

# Policy Position Statement - LGBTIQ+SB+ First Nations People with Disability

## Cultural and Content Advisory: A Note Before You Read

This position statement discusses the lived experiences, rights, and systemic exclusion of First Nations LGBTIQ+SB+ people with disability. In doing so, it contains information that some readers may find distressing, including:

- Statistics on suicide and suicidal ideation among First Nations LGBTQ+SB+ young people
- Accounts of family and sexual violence, abuse, and exploitation
- Descriptions of discrimination, racism, transphobia, and homophobia across health, disability, and justice systems
- Experiences of systemic neglect and institutional harm

If this content raises difficult feelings, please reach out for support using the contacts at the end of the document.

Despite the weight of this evidence, this document is grounded in strength. It centres the voices, rights, and self-determination of First Nations LGBTIQ+SB+ people with disability, people whose cultures, identities, and communities have endured, and continue to thrive.

*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

First Peoples Disability Network Australia (FPDN) calls for urgent, coordinated policy action to address the systemic invisibility and compounding disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, Brotherboy, or Sistergirl (LGBTQIA+SB+). No Australian policy instrument, data system, or funded program currently addresses the three-way intersection of Indigeneity, disability, and diverse gender or sexuality.

The Disability Royal Commission (DRC) treated these populations as parallel lines that never met. The NDIS Review named the intersection but did not target it. Closing the Gap disability cross-cutting outcomes do not mention LGBTQIA+SB+ identities. Guided by FPDN's Cultural Model of Inclusion, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), this statement sets out what must change and who must act.

## Key messages

### **Invisible at the intersection.**

No Australian dataset, survey, or peer-reviewed study provides prevalence data or specific analysis at the three-way intersection of Indigeneity, disability, and LGBTQIA+SB+ identity. This statistical invