

# Annual Report 2023





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# About National Disability Services



National Disability Services (NDS) is Australia's peak body for non-government disability service organisations. Our diverse network of more than 1150 members, who range in size from small support groups to large multi-service organisations, provide the full range of services available to people with disability.

NDS promotes the full social and economic participation of people with disability by working with our members to develop capability, be informed and voice their needs.

The collective experience of our members has been NDS's heart and soul for more than 75 years, filling and shaping the body of knowledge that the sector relies on.

We believe that the strength of disability service providers is enhanced by a shared voice, collaboration, learning and mutual experiences. We are stronger when we work together.

## Effective and smart advocacy

We're here to help members navigate challenges and drive innovation. From offices in every state and territory, our local teams bring deep local knowledge to all the services they provide, together with a broader understanding of policy.

We also have strong relationships with governments and their departments, and work collaboratively with stakeholders across the disability sector to advocate for policy improvements. NDS members enjoy frequent opportunities to contribute to policy development, ensuring our policy positions draw on good practice and robust evidence.

## Timely insights and analysis

With the complexity of challenges facing the sector and the rapid pace of change and reform, having a trusted source of news and analysis has never been more important. We work hard to keep our members informed through:

- regular updates on local and national issues
- exclusive access to submissions, news, policy papers, case studies, research, webinars, project-related information, hubs and more
- exclusive access to the NDS Helpdesk, an online platform where you can ask questions about the NDIS and disability employment
- member-only webinars and events.

## Networking, collaboration and sharing of knowledge

NDS members enjoy regular opportunities to pool resources, exchange ideas, and talk, learn, teach and listen. Along with our local and national conferences, events and communities of practice, NDS contributes to individual and organisational capability-building through an extensive suite of learning and development solutions specifically designed to address sector needs.

## Tools, resources and services

NDS members have access to professional advisory services and discounts on a range of partner products and services. We're committed to lowering the cost of doing business, so our members can free up financial resources for what matters most — delivering the best possible service for people with disability.



# National Disability Services Impact

From 1 July 2022 to 30 June 2023

## Membership at 30 June 2023

<b>747</b> Organisational Members	<b>427</b> Organisational Associates	<b>60</b> Industry Supporters	<b>13,422</b> NDP members
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	<b>100,000</b> Workforce employed by NDS members	<b>500,000</b> People with disability supported by NDS members	
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	<b>23</b> Policy submissions to government	<b>975</b> Media mentions in major media	
	<b>471</b> News updates posted on website	<b>1.6 million</b> Webpage views	
	<b>56,197</b> Social media followers across LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook	<b>3,411</b> National Community of Practice members	
	<b>181</b> Events held	<b>16,836</b> Event attendance	
	<b>194</b> Learning and Development workshops	<b>87,136</b> Learning and Development community users	

## President and CEO's report

In 2022–23, the energy and focus of the sector was dominated by the establishment of the NDIS Review. Due to report by October 2023, the Review is seen by many in the sector as an opportunity to reset the scheme and fulfil its promise.

Of course, other important issues have drawn our attention, but always we were drawn back to the Review and the need to make sure that the views of providers were heard and heeded. So, it has been a year of listening to members, developing policies and positions, and making numerous submissions. We have spoken directly to the Review's Co-chairs as well as Minister Shorten and his office.

And it was gratifying to read, within their five key challenges and ten priority areas, much of what we had been telling them. Though we can be sure that plenty of advocacy lies ahead to make sure those recommendations become effective reforms for providers.

Meanwhile, we did not slacken on other advocacy. The Disability Royal Commission wound up its hearings in mid-2023, and CEO Laurie Leigh appeared in Hearing 32, arguing that the final recommendations need proper funding to cover the costs of training and time. We made a similar argument during the Quality and Safeguards Commission's Own Motion Inquiry into SIL. Everyone agrees that the disability workforce needs to be better trained to guarantee safe practices, but proper funding is crucial. Providers simply



can't afford to put more time and money into training under the current pricing model.

Despite our strong submission, the 2023–24 Pricing Review did not cover providers' rising costs. It placed our members under even greater financial stress. Although there was an average 5.3 per cent increase for wage related elements in the cost model, the lack of any increases for non wage related costs, for therapy supports, level two and three support coordination, and plan management reinforced our conviction of the need for an independent body to monitor and set prices.

In 2022–23, COVID-19 dropped into the background. It was no longer the overriding concern for most providers, which allowed the sector to get a good look at itself without pandemic measures distorting the image. Our 2022 State of the Disability Sector Report revealed providers struggling through workforce and pricing issues, weighed down by regulatory burden, and fearing for their economic viability.

But a new federal government with a more positive approach to the NDIS and a promise of reform gave many a cause for optimism. If,

as the peak body for disability services, we were sometimes daunted by the amount of work set before us, we were always energised by the determination in the sector to make the scheme work.

Within our organisation, NDS Strategy – Towards 2025 was bedded down over the year. Our commitment to sector change through effective and smart advocacy for our members became the driving force of NDS and second nature to our staff.

Our new organisational structure allowed us to beef up our lobbying efforts and give our state and territory managers more time for members. And our move to a more inclusive model of communities of practice for our national forums has increased the circulation of ideas and knowledge among members. Internally, we have been redeveloping our computer and communications systems to better and more easily speak to our members. We have become a more effective organisation.

Throughout the year we kept up the full range of member services: holding events, meetings and conferences, creating training resources, building networks, and keeping our members well-informed.

Clearly a member favourite, our Hot Topics Breakfasts brought the big issues down to earth and gave members in each state a rare chance to network with their peers. The networks are bigger and richer at our annual conference, which has been refreshed for 2023 as NDS's Executive Leaders Conference. Held over two days in December, we present our State of the Disability Sector report and pack the agenda with as much insight and information as we can arrange. The sector we serve is large and varied and our aim is to be the common factor and benefit for our members.

In this period of reform, NDS has also been looking at how we need to change. Last

November, the NDS Board proposed that members change the NDS Constitution to allow the inclusion of for-profit disability service providers as full organisational members. We have consulted extensively with members on this issue during the year and in response have developed a stronger governance framework and enhanced policy positions which, together with the proposed changes, ensure that NDS remains reflective of our history and the sector.

The Board and management believe that broadening our membership, while retaining a strong connection to our non-profit heartland, will make us a more powerful voice for disability service providers across Australia. The proposal will be voted on by members at the AGM on 24 November.

We would like to thank the members of our Board and our state and territory committees for all their hard work this year. Thanks, too, to our staff, who are unflinchingly diligent and dedicated.

Finally, we would like to thank our members. Our discussions and consultations with you are always productive. You keep us informed, on our toes and inspired. You are the reason we are here, and we are committed to serving your interests.



**Rohan Braddy**  
President



**Laurie Leigh**  
CEO

# Policy and advocacy

The incoming Federal Labor Government set a busy agenda for reform of the disability sector in 2022, with the NDIS Review getting under way and the Disability Royal Commission holding its final hearings, as well as a host of reforms around workforce, disability employment, and quality and safeguards.

As Australia's peak body for disability service providers, NDS pursued an active advocacy program throughout 2022–23, working closely with policy makers, working groups and peak bodies to ensure that providers views and practical knowledge of the scheme are recognised as an essential ingredient of reform.

We continued to maintain a good working relationship with the new federal government and have regular and productive discussions with Ministers Shorten and Rishworth, and federal government departments and agencies.

We made submissions on topics ranging from rising costs and workforce challenges to the need for more provider input into the pace of reform.

In each state and territory, meanwhile, our teams developed new ways to connect with our members and new forums to convey their concerns. In between meetings with state and territory ministers and their advisors, we contributed facts and ideas to a vast range of steering groups, plus think tanks, statutory bodies and community networks.



As to results, while an announcement of an eight per cent NDIS sustainability target caused concern, and finding insurance remains a serious issue, the year saw progress on a wide range of fronts. These included more investment in NDIA processes and resources for the NDIS Commission. NDS's growing influence could also be seen in new measures around planning and decision making, the new payments for School Leaver Employment Supports and the announcement of support for young people to leave residential aged care.

Still, plenty of problems remain, with the review of pricing a core concern and anxiety about the complexities of the NDIA's new PACE computer system.

With the NDIS Review soon to be delivered, it's more important than ever that governments partner with industry to develop long-term solutions that guarantee service availability and quality. And we're working harder than ever to make sure that they do.

## NDIS reform

Anyone wishing for a quieter year on the NDIS front in 2022–23 would have been disappointed. By announcing a wide-ranging review of the NDIS, Minister Shorten put the focus firmly back on reform. Led by an independent panel, the NDIS Review represents a once-in-a-decade opportunity for NDS members to help design the NDIS of the future.

That's why — in consultation with members and armed with research-based evidence — we worked to advocate for:

- fair and independent pricing of supports
- better planning, localised decision making and more effective communication
- a reset of the NDIS Quality and Safeguarding Framework and better processes to support participant safeguarding
- greater recognition of the role of planning and pricing as a driver of quality supports
- an NDIS Workforce Plan that recognises longstanding workforce issues.

We also responded to issues with the Disability Support for Older Australians program, and launched a research project into how better pricing and payment processes might lead to better outcomes all round.

## Not a One Stop Shop report

As part of NDS's research and advocacy efforts, we commissioned a major report to mark the tenth anniversary of the NDIS scheme. Not a One Stop Shop looks at

the future of mainstream and community-based disability services, or 'foundational supports', as funding and volunteers reach a critical low. The research suggests that without adequate services, people with disability are at greater risk of needing an NDIS funding package or increased NDIS supports.

