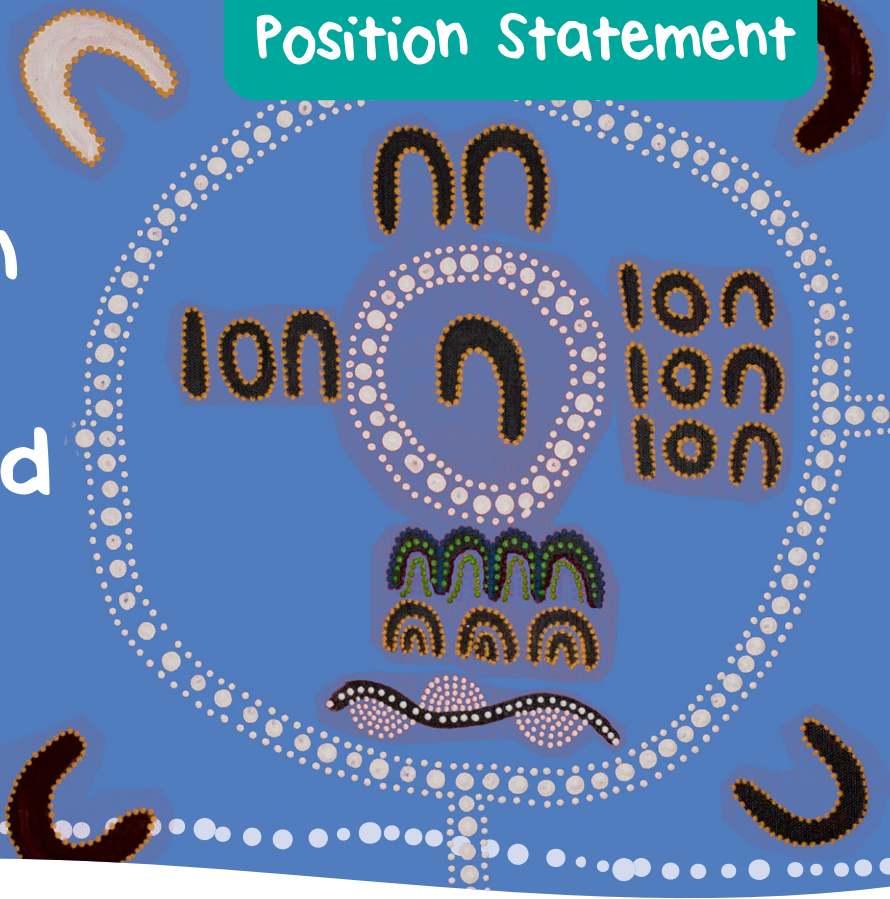


Policy Position Statement - Aged Care and Disability



Cultural and Content Advisory: A Note Before You Read

This statement discusses trauma, institutionalisation, cultural unsafety in aged care, dementia, disability, and the experiences of Stolen Generations survivors. It includes material that may be distressing for some readers, particularly First Nations people and others with lived experience of these systems. If this content raises difficult feelings, readers are encouraged to take care while engaging with this material and to pause or seek support if needed.

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.



First Peoples
Disability Network

Executive summary and introduction

Many First Nations people enter aged care because of disability-related support needs rather than age-related frailty. Early-onset dementia, acquired brain injury, stroke, sensory impairment and chronic disease contribute to aged care entry from age 50, decades before the age profile seen for non-Indigenous Australians. The aged care system is not structured to respond to this pattern of need. It was designed for age-related frailty and does not consistently provide culturally safe assessment, disability-informed care planning, a disability-capable workforce or community-controlled delivery at the scale required.

The Aged Care Act 2024 and the Support at Home program, which commenced on 1 November 2025, introduced rights-based protections for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including the right to remain connected to Country and to receive culturally safe services. Additional reforms, such as the Statement of Rights, the Elder Care Support program, the Remote and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Aged Care Service Development Assistance Panel, and the Integrated Care and Commissioning initiative, represent positive steps toward a more equitable and culturally responsive system.

However, these reforms are not yet delivering consistently in practice. Key commitments remain partially implemented or unmet, and critical elements require strengthening to achieve their intended impact.

