

Australia's Disability Strategy

The evidence base for this paper draws on the work of the National Disability Footprint, including the Data and Research Footprint (Element 2) delivered in partnership with Dr Scott Avery and Girra Maa Indigenous Health, University of Technology Sydney.

Australia's Disability Strategy 2021–2031 (the Strategy) is Australia's national plan to make life better for people with disability, by guiding governments and communities to make systems, services and communities safe, inclusive and accessible.

The Strategy sets a shared national agenda across seven Outcome Areas. Since the 2024–2025 refresh, governments have issued three new Targeted Action Plans (TAPs) for 2025–2027, revised the Data Improvement Plan, and published the third Outcomes Framework annual report. While the Strategy embeds the social model of disability and includes guiding principles aligned to the UN CRPD, routine, complete and culturally safe reporting for First Nations people with disability remains limited across several measures. Associated Plans now span employment, health for people with intellectual disability, advocacy, and arts and disability. To lift impact for First Nations communities and ACCOs, this factsheet recommends strengthening First Nations indicators and targets in ADS reporting, aligning TAP actions to the Closing the Gap Disability Sector Strengthening Plan, and accelerating the National Disability Data Asset to enable disaggregation by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status across all feasible measures.

The Strategy has seven Outcome Areas that aim to improve the lives of people with disability:

Outcome area	Aim	Relevant Targeted Action Plan(TAPs) / Associated Plans
Employment and Financial Security	People with disability have economic security, fair pay and access to decent, inclusive work.	Employment TAP 2021–2024; Employ My Ability (Associated Plan).
Inclusive Homes and Communities	People with disability can live in homes that meet their needs and participate in inclusive, connected communities.	Inclusive Homes and Communities TAP 2025–2027.
Safety, Rights and Justice	People with disability are safe, their rights are respected and they have fair access to justice.	Safety TAP 2021–2024; Safety, Rights and Justice TAP 2025–2027.
Personal and Community Support	People with disability can get the supports they need, when and where they need them, with quality and safety.	Emergency Management TAP 2021–2024 (relevant to community support in disasters).
Education and Learning	People with disability access inclusive education and achieve lifelong learning.	Early Childhood TAP 2021–2024 (early years focus).
Health and Wellbeing	People with disability have access to inclusive, culturally safe health care and better health outcomes.	National Roadmap for Improving the Health of Australians with Intellectual Disability (Associated Plan).
Community Attitudes	Communities value the contributions of people with disability and reduce stigma and discrimination.	Community Attitudes TAP 2021–2024; Community Attitudes TAP 2025–2027.



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Key messages

- The Strategy was updated in January 2025 with refreshed priorities, a revised Data Improvement Plan and three new Targeted Action Plans for 2025–2027.
- Third annual reporting against the Outcomes Framework was released in January 2025. The fourth report is expected in January 2026 (DHDAC, 2025).
- First Nations perspectives are recognised in the Strategy’s guiding principles.
- First Nations-specific targets and data are still needed.
- Associated Plans now include four national plans relevant to the Strategy. The development of an Associated Plan on Accessible Information and Communications is underway (DHDAC, 2025).
- Governments are progressing the National Disability Data Asset to improve disability data linkage and reporting.

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Intersectionality & Diversity

The Strategy includes a section under ‘Implementation’ on intersectionality and diversity. It acknowledges that governments must understand the diversity of people with disability and apply an intersectional lens, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives (Australian Government 2025).

Although FPDN supports this in principle, noting that suggestions of intersectionality are woven throughout, FPDN believes the ADS should be explicit about First Nations people with disability, with a dedicated Outcome Area or Policy Priority dedicated to intersectional cohorts.

Social Model of Disability

The Strategy is based on the social model of disability, consistent with the CRPD, which recognises that disability results from the interaction between people with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder full and effective participation on an equal basis with others (Australian Government 2021; OHCHR 2006).

Embedding the social model of disability across ADS-related work promotes inclusion and participation for people with disability, their families and broader communities. By endorsing the ADS, all levels of government have committed to adopting a social model of disability as a best practice approach.



Guiding Principles

The Strategy includes eight guiding principles aligned to UN CRPD Article 3, and they should be applied across all portfolios as all work impacts people with disability (Australian Government 2025).

