

All Australians have a right to access the labour market and not just short-



term or transitory jobs. Life Without Barriers believes the proportion of people with disability in the workforce, at all levels of seniority and across a broad range of roles, should reflect the makeup of the broader Australian community.

“Employment of people with disability is not about benevolence; it is critical to the fabric of society. All people have the right to equal access to employment, and when Australian workplaces are genuinely diverse and reflective of our communities, all of society benefits,” Robbs says.

“To make that happen in our own organisation, we’ve committed to a goal of having 15% of our total workforce, at all levels, comfortably identifying as having lived experience of disability within the next three years.”

## Employment rates for people with disabilities in Australia

Life Without Barriers Chief Innovation Officer, Emma Bennison said the most important contributors to the stagnated rates of employment of people with disability is unconscious bias and misconceptions about what people with disability can do.

“We need the voices and perspectives of people with disability at the decision-making table—that’s how we will see an enduring change in the statistics around employment rates for people with disabilities,” Bennison says.

People with disability comprise nearly 20% of Australia’s population; however, they are yet to experience consistent and equitable access to employment.

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, working-aged people with disability are twice as likely to be unemployed than those without disability. They are also more likely to be unemployed for longer.

Around 93% of people with disability of working age report experiencing barriers to gaining employment.

## The changes Life Without Barriers have made to create an inclusive workplace

Bennison explains, over the past several years, Life Without Barriers has challenged itself to disrupt barriers within the organisation that prevent people with disability from being able to

participate and benefit from everything employment has to offer.

“That has meant listening, learning and leaning in and we have ongoing work to do,” Bennison says.

“We have a mechanism within our workplace for employees to identify solutions and opportunities to support people living with disability and chronic and mental health conditions called our Disability Ability Wellness Network [DAWN] group, which is a structured support network within our organisation.

“One of the really straightforward ways we make working with us accessible is to ask and think about any accessibility needs that a person may have to come into an interview or ensuring our documentation and ICT [information and communications technology] systems are accessible.

“It’s a gradual and continual process of testing approaches and getting direct feedback from people about the processes we are using. The goal is to improve the way we work and connect.”

## Access Inclusion and Employment Plan

The Life Without Barriers 2022-2025 Access Inclusion and Employment Plan (AIEP) outlines its commitment to improving access and creating employment without barriers for people with disability.

As Chief Innovation Officer, Bennison leads the organisation’s strategic commitments within the AIEP and key actions it will take to achieve its 15% employment target.

“In addition to working with colleagues across the organisation to ensure that the 66 actions in the AIEP are achieved, my leadership role is to educate, mentor and constructively disrupt the status quo so Life Without Barriers can set an example that corporates and governments can follow when it comes to the employment of people with disability,” Bennison says.

## Why employing people with disabilities makes good economic sense

“We have 113,000 job-ready Australians who are likely to have lower absenteeism and higher productivity than most that are ready and willing to get into employment,” says Bennison.

“One in five people in Australia will be a person with a disability, whether or not their disability is visible—that perspective is vital when providing any service to the public.

“It makes good economic sense for any business, including disability service providers to have skilled and talented people with lived experience of disability in the workforce.

“We are fantastic problem solvers, fantastic communicators and fantastic innovators who are really good at turning challenges into opportunities because that’s what we are actually doing on a daily basis in order to get through life.

“By not making their workplaces accessible, Australian businesses, government departments and service providers are missing out on a significant amount of untapped talent,” she says.

## Why government and the care sector should be leading the way

The care sector is one of the fastest-growing employment sectors in Australia right now.

Bennison says the care sector has direct engagement with people with lived experience and is, therefore, primed to work in partnership with people to forge genuine change in the labour market and increase representation at all levels of the workforce.

“The care and support sectors are one of Australia’s top industries for employment growth,” says Bennison.

“This sector has the capability to lead the way in the employment of people with disability and, in doing so, ignite governments and corporate employers to follow.

“And that’s exactly why leaders without disability need to appoint us to leadership roles, particularly within organisations that exist to serve us.

“There will be fear around getting it wrong. However, people with disability are experts in figuring out how to solve problems relating to access requirements and we can help. Employers only need to be courageous enough to ask.

“We can do more than provide good services, we can and should set an example for government and corporate employers by employing people with a disability.” ●



66

# Endeavour Foundation paves the way for job opportunities for those with disability

With just 27% of Australians with profound disability actively taking part in the labour force, Endeavour Foundation has made it its mission to support people living with disability to find employment. **By Lisa Calautti**



David Swain,  
the CEO of  
Endeavour  
Foundation

**A**nd sadly, the 27% figure has changed little over the past two decades, with 93% of people with disability experiencing difficulties in finding work.

Armed with a quest to help people 'turn possibilities into reality', the Endeavour Foundation supports people with disability by working hard to offer them contemporary career options, tailored training and pathways to mainstream jobs.

David Swain, the CEO of Endeavour Foundation, says helping people turn their possibilities into reality was about creating a much more inclusive community, with a particular focus on people living with intellectual disability.

"We partner with the people we support to look at what's possible for them, and how can we take that and bring it to fruition together, whether that be through work, or how they engage in work, or how they engage in the community, or where they live," he says.

"What can we do to bring a positive uplift and create a much more inclusive community for the people we support? That's why we exist and that's why the organisation was established 72 years ago."

Endeavour Foundation began in 1951 with a focus on children with intellectual disability who were excluded from the mainstream education system. It began with a makeshift school for children with



## We're now doing more partnering with other organisations in a staged approach to full mainstream employment, which is going from our disability social enterprises, to supported hosted employment, where we will support our employees in another employer's environment.

Foundation's work in helping people find diverse employment.

"I was chatting with one employee, one of the first employees in the supported work environment that I met, and she was doing labelling work on bottles," he says.

"These are bottles for a luxury car products company that we partner with, called Bowden's Own, and the employee was just showing me how she applies the stickers on the front of these bottles and on the back of these bottles, where she has to line it up, how she has to get the bubbles out, but then there'll be some bottles that have more square sort of edges on them, others are round bottles and it's a different strategy that she uses.

"And she was so proud of doing that job, so careful in her work, so proud of the team she works with and the support she gets from her manager. In that moment I saw how proud our employees are of the work they do."

Swain says he felt privileged to be working with an organisation that acutely focuses on the ability of every single individual and gets the most out of the team.

"It's the happiness factor in our workplaces I think many workplaces can learn from," he adds.

Swain says the foundation's pathways to mainstream employment initiatives, which are now being explored, are an exciting prospect.

"This gets back to our purpose, the potential of doing more, or different work that people might choose," he says.

"We're now doing more partnering with other organisations in a staged approach to full mainstream employment, which is going from our disability social enterprises, to supported hosted employment, where we will support our employees in another employer's environment.

"The next step then is to transition those employees to another organisation's payroll while we provide continued support, and then the last step is full mainstream employment."

### Housing assistance focus

Endeavour Foundation's home supports include providing accommodation for approximately 550 people, alongside in-home supports depending on what each person requires.

This includes the foundation's 'My Home, My Life' program and encompasses contemporary, Platinum Level, fully accessible homes as part of an ongoing investment in quality housing.

"In the main, we offer people the choice to live with two or three other people, sharing a home together and a support worker staying there overnight but we're increasingly building a variety of other homes with people living independently or with one other person," Swain explains.

"Whatever people choose—and some people prefer to live with other people—we're building a range of housing options, and we're moving towards building a much more diverse range of homes.

"Choice is important and that's what we want to be providing as part of the transition of the supported independent living space, which I think is absolutely needed.

"But we also recognise some people have lived with others in shared living arrangements for many years, and they don't want to change that because they've formed close bonds with friends and live close to family.