In particular, FPDN has identified the absence of disability within aged care governance structures (including within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Aged Care Framework 2025–2035) as a significant gap that limits the system’s ability to respond to the needs of First Nations people with disability. The Equity of Access fee reduction supplement was not included in the Aged Care Rules. Only three Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander assessment organisations are currently operating nationally for a population of nearly 250,000 eligible people. Interim First Nations Aged Care Commissioner Andrea Kelly found the system “has failed, and continues to fail” (Kelly, 2025) older First Nations people, and Natalie Siegel-Brown, the Inspector-General of Aged Care is “highly concerned” reforms will reduce community-controlled provision (IGAC, 2025). For First Nations people with disability, these shortcomings compound existing barriers associated with cultural unsafety, remoteness and the unresolved interface between the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and aged care.

This statement identifies the policy changes required to address these issues. It should be read alongside FPDN’s broader position statement on older First Nations people with disability, which addresses the full scope of ageing with disability beyond the aged care system.

Key messages

Aged care entry for many First Nations people is disability-driven, but the system is not structured to respond to disability.

Thirty-eight percent of First Nations home support users and 11% of those in permanent residential care are aged under 65 (GEN, 2025). These users are disproportionately people with disability rather than people experiencing age-related frailty. However, the aged care system does not consistently provide disability-specific assessment, care planning or allied health capacity. The Integrated Assessment Tool has not been validated for cultural safety or disability competency with First Nations communities.

The removal of the Equity of Access supplement has reduced the viability of culturally safe aged care delivery.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander fee reduction supplement, confirmed by the Department in September 2024, was not included in the final Aged Care Rules. As a result, Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs) may be required to charge fees for services that were previously provided at no cost. The Institute for Urban Indigenous Health (IUIH) has warned that this may reduce the capacity of First Nations providers to continue delivering aged care, resulting in reduced or no access to culturally safe services for First Nations people with disability.

Current First Nations assessment coverage is insufficient to meet population need.

Only three Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander assessment organisations are operating under the phased rollout that commenced in August 2025. This level of coverage is not proportionate to a population of nearly 250,000 eligible people. The Single Assessment System's reliance on the My Aged Care digital portal adds further barriers for First Nations people with cognitive, sensory or literacy-related disability, particularly in remote communities. Assessors have been compared to "robodebt" by clinicians who report disagreeing with algorithmic outputs eight times out of ten.



Only three Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander assessment organisations are operating under the phased rollout that commenced in August 2025. This level of coverage is not proportionate to a population of nearly 250,000 eligible people.

The current NDIS-aged care interface creates significant access gaps for First Nations people with disability.

First Nations people who are eligible for aged care from age 50 may never have had access to NDIS assessment or support. At age 65, they are permanently excluded from uncapped NDIS funding. Assistive technology may then shift from needs-based NDIS funding to the aged care annual cap of \$15,000. No linked dataset currently tracks these transitions or their consequences for First Nations people with disability.

Cultural unsafety functions as a barrier to access for First Nations people with disability.

Thirty-one percent of older First Nations people report unfair treatment when accessing services, and 15% avoid services entirely as a result (Temple et al., 2019). Interim First Nations Aged Care Commissioner Andrea Kelly found the system to be "largely culturally unsafe" and "alienating," with Stolen Generations survivors finding institutional settings "distressingly" reminiscent of past institutionalisation. Commissioner Kelly found the system Cultural unsafety does not merely reduce quality; it prevents First Nations people with disability from accessing the system at all.

Community-controlled models are better placed to deliver culturally safe aged care that responds to disability.

The Institute for Urban Indigenous Health's integrated model across health, disability and aged care demonstrates the value of coordinated, community-controlled service delivery. However, only 23% of First Nations Elders receiving aged care are supported by Aboriginal-led providers (Royal Commission, 2021). The Inspector-General of Aged Care is "highly concerned" that current reforms will reduce community-controlled provision further by increasing regulatory and administrative burdens that these organisations cannot absorb.

Younger First Nations people with disability are entering aged care due to gaps in disability supports.

A cohort of younger First Nations people with disability are entering or relying on aged care services due to gaps in disability supports, particularly in thin markets and remote areas. Aged care services are not designed to meet the social, developmental, and disability-related needs of people accessing care at younger ages, including access to allied health, assistive technology, and culturally safe, community-based supports. Targeted policy and service responses are required to ensure this group can access appropriate, culturally safe care that aligns with their needs, preferences, and life stage.

31%

Thirty-one percent of older First Nations people report unfair treatment when accessing services.

23%

Only 23% of First Nations Elders receiving aged care are supported by Aboriginal-led providers

Sources: Temple et al., 2019, Royal Commission, 2021

Key evidence and statistics

- **First Nations people enter aged care significantly younger than non-Indigenous Australians: median age at home care admission is 70, compared with 82; for residential care, 75 versus 86** (GEN, 2025). This younger entry reflects disability-driven need, not age-related frailty, yet aged care assessment, classification, and service models are built around the latter.
- **As at 31 March 2025, 9,519 First Nations people held a Home Care Package, representing 3% of the 289,481 national total.** A further 2,137 First Nations people were waiting at their approved level (HCP Data Report Q3 2024-25). No data exist on how many First Nations people with disability have died on the aged care waitlist, despite 4,812 older Australians dying while waiting for appropriate home care in 2024-25 nationally (The Weekly Source, 2025).
- **Despite comprising approximately 4% of the aged care-eligible population (aged 50+), First Nations people represent only 2.7% of mainstream aged care users, and only 16% of eligible Elders receive aged care, compared with 26% of non-Indigenous Australians** (NATSIAACC, 2025). This under-representation coexists with dramatically higher age-standardised usage rates (2.6 to 5.0 times higher depending on service type), confirming the access gap is driven by systemic exclusion, not lower need (AIHW, 2025).
- **The Royal Commission estimated an additional 42,000 Indigenous Elders needed to start receiving culturally safe aged care to achieve equity** (Royal Commission, 2021). NACCHO has called for culturally safe assessment tools, integration of aged care with disability and primary health services, and sustainable block funding for ACCHOs, describing market-based models as "fundamentally at odds" with community-controlled service delivery (NACCHO, 2024).
- **Among First Nations people aged 60 and over, dementia prevalence is approximately three times the general population rate (21% versus 6.8%), with onset seven years earlier** (AIHW, 2025). A 2024 Cambridge University scoping review found no culturally safe dementia care interventions for Indigenous populations worldwide, describing the evidence base as empty. First Nations people with dementia in residential aged care face compounding risks of chemical restraint, cultural disconnection, and loss of first language, with behaviour shaped by trauma and culture mischaracterised as "non-compliance."

42,000

The Royal Commission estimated an additional 42,000 Indigenous Elders needed to start receiving culturally safe aged care to achieve equity

3X

Among First Nations people aged 60 and over, dementia prevalence is approximately three times the general population rate, with onset seven years earlier.

Sources: Royal Commission, 2021, AIHW, 2025

"I wouldn't want to be back in one of them places because without your independence, you might as well lay down and die." (Uncle Wayne Garlett, Ballardong man, Stolen Generations survivor and person with disability, WA) (ABC News, via YourLifeChoices, 2025). **For the approximately 17,150 Stolen Generations survivors now of aged care-eligible age, who are 1.4 times more likely to have severe or profound disability, residential aged care evokes childhood institutionalisation.**

"I think there's always been a difference in the aged care needs of Aboriginal people. We're in a system, an English system, and I think our care needs are different. Not that we need to be in a building with four walls and just sit there." (Aboriginal Elder, Walgett, NSW) (McCausland et al., 2023, Ageing and Society). **This Elder names the fundamental incompatibility: a Western institutional model imposed on people whose concept of ageing well centres connection to Country, kin, and culture.**

The Inspector-General of Aged Care stated: **"I have grave concerns about the way residential aged care is mainstreamed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and those institutional settings can be very triggering of trauma from past institutionalisation"** (Siegel-Brown, 2025, via YourLifeChoices). **She also warned that co-contributions under Support at Home risk pushing vulnerable First Nations Elders away from essential supports.**

- **The 2026–27 Federal Budget includes a \$3.2 million commitment over four years to exempt Stolen Generations redress payments from means testing for residential aged care.** This reform reflects a key area of advocacy by FPDN and represents a positive step toward reducing financial barriers for Stolen Generations survivors and First Nations people with disability.