## Pulse survey

Following the 2023-24 Annual Pricing Review and after hearing the concerns of members about the inadequate pricing environment, we conducted a Pulse Survey to gather the early views of members. Swiftly conveyed to the Review Panel and Minister for the NDIS, the results showed:

- 83 per cent of providers say they are concerned about their ability to deliver disability services using the new price limits in this financial year
- 32 per cent of providers had trouble accessing insurance required to run their disability services in the last 12 months
- 59 per cent of providers expressed concern that their organisation does not have the capacity to adapt to the NDIA's new PACE computer system.

## State of the Disability Sector

Throughout 2022–23, we gave policy makers up-to-date research and data via our annual State of the Disability Sector Survey. Examining every level of government, the survey told a story of cumbersome processes, unsustainable staffing and a pricing structure that does not cover costs. Concern also remains that unfunded activity, such as helping participants navigate the scheme, is distracting from direct service provision. NDIS participants simply need more support.

## Pricing issues

The need for fairer and more transparent pricing remained a major focus throughout 2022–23. NDS undertook a detailed examination of the real costs of providing quality supports, with the research revealing a significant and growing failure to fund the cost of operating, quality control and compliance.

Yet despite this research, the NDIA announced an average increase of just 5.3 per cent of wage-related elements in the cost model, well below the inflation rate. Therapy supports, plan management and level two and three support coordination received no increases for the fourth year in a row – in what was effectively another price cut that will force out providers.

Too many of our members are already operating with dwindling cash reserves and slim profit margins. They too often rely on short-term measures, such as the temporary loading and the temporary transformation payment, to bridge the gap. Unfortunately, many of these measures will be phased out entirely in 2024, which will further challenge the sector's ability to meet the needs of participants.

The ever-changing landscape of the disability sector, including the changes to SIL and the Quality and Safeguarding Framework, and the new PACE computer system, requires constant adaptation and innovation. NDS is concerned that the current prices for essential supports are not enough to cover the costs of doing business. Simply surviving is enough of a struggle; adapting to reforms from the Royal Commission and NDIS Review may be a burden too many.

NDS has written to Minister Shorten with these concerns. We are seeking feedback from providers to use in our advocacy to government. Time is running out for too many providers. This gap needs to be closed.



## Housing issues

### Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA)

Australia is experiencing a severe shortage of safe, affordable housing for people with disability. Too much housing stock is old and no longer suitable or located in undesirable areas. Larger group homes, which tend to house people with similar support needs together, do not fit in with the new ethos of choice and control for participants.

And if, for participants, much of the legacy and basic housing is unattractive, for providers, it is increasingly expensive to own and maintain. The approval processes for SDA are fragmented, confusing and slow and, consequently, in many places, we have the contradiction of high demand with high rates of vacancy.

NDS argues for more investment by state and federal governments to meet current and future demand. And there should be greater incentives for the private sector to build accessible housing.

In June 2023, the NDIA released the SDA Pricing Review 2022–23, the first comprehensive review of the assumptions and methodology behind SDA prices. The NDA made a submission to the Review.

The report reconsidered how disability housing is categorised and the assumptions behind determining vacancy rates. It outlined a range of SDA price increases that will help the long-

term sustainability of the SDA market. NDS was generally satisfied with the review, but we noted that several of the key parameters in the pricing model still need updating.

### Supported Independent Living (SIL) issues

Supported Independent Living providers suffer the same general problem as most other supports: the cost model does not accurately reflect the real price of providing services. We argue that adequate pricing, added to proper funding for training, will go some way to create a healthy SIL environment.

In January, the Quality and Safeguards Commission delivered the report of its Own Motion Inquiry into SIL. It looked at more than 7000 reportable incidents and complaints over the past four years and found three broad causes: the capability and culture of the workforce, the complexity of SIL settings and participant needs, and poor communication and lack of transparency.

When the report came out, NDS published our response. Firstly, we agreed with the report's view that any abuse, neglect or exploitation of people with disability is unacceptable. We said the report was a well-considered examination of these issues in SIL. Indeed, it reflects what we have been raising with government, the NDIA and the Commission for a long time.

## Workforce issues

NDIS represents one of the largest job creation opportunities in Australian history. It has been estimated that the disability workforce will need to grow by an additional 83,000 full-time equivalent staff by 2025, while a further 213,000 workers will be needed to replace those leaving the industry.

So why aren't we seeing more growth? Although 2022–23 saw a return to stability after the dramatic dip that came with COVID-19, many providers still found it difficult to attract suitably skilled, qualified and resilient workers or retain many of those who were already on board.

Stability is simply not good enough in a sector that is growing as fast as ours. And with significant wage reforms in rival sectors enticing ever more workers away, there is no reason to be sure that it will even continue.

The disability sector is ready and willing to work with the Federal Government to update the Disability Workforce Plan. That's why NDS continued to highlight workforce shortages throughout 2022–23 and shine a bright and constant light on the need for reform.

### Working Groups

NDS was proud to co-chair the NDIS Workforce Industry Reference Group throughout 2022–23. Comprised of government, unions, employers, training and employment service providers, First Nations workers and people with disability, the group put together the bones of a comprehensive NDIS Workforce Strategy. Australia needs fewer short-term disability jobs and more disability careers. And we need those careers to be well-paid and fulfilling.

### NDIS Jobs and Skills Forum

Hosted by Minister Shorten and attended by

NDIS participants, their families, the wider disability sector and unions, this major forum saw NDS urge the government to consider a range of reforms. Chief among them was a national Allied Health Workforce Plan to map workforce gaps and implement strategies to meet projected needs.

### Workforce advocacy

With major reform processes already underway, NDS continued to meet with ministers and senior departmental executives to advocate for an independent pricing authority and blended payments to fund training outside of participant plans.

### Workforce Census

Comprehensive reform requires comprehensive data, and NDS continued to provide it throughout 2022–23. Released in June, our Workforce Census revealed that although the worsening conditions of recent years have stabilised, the disability sector workforce remains precarious with continued undersupply and a high turnover rate.

This could worsen as significant wage reforms in parallel industries, such as aged care, are seeing support workers jump ship.

### SCHADS Award variations

The year saw further variations to the SCHADS Industry Award, with homecare employees split into aged care and disability streams, depending on who they are working for. As we pointed out in our pricing submission, providers now need to mediate the two pay rates with any home care workers who perform household tasks for both NDIS participants and aged care consumers.



### NDP Workforce Virtual Conference

Held in June, the 2023 NDP Workforce Virtual Conference focused on the daunting challenges and exciting possibilities of recruiting and retaining staff in the disability sector. Over 330 attendees heard from a wide range of experts in workplace wellbeing speak on topics such retention, self-care, diversity, supervision and developing leaders in disability.

### Think Support

In WA, NDS contributed to attracting young people into careers in the sector via the ThinkSupport social media campaign. The next phase of the campaign will target men and First Nations workers. Keep an eye out for the launch of the new #ThinkSupport campaign release later this year on both social media and selected Aboriginal radio stations.

### Job Matching Service

Also in WA, NDS continued to broker relationships between providers and employment and training agencies via the NDIS Job Matching Service. Working up and down the state, we identified local barriers to recruitment and attempted to remove them through workforce planning consultancy services and providing up-to-date information on state and federal training and employment schemes. We also brokered a number of strategic relationships with local training and employment providers.

## Enterprise Training Program

A joint pilot project between NDS, the WA Department of Communities and WA Department of Training and Workforce Development, this groundbreaking program saw more than 1000 staff attend almost 20,000 hours of subsidised training.

## Gateway to Industry Schools project

In Queensland, NDS continued to build links between schools and industry. Designed to help Queensland school students potentially choose and pursue a disability career, the Gateway Project's 29 participating schools operate out of Bundaberg, Logan, Maryborough, Toowoomba, North Brisbane, Bayside and Ipswich.

## Entry to Care Roles Project

In Victoria, NDS placed 21 young people into disability support careers as part of a program that identified suitable job seekers, helped train them up, and put them in touch with a suitable employer.

## Workforce Retention Project

Funded by the Victorian Government, NDS's Workforce Retention Project continued to develop tools and resources throughout 2022–23 to help providers retain quality staff.

## National Workforce Community of Practice

NDS's National Workforce Community of Practice had another productive year in 2022–23, sharing knowledge on good practice, government policy and industrial relations laws. Some of the year's major discussion points included the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility Scheme, the Fair Work Legislation Amendment (Secure Jobs, Better Pay) Act

2022 and the new NDIS Workforce Capability Framework

## Workforce networks and roundtables

Throughout 2022–23, the NDS Workforce Team continued to explore new ways to attract good candidates, retain good workers, encourage resilience and improve supervision.

## Courageous Leadership Program

In SA, NDS developed and launched a leadership program to support leaders and emerging leaders in our member organisations to develop skills and resilience.

## Disability Workforce Development and Retention Fund

Launched in WA, this fund expands and develops quality services in regional areas. To that end, NDS signed grant agreements with 13 organisations throughout the year, for programs to:

- help allied health therapists transition from other sectors
- help disability support workers achieve a formal qualification through the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) process.
- provide culturally appropriate, place-based training and mentoring for Indigenous workers, as well as entry level pathways
- develop a series of social inclusion learning modules and other professional education resources
- establish a mentorship program
- develop competence in telehealth
- identify professional development opportunities for therapists, with mentorship and clinical supervision
- develop a leadership transformation program, an employee value proposition and a series of community recreation e-learning modules.



## Disability employment issues

Ensuring that more people with disability can gain and retain work remained a major challenge throughout 2022–23. Almost 23,000 participants left the Disability Employment Services (DES) program during the year, adding to troubles with increasing costs, issues with Star Ratings and a stagnant rate of employment.

On supported employment, NDS continued to work with a range of stakeholders on our Industry Vision for Supported Employment. The Australian Government issued its 12 guiding principles for the future of supported employment.

The government is developing an Employment Action Plan for 2023–24, while measures in the \$57 million federal budget supported employment package have also been welcomed. These measures included a grants

program for disability social enterprises, Jobs Expos, consultation on a disability job procurement initiative, disability employment advocacy and an information program for participants and their families.

## Social Wage

With so many supported employment providers under pressure throughout 2022–23, NDS continued to advocate for a Social Wage to supersede the current pro-rata wage arrangements. We believe that a social wage would ensure more transparency and less complexity, together with wage rates that meet Australia's obligations under the UNCRPD.

## Disability at Work Conference

Attended by hundreds of employment providers, NDS's Disability at Work Conference explored new ways to create employment opportunities for people with disability, and discussed ideas for a Vision for Disability Employment.



### New wage structure in the SES Award

NDS worked closely with members throughout the year to help them prepare for the new wage structure in the SES Award. This included developing a Good Practice Guide and a comprehensive Question and Answer document and organising a DSS presentation on the Supported Wage System assessment process.

### Supported Employment Roundtable

In October, NDS's CEO attended a roundtable on the future of supported employment hosted by the Minister for Social Services, Amanda Rishworth. We'll be meeting with state and territory disability ministers, supported employees, supported employment providers and peak bodies to consider a way forward at this crucial time for the sector.

### Industry Vision for Supported Employment

In 2022–23, NDS continued to work with members to implement the Industry Vision for Supported Employment. Along with regular Vision Community of Practice meetings (on topics such as Business Transformation, Social Enterprise Models and the future of wage setting in supported employment), this work saw us publish the results of the second member survey and data collection exercise.

### BuyAbility

Throughout 2022–23, NDS continued to maintain the BuyAbility website, an important information resource for existing and potential customers of Social Enterprises, as well as jobseekers and employees with disability.

### Disability Employment Services

DES providers operated in an uncertain environment throughout 2022–23 as preparations for the new contract in 2025 gathered momentum. Complicating life further was the suspension of the DES Star Ratings following the inclusion of compromised and obsolete data.

In the absence of a performance framework, NDS worked with members and the DSS on the phased introduction of the new DES quality framework, ensuring that the views and experiences of people with disability will be prominent in measuring DES provider performance. We also sought an improved interface between DES and NDIS participant employment supports and emphasised the need for greater transparency and consultation.

### Diversifying Disability Employment

In Tasmania, NDS wrapped up a year-long project in which 67 workplaces underwent disability awareness training, resulting in the



identification of 36 immediate vacancies that were earmarked for people with disability to fill.

### Community of Practice Webinars

Throughout the year, NDS's Industry Vision Communities of Practice webinars explored mainstream and community-based employment. We also offered workshops on the many commercial benefits of social enterprises.

### Quality and Safeguards issues

The right of people with disability to feel safe and be supported by quality services was a key focus of the NDIS Review as well as the ongoing work of the Disability Royal Commission. It remained a key priority for NDS policy and advocacy in 2022-23 as we engaged regularly with the Quality and Safeguards commission on issues such as reducing the regulatory burden on providers.

NDS members also continued to do their part — conducting training, improving supervision, reviewing incidents and refining roles. This work can be complex and affected by external

factors, but there can be no doubt that it's worth doing well.

There can also be no doubt that unnecessarily complicated or time-consuming processes can do more harm than good. That's why NDS remains committed to working with all stakeholders to streamline the participant safeguarding system.

### Regulatory Burden Workshops

Throughout the year, NDS, with the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission, hosted a series of virtual and in-person workshops. The goal was for providers to voice their concerns about regulatory levers that create work without contributing to safer outcomes. Worker screening delays and the unlevel playing field of registration were also identified as issues.

### Practice Standards

The introduction of the High Intensity Support Descriptors around Practice Standards added yet another layer of confusion around audit expectations, training and the increasing health needs of participants. NDS continues to advocate in this space for increased education and clarity.

## NDIS Participant Safeguarding Proposals Paper

NDS's submission to the NDIS Review on Participant Safeguarding outlined several opportunities for improvement. These included doing more to:

- identify and share good practice
- clarify the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders and how they help ensure safety
- strengthen advocacy for people with disability
- support participants to develop and maintain informal networks
- identify and manage risks and enable a quick response.

## NDIS Quality and Safeguarding Framework issues paper

Designed to replace the old patchwork of quality and safeguarding systems, the NDIS Quality and Safeguarding Framework should also help providers keep everyone safe while supporting participants to exercise choice and control.

Towards that end, NDS spent 2022–23 pushing for:

- embedding minimum standards and greater oversight for all supports, particularly where there is a greater risk to participant safeguarding
- improved pricing and payment mechanisms to ensure a skilled and well-supported workforce and a provider market that invests in innovation

- compulsory worker screening for workers providing direct disability support to NDIS participants
- better coordination in sharing data and information in quality and safeguarding to streamline reporting processes and reduce duplication
- a national approach to worker screening and restrictive practices.
- participant plans that support individual risk-taking and decision making.

There are many opportunities for the NDIS Commission and the NDIA to work better together. The Framework can drive improvements in the way the NDIA supports participant safety and their access to quality services.

## Royal Commission update

The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability entered its final year and held the last of its hearings to gather evidence during 2022–23. NDS continued to monitor and report on the hearings and reports of the Royal Commission, publishing updates on a range of topics including people's experiences in boarding houses, hostels and gaols.

And while we know there are thousands of excellent people in this industry who work non-stop to provide quality care, the hearings also continued to shine a light on poor practice. All Australians should have confidence in the quality and safety of supports provided to people with disability, and NDS will continue to support providers with training, resources and advice on best practice to ensure our sector meets a high standard of supports for people with disability.

In this spirit, NDS continued to work with Disability Royal Commission throughout 2022–23, as it sought new ways to help providers to deliver high-quality, equitable and sustainable supports.

In February NDS CEO Laurie Leigh appeared in Public Hearing 32, putting our 2022 State of the Disability Sector Report into official documentation. She spoke about NDS's online learning materials, including the Human Rights and You eLearning program and our Zero Tolerance resources. She spoke about the cost to providers of workplace training in creating safe environments and the effects of workforce shortages on participant safety. She reported provider dissatisfaction with an uneven playing field for registration, especially the cost of compliance in time and money.

## Representation for the sector and submissions

Our vision is for an inclusive Australia where

all people with disability live safely and equitably and we stand ready to work with the Royal Commission to see this vision realised.

To that end, NDS made several recommendations throughout the year, including initiatives to increase recruitment and retention, reforms designed to improve training and supervision for workers, and ways to ensure that all workers in risk-assessed roles undergo NDIS worker screening. We also pushed for supported decision making to be embedded in practice, more funding for advocacy and self-advocacy development, and funding for Positive Behaviour Support.

Throughout, we argued that providers need appropriate time and support to deliver changes correctly. As the recommendations of the Royal Commission are considered by government, we need to match the timetabling and government resourcing of reforms with the capacity of the sector to respond.



## Keeping members informed

Keeping members informed is NDS's core business. Throughout the year, NDS continued to distribute regular Royal Commission newsletters and provide our members with concise summaries of each hearing as it unfolded. NDS members could access a range of experts and resources to support them through the Disability Royal Commission. These are available on the NDS website's Disability Royal Commission Hub.

## State and Territory issues

### South Australia

South Australian providers are reporting significant anxiety about the transformational change they expect from the Royal Commission's work and the review of the NDIS. Organisations and their leaders are already exhausted and under immense pressure with unsustainable pricing and expectations and are rightly concerned about their ability to adapt and change as they are anticipating.

A key pressure on providers is that a significant proportion of the state's Supported Independent Living services are provided by the state Department of Human Services (DHS). It has been an in-kind arrangement with the Commonwealth, and they are in the process of transitioning to the NDIS. DHS remains a competitor in the very tight SA market, enjoying some significant advantages as a government provider. NDS is actively working with DHS to provide better transparency and collaboration with the sector.

Vacancies in Supported Independent Living services are a significant issue in South Australia, undermining the sustainability of many organisations. South Australia needs a centralised SIL vacancy management authority enabling all participants to choose from all SIL vacancies available. We believe this would give real choice for people with disability and support current providers to fill their vacancies, leading to better future planning and investment.

The cost of regulatory compliance is another major issue for SA providers, especially when regulations change with little notice.



### Northern Territory

The nation-wide difficulties of recruitment and retention of workforce is complicated in the Northern Territory by barriers of culture and community isolation.

Administrators, support coordinators, allied health assistants and entry level managers are very hard to find and keep. We believe one cause is NDIS pricing, which doesn't fully reflect the difficulties of operating in the Territory nor the value of these workers to the Territory community.

In the Territory about half of NDIS participants are First Nations people and many providers, whether on country or in town, are committed to being respectful of culture. Unfortunately, the transactional nature of NDIS service provision often doesn't allow time for developing the relationships that are the bedrock of culturally sound practice. Nor is it accounted for in the participant plans.