"These are some of the challenges that we face in providing a range of high-quality homes that people want to live in." ●

disability and, over time, the Endeavour Foundation has grown and changed, and its focus is now supporting people to flourish at home, at work and in the community.

"Also, through our subsidiaries, we are providers of Disability Employment Services and Workforce Australia. We offer a range of therapeutic programs, apprenticeships, traineeships and, in those spaces, we can really leverage our additional resources to bring an uplift to the people we support," Swain says.

### An array of employment paths

Endeavour Foundation's passion and commitment to finding satisfying employment for people with disability extends across various areas.

"That's as diverse as e-waste recycling, where we recycle 1300 tonnes of e-waste a year, through chrysanthemum growing to packaging and repackaging, to making cakes and metal fabrication—all sorts of things designed around providing people with skills, work and development opportunities," Swain explains.

"I think what the organisation is currently doing is amazing in providing good work opportunities. We provide good jobs and our employees do great work."

Swain says he is excited about the future ahead for the Endeavour



68

# New housing options opening up new doors

Leading National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) providers are paving the way for new, innovative and independent housing opportunities for people with disability with custom designed self-contained studio apartments and villas offering independent living opportunities. **By Lisa Calautti**

IMAGES: Supplied

**S**outh west of Brisbane, Aspire Hub has created 15 new purpose-built, self-contained studio apartments customised for supported independent living and individualised living. These offer options for independent living, private bathrooms and kitchens, as well as fully furnished common areas including a shared kitchen, dining and living areas, and a backyard.

The residences have been built in collaboration with the builder, designed to allow for more independence within the traditional NDIS accommodation model.

Unlike specialist disability accommodation (SDA), which is only funded for complex and high needs, these residences were built in collaboration with the builder who was dedicated to the conventional NDIS accommodation approach. Since 2020, Aspire Hub has offered disability housing and living





Jayden Smith-Snowden living independently at the Darra apartments thanks to the NDIS.



Nicole Doherty, Empowered Liveability Director

**We believe everyone deserves the right to enjoy freedom and independence within their home, which is why we're passionate about innovating and finding new solutions to improve our clients' lives**

supports to NDIS participants in south east Queensland, and last year it expanded its operations to Western Australia.

Aspire Hub helps participants with low to high needs with a range of services, including short to medium-term accommodation, community nursing services, social and community participation, and child safety residential care.

Cherryl Joseph, Aspire Hub Co-founder and Director of Operations, says the housing model has been used for some time at various locations in with great success.

"We are very excited to see the completion of these new apartments in Darra which we anticipate to be in high demand," Joseph says.

"This model of supported independent living is something we have offered clients for some time and we have received

such great feedback, with many of those residences now at full occupancy.

"We believe everyone deserves the right to enjoy freedom and independence within their home, which is why we're passionate about innovating and finding new solutions to improve our clients' lives."

The residences include dedicated living quarters for carers and wheelchair accessibility for select apartments, with the home's design reflecting an innovative approach to disability support, prioritising independence, freedom and choice.

"The design of the homes is quite unique and allows for our participants to increase their independence with space to develop life skills such as cooking and washing while still encouraging interaction through shared living areas," says Joseph.

"This type of accommodation complements a shared living

arrangement funded by the NDIS without having the need for specialist accommodation.

Jayden Smith-Snowden is an 18-year old who has recently transitioned out of child safety into independent living with the NDIS at the Darra apartments.

Jayden says she loves having her own "little space" just for her to live in and being so close to the train station was an added bonus being a convenient 10-minute walk.

She said the independence she has gained in the short time she has resided at Darra has been amazing, in addition to having constant companionship from others who live in the complex.

Being able to live at Darra was important to Jayden because her family had a history of homelessness.

"My mum was homeless; my dad was homeless. My sister is currently homeless,



and so I swore to my mum and to myself before she passed away that I would not end up in her shoes; that I would break the cycle of my family,” she says.

Victorian-based national SDA provider, Empowered Liveability has been helping people with disability own an accessible home for the past six years.

With 65 houses across Australia, providing homes for over 100 participants, Empowered Liveability is supporting people with disability to live on their own terms.

Nicole Doherty, Empowered Liveability Director, said her company was created to empower people with a disability by providing them with tailored accessible living solutions, including young people who have been forced into aged care.

“My background was 20 years in direct care and I had always found people looking for housing and just not being able to find suitable living situations,” she says.

“Hostels, caravan parks and hotels were just a really unsuitable situation.”

The Empowered Liveability team comprises people with disability, or someone who has a child or a family member with disability, as well as several neuro diverse team members who have autism and ADHD.

“We very much come from that lived experience of disability rather than a

real estate background compared to a lot of other developers in the space,” Doherty explains.

“I think for us, it’s very much coming from that understanding that you know specialist disability accommodation [are] participants homes, [and] not so much a workplace.

“Support workers need to work in those spaces, but it’s a home first. And I think understanding that and being able to build and develop and have a service delivery from a participant’s point of view, not from a real estate point of view, has been really valuable for us because even if we take on somebody else’s build, we go in there with that ‘disability lens’ of making sure that the house is actually practical and not just ticking boxes of requirements—it goes above and beyond that for us.”

Doherty says that housing for all of society was extremely important and sadly it was something that not everyone had access to.

“For people with disabilities, being able to have housing that is accommodating to their needs specifically—whether it’s access or sensory—it’s just making sure that inclusion across our community is front of mind,” she says.

Catering for people aged generally between 18 to 65, Doherty says

Empowered Liveability strives to offer lots of different living options.

In Empowered Liveability homes, maximum occupancy for separate housing is capped at a maximum of three people.

“But I think the biggest thing is, as long as the person with disability is actually getting to choose what works best for them, then I don’t think anyone really needs to dictate what needs to apply.

“Because in some cases that works well for people. So, as long as there’s lots of options for people that’s what the whole sector should be sort of moving towards.”

Empowered Liveability recently marked the four year anniversary of its very first tenant, which Doherty says was her favourite success story.

“I was already working with him for a couple of years, and he was not even 30 years old and he was stuck in aged care within a hospital, and he had acquired his disability,” she explains.

“His family had been very passionate about finding him somewhere that was going to work specifically for him and he was able move in within a couple of minutes of his family, in the community that he grew up in and he was able to choose the supports he wanted to work with him.”

In New South Wales, SDA provider Good Housing was born out of a family need for specialty housing.

“So, our lived experience means we truly empathise with the challenges and emotional process associated with finding the right home,” Co-founder and Chief Empowerment Officer Antony Anisse says.

“We are very focused on our tenants’ physical, social and emotional wellbeing throughout the entire tenant journey, pre and post move-in.

“Being vertically integrated as a developer, builder and operator means that we can sustainably produce beautifully designed and conscientious homes that improve the quality of life of our tenants.

“We cater for all design categories—high physical support, robust housing, fully accessible and improved liveability.”

Anisse says everything Good Housing did was governed by an intention to improve individuals’ lives, while transforming the future of specialty housing.

“Despite the progress made in recent years, there are still so many people



with disabilities who are stuck in aged care, hospitals or group homes that don't meet their needs," he says.

"One person stuck in any of these settings is one too many.

"We believe home is where the heart is and everyone should have a place that makes them feel safe and happy. This is why we are not only creating more homes across NSW but have expanded into Victoria and are actively exploring the landscape in other states."

Anisse says at the core of everything Good Housing did, it was crucial any initiative focused on the person living with disability.

"We don't make assumptions about what the tenant wants or needs; we work closely with them and their support network to understand what a good home means for them, and then work backwards from there," he says.