\$3.2M

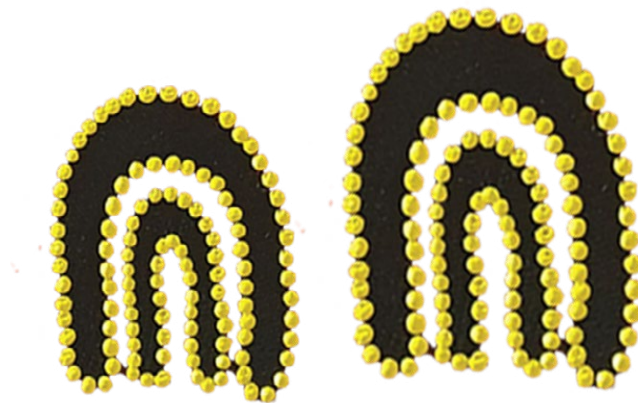
The 2026–27 Federal Budget includes a \$3.2 million commitment over four years to exempt Stolen Generations redress payments from means testing for residential aged care.

Key recommendations

- **Reinstate the Equity of Access fee reduction supplement.** The omission of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander supplement from the Aged Care Rules contradicts Royal Commission Recommendation 47 and the Department's own September 2024 commitment. The Minister should restore this provision through immediate Rules amendment. (Priority Reform 3; responsible actor: Minister for Aged Care.)
- **Rapidly expand Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander assessment organisations. Three organisations for 250,000 eligible people is wholly inadequate.** The rollout must be accelerated to at least 20 organisations within 12 months. Assessment tools must be validated for cultural safety and disability competency, with the capacity to identify disability-specific support needs alongside aged care needs. (Priority Reform 3; responsible actors: Department of Health, Disability and Ageing.)
- **Validate the Integrated Assessment Tool for First Nations disability.** The IAT has not been tested for cultural safety or for its capacity to identify disability among First Nations people. A co-designed validation process led by First Nations people with disability must be commissioned, with assessors trained to distinguish disability-driven need from age-related frailty and to refer to the NDIS where appropriate. (Priority Reform 3; responsible actors: Department of Health, Disability and Ageing, NDIA.)
- **Fund ACCHOs to deliver integrated aged care with disability supports.** Sustainable block funding should enable ACCHOs to deliver aged care that includes disability-specific allied health, assistive technology, and personal care within community-controlled primary health models. NATSIFACP's flexible model must be maintained and expanded, not diluted by mainstream regulatory requirements. (Priority Reform 2; responsible actors: Department of Health, Disability and Ageing.)
- **Close the NDIS-aged care gap at 65.** Legislate NDIS Review Action 2.11 to allow concurrent NDIS and aged care supports. First Nations people who were never assessed for the NDIS before 65 due to remoteness, diagnostic barriers, or absence of Aboriginal-controlled providers must not be permanently excluded from disability-level supports. (Priority Reforms 2 and 3; responsible actors: NDIA, Department of Health, Disability and Ageing.)
- **Mandate trauma-informed protections for Stolen Generations survivors.** Protocols must ensure survivors with disability, particularly those with dementia, are not placed in institutional settings without culturally supported consent. (Priority Reform 3; responsible actors: Minister for Aged Care, Department of Social Services.)
- **Mandate cultural safety and disability competency training.** The Inspector-General found cultural safety training is still not mandatory in aged care. All aged care workers must complete nationally accredited training in cultural safety, trauma-informed care, and disability competency, developed in partnership with First Nations people with disability. (Priority Reform 3; responsible actors: Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission.)