Workforce shortages exacerbate the problem. Staff turnover often means that inexperienced workers operate in communities where trust needs to be earned and is easily lost. And

complex social problems and unrest in Alice Springs, Tennant Creek and Katherine have affected all community services, worsening workforce shortages and increasing risks to participants and workers.

Finally, Territory providers, perhaps more than most, feel the unfairness of a system where being registered and following its obligations is a burden with few compensations. While choice and control for participants is a key principle, it seems to mean that sharp and inappropriate practices often go unreported and unpunished.

### Queensland

With its population concentrated in the south-east and along the coast, Queensland's services thin out as you move inland. Out west, recruitment is brutal, with allied health professionals hardest to find. Consequently, participant plans are often under-utilised — not because the services are not needed, but

because there are few providers, support workers or allied health workers to offer them.

When services are thin, people either miss out on supports or travel to get them. Cloncurry participants often travel 120 kms to Mt Isa for services, and Winton participants trek 175 kilometres to Longreach. Or sometimes it is the providers who travel. Either way, transport costs eat into participant plans and providers are not sure how to bill for their time, petrol, and wear and tear.

But there will be no progress until there are incentives for workers to move to remote areas or train in the community. And a solution must be found for the chronic housing shortage. More needs to be done to support an integrated system of service delivery.

Registered Queensland providers feel the increasing burden of compliance, with new obligations being imposed without funding to meet the added costs. And few believe that more regulations are making services safer.

### Western Australia

The workforce problems of Australia's largest state are made worse by the remoteness of many communities. And the sector is growing fast. A 2020 report predicted the need for 12,000 new sector jobs by 2024, but it is unlikely the need will be met by then. There will be longer waiting lists for services or, for some communities, few services at all.

But there has been one significant step forward in WA's workforce in the form of NDS's Job Matching Service, which we hope will be a model for other states. Now in its third year, it co-ordinates and connects employers, employees and the complex array of employment and training

opportunities. The service has helped to co-ordinate dozens of student placements and more than 5000 workers have begun training.

Disability employment in WA received a blow last year when the Activ Foundation announced the closure of its large-scale industrial worksites in Perth, Geraldton and Bunbury, putting the jobs of more than 600 people with disability at risk. Thankfully, the WA and Commonwealth Governments committed millions of dollars of transition funding to keep the plants open. Earlier this year, provider Workpower took over. However, the conditions putting pressure on supported employment have not changed and a permanent solution must be found.

## Australian Capital Territory

Workforce is the big issue in the ACT, as it is everywhere else, but there are added barriers to employment. A recent report by Anglicare found the ACT is the most unaffordable area in Australia for low-income workers, such as most disability support workers. Rents have risen, as have general costs of living. In our 2022 State of the Disability Sector (SOTDS) Report, more than four out of five ACT providers reported moderate to extreme difficulty recruiting workers.

Also, the job market in Canberra is dominated by a large government employer that pays workers well with superior benefits. Providers find it hard to compete, especially for jobs in administration, accountancy, HR and IT.

In disability employment, the participation rate has barely changed over the last 20 years, stuck on 53 per cent. People with disability in the ACT are an under-used resource for employers, especially the public service. Under three per cent of public service workers identify as having a disability. More needs to be done to tap the large public sector in the ACT to raise the level of disability employment.

The ACT is a jurisdiction where providers have compliance requirements to two separate authorities, adding a significant burden. ACT respondents to the SOTDS survey made it clear that duplication was not creating safer services. NDS in the ACT are working closely with the National Quality and Safeguards Commission and the ACT Office of the Senior Practitioner to consider how processes can be streamlined and duplication eliminated.



## Tasmania

From November 2022, Tasmanian providers, already stressed by change and regulatory burden, found themselves the guinea pigs for the NDIA's new computer system, PACE. On top of the frustrations of bedding in a flawed computer system and the cost of training staff, providers found that participants were not given the support promised by the NDIA, thus providers had to step in to assist. This extra non-funded activity took a toll on providers.

One of the most acute problems among the sector's substantial workforce issues is attracting allied health professionals to the state. The University of Tasmania now offers physiotherapy and speech pathology, but a planned course in occupational therapy could not attract the required academic staff. There is still no Allied Health Assistant course in Tasmania. It will be a long time before there will be enough graduates to address the shortage.

The future for Specialist Disability Accommodation remains unclear, as the state government has not confirmed if it will continue to be an SDA provider. Much of the state's existing housing stock is old and not fit for purpose. New stock needs to be built, including three-bedroom flats that are necessary for two-to-one SDA support. NDS Tasmania is keen to work with government to map supply and demand to reduce the impact of vacancies while ensuring that universal design principles become the norm.

## Victoria

While the Victorian sector seems vibrant on the surface, there is no doubting the stress that providers in the state are feeling. The State of the Disability Sector Report found that 42 per cent of Victorian providers expected to make a loss in 2022–23. This is deeply concerning and only made the Victorian team more committed to the interests of providers.

Keeping providers informed and connected is a major commitment of the Victorian team, and in 2022 we hosted 87 network meetings and seminars, attracting almost 8000 registrants. In these meetings all the

## New South Wales

NDS used the opportunity of a state election to consolidate data and distil our thinking on all the core issues. Calling on the state political parties to commit to strengthening the disability support sector, NDS urged them to eliminate the duplication of effort in dual reporting and to collaborate with the NDIS rather than compete with it.

We also advocated a more coordinated approach to address serious workforce shortages and more investment in retaining a skilled disability workforce. We argued that, since the shortage of public housing disproportionately affects people with disability, there ought to be more disability-specific accommodation.

major concerns of the sector were discussed — workforce, regulatory burden, pricing, housing — but there also were chances for members to learn new skills, catch up on policy and regulatory changes, and share their experiences and opinions with peers. There is a wealth of expertise in the Victorian sector and the Victorian team is determined to make sure that, in these uncertain times, strength can be found in pooling knowledge and making informed choices.

Victoria is experiencing similar workforce shortages as everywhere else in Australia, with an added frustration in long delays for workers to get NDIS checks. This is another example of Victorian providers getting tangled up in red tape, with reporting obligations to different government authorities on a range of activities. Unnecessary duplication makes provider obligations onerous. NDS in Victoria is advocating more coordination between authorities to lift the regulatory burden off providers.

Following the line that the NDIS is not a one-stop shop, the NSW team pointed out to candidates that only 12 per cent of people with disability in the state were on NDIS supports. The state should be doing more to fill the gap in services for the majority who are outside the NDIS framework. We called for an effective, integrated social care response for all the people with a disability in NSW.

The rate of unemployment among people with disability is more than twice that of the general workforce and their workforce participation rate is far lower. Among the measures we advocated to boost employment was for the state to favour social enterprises when procuring goods and services.

# News and advice

NDS works hard to keep our members in the know about policy developments and equipped with all the information they might need for business decisions. Throughout 2022–23, we sent our members news updates, CEO messages and newsletters, fielded thousands of phone calls and email queries, organised face-to-face meetings and made presentations.

A vital component of NDS activity is keeping our membership informed about what is going on in the sector. We release national news updates as well as the latest news for each state — up to 400 items each year, posted on our website.

For the past two years, we have also produced daily roundups from the Disability Royal Commission when it was in session, and, during 2022–23, NDS news was dominated by the NDIS Review. We reported every stage of the Review process and alerted providers whenever reports and statements were released.

Other news updates told providers about changes to regulations, encouraged them to make submissions to inquiries and invited them to dozens of meetings, conferences, webinars and briefings. Others alerted them to new resources on our website. Our regular COVID-19 bulletins were scaled down this year, although our COVID-19 resource page remains up to date.

We also produced monthly newsletters for each state and regular messages from our CEO Laurie Leigh.

Our members learnt of most news items through email alerts, which have a summary and a link to the full story. Our national news mailing list had 9700 recipients and an average of 2200 email recipients clicked on each item. A sign of the straitened times was that the highest click rates were for items that affected our members' financial viability: the pricing review, the indexing of participant plans, and the Fair Work wage increase for support workers. Major policy news, such as the announcements on supported decision making, the cap on NDIS growth, and the numerous announcements about the NDIS Review and the Disability Royal Commission also got big responses.

All federal and state budget announcements had high open rates, even though the headline text for most states did not promise good news.

## Newsletters

NDS distributes regular newsletters for every state, each headed with an In Focus article, a round-up of the month's activities from the local NDS manager.

Nationally, we provided:

- **CEO Updates** – regular updates and high-level insights from Laurie Leigh, the NDS CEO
- **NDIS Review Updates**
- **Events Updates:** fortnightly rundowns of events and training opportunities coming up in each state and territory



- **Royal Commission Updates:** newsletters spotlighting what service providers can do to ensure gold standard practice
- **Disability Digest:** a monthly newsletter for our 'Industry Supporters' (organisations that are not disability services but whose market is disability services)
- **News in 90 seconds:** a fortnightly roundup of the latest news, events and collaboration opportunities from NDP
- **NDIS Quality and Safeguards Sector Readiness** newsletters for WA subscribers.

## NDS Website

The NDS website remained a vital resource for disability workers all over the country throughout 2022–23, with more than 1.6 million unique page views.

The most popular pages covered Events and Training and Zero Tolerance.

## Social Media

With a 33 per cent increase in followers, it was another big year for NDS's social media outlets. That growth included a 41 per cent jump in LinkedIn traffic, as well as 1200 more followers across Twitter and Facebook.

## State of the Disability Sector Survey

Throughout the year, NDS continued to provide members and policy makers with reliable, evidence-based research and data about the disability sector. Our most important work in this field remained the Annual Market Survey, the results of which were again released in our flagship State of the Disability Sector report.

## National Disability Research Partnership

Throughout 2022–23, NDS continued to participate in the NDRP, a world-class disability research and policy hub which seeks to bridge the gap between research, policy and practice.

# Networking and events

One of NDS's most important roles is to enable networking and collaboration across the sector. Our Communities of Practice, conferences, events, workshops and webinars provide a vital platform for members to pool resources, exchange ideas, and hear from thought leaders and policy makers from all around the world.

2022–23 was another busy year on this front, with specialist disability service providers coming together from all over the country at online and in-person events.

## Communities of Practice

Providing members with a regular forum to discuss policy issues, common needs, trends and concerns, NDS's Communities of Practice were chaired by subject matter experts and supported by NDS staff. We had specialty Communities of Practice for:

- Children and Young People
- Housing and Support
- NDIS Intermediaries
- Disability Employment Services
- Quality and Safeguarding
- Remote and Very Remote
- Employment Supports (Social Enterprise)
- Workforce.

## CEO and Senior Leader Briefing WA

NDS invited CEOs and senior leaders from all over the state to discuss WA's disability system with our board. Over 130 members took the opportunity to network and connect.

## Essential Conversations

In August, NDS ran another series of online briefings and masterclasses. Designed to get members ahead of the curve, the 15 sessions covered a range of emerging themes in the sector and all the work that's underway to address them. The topics included dignity of risk, navigating financial stress, navigating conflict of interest and boundaries, supported decision making, violence in shared living homes, the future of WHS and HR in the disability sector, and the future of SDA.

## Navigating the Uncertainty of Change Conference

Held in Brisbane, this two-day event focused on navigating change and creating a culture of trust. Day one looked at mental wellbeing, while day two included the option of offsite field trips so members could network with peers.

## Contemporary Governance and Leadership Summit

Attended by more than 200 leaders, this one-day conference explored strategic governance and best practice. Speakers included Professor Nicole Gillespie, Dr Bernadette Curryer and Dr Jackie Bettington.



Above: The Hon. Bill Shorten MP, Minister for the National Disability Insurance Scheme, speaks at the CEOs' Meeting 2022

## WA Jobs Expo

In Perth, the WA Jobs Expo attracted over 400 people with disability and provided 22 exhibitors with a chance to showcase their employment openings and services.

## NDS WA Lunch

More than 600 people attended a lunch at Crown Perth to celebrate the International Day of People with Disability. With 175 complimentary tickets provided for people with disability, the lunch included performances by local entertainers and some thought-provoking panel discussions.

## NT Disability Support Awards

Held in collaboration with the NT Government, the awards celebrated an inclusive Territory where people with disability are valued and respected.

## The CEOs' Meeting

Over two days in November at the Hilton Hotel in Sydney, the 2022 CEOs' meeting saw over 500 members gather to swap ideas on policy directions and issues. The theme, The Basics for Brilliance, ran through a jam-packed two-day program of speeches, workshops and social events.

## Regional and Remote Conference

Held in Darwin and online, this one-day conference in March looked at some of the opportunities for disability service providers in regional and remote areas. Topics included workforce sourcing and retention, service provision, effective community engagement and culturally secure practices.

## NDP Speed Dating Networking

Held in Adelaide and Melbourne, NDP's Speed Dating Networking events provided NDS members with a chance to build connections

with Allied Health and behavioural support professionals, sole traders, disability educators and managers.

### WA Disability Support Awards

Presented in Perth, NDS's annual WA Disability Support Awards celebrated the individual workers and teams who support people with disability to achieve their goals. The seven Awards recognised over 114 nominees.

### Disability Hot Topics Breakfasts

Held in capital cities all over the country, NDS's Disability Hot Topics Breakfasts briefed members on the key national issues in the State of the Sector Report, the burning issues in the state, and what is — and isn't — being done to address them. The state minister responsible for disability services addressed each meeting and the main presentation was made by NDS CEO Laurie Leigh.

### Workforce Virtual Conference

This one-day online event focused on the daunting challenges and exciting possibilities of recruiting and retaining staff in the disability sector.



Above: NDS CEO Laurie Leigh speaks at the CEOs' Meeting 2022



Above: The Hon Ngaree Ah Kit MLA, Minister for Disabilities, Chelsea Moyd-Monagle, TK Community Care Services, and Mick Fallon, NDS at the NT Disability Inclusion Awards



Above: WA Disability Support Awards



## Learning and development

With disability support becoming ever more complex, professional development is becoming ever more important. That's why NDS continued to offer high quality and affordable learning and development opportunities throughout 2022–23. Carefully mapped to the NDIS Practice Standards, NDS's ever-growing suite of online professional development resources made it affordable for workers to develop new skills — and easy to do so anywhere, any time.

By the end of the year, the NDS Learning and Development community grew by 35,630 to 87,136 individual users. We also saw 282 new disability organisations subscribe to Workforce Essentials, NDS's all-in-one learning management system and eLearning platform.

### Workshops

NDS ran almost 200 separate workshops throughout the year. They included:

- 32 public workshop events
- 81 tailored and delivered specifically for the needs of organisations
- 24 for disability organisations, with the most popular being Defensible Documentation, Emerging Leaders, and Incident Reporting
- 57 for organisations outside of the disability sector.

We also hosted new workshops on:

- Choice and informed supported decision making
- Incident reporting skills for frontline staff
- Buddy training for frontline staff
- Client risk assessment for frontline staff
- Risk management systems
- Mealtime management
- Setting up buddy programs for organisations
- Nutrition and unexplained weight loss.

# Business support

Throughout 2022–23, NDS remained committed to lowering the cost of business. We want our members to have all the tools, resources and support they need to not only survive but to thrive.

## Professional Advisory Services

In 2022–23, NDS's extensive suite of free and discounted professional advisory services included:

- discounts on management consulting services such as cost optimisation programs, supplier management, process efficiency, contract risk mitigation and specialist knowledge
- a free WHS member-only advice line
- a free legal helpline (for not-for-profits)
- 30 minutes of free advice from NDS's IR and HR advisory service
- a complimentary 20-minute phone NDIS consultation for small businesses and sole trader members
- 10 minutes of free financial advice
- exclusive access to the NDS Helpdesk.

## Exclusive member benefits

Thanks to our partnerships with a host of businesses, NDS continued to offer a range of discounted services for members throughout 2022–23. Designed to reduce the cost of doing business while driving greater efficiency, these services included:

- discounted access to NDS Quality Portal to manage risk and quality performance

- discounted Qantas Club membership
- discounts on online recruitment reference checks
- a free fleet appraisal and fleet management discounted services
- access to specialist insurance and risk management advice
- discounted access to NDS Management Support Online (MSO), providing access to hundreds of resources on all aspects of running an organisation
- discounted access to a digital workplace platform for filling shifts.

## National Disability Practitioners

Throughout 2022–23, staff within NDS member organisations continued to enjoy free membership to National Disability Practitioners (NDP) and its many resources and professional development opportunities. The NDP community includes disability support workers, allied health practitioners, sole traders, leaders, educators, and business support roles and students.

In 2022–23, NDP also provided members with the opportunity to connect at several networking events and launched an innovative new online space to grow their professional network, share knowledge and resources and have conversations in real time.



# Disability support

Throughout 2022–23, NDS continued to ensure that workers, families and practitioners had the resources they need to provide quality services. Working with disability organisations, service providers, academics, businesses and statutory bodies, we identified potential problems and set out ways to address them in a well-received series of workshops and training aids.

## Zero Tolerance resources

Run in partnership with the Australian disability sector, Zero Tolerance is NDS's national approach to helping providers understand, implement and improve practices that safeguard the rights of the people they serve. During 2022–23, we continued to expand our collection beyond more than 150 online resources. We also revamped our restrictive practices films to reflect current legislation and moved our Understanding Power and Control films to

the Understanding Abuse collection. It was crucial to ensure that these films clearly identify unacceptable restrictions on people's lives. The accompanying guide was also updated.

## Quality and Safeguards resources

Throughout 2022–23, our extensive suite of online resources helped providers meet the requirements of the Quality and Safeguards Framework. We also continued to deliver workshops, forums and in-house training in key areas, such as incident management, complaints, behaviour support, continuous improvement, preventing abuse and neglect, and audit preparation.

## Let's Talk Disability

During 2022–23, NDS continued to deliver fun, interactive, half-day workshops all over the country, run and led by people with lived experience of disability.



### ACROD Parking Program

In WA, the ACROD Parking program remained busy throughout 2022–23, with approximately 100,000 disability parking permits in circulation. As well as providing permits to eligible individuals and organisations, NDS also advocated and raised community awareness for accessible carparking spaces.

### Companion Card Program

WA's network of Companion Card affiliate organisations continued to grow throughout 2022–23. This popular program enables people with a significant and permanent disability to attend community events and venues together with their companion or carer without having to pay for a second ticket.

### Ready to Go Home Project

In WA, the Ready to Go Home project concluded with the creation of a suite of resources to improve the experience of people with disability as they prepare to be discharged from hospital.

### Clinical Innovation Intellectual Disability Health Network

In NSW, NDS was a member of the Intellectual Disability Health Network and sat on the

Council for Intellectual Disability. Both bodies promote and embed the right to decision-making for people with disability.

### Behaviour Support

Across Australia, NDS engaged in projects to help behaviour support practitioners deliver better outcomes. These included workshops, where providers and practitioners come together to dispel myths and establish an understanding of effective collaboration.

### Keeping everybody safe

In Victoria, NDS launched a state government-funded project to address occupational violence in the disability sector. Focused on building the sector's capacity to develop safe systems of work, the project explored:

- developing capable environments
- embedding use of positive behaviour support principles across the services
- the use of person-centred active support
- incorporating a trauma-informed approach to support provision
- using both expressive and receptive communication
- building skills to ensure participants are part of their community.



### WA Quality and Safeguarding Forum

In WA, NDS's WA Quality and Safeguarding Forum focussed on supported decision making and the health and disability interface. Subject matter experts in the forum included delegates from the NDIS Commission, the Department of Communities, the Department of Health and the University of Notre Dame.

### The Healthy Tasmania Project

The Healthy Tasmania Project saw people with disability and their carers take part in healthy cooking education sessions and demonstrations. To reach its potential and create a long-term resource, captioned videos of simple-to-prepare meals were also posted online.

### Sector Readiness Project

In WA, NDS continued to deliver consultations, workshops, events and services to help members stay on top of changes to quality and safeguarding.

Concentrating on positive behaviour support, restrictive practices, governance, service quality and risk, more than 50 providers reviewed their policies and procedures and identified gaps.

### Practice Standards resources

This year's major challenge was the introduction of the High Intensity Support Descriptors. It was yet another a layer of confusion on audit expectations, training and meeting the health needs of participants.

To help untangle members' concerns, NDS invited the NDIS Commission to speak at a several events and will continue to advocate for increased education and clarity.

NDS also held workshops on Workplace Health and Safety Prosecutions and what they might mean for providers.

In a short workshop series, JAZ ANZ provided members with tips and guidance on negotiating with auditors and dealing with difficult issues.

### COVID-19

COVID-19 continued to have an impact throughout 2022–23, as governments began to outline how Australians will live with the disease. Generally speaking, regulations moved away from mandates and towards encouraging providers to review their own settings, assess their own risks, and embed day-to-day COVID-19 management in policies and procedures.

Providers took over vaccination decisions, while maintaining their responsibility for their staff's health and safety and their duty of care for people with disability. Some providers directed their workers to get vaccines, while others opted to strongly recommend them.

Throughout, NDS communicated the changing requirements and updated our online COVID-19 risk management toolkit. With input from the Health Department, Holman Webb Lawyers and Workplace Plus, we also held a seminar to address concerns about mandatory vaccinations.

# Membership awards

NDS's Membership Recognition Awards acknowledge the loyalty, support and contributions of long-serving members. In November 2022, 25 such organisations were recognised for their longstanding and productive partnerships.

## 50 years of continued membership

Mobo Group



Above: Staff and clients of Mobo Group

## 40 years of continued membership

Able Australia Services  
Barkuma Inc  
Centacare Community Services  
Eurella Community Services Inc  
Fairhaven Services Ltd  
Latrobe Valley Enterprises  
Mercy Community  
Warrah

## 30 years of continued membership

Anowah Community Living Ltd  
Challenge Community Services  
ConnectAbility Australia Ltd  
Forrest Personnel Ltd  
Li-Ve Tasmania  
Polio NSW  
Tulgeen Group

## 20 years of continued membership

Ability WA  
ASTERIA Services  
Carpentaria Disability Services Ltd  
Christie Centre Inc  
IMPACT Community Services  
Interchange Incorporated  
MacKillop Family Services  
NPY Women's Council  
Wesley Mission Queensland

## Presidents Service Awards

In December 2022, NDS honoured two long-serving contributors to the organisation with the President's Service Award. The Award is presented to people who have provided excellent service to NDS.

Group CEO of PeopleKind Group and former NDS Director, Gordon Trewern, was recognised for 40 years in disability services, 15 years of which he sat on the NDS board.

Gordon has spent his entire working life in disability services, joining Nulsen Disability Services in Western Australia as a support worker in 1982. By 1989, he was coordinator of their accommodation services, and became CEO in 1994. In his forty years at Nulsen – recently rebranded as PeopleKind – he has seen it go from custodial care provider to a multi-faceted organisation offering a range of disability accommodation and support.

He has served as an NDS Board member for 15 years, also serving as a member of the WA State Committee for more than 10 years, three years as Chair and many years as Deputy Chair.

In presenting Gordon with his President's Service Award at the NDS's CEOs' Meeting in November, Rohan Braddy thanked Gordon 'for his long and valuable contribution to NDS's work and the sector more broadly.'

Former Head of Policy Philippa Angley, who left NDS earlier this year, received her Award for her 16 years working in policy and advocacy for the organisation.

Philippa received her President's Service Award at NDS's Victorian office's end-of-year gathering on 15 December from NDS President Rohan Braddy. Rohan spoke of her 'invaluable and significant contribution to NDS and the Australian disability sector'.

Philippa joined the organisation in 2005 as Victoria's Deputy Executive Officer, but soon



Above: NDS President, Rohan Braddy and Gordon Trewern.



Above: Former NDS Chief Executive, Ken Baker AM, with Philippa Angley and NDS President Rohan Braddy

showed her strengths in policy. Before long, she was working closely with NDS Chief Executive Ken Baker AM and helping to shape NDS policy and advocacy work for the next dozen years.

As well as her deep policy knowledge, Philippa gave enormous support to NDS members, mentored staff and co-ordinated multiple NDS Committees. She was a strong presence and a fine example to everyone she worked with, gifted with huge capacity for work and ability to transform policy points into insights and ideas.

NDS congratulates Gordon and Philippa on their awards and thanks them for their long and dedicated service.

# NDS Board



**Rohan Braddy**  
**President**

Chief Executive Officer  
Gateways Support  
Services



**Warwick Cavanagh**  
Elected Member

Chief Executive Officer  
Bayley House



**Mark Kulinski**  
South Australia Chair

Chief Executive  
Community Living  
Australia



**Elizabeth Sutton**  
Queensland Chair

Chief Executive Officer  
Ingham Disability  
Support Services



**Julie Waylen**  
**Vice President**  
*(from Apr 2023)*

Chief Executive Officer  
Diversity South Inc.



**Laura Collister**  
Victoria Chair  
*(to Aug 2022)*

Chief Executive Officer  
Wellways Australia Ltd



**Nadia Lindop OAM**  
Elected Member  
*(to Nov 2022)*

Chief Executive Officer  
MJD Foundation Ltd



**Eric Thauvette OAM**  
Australian Capital  
Territory Chair

Chief Executive Officer  
Hartley Lifecare



**Annie Rily**  
**Vice President**  
*(to Feb 2023)*  
Northern Territory Chair  
*(to Feb 2023)*

Chief Executive Officer  
Carpentaria



**Hayley Dean**  
Victoria Chair  
*(from Aug 2022)*

Chief Executive Officer  
Melba Support Services



**Joan McKenna Kerr**  
Western Australia Chair  
*(to Mar 2023)*

Chief Executive Officer  
Autism Association of  
Western Australia Inc



**Laurie Leigh**  
Company Secretary,  
National Disability  
Services

Chief Executive Officer  
National Disability  
Services



**Cassie Atchison**  
Elected Member

Chief Executive Officer  
Broome Regional  
Aboriginal Medical  
Services



**Mark Jessop**  
Tasmania Chair

Chief Executive Officer  
Nexus Inc.



**Justin O'Meara Smith**  
Western Australia Chair  
*(from May 2023)*

Chief Executive Officer  
Interchange WA Inc.



**Kirsty Minton**  
Company Secretary,  
National Disability  
Services

Chief Operating Officer  
National Disability  
Services



**Lawson Broad**  
Northern Territory Chair  
*(from Apr 2023)*

Chief Executive Officer  
Somerville Community  
Services Inc.



**Melanie Kiely**  
Elected Member

Chief Executive Officer  
MSWA



**Philip Petrie**  
New South Wales Chair

Chief Executive Officer  
Allevia Limited



**Auditor**  
Ernst & Young



# State and Territory Divisional Committees

During the Year 2022–2023 until the 2023 Divisional Election

Australian Capital Territory	New South Wales	Northern Territory
<b>Chair</b>	<b>Chair</b>	<b>Chair</b>
Eric Thauvette	Philip Petrie	Lawson Broad Janet Wright <i>(until Feb 2023)</i>
<b>Vice-Chair</b>	<b>Vice-Chair</b>	<b>Vice-Chair</b>
Nadine Stephen	Julia Squire	Nadia Lindop OAM
<b>Members</b>	<b>Members</b>	<b>Members</b>
Anne Kirwan Donna Cosgrove Dougie Herd Kylie Stokes Leanne Heald Lisa McPherson Wayne Herbert Pam Boyer <i>(until Oct 2022)</i>	Allan Young Andrew Anderson Annie Doyle Brett Thompson David Carey Deb Sazdanoff Edward Birt Lewis Kaplan Rosy Walia David Kneeshaw <i>(until Apr 2023)</i>	Anne Gawen Annie Rily <i>(until Feb 2023)</i> Janet Wright Kim McRae Rachel Choy Steve Vitone Janet Wright Fiona Lodge <i>(until Mar 2023)</i> Kerry Bosch <i>(until Apr 2023)</i> Scott Ferguson <i>(until May 2023)</i>

South Australia	Victoria	Western Australia
<b>Chair</b>	<b>Chair</b>	<b>Chair</b>
Mark Kulinski	Hayley Dean	Justin O'Meara Smith Joan McKenna Kerr <i>(until Mar 2023)</i>
<b>Vice-Chair</b>	<b>Vice-Chair</b>	<b>Vice-Chairs</b>
Sue Horsnell	Natasha Williams	Frances Buchanan Marina Re
<b>Members</b>	<b>Members</b>	<b>Members</b>
David Panter Helen Sheppard John van Ruth Kyp Boucher Liz Forsyth Mel Kubisa Peter Stewart Philip Brookes Simon Rowberry Andrew Ramsey <i>(until Mar 2023)</i>	Amanda Youngs Drew Beswick Kate MacRae Peter Symonds Phil Hayes-Brown Terry Symonds Vaughan Winther	Caroline Watt Darren Ginnelly Dawn McAleenan Justine Colyer Kate Fulton Kathy Hough Paul Fleay Joan McKenna Kerr <i>(until Mar 2023)</i> Rosie Lawn <i>(until Nov 2022)</i>
	<b>Ex Officio Members</b>	<b>Ex Officio Members</b>
	Rohan Braddy Warwick Cavanagh	Cassie Atchison Julie Waylen Melanie Kiely

Queensland	Tasmania
<b>Chair</b>	<b>Chair</b>
Elizabeth Sutton	Mark Jessop
<b>Vice-Chair</b>	<b>Vice-Chair</b>
Richard Littler	Nigel Hill
<b>Members:</b>	<b>Members</b>
Ben Keast Brett Casey Cheryl Dalton Mark Townend Rachel Freeman Robert Galea Bryan McCormick <i>(until Dec 2022)</i>	Allyson Warrington Belinda Smith Deborah Byrne Dee-Anne Kapene <i>(until Jul 2023)</i> Donna Bain Donna Blanchard Keryn Welch Nick Connor Russell Penman Ruth Chalk John Rowland <i>(until Mar 2023)</i>

# NDS National Communities of Practice

NDS National Communities of Practice (CoP) have replaced National Committees. NDS is encouraging all members to enjoy the benefits of collaboration and networking with other members from around the country who have shared interests.

Membership of the National CoPs is open to all members who have an interest in that area. Each CoP is chaired by a subject matter expert in the area and will be supported by NDS staff with relevant expertise.

The National CoPs have three main roles:

- Exploration of key issues to support policy development
- Member engagement and establishing connections
- Support and development of that sector area of interest.

The eight NDS National Communities of Practice in 2022–23 were:

## Children, Young People and their Families

The National Children, Young People and their Families Community of Practice seeks to promote the interests and wellbeing of children and young people with disability and their families through the exchange of information, discussion of good practice, and the provision of policy advice that informs effective and quality service delivery.

**Lead:** Sarah Fordyce, State Manager VIC

## Housing and Support

The National Housing and Support Community of Practice seeks to promote policy and practice across Australia that improves the accommodation support and housing options for people with disability through the exchange of information, discussion of good practice, and the provision of policy advice that informs effective and quality service delivery.

**Lead:** Mick Fallon, Northern Territory Manager

## NDIS Intermediaries

The National NDIS Intermediaries Community of Practice seeks to provide policy advice on issues associated with the operations of Local Area Coordinators, Support Coordinators and Plan Managers, as well as promote the exchange of information and discussion of good practice.

**Lead:** Emily Forrest, Director of Policy and Advocacy

## Disability Employment Services

The National DES Community of Practice is a peer-led forum for providers of Disability Employment Services. The meetings provide an opportunity for DES providers to share best practice, provide feedback on issues, and discuss policies and reporting requirements affecting DES providers and their employees.

**Lead:** Colin Entwistle, Head of Employment



## Quality and Safeguarding

The National Quality and Safeguarding Community of Practice is a peer-led forum that covers all areas of providing quality safe services for people with a disability. Meetings will bring people together and provide opportunities to support and learn from one another.

**Lead:** Sarah Nicoll, Head of Quality and Safeguards

## Remote and Very Remote

The National Remote and Very Remote Community of Practice will provide an opportunity to share, listen and experience work in remote areas, consider opportunities and challenges when accessing and delivering NDIS funded support, and formulate advocacy positions to ensure services in remote areas are sustainable, effective and culturally appropriate.

**Lead:** Mick Fallon, Northern Territory Manager

## Employment Supports (Social Enterprise)

The National Employment Supports Community of Practice is a peer-led forum for providers of employment supports across Australia. The forum will feature updates and discussions on national policy developments and issues and provide an opportunity for service providers to share good practice, discuss the latest policies and reporting requirements, and raise issues impacting supported employees.

**Lead:** Colin Entwistle, Head of Employment

## Workforce

The National Workforce Community of Practice supports NDS member organisations to keep abreast of disability workforce developments and opportunities. It provides a forum for members to share challenges, ideas and solutions.

**Lead:** Matthew Zammit, Head of Workforce



## Board committees\*

### Governance Committee

The Governance Committee assists the Board to ensure that NDS is governed by its legal, constitutional, and ethical obligations as well as assisting the Board to establish and maintain its governance processes.

#### Chair

Mark Kulinski

#### Members

Eric Thauvette OAM  
Mark Jessop  
Philip Petrie  
Warwick Cavanagh

#### President

Rohan Braddy

#### Staff

Chief Executive Officer  
Chief Operating Officer

### Audit, Risk and Investment Committee

The Audit, Risk and Investment Committee assists the Board in managing organisational risk, compliance and overseeing NDS's financial reporting, internal control, audit processes, as well as the implementation and review of the Investment and Reserves, and Risk Management Framework policies.

#### Chair

Melanie Kiely

#### Members

Hayley Dean  
Julie Waylen

#### President

Rohan Braddy

#### Staff

Chief Executive Officer  
Chief Operating Officer  
Financial Controller

#### Auditor

Ernst & Young

### Communications Committee

This Committee provides advice to the Board on key communication initiatives that will strengthen the brand and affect the organisation's reputation within the market.

#### Chair

Philip Petrie

#### Members

Cassie Atchison  
Warwick Cavanagh

#### President

Rohan Braddy

#### Staff

Chief Executive Officer  
Director of Communications

\*as at 30 June 2023

## Farewell



In April 2023, the Former President of NDS, Joan McKenna Kerr, was appointed to the NDIA board. In making the appointment, Minister Shorten cited her passionate and long-standing advocacy for people with disability.

For more than 30 years, Joan has fought tirelessly for the rights of people with autism and their families in Western Australia. She is the long-time CEO of the Autism Association of Western Australia, taking it from a small parent-support charity to one of the four largest disability organisations in the state. For decades she led the push for better early diagnosis, training and public education, while committing her organisation to getting practical and financial support for people with autism and their families. Today, the association provides support services to more than 8000 people with autism.

Joan's advocacy and energies span the sector. While speaking up for people with autism, Joan has pushed for rights and services for all people with disability and fought hard for disability providers. Until recently, she was President of NDS and served on our national Board and Western Australia committee.

Joan is well known to the NDIA. She was a member of the NDIS Independent Advisory Council and the Commonwealth NDIS Advisory Group reporting to the Council of Australian Governments (COAG). She was

also a Director of the Australian Advisory Board on Autism Spectrum Disorders.

NDS CEO, Laurie Leigh was delighted for her and recognised the appointment's importance. 'This is fantastic news for the sector and for providers, as Joan will bring a provider perspective to the Board of NDIA along with her extended experience in the sector.'

NDS congratulates Joan on her appointment and thanks her for her long and dedicated service to NDS at state and national levels.

The other appointee was Dr Richard Fejo, a Larrakia man with disability from the Northern Territory, whose position adds a much-needed First Nations viewpoint and brings equal representation of people of disability on the NDIA board. They replace outgoing board members Glenn Keys AO and Prof. Jane Burns.

NDIA Chair Kurt Fearnley said, 'I look forward to the new appointees bringing their wealth of experience to an increasingly diverse board.'

# Performance overview

## Summary

The net operating surplus after tax of the Company for year ended 30 June 2023 was \$626,014, (2022: \$1,538,452 deficit).

The surplus from Company operations was \$55,132, which was lower than the board-endorsed budgeted surplus of \$169,015. Whilst the surplus was lower than budgeted, there was expenditure related to the setup of a dedicated response to the NDIS Review that was announced during the year, and continued activities under the digital transformation program which will enhance member experience and services whilst driving internal efficiencies, neither of which were included in the budget. These additional activities were made possible through stronger than budgeted returns from funds held in term & rolling deposits over the year (due to the Australian Federal Reserve Bank interest rate increases).

In addition to the operating surplus, the funds under investment generated \$28k of realised gains and \$259k of income from dividends/franking credits. The unrealised movement on the portfolio was an increase of \$283k.

Net assets remain strong, increasing to \$16.72M (2022: \$16.09M). The current ratio (current assets: current liabilities) was 1.80 (2022: 1.57).

## NDS income 2022-23

Total operating income (i.e. excluding income from funds under investment) received in 2022-2023 was \$22.38M, compared to the FY22 total operating income of \$20.49M, an increase of 9.2%. 50.7% of revenue for the organisation was related to projects being undertaken by NDS to support the sector (2022:49.9%).