"Collaboration is also essential to creating appropriate SDA. A physical home is just one aspect of what is needed for someone to thrive and feel safe.

"We take a collaborative approach with support providers as well as allied health and clinical care practitioners.

"By doing this, we can do things like ensuring the right assistive technology is incorporated into the home, and that the design truly complements and maximises a person's independence."

Seeing firsthand the difficulties his cousins, and their parents, faced when the decision was made to move their cousins out of the family home into SDA, inspired the establishment of Good Housing.

"The deep concern, guilt and fear of the unknown play out in the minds of all parents when considering a potential forever home for their children," Anisse says.

"When we were looking for accommodation for our cousins, we couldn't find any SDA that had family, radical empathy and a dedicated spirit embedded in their DNA.

"This experience inspired the creation of Good Housing with radical empathy, dedication and innovation as our key pillars and values."

Good Housing began with the goal to create homes where tenants and their families could feel comfortable with the quality of the home, the support provided via support providers and the independence it afforded tenants.

Creating a sense of belonging and safety was paramount, Anisse says.

"We put this into action in our first SDA, Oak Tree in Mount Colah in Sydney, and this is still part of the foundations of all our projects currently under construction in Sydney, Melbourne and regional NSW and Victoria."

However, finding suitable accommodation remains a common challenge for those with disability, Anisse explains.

"Securing the right SDA funding with the NDIA [National Disability Insurance Agency] continues to be a challenge for many individuals, even when there is overwhelming evidence that they need it.

"Often, someone trying to find the right accommodation might need to go through multiple appeal processes within the NDIA before they finally get appropriately funded.

"This can be incredibly frustrating and draining for the person and their family and we support any initiatives that can help make this process easier."

While the Good Housing team has the expertise to navigate such challenges with its tenants, there was only so much that could be done without input from key stakeholders, Anisse explains.

"We have the right resources to address the challenges that people looking for housing face and would welcome engagement with government, hospitals, support providers and allied health providers to facilitate this," he said.

This year Good Housing began its 'Project Good Feeling' initiative, which has been designed to empower tenants and make their transition into accommodation as smooth and hassle-free as possible.

Anisse says, "As a welcome gift, we offer our tenants specially curated furniture packages, which include essential appliances, white goods and stylish furniture pieces."

"We recognise that our tenants may have their own style or own existing furniture, so they can choose to take all, some or none of the package." ●



## A TEAM UNITED

## ...► WHAT YOU GET:

Empowered Liveability stands out among the rest with their remarkable team comprised of PWDs, carers, and seasoned professionals who understand both your property and care support needs.

- ☒ Tailored-fit homes
- ☒ Fully furnished common areas
- ☒ White goods supplied
- ☒ Your choice of supports

*People with disability deserve a personalized approach to their housing journey. With Empowered Liveability you can expect a customized tailored solution.*



Visit Our Website  
[www.empoweredliveability.com.au](http://www.empoweredliveability.com.au)

Contact Us  
1300-974-912



# Empowering individuals with disabilities to achieve their goals through home care services



The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) offers participants funding to purchase the necessary supports and services to live independently. Among the available services is NDIS home care, which includes assistance with cooking, cleaning, personal care and transportation. **By Anthony O'Brien**

Angela Feery-Richards, Director of Simply Helping Franchising



**T**hese services are provided by registered NDIS providers such as disability support workers, nurses or carers. Various home care services are available to support participants. These services focus on keeping participants healthy, safe in their homes, and connected to the community. They can include meal preparation and assistance, household chores, home maintenance, home modifications, assistive technology, social support, and more.

Angela Feery-Richards, Director of Simply Helping Franchising, emphasised the significance of home care services for individuals with disabilities and outlined several notable advantages linked to receiving these services. "Maintaining independence for participants in their home environment, a say in what and how services are provided thereby meeting their needs and objectives as given in their plan." ▶





## Supporting people under 65 with a permanent and significant disability

Australia's aged care services primarily cater to the needs of older individuals, and are not generally intended for those under the age of 65. Younger individuals should only consider aged care as a last resort and, even then, only in specific and limited circumstances.

In order to address this issue, the Federal Government commissioned Ipsos Public Affairs to analyse the situation of younger people residing in residential aged care a few years ago<sup>1</sup>. The government has been actively collaborating with younger individuals, their families and caregivers to prevent the influx of younger people into residential aged care. Various supports are available to assist them including support through the NDIS to find suitable accommodation options that meet their needs.

The effectiveness of these efforts is evident in recent statistics. According to a report from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, the number of Australians under the age of 65 living in permanent residential aged care decreased by 20% between September 2020 and September 2021<sup>2</sup>. The figure dropped from nearly 4,600 to around 3,700 during this period. Similarly, the number of Australians under the age of 45 residing in residential aged care also saw a significant decline of 24%, reducing from 120 to 91 within the same timeframe. These statistics demonstrate the positive impact of the measures taken to address the issue and provide evidence of progress.

In the May Federal Budget, the federal government pledged \$7.3 million to further reduce the number of people under the age of 65 living in residential aged care. However, the jury is out on whether this is enough. According to Adjunct Associate Professor Di Winkler from La Trobe University, since 2020, the federal government has spent more than \$50 million on initiatives that have done little to improve the lives of young people actually living in aged care or those at risk of entry.

Hinkler added that given the lack of progress to date, the three new initiatives to be funded by this \$7.3 million commitment are unlikely to achieve the 2025 target of no younger Australians living in facilities meant for much older people.

### Why are young people in aged care facilities?

According to Hinkler, younger people are typically admitted to aged care facilities after a late-onset disability such as a brain injury or deteriorating with a neurodegenerative condition such as multiple sclerosis.

Two-thirds of younger people enter residential aged care from hospital. They may not be able to return to their previous home because it is not wheelchair accessible, or they need a high level of paid support<sup>3</sup>.

While Australians under 65 who acquire a severe disability are eligible for the NDIS and funding for housing and

support, NDIS processes are slow. Young people can get lost in the gap between the health and disability systems and fall into aged care, says Hinkler.

La Trobe University's recent analysis looked at the pathways into and out of aged care in 2021-22. It shows fewer young people are entering residential aged care each year. In June 2022, 2,934 younger people were in residential aged care, down from 3,899 in June 2021. During the year, there were 553 new admissions. Some 1,518 people left but this was mostly due to people either turning 65 and 'ageing out' or dying.

There are an estimated 3,000 vacancies in disability housing across Australia, 1,000 of which are newly built specialist disability accommodation.

Yet last financial year, only 39 young people left residential aged care to go into NDIS-funded specialist disability accommodation, according to La Trobe University research. More than 500 NDIS participants aged under 65 remain in residential aged care with a goal to move.

So, while the number of young people in residential aged care is diminishing, they are not necessarily finding alternative accommodation, Hinkler notes.

To determine their eligibility for the NDIS, younger people with disabilities or their representatives have the option to undertake an eligibility assessment. They can also contact the NDIS directly and request access to the scheme. There are multiple ways to reach out to the NDIS, including in-person visits, phone calls, emails, webchats or by completing an online form. The NDIS website provides detailed information on the various methods available to contact them.

The NDIS exists to support Australians between the age of seven and 65 living with disability. It aims to support people to live in the community or other settings that are suitable for their age<sup>4</sup>.