Principle	In practice	Practical application
Respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy including the freedom to make one's own choices, and independence of persons	Start with choice and control. Support people to make their own decisions.	Offer supported decision-making; provide information in preferred formats; respect privacy; avoid paternalistic processes.
Non-discrimination	Remove unfair rules or behaviours that exclude people with disability.	Review eligibility criteria; prohibit discriminatory clauses in procurement and funding; train staff on rights and obligations.
Full and effective participation and inclusion in society	Partner with people with disability in all decisions that affect them.	Co-design and pay participants; schedule accessible meetings; remove physical, communication and digital barriers.
Respect for difference and acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity	Value disability as part of human diversity, with intersectional and culturally safe practice.	Partner with ACCOs; use culturally safe engagement; reflect diverse identities in data, imagery and staffing.
Equality of opportunity	Level the playing field so everyone has a fair chance.	Provide reasonable adjustments; set measurable inclusion targets; embed inclusive recruitment and promotion.
Accessibility	Make places, services and information usable by everyone.	Apply universal design; ensure physical access; provide Easy Read, Auslan and captioning; meet WCAG AA for digital.
Equality of people (UN CRPD: equality between men and women)	Ensure gender equality and inclusion across all programs and settings.	Use gender-responsive analysis; disaggregate data by gender (including non-binary where possible); address gender-based risks.
Respect for the evolving capacities of children with disabilities and respect for the right of children with disabilities to preserve their identities	Uphold children's rights, agency and identity, including culture and language.	Use child-friendly communication; involve families and trusted adults; support connection to culture, Country and community.

Targeted Action Plans

Targeted Action Plans are short-term plans, generally 1–3 years, that focus joint government effort on priority areas agreed by disability ministers (Australian Government 2024).

- The following five Targeted Action Plans were released with the Strategy: Employment; Community Attitudes; Early Childhood; Safety; Emergency Management (Australian Government 2024).
- In January 2025, governments released three new Targeted Action Plans for 2025–2027 covering Community Attitudes, Inclusive Homes and Communities, and Safety, Rights and Justice (DSS Ministers 2025).
- All levels of Australian governments provide updates on the TAPs each year. For 2023–24, governments reported 50% of actions completed, 47% ongoing, and 3% discontinued (DHDAC, 2025).

Despite most actions being marked as completed or on track, this reporting is largely activity-based and often does not show how actions have improved outcomes for the target cohort.

An example of an activity-based indicator appears in Queensland reporting where counts of business development seminars are cited, without linked outcomes for First Nations providers. Activity counts alone do not evidence outcomes for the target cohort (Australian Government 2024).

Associated Plans

Associated Plans are strategies, plans, roadmaps and frameworks that show how work in particular systems supports the Strategy over 3–10 years, and can be sector or community specific. There are currently four Associated Plans listed on the Disability Gateway: Employ My Ability; National Roadmap for Improving the Health of Australians with Intellectual Disability; National Disability Advocacy Framework; and Equity: the Arts and Disability Associated Plan (Australian Government 2025). The Australian Government committed \$12.3 million and is developing an Associated Plan on Accessible Information and Communication (DHDAC, 2025).

Outcomes Framework

The Outcomes Framework measures, tracks and reports on outcomes for people with disability under each Outcome Area and Policy Priority. Progress against each Policy Priority is published annually. The third annual Outcomes Framework report was released on 30 January 2025 (AIHW 2025). While reporting is improving, disaggregation by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status is still not consistently available across all measures, limiting trend analysis for First Nations people with disability (AIHW 2025; Data Improvement Plan 2024).



Data improvement

The Data Improvement Plan sets out how to improve the data needed for the Outcomes Framework, with a focus on collecting data for future measures. The plan was revised in 2024 to strengthen actions and address Royal Commission data recommendations (Data Improvement Plan 2024). Governments are also progressing the National Disability Data Asset to integrate data across jurisdictions and support better reporting for the Strategy. The NDDA Transition Authority was established and project work is continuing in 2024–2025 (NDDA 2024; ONDC 2024).

Engagement

The Strategy's Engagement Plan outlines how people with disability will be engaged in the implementation of the Strategy. Supporting guidance includes the Guide to Applying Australia's Disability Strategy and good practice engagement resources (Australian Government 2025). Disability Gateway

Rights foundations

- Implementation should reflect the UN CRPD (for example Articles 12, 13 and 19) and UNDRIP, and align with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap Priority Reforms (CRPD 2006; UNDRIP 2007; CTG 2022).

FPDN's Recommendations

1. Strengthen First Nations indicators and targets across Strategy measures, aligned to the Closing the Gap Disability Sector Strengthening Plan.
2. Require TAP indicators to evidence outcomes, not only activities, with disaggregation by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status wherever feasible.
3. Fast-track NDDA use-cases that enable routine First Nations reporting for Strategy measures.
4. Publish a consolidated annual "First Nations outcomes snapshot" across the Strategy and Closing the Gap.
5. Apply the Guide to Applying Australia's Disability Strategy and good practice engagement to all Strategy-related consultations with ACCOs and First Nations people with disability.



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