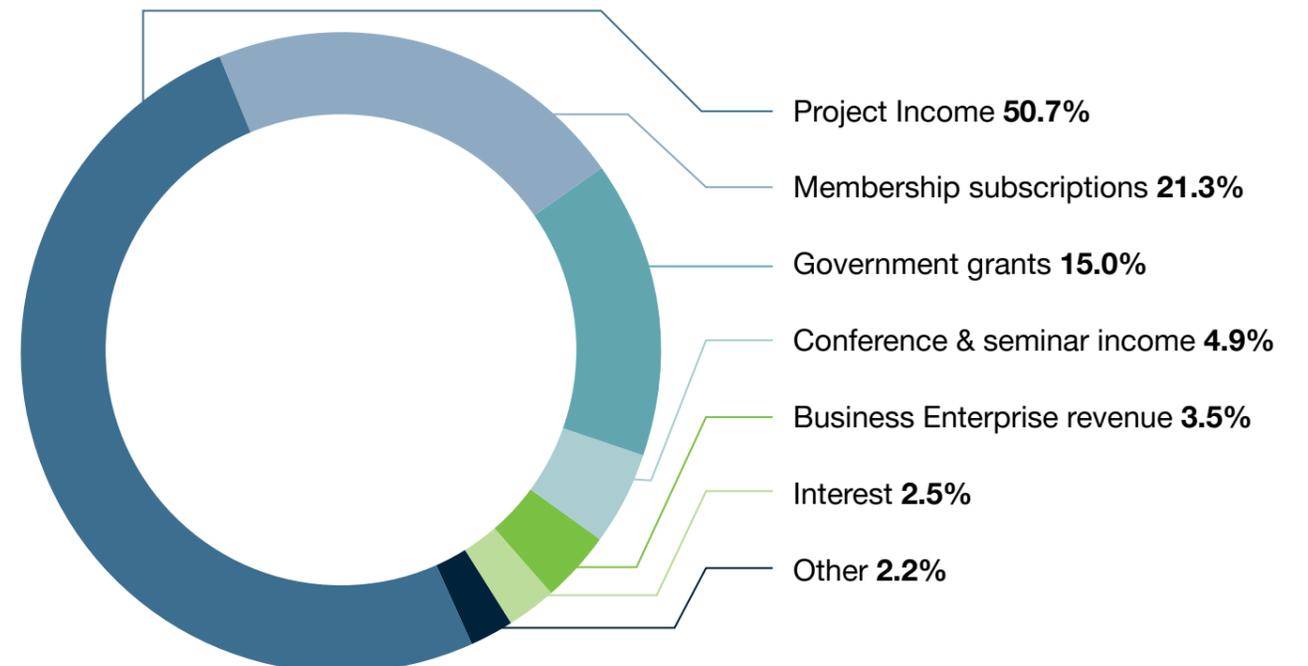
NDS acknowledges the support of the Federal, State and Territory Governments and Philanthropic bodies that provide funding for these initiatives.

Other major sources of income were: NDS and NDP membership subscriptions (21.3%; FY22 22.8 %); government grants (15%; FY22 16.5%); conference and events income (4.9%; FY22 4.5 %), and interest from funds held in term and rolling deposits (2.5%; FY22 0.3%).

## Income 2022-23

Income	2023 \$'000	2022 \$'000
Government grants - operating	3,348	3,379
Membership subscriptions	4,766	4,668
Conference and seminar income	1,097	916
Project income	11,340	10,252
L&D net income	776	531
Rental income	122	72
Finance income	562	69
Campaign contributions	0	356
Other	364	243
<b>Total income</b>	<b>22,375</b>	<b>20,487</b>

Graph 1: Income 2022-23



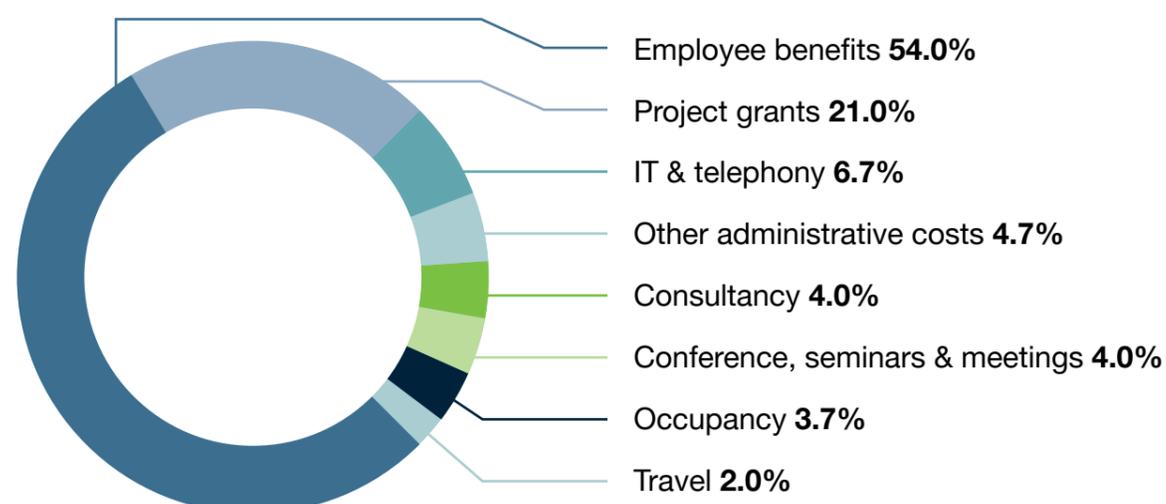
## NDS expenditure 2022–2023

Total operating expenditure for the year increased by 4.7% to \$22.3M (2022: \$21.3M). Employment costs continue to make up the largest area of expense incurred by the organisation (54.0%; 2022: 54.6%). Other principal expenses were: expenses related to grants and other project activities issued to service providers (21.0%; FY22 19.8%), and IT and Telephony (6.7%; FY22 7.0%).

## Expenditure 2022-23

Operating expenses	2023 \$'000	2022 \$'000
Employee benefits	12,052	11,640
Consultancy	886	1,089
Advertising	69	81
Conferences, seminars and meetings	864	575
Project grants and activities	4,694	4,214
IT and telephony	1,486	1,496
Occupancy	834	777
Travel	454	253
Other administrative costs	981	1,197
<b>Total operating expenditure</b>	<b>22,320</b>	<b>21,322</b>

Graph 2: Expenditure 2022-23



## Assets and liabilities

Assets	2023 \$'000	2022 \$'000
<b>Current assets</b>		
Cash and cash equivalents	20,107	25,886
Financial assets (excl cash) at fair value	7,384	7,064
Other current assets	2,104	1,845
<b>Total current assets</b>	<b>29,595</b>	<b>34,795</b>
<b>Non-current assets</b>		
Property, plant and equipment	3,776	3,697
Right of Use Asset	633	384
<b>Total non-current assets</b>	<b>4,409</b>	<b>4,081</b>
<b>Total assets</b>	<b>34,004</b>	<b>38,876</b>
Liabilities	2023 \$'000	2022 \$'000
<b>Current liabilities</b>		
Trade and other payables	1,436	2,147
Provisions	265	437
Employee benefit liabilities	713	821
Lease liabilities	87	55
Unearned revenue	13,904	18,717
<b>Total current liabilities</b>	<b>16,405</b>	<b>22,177</b>
<b>Non-current liabilities</b>		
Provisions	32	32
Employee benefit liabilities	257	232
Lease liabilities	591	342
<b>Total non-current liabilities</b>	<b>880</b>	<b>606</b>
<b>Total liabilities</b>	<b>17,285</b>	<b>22,782</b>
<b>Net assets</b>	<b>16,719</b>	<b>16,093</b>

A full set of audited financial statements is available on request, please email: [nds@nds.org.au](mailto:nds@nds.org.au).

# Senior Leadership Team

## CEO

Laurie Leigh

## Executive Assistant to CEO

Charlie Heywood

## Chief Operating Officer

Kirsty Minton

## Financial Controller

Gayle Reed

## Human Resources Manager

Katrina Hawkins

## Director of Member Services and Marketing

Belinda Allen *(to Feb 2023)*

Joanna Pretty *(from Apr 2023)*

## Director of Communications

Andrew Beswick

## Director of Policy and Advocacy

Emily Forrest *(from Sep 2022)*

## Heads of Policy

Kerrie Langford

Head of Employment *(to Jun 2023)*

Colin Entwistle

Head of Employment

Sarah Nicoll

Head of Quality and Safeguards

Dianne Hardy

Acting Head of Workforce *(Jul 2022 to Feb 2023)*

Matthew Zammit

Head of Workforce *(from Feb 2023)*

## ACT Territory Manager

Jo Huxley

## NSW State Manager

Karen Stace *(to Aug 2022)*

John Yealland *(Acting, Aug 2022 to Feb 2023)*

Debbie Jaggars *(from Feb 2023)*

## QLD State Manager

Jason McKey

## TAS State Manager

Renee Malby *(to Dec 2022)*

Graeme West *(Acting, Jan 2023)*

Lizzie Castles *(from Feb 2023)*

## WA State Manager

Coralie Flatters *(to Jul 2023)*

Graeme West *(Acting, from Jul 2023)*

## NT Territory Manager

Mick Fallon

## SA State Manager

Janine Lenigas

## VIC State Manager

Sarah Fordyce



## National Disability Services Annual Report 2022–23

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**Contact:** [comms@nds.org.au](mailto:comms@nds.org.au)

Data used in this report is drawn from the most accurate information available at the time of writing.

We would like to acknowledge and thank the many people who have agreed to allow photographs of themselves to be used in various NDS publications.

National Disability Services acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Custodians across the lands in which we live and work and we pay our respects to Elders both past and present.

[nds.org.au](https://nds.org.au)