For more information and to check your eligibility, visit the NDIS website ([www.ndis.gov.au](http://www.ndis.gov.au)), phone **1800 800 110**

1. <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/analysis-of-younger-people-living-in-residential-aged-care>

2. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/news-media/media-releases/2021/february/900-fewer-younger-people-aged-under-65-living-in-r>

3. [https://assets.summerfoundation.org.au/app/uploads/2023/05/11135847/YPIRAC\\_Targets\\_ASSBI\\_poster\\_11May.pdf](https://assets.summerfoundation.org.au/app/uploads/2023/05/11135847/YPIRAC_Targets_ASSBI_poster_11May.pdf)

4. <https://www.myagedcare.gov.au/support-people-living-with-disability>

► Simply Helping is a care provider founded in regional Victoria in 1998, which is now a franchised business throughout Australia with 19 franchises and around 5,000 clients including disability service users. Its team members are trained and qualified professionals who undergo a rigorous interview process before selection. “All our care workers have all the appropriate competencies and certifications. We provide ongoing training and professional development.”

Feery-Richards emphasises the increasing need for high-quality in-home care. “Whether your requirements are short term, or you need more complex long-term assistance, we offer a wide range of flexible, personalised in-home care, including aged care. Through the NDIS, we have assisted many people to achieve even better outcomes.” At Simply Helping, the team members are also reference checked, police checked, worker screening checked and

hold a current Working with Children Check.

“We prioritise safety and peace of mind. Simply Helping takes pride in delivering professional, considerate and secure in-home care services,” says Feery-Richards.

The foundation of successful in-home care lies in establishing trusting relationships and providing tailored solutions. Simply Helping invests the necessary time to carefully match individual requirements with the skills and experience of their carers. Additionally, a feedback system is in place to ensure participant satisfaction with their assigned carer who is responsible for their wellbeing.

### Empowering NDIS participants to achieve their goals

The community support workers and the team at Simply Helping’s franchise in Central and Northern Melbourne, for instance, demonstrate unwavering commitment and deep passion in assisting NDIS participants in accomplishing their goals. A recent testament to this commitment occurred when Silvia, an NDIS participant, experienced a heart-warming moment as she attended the enchanting *Mary Poppins the Musical* alongside her dedicated support worker, Lauretta.

“We are so proud, on behalf of Silvia, to share her achievement given this is a goal that Silvia says is ‘not just an everyday need but something beyond simply going out into the community,’” Feery-Richards says.

Before the event, Silvia, who lives with a psychosocial disability and encounters anxiety when engaging with the community, took charge by independently securing her tickets and coordinating her participation in the event with Lauretta. Feery-Richards explains, “This was a significant achievement for Silvia given the unfamiliar territory, which she could successfully navigate while demonstrating choice and control.”

As the event day arrived, Silvia and Lauretta eagerly prepared for the occasion. They embraced the joy of getting dressed up and looked amazing. A proud Feery-Richards says, “Lauretta’s authentic and caring nature as a support

## Mun products enhance convenience and promote sustainability

Mun Australia, a provider of medical and homecare solutions, has unveiled two products aiming to bring convenience to the lives of individuals with disabilities and their caregivers. With a focus on enhancing convenience and promoting sustainability, Mun Australia continues to deliver innovative solutions to the home care sector.

The first product on the list is the GloveOn COATS Handy Pack, a pack of 50 gloves that combines high quality with convenience. Developed with the specific needs of the NDIS and retail markets in mind, this handy pack allows nurses and caregivers to purchase a smaller quantity of gloves at a time. This not only grants them more control over their budget constraints but also ensures that they always have access to top-notch gloves whenever needed. Moreover, the GloveOn COATS nitrile gloves have a colloidal oatmeal coating that makes them especially suitable for anyone who has skin sensitivity or dermatitis and they contain moisturising components.

GloveOn COATS has already received many positive reviews about its skin moisturising properties. It helps healthcare workers get on with their important work without worrying about skin allergies and reactions from the gloves.

In line with its commitment to environmental responsibility, Mun Australia has also introduced the GloveOn Avalon biodegradable gloves. Recognising the environmental impact of personal protective equipment (PPE), Mun Australia aims

to contribute to the global effort of minimising waste. These gloves, for example, employ anaerobic digesters for biodegradation, leaving behind no microplastics. By opting for GloveOn Avalon, caregivers and individuals with disabilities can make a conscious choice to reduce their ecological footprint without compromising the quality and effectiveness of the gloves.

“With the increased use of gloves and PPE from the COVID-19 pandemic, more clinical waste is being generated in protecting healthcare workers and the public. As it’s in Mun’s nature to improve the health and wellbeing of our community and environment, we believe GloveOn Avalon will help reduce the impacts of this waste,” says David Teng, Director of Mun Global.

### About Mun

With offices located in Australia, Malaysia and India, Mun is dedicated to producing the best quality gloves across the globe and becoming the leader for premium healthcare products that enhance people’s care, wellbeing and welfare around the world. Every GloveOn® and PrimeOn™ product is created with precision, reliability, integrity and quality. Our gloves, PPE and hand care ranges exceed numerous international standards, including AS/NZS, ASTM, EN and ISO, and are TGA compliant.

For more information on Mun, visit the company’s website at <https://munglobal.com.au>



worker ensured that Silvia felt reassured and in control throughout the whole journey of being transported to the theatre and then participating with a large crowd of people to enjoy the musical."

Silvia says, "My support worker communicated with me throughout the whole day, asking questions about how I was coping and giving me many options so that I felt more secure." The musical was a fantastic event which Silvia thoroughly enjoyed.

Silvia explains that "one of the most important things is feeling like I can participate in day-to-day activities. Having achieved this gives me the confidence to look beyond and try bigger and better things. With the right support, anything can be achieved."

Silvia is excited about her upcoming goal of attending the Melbourne International Flower and Garden Show.

To discover how Simply Helping can aid you and your loved ones, please visit its website at [simplyhelping.com.au](http://simplyhelping.com.au).



IMAGE: Kampus Production from Pexels



## GloveOn COATS® The Revolutionary Gloves For Loving Your Hands

### Experience the All Natural Benefits of Colloidal Oatmeal



Keeps skin hydrated and moist with occlusive and water binding properties



Protects the skin from oxidative damages as an antioxidant



Forms a protective barrier to shield the skin from external irritants.



Preserves the skin's protective barrier function by restoring pH balance



Relieves inflammation, irritation and itch, which facilitates skin recovery



Acts as a natural cleanser by removing dead skin cells



A brand by

**mun**



SCAN  
HERE TO  
LEARN  
MORE

**gloveon**

Left to right; Aspect participant, Marlene Eksteen – Practice Leader and Kathy Hodges – AHA



IMAGE: Supplied

# Allied Health Assistant model revolutionises autism therapy support in regional and remote Australia

76

For more than 55 years, Autism Spectrum Australia (Aspect) has been providing invaluable support to autistic people of all ages, and in 2022 it delivered more than 69,000 hours of therapy support to participants. **By Lisa Calautti**

Marlene Eksteen, Practice Leader



IMAGE: Supplied

**R**oughly, 1 in 70 people in Australia are on the autism spectrum.

Aspect is Australia's largest autism-specific service provider and has one of the biggest autism-specific school programs in the world.

The not-for-profit organisation is inspired by the belief that anyone on the autism spectrum has the right to be an active participant in their community and to make choices about the things that matter to them.

"I believe these values are demonstrated in the work that we do, and the way that we do it," Marlene Eksteen, Practice Leader, says.

"At Aspect, we are positive about what's possible for autistic people of all ages. Our mission is to develop person-centred, family-focused solutions which are flexible, responsive and evidence-informed.

"Across Aspect, we aim to support and empower autistic people, their families and their support networks to bring about meaningful change based on their individualised functional goals."

## An array of services to help people of all ages

Diagnostic assessments for children and adults, as well as creating autism-friendly environments, are among Aspect's services.