- **Embed disability in First Nations aged care governance.** First Nations people with disability must have a formal role in the permanent statutory First Nations Aged Care Commissioner's advisory structures and the 10-year Aged Care Framework (2025-2035), ensuring disability is embedded in governance architecture that would otherwise address aged care and Indigeneity without disability expertise. (Priority Reform 1; responsible actors: First Nations Aged Care Commissioner, Department of Health, Disability and Ageing.)
- **Publish disaggregated aged care data by disability and Indigenous status.** Waitlist deaths, wait times, service utilisation, restrictive practices, and quality indicators must be reported by Indigenous status and disability type. The absence of this data renders First Nations people with disability invisible in aged care reform. (Priority Reform 4; responsible actors: AIHW, Department of Health, Disability and Ageing.)

This statement should be read alongside FPDN's broader position statement on older First Nations people with disability, which addresses the full scope of ageing with disability beyond the aged care system.



References

- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2025) Aged Care for First Nations People. AIHW, Canberra. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/aged-care-for-indigenous-australians>
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2025) Dementia in Australia: First Nations Australians with Dementia. AIHW, Canberra. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/dementia/dementia-in-aus/contents/first-nations-australians-with-dementia/how-many-first-nations-people-have-dementia>
- GEN Aged Care Data (2025) People Using Aged Care (updated 30 April 2025). <https://www.gen-agedcaredata.gov.au/topics/people-using-aged-care>
- GEN Aged Care Data (2025) Home Care Packages Program Data Report Q3 2024-25. <https://www.gen-agedcaredata.gov.au/getmedia/fc1bfb1d-db45-4d82-9807-cff378f3faaa/Home-Care-Packages-Program-Data-Report-3rd-Qtr-2024-25>
- Institute for Urban Indigenous Health (2024) Submission to Aged Care Rules Consultation Release 2a. <https://consultations.health.gov.au/ageing-and-aged-care/new-aged-care-act-rules-consultation-release-2a-su/results/236-instituteforurbanindigenoushealth.pdf>
- Kelly, A. (2025) Transforming Aged Care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People: Report to Government. Department of Health and Aged Care. <https://www.health.gov.au/news/new-report-centres-voices-of-older-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-people>
- McCausland, R. et al. (2023) 'Elders' perspectives and priorities for ageing well in a remote Aboriginal community', Ageing and Society, 45(1), pp. 31-54. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/ageing-and-society/article/elders-perspectives-and-priorities-for-ageing-well-in-a-remote-aboriginal-community/4EFCAD2A0DCE60F8F641A2E6BDDFBC66>
- NACCHO (2024) Aged Care Quality Standards Guidance Submission. <https://www.naccho.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Aged-Care-Quality-Standards-Guidance-NACCHO-submission-May24.pdf>
- NATSIAACC (2025) Submission to Senate Community Affairs References Committee on Aged Care Service Delivery. <https://natsiaacc.org.au/aged-care/>
- Office of the Inspector-General of Aged Care (IGAC) (2025). Progress Report: Implementation of the Recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety. <https://www.igac.gov.au/sites/default/files/2025-09/2025-progress-report-on-the-implementation-of-the-recommendations-of-the-royal-commission-into-aged-care-quality-and-safety.pdf>
- Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety (2021) Final Report: Care, Dignity and Respect, Volume 3A. <https://agedcare.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/final-report-volume-3a>
- The Weekly Source (2025) '4,812 older Australians died waiting for appropriate home care in 2024-25'. <https://www.theweeklysource.com.au/4-812-older-australians-died-waiting-for-appropriate-home-care-in-2024-25/>
- YourLifeChoices (2025) 'Stolen Generations survivors overlooked in aged care reform, advocates say'. <https://www.yourlifechoices.com.au/health/aged-care/stolen-generations-survivors-overlooked-in-aged-care-reform-advocates-say/>



Acknowledgement

This work was supported by the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) through funding provided as part of the National Disability Footprint, under the Disability Sector Strengthening Plan (DSSP). We acknowledge NIAA as a key partner in enabling the development of these resources.

First Peoples Disability Network Limited

 policy@fpdn.org.au

 fpdn.org.au/policy

Accessibility Statement

If you encounter difficulties, or need this document in an alternative format please contact media@fpdn.org.au or by calling (02) 9267 4195.



First Peoples
Disability Network



Information on this Statement
Date issued: June 2026
© Artwork by Uncle Paul Calcott