**It can be very challenging for families in regional, rural and remote areas of Australia to access regular generic allied health services such as speech pathology and occupational therapy, while autism-specific therapy services are almost non-existent in these areas.**

In relation to NDIS supports, Aspect Therapy offers a range of therapy and positive behaviour supports, including speech pathology, occupational therapy, psychology and social work. It also provides adult day programs and support coordination. Aspect operates nine autism-specific schools with 102 satellite classes across New South Wales and South Australia.

### **Growing demand for therapy support in regional and remote areas**

In rural and remote communities, Aspect's Allied Health Assistant (AHA) Program delivers therapy support under the direct supervision of allied health professionals, such as speech pathologists and occupational therapists.

Aspect's outreach therapists offer these services via fly-in fly-out, or drive-in-drive-out, in addition to implementing a telepractice service model between visits.

"It can be very challenging for families in regional, rural and remote areas of Australia to access regular generic allied health services such as speech pathology and occupational therapy, while autism-specific therapy services are almost non-existent in these areas," Eksteen explains.

"Here at Aspect, we have developed and implemented an outreach AHA workforce to deliver professional, culturally competent services to autistic participants in many local communities in regional, rural and remote communities across Australia.

"An outreach AHA model of service delivery is enabling us to efficiently provide services to more autistic individuals in hard-to-reach locations where the unmet need is great, increasing our ability to meet participant demand and address this need all the while bringing about positive changes for those autistic people we are partnering with through this model."

Autistic people and their families living in rural, regional and remote communities currently benefit from the outreach AHA model. This includes people in Deniliquin, NSW, the northwest coast of Tasmania and the Fraser Coast, Queensland.

### **The origins of the Allied Health Assistant model**

Aspect's first outreach AHA began in 2018, where the service was initially piloted on Norfolk Island.

"It has been lovely to see the demand for these services grow—on the Fraser Coast we initially established an AHA outreach role in Maryborough and, then following an increase demand for these supports, we appointed a second outreach AHA in Hervey Bay, just 30 minutes down the road and we now have a different team of therapists supporting each of these communities," Eksteen explains.

"One of the local NDIS partners in the region indicated that there was a significant decrease in underutilised plans following the introduction of our AHA outreach service into this community.

"On the northwest coast of Tasmania, we also now have two outreach AHAs and two therapy teams supporting the Burnie and Devonport communities, and the demand for services is continuing to grow."

Aspect's outreach AHA program first began as a three day a week offering, but since its inception growing community demand has seen the program's assistants working additional days.

"Historically, AHAs have worked within a medical model of service delivery. Through our innovative program we are proud to have introduced AHAs into the disability sector and see the role they can play in implementing therapy supports to autistic individuals in their local communities. We are working to expand the program to deliver professional, culturally competent services to autistic participants in more rural and regional local communities," says Eksteen. ●

### **PARTICIPANT STORY**

#### **A healthier lifestyle and engaging in community: Mary's empowering transformation**

One of Aspect's participants, Mary\*, had a goal to be more independent and develop new friendships outside of her relationship with her mum. In order to do so, she wanted to develop a healthy routine and lifestyle to be more active so she could socialise within the community.

Working with her AHA, Tammy, and in consultation with an Aspect therapist, Mary was able to establish a routine to take daily medication, an exercise routine and meet with a clinic regarding healthy eating. Tammy and the therapist also looked at Mary's interests and determined one way for her to meet new people might be to join a crochet club.

"With Tammy's help, I got my tablets organised so that when there is a public holiday, and I have no support workers to remind me, I can remember to take my tablets. I also watch what I eat now. I used to drink six cans of Pepsi Max per day, and now I don't drink it at all.

"I like to exercise now too. I walk 30 minutes to an hour every morning, do dance exercise routines at home, and go to water exercise class most weeks. I have even done a Park Run—a 5km walk—a couple of times."

The most significant positive outcome has been in Mary's ability to meet likeminded people and form new friendships, which has now developed into a leadership role to teach others about her crocheting.

Mary's growing confidence and enjoyment of socialising are evident as she ventures out more frequently.

Attending a birthday party without discomfort was a breakthrough moment, allowing her to actively engage in conversations. "I am now looking for more things to do like joining a Farming Forward group."

\*name changed for privacy



# Investing in psychosocial supports: Closing the gap

By Hayley Abell, Director of Strategy and Advocacy, Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia

**O**ver 40 years ago, during the era of deinstitutionalisation, a promise was made to individuals living with severe and complex mental health conditions

and their families and carers. Governments promised that people would receive mental health supports in the community following the closure of institutions. Unfortunately,

despite decades of ongoing advocacy to governments by organisations like Mental Illness Fellowship Australia (MIFA) and people with lived experience, this commitment has yet to be fully realised. We continue to witness a significant gap in psychosocial supports. These are services in the community that assist





**people with their mental health recovery, helping them to navigate the complexity of the social, economic, health and mental health issues they face, so they can live a happy and contributing life.**

In 2020, the Productivity Commission highlighted this gap, shedding light on the urgent need for greater investment in psychosocial supports. There are at least 154,000 people in Australia currently living without support for their severe and complex mental health conditions who require psychosocial supports to live well. This group of people are disconnected from existing

mental health programs and are without mental health supports. In many cases, these are vulnerable individuals who need high levels of support across multiple life domains, like housing, employment and health. They experience disadvantage, discrimination and marginalisation. An element of neglect persists in failing to respond quickly to support this group of people who need help now.

MIFA firmly believes that a national psychosocial support program is the solution to this psychosocial support gap. A national program is needed to ensure every Australian living with a



psychosocial disability can get the support they need when they need it. The establishment and implementation of a national program will enable individuals living with severe and complex mental health conditions to receive the psychosocial support they urgently need to support their mental health recovery.

The need is evident to us and yet we are consistently challenged by the slow traction in this area of mental health reform. Unfortunately, psychosocial supports are not well understood in the community or among politicians, making a new national psychosocial support program a hard sell. It is much easier to unlock funding for perinatal health, children's mental health initiatives, community mental health hubs, and depression and anxiety. Recent federal budgets are full of new investments that support these types of initiatives. With political appetites firmly nestled elsewhere, why do we keep pushing for greater investment in psychosocial supports for people living with severe and complex mental health conditions? It is simple really. Not only is it the logical solution, but the right one for ensuring that people can get the supports they need and deserve.

The transformative power of psychosocial supports cannot be overstated. Psychosocial supports provide individuals with the tools, strategies and resources necessary to manage their symptoms and improve their overall wellbeing. These supports can include therapies, counselling,



## Without appropriate psychosocial support, individuals with severe and complex mental health conditions are at a higher risk of experiencing long-term disability, unemployment, social exclusion and loneliness.

peer support groups, vocational training, daily living programs and social inclusion programs. These services have the capacity to change lives for the better by promoting resilience, better management of mental health and health challenges, facilitating independent living within the community, and supporting people to pursue their personal goals and passions in life.

Investing in psychosocial supports also makes economic sense. Severe and complex mental health conditions often result in significant healthcare utilisation, including frequent hospitalisations and emergency department visits. By investing in psychosocial supports, we can provide individuals with the tools and support to better manage their symptoms and

prevent crises, ultimately reducing the burden on acute care services. This can lead to cost savings for healthcare systems and allow resources to be allocated more efficiently. Right now, emergency departments and hospitals are the only choice for many people. We need more psychosocial support programs in local communities to reach out to people in need to keep people out of costly hospital settings.

Without appropriate psychosocial support, individuals with severe and complex mental health conditions are at a higher risk of experiencing long-term disability, unemployment, social exclusion and loneliness. By investing in psychosocial supports we can empower individuals to regain their independence, reintegrate into society and contribute to the workforce.

Given these evident benefits, one might wonder why the gap in psychosocial supports remains. The answer lies in the complex landscape of national mental health reform, characterised by fragmented and siloed systems, diverse stakeholders with competing interests, and varying degrees of equity. Despite this complexity, there are various mechanisms of national mental health reform currently underway that provide opportunities to remedy the psychosocial support gap. There is a good possibility that we can influence a change in government policy through one or more of these reform pathways to address the psychosocial support gap through the development of a national psychosocial support program.

The first pathway is through the work that is being done by Commonwealth and State and Territory governments under the National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement (the 'National Agreement'). There is a process underway to assess the level of need for psychosocial supports across various jurisdictions so governments can quantify the level of investment needed. South Australia has already completed its own psychosocial supports needs analysis and we are eagerly awaiting on other States and Territories to progress their needs assessments. Under the National Agreement, governments are mandated to complete this work by March 2024.

While the intent to quantify the demand for psychosocial support is commendable, this approach has inadvertently led to a delay. A decision was made in the process of negotiating the National Agreement and associated bilateral agreements that governments would not adopt the psychosocial support estimates calculated by the Productivity Commission. We certainly lament this decision, given the expertise of the Productivity Commission team in conducting these analyses, and the length and breadth of consultation they undertook with the mental health sector and people with lived experience to understand the need for psychosocial supports. Indeed, we can only speculate about why this decision was made. Discussions and negotiations that are undertaken throughout the bilateral



agreement process are a closed-door and confidential. We imagine our government colleagues disagreed about appropriate funding contributions, and responsibilities and accountabilities for the development and oversight of programs to support this group of people.

One element that concerns us greatly is the lack of enthusiasm being displayed to take responsibility for a national program of this kind to support the cohort of people missing out. A national program can be co-funded by the Commonwealth and the States and Territories, with agreed investments, accountabilities and responsibilities for program delivery. We are seeking national oversight to provide a level of consistency and equity, with localised delivery to account for local community needs and resources. While the Commonwealth Government remains silent on any commitment to additional investment in this space, there is no incentive for States and Territories to take the lead and seek to address the gap in psychosocial supports without Commonwealth backing. So we remain in limbo until March 2024.

The second reform pathway is the full-scale review of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). The NDIS Review Panel (the 'Panel') is due to hand down its final report to the Commonwealth Government in October 2023 and is currently undertaking extensive consultation with a wide range of stakeholders. The Panel is seeking to understand how the NDIS can be improved to restore faith in the original vision of an insurance scheme for people with disability who most need it. As part of this review, the Panel is examining the delivery of supports for people with psychosocial disability under the scheme. They are also considering how supports for people with psychosocial disability who are not eligible for the NDIS can be delivered in the community as part of Tier 2 of the NDIS. Tier 2 was originally designed to support people with disability not eligible for the scheme and their primary carers.

There is an important shift in understanding that needs to happen as part of the NDIS review process. For some time now, MIFA has been urging governments to look at the group of people living with severe and complex

mental health conditions as a cohort. There are about 300,000 people in Australia living with severe and complex mental health conditions who require psychosocial supports to live well. Of this group, there are about 60,000 people with primary psychosocial disability (about 10% of all NDIS participants) receiving supports under the NDIS. That leaves about 240,000 people who are not receiving NDIS supports and, of these people, about 154,000 are missing out on mental health supports in the community. It is important to look at these groups of people as a single cohort to understand that we need the NDIS (Tier 3) plus a national psychosocial support program that sits alongside it as part of Tier 2 to support people who are not eligible. The two national programs can work in tandem to support the needs of people who require psychosocial supports to live well.

The need for a national psychosocial support program that sits alongside the NDIS is growing. MIFA has long argued that a national program for people with severe and complex mental health conditions could relieve pressure on the NDIS and provide a more accessible, less traumatic and cost-effective alternative for people to receive supports in their local community. The media has reported on the 'sky rocketing numbers' of future NDIS participants and the enormous associated costs that threaten the sustainability of the scheme. With these concerns fresh and current, the time is now to consider how a national psychosocial support program can be the glue that provides easy access to the supports that people need outside of the NDIS. We envisage streamlined transitions between the two national programs to ensure people get help fast. People with mental health conditions who are found ineligible under the NDIS can be warmly referred to the national psychosocial support program to access services in their local community without all the barriers.

We continue to take every advantage to add these insights and ideas into the national mental health reform processes. As we wait for them to unfold there is another powerful pathway open to us that MIFA actively pursues. MIFA believes that the inclusion and elevation of lived experience voices to the reform

process is fundamental and must be incorporated at every opportunity. We have witnessed the power of lived experience in other national campaigns, such as the impactful Every Australian Counts movement, which continues to shape the trajectory and subsequent refinement of the NDIS. We draw from these experiences to reflect on how we can elevate the perspectives of those who have lived and living experiences of mental health challenges and ensure that their ideas and insights are fully integrated into national conversations.

As part of our national campaign to close the psychosocial support gap, MIFA recently hosted a Parliamentary Friends of Mental Health lunch at Australian Parliament House to amplify the voices of lived experience. Individuals with lived experience and researchers presented to Federal politicians and their advisers, sharing their insights on psychosocial supports and how they improve people's lives for good.

The stories shared by our speakers were nothing short of compelling. They vividly illustrated the transformative effect that access to psychosocial supports can have on individuals' lives. When given the opportunity to engage with these services, their wellbeing improved significantly, and they were able to identify and follow their passions and dreams. Their testimonials serve as a powerful reminder of the way forward—a future where lived experience voices take centre stage in shaping mental health reforms.

To close the gap in psychosocial supports, we must invest in comprehensive and accessible programs that prioritise the needs of individuals with severe and complex mental health conditions. This involves a commitment from all levels of government to bridge the existing disparities and address the challenges hindering the provision of adequate services. It is crucial to involve individuals with lived experience as active participants in the reform process, leveraging their invaluable insights and amplifying their voices to guide policy decisions. It is time to turn promises into action and prioritise the wellbeing of all Australians by investing in comprehensive and transformative psychosocial support programs. ●



82

# Enabling inclusive travel experiences: Leisure Options pioneers accessible travel for all

By Lisa Calautti

**F**or 28 years, Leisure Options has been transforming the aspirations of individuals with

disabilities into reality through their exceptional supported holiday services. As a boutique travel agency based in Port Melbourne, they specialise in making travel accessible for all and offer an array of holidays worldwide. Gary Elliott

and Cathy Boyce, the dedicated operators of the supported travel provider for the past 13 years, consider it a privilege to provide holidays to individuals who may have otherwise been unable to travel.



Gold Coast, Queensland,  
Australia

“They strive to deliver unforgettable experiences and embrace a family-oriented approach to their holidays. By offering comprehensive support, including a roster of experienced disability support workers, they ensure that travellers have access to the necessary assistance throughout their journey.”

a disability, such as accessible taxis instead of regular ones, the difference in this cost can be claimed.

Additionally, if accommodation costs are higher due to the impact of a disability, participants may be eligible to claim the additional expenses associated with an accessible room.

Where individuals require a wheelchair-accessible vehicle for their travels, they may be eligible to request reimbursement for the price difference between renting a standard small vehicle and a larger accessible one. Furthermore, the expenses associated with utilising the services of a provider that specialises in offering diverse supported holidays, personalised travel options and respite care, can also be covered through an NDIS plan.

### More than a travel agent

Typically supported travel extends beyond being a mere travel provider. They strive to deliver unforgettable experiences and embrace a family-oriented approach to their holidays. By offering comprehensive support, including a roster of experienced disability support workers, they ensure that travellers have access to the necessary assistance throughout their journey.

Leisure Options Travel Coordinator, Steven White, says tailoring holidays

### What is supported travel?

Travelling is an inclusive opportunity available to everyone, regardless of their abilities. To this end, the NDIS is designed to provide support and assistance to individuals in pursuing their desired activities, including going on vacations and the expenses involved.

According to My Plan Manager<sup>1</sup>, for example, if a participant requires support workers while traveling, their invoices for direct support time can be claimed as usual from their plan. However, if intermittent support is required during travel, especially during long trips, it is important to negotiate this with a provider to avoid significant expenses.

Furthermore, if portable equipment is required, such as a hoist for bed transfers, the costs of hiring such equipment to assist with everyday movements in a participant's accommodation can be claimed.

To determine what can be claimed, My Plan Manager recommends participants have a conversation with a support coordinator or plan manager. They can assess individual circumstances and goals and provide guidance on eligible claims.

Depending on specific situations, participants may be able to claim certain transportation expenses. For instance, if they have to pay for more expensive transport options due to



## A quick guide to booking a supported holiday

### Travel insurance

Travel insurance is not included in the price, but it is strongly recommended that all travellers obtain the appropriate insurance. It is mandatory for international travel and cruising.

### Airfares

Airfares are not included in the advertised price of any group holiday, except where indicated.

### Departures

All advertised holidays depart from Melbourne. However, travel arrangements from wherever someone lives in Australia can be arranged.

### Accommodation

Small groups have the flexibility to stay in a wider range of accommodation including large houses, offering a more family-style getaway. Most tours will utilise twin-share, but a single supplement option is available on request for an additional charge.

### Active night

Leisure Options can provide checking or intervention during the night. They

can supply a dedicated active night tour leader who will be available when needed. This must be organised prior to departure.

### Tour leaders

All tour leaders have police and national worker checks, current first aid certificates, and access to 24-hour nursing advice and support.

### National Disability Insurance Scheme

The NDIS will provide funding for the staff supports a participant requires to ensure they enjoy a safe and fun-filled travel experience. The amount covered by the NDIS will depend on individual support requirements and the categories in their plan.

While the NDIS will not fund holidays as such, participants can utilise funding within their plan to cover staff supports to ensure they enjoy a safe and fun filled travel experience that aligns with their goals and the aspirations within their plan. The amount covered depends on individual support requirements and what days of the week or weekend they travel.

to help people achieve their bucket list travel destination was just part of their job. "More than simply a travel provider we strive to deliver memorable experiences and embrace a family-style approach to our holidays."

### A dedicated team

The majority of staff possess either a disability or medical background, while others bring expertise from teaching or emergency services. Around 95% of team members are already experienced support workers in the disability sector. To serve NDIS participants across the country, the supported travel provider has staff located in various states. "If we've got a participant who lives somewhere where we're not, and don't necessarily have a staff member, we can certainly look to relocate one of our support staff to them," White says.

Unlike traditional travel agencies, a supported travel provider might have a medical team and has an in-depth understanding of various conditions and necessary accommodation options. By collaborating closely with participants, their support coordinators, family members or advocates, Leisure Options has a meticulous application process to assess and match the required supports for each traveller.

"At Flight Centre, they just don't have access to the support staff to begin with," White explains.

"Plus, because we work solely within the disability space and we have medical professionals on staff as well, we're aware of all the considerations relating to specific conditions and the required supports."

### Overcoming challenges

NDIS participants face distinctive challenges when it comes to travelling, ranging from mobility issues to behavioural considerations. Leisure Options is well-equipped to tackle these obstacles. During the planning phase, they carefully select suppliers, including accommodation and transport providers, ensuring that all facilities meet the accessibility needs of their travellers. Factors like access and mobility are always taken into account, allowing for a seamless and enjoyable travel experience. The agency also maintains two of its own vehicles which



have been modified to accommodate those with mobility aids, including a fully converted Kia Carnival for their wheelchair travellers.

### Types of holidays

Clients can have a variety of different goals relating to their holidays, White explains.

Some individuals aspire to visit specific destinations, such as Disneyland or the Gold Coast, and the agency tailors holidays accordingly to help achieve those dreams. Others may have more modest aims, desiring a short break or a local getaway.

For example, Singapore is a disability friendly city. Often referred to as the “Lion City”, it is the world’s only island city-state. People with disability can get around easily in this multi racial country using public transport via the mass rapid transit train with stops located along many tourist spots. Not only are the entry points to the train stations wheelchair accessible, shopping malls and buses have facilities catering to those with disabilities as well. It is also a family friendly place for children with disabilities as tourist spots like the Night Safari and Gardens by the Bay (where they have free nightly shows) have dedicated ramps, lifts and allocated viewing areas.

The agency recognises that holidays hold different meanings for different people, and their focus lies in assisting participants in experiencing new adventures, enhancing socialisation skills, making new friends and immersing themselves in different cultures.

### Leading provider of supported travel

The supported travel sector is experiencing substantial expansion, evident from the increasing number of companies entering this industry.

In the face of increasing competition, Leisure Options has maintained its position as a leading provider of supported travel, thanks to its years of experience and commitment to excellence. It remains dedicated to its core mission of making dreams come true for participants with disabilities which makes it their travel agency of choice.

**While family members typically do not travel on these holidays, the agency ensures that participants receive dedicated support to enjoy their journey away from home.**

### Unforgettable moments

Leisure Options has numerous success stories, but one recent journey stands out—a special trip for an autistic young man. The gentleman’s mother expressed her amazement at how the supported travel provider enabled her son to enjoy the rides at Disneyland, a feat she had previously been unable to accomplish.

By utilising strategies developed based on the participant’s supports and needs, the agency ensured that he could partake in exciting activities, such as enjoying the thrilling amusement park rides.

### Support and respite

Leisure Options primarily focuses on providing participants with the

necessary support to travel independently, offering respite to families and regular support systems. While family members typically do not travel on these holidays, the agency ensures that participants receive dedicated support to enjoy their journey away from home.

“We are providing the support to enable them to travel away from their family, or away from their regular supports,” White explains.

“Often, it’s a respite scenario.

Often the families might say, ‘We’re booking our holiday on these dates. Can you take such and such a way during this period?’” ●

1. <https://myplanmanager.com.au/get-away-using-ndis-funding-for-a-holiday/>


**Leisure Options**



## Australia's Supported Travel Experts Since 1994

- Small Group or Individualised Packages
- Beach House Respite Options
- Registered Travel Agent
- Accredited Tourism Business
- Unique and Tailored Experiences
- Qualified and Experienced Team

We support the



Registered  
NDIS Provider





**P: 1300 363 713**  
**E: [mail@leisureoptions.com.au](mailto:mail@leisureoptions.com.au)**  
**[www.leisureoptions.com.au](http://www.leisureoptions.com.au)**



# More Risk, More Play: Creating an Inclusive Culture

In this excerpt from writer and arts consultant, Morwenna Collett, she “asks what would Australia look like if we actually embraced diversity ‘in all its glory?’” **By Morwenna Collett**

**I**n *More Risk, More Play: Creating an Inclusive Culture*, arts consultant Morwenna Collett, asks what Australia would look like if we actually embraced diversity ‘in all its glory’. When we talk about diversity, race and gender immediately spring to mind, but it is much broader and more complex than that. Writing as a proud disabled woman, she argues that the truth is we all have accessibility requirements: it’s just the way we design our world that makes it easy for some to enjoy our culture and hard for others. Access is just another way of describing ‘the good life’, because it is the essence of belonging and community. The choices we make—economically, geographically,

linguistically, socially, architecturally, technologically—put Australian culture in or out of reach. Ultimately, access and its associated values of diversity, equity and inclusion, are about ending discrimination by examining very closely the way we treat each other in all of our relationships.

## **Diversity is broader than race**

Celebrating diverse perspectives and embracing other kinds of lived experience is essential if the Australian arts and culture sector is to produce exceptional art and sell more tickets. But what will it take, whose responsibility is it, and how would it inform the hearts and minds of arts

practitioners and audiences across the country? The arts sector has found it hard to embrace diversity in the past, and failed to answer important questions, but there is an increasing appetite for it across the mainstream arts sector.

I write as a proud disabled woman and an experienced practitioner who has been working in the arts and for arts funding bodies all my adult life. That’s taken some doing and I acknowledge my good fortune in being able to do it when the barriers for many others are too high. My views have been shaped by my own experiences and those of the people and organisations I’ve worked with, and I’m sharing, now, the things I



think we need to think about, and what the future could look like if we acted.

Access, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (ADEI) are essential to Australian culture, not just in the arts but in everything we do and everything we are. It's about fairness, it's about basic human rights, it's about representation and most of all it's about belonging and community. Ultimately, ADEI is about the way we treat each other. People have different needs and we need to build workplaces that work for everybody by removing the barriers to participation—it's common sense and responsible business practice.

But people's lives are also multi-dimensional—we all have many facets to our identities and may experience multiple forms of marginalisation. This is one of the reasons working in the ADEI area is so challenging. Can we create a 'one-stop-shop' Diversity Plan or do we need specific plans, such as a Reconciliation Action Plan, Disability Inclusion Action Plan and Gender Equity Action Plan? A long shopping list of under-represented groups can be overwhelming for an under-resourced arts organisation—just knowing where to start can seem like an impossible task—but it is better to dive in and get on with something, than sit back and try and figure it all out in advance while doing nothing at all.

When the pressure is on, it can become harder for arts organisations to do things like ADEI voluntarily. As a consultant, I've seen a lot of willingness to do better on the part of organisations, but without funding avenues and support, how can they make practical changes? Ultimately, for ADEI in the arts to succeed, governments will have to play a significant role. Change will only be possible if it is built into its systems and structures and supported with funding, but there are a few things individuals and organisations can do.

First, be a good ally. Read, listen, watch, converse. Educate yourself and learn. Lead by example. Call things in and call things out. Create space for others—if you're not someone with lived experience of diversity yourself, ask whether someone with lived experience has been booked for the panel you've been invited to speak on and if not,

recommend someone—offer to give up your seat. Think about how things can be done differently, more fairly and more inclusively. A beautiful ally-friend recently told me how she'd applied for a job she really wanted, but, conscious of the value of that leadership role, she proposed a job share with a diverse artist in the interview. That's an example of a good ally to me.

Second, plan for it. Benjamin Franklin was onto something when he said, 'by failing to plan, you are preparing to fail.' ADEI progress doesn't happen overnight, only if you chip away at it over time. Develop a strategy, policy or plan—whatever floats your boat. And take inspiration from others. We don't have to re-invent every wheel. There's much to love about the Sydney Opera House's 'Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Strategy'. I'm sure they won't mind if you borrow a bit.

Third, make sure you resource it. It costs money to do things. Has your organisation got a budget line for accessibility and DEI projects? Get people behind it and debate whether you need a Diversity and Inclusion Director or Manager (please don't make them an Officer or Coordinator—this stuff is hard) OR ... do you just make ADEI part of everyone's role? Both options can work. Appointing everyone to a task can be a dangerous game with no one ultimately responsible, but you also have to keep an eye out for the dangers of 'silos': 'I don't have to do that ADEI thing in my area that is actually my job, because our D&I Manager should do it!' None of that, please.

Finally, don't be shy about using both sticks and carrots. Consider where you can actively encourage diversity and discourage homogeneity in your workplace. Identify both incentives and disincentives. Set quotas, targets or KPIs for diversity in your work. Can you offer an opportunity to someone or a group of people from an under-represented background? Can you expose a lazy department or division that has got its head in the sand? Be creative: we're arts organisations after all.

In the end, we all need to start somewhere. It doesn't have to be perfect on day one. The sky is the limit for what we might invent and the

avenues we might create to provide support and encouragement. To those who have power and privilege: consider how you can use this power for good and what incentives and deterrents you could put in place. With the backing of governments, arts and culture has made considerable progress in advancing ADEI over the last few years, and it seems its time is now. What we need next is greater wider support and funding to ensure our arts organisations and processes can be designed and implemented with diversity in mind.

We all have a responsibility and a role to play in creating an accessible, diverse, equitable and inclusive Australian culture. Let's create it together. There are lots of new voices and stories to be heard across Australia.

In 2022, Melbourne Fringe and Chunky Move commissioned a welcome new work from Fayen d'Evie through the Radical Access program in partnership with Arts Access Victoria. That's great, but why should a \$40,000 commission for a d/Deaf and disabled artist be called radical? It really shouldn't be. I'm confident it won't be by 2033. ●

This is an edited extract from Morwenna Collett's, *More Risk, More Play: Creating an Inclusive Culture*, in a double issue of Currency House's New Platform Paper, available free on [www.currencyhouse.org.au](http://www.currencyhouse.org.au)



# Advertiser Index

Aruma	42, OBC
Australia and New Zealand Banking Group (ANZ)	6, 50
Australian Ramp and Access Solutions	4
Autism Spectrum Australia (Aspect)	15
ConnectAbility Australia	31
Empowered Liveability SDA	71
Endeavour Foundation	2
EPIC Assist	61
eTrack NDIS Software	47
Focus on Ability Film Festival	1
Freedom Solutions Australia	46
Interaction Disability Services	20
Leap in! Plan Management	32
Leisure Options ,Äi Holidays and Travel	85
Life Without Barriers	58, 64
Lumary	16
Mun Australia	75
NOVA Employment	IFC
Placeable Solutions	5
Quantum Rehab	11
Rocky Bay	39
ShiftCare	49
Simply Helping	IBC
SPC Global	26
Tunstall Healthcare	8
Vana Care	38
Well Health Care	21



ANY AGE. ANY PLACE.  
SIMPLY HELPING YOU.

aged care  
disability care  
respite care  
domestic assistance  
social support  
gardening  
pet sitting/dog walking  
transport

Personalised,  
flexible in-home  
care services

**New South Wales**

Illawarra 02 4244 3470  
Sydney West 02 9623 6655  
Liverpool 0479 070 119

**Queensland**

Cairns 0458 720 217

**Western Australia**

Lower North Perth 08 9371 9115

**Victoria**

**Melbourne**

Bayside & Peninsula	] 03 9574 0924
Inner & South Eastern	03 9661 0499
Central and Northern	
Eastern	] 0448 225 177
Greater Eastern	
North East	03 9001 8585
Outer South Eastern	0406 316 334

**Regional**

Cntrl HghLnds & Djerriwarrh	03 5341 8046
Geelong & Barwon	03 5261 4808
Gippsland South & West	03 9799 4676
Goulburn Valley	03 5795 1635
Loddon Mallee	03 5486 0203
South West	03 5381 2076

[simplyhelping.com.au](http://simplyhelping.com.au)



PROUDLY SUPPORTING

 **The Fred Hollows  
Foundation**

  
Registered NDIS Provider



**simply  
helping**  
In-home Care & Support Service

# support services are like your favourite pair of undies they need to be a good fit

Want a disability service provider who puts you first?

With our range of services, we're sure there's one or more that will be a perfect fit for you.

You know how to live your best life, and we're here to help you do just that.

Call us on 1300 538 746  
or scan the QR code below



**aruma.**  
Disability services. Putting you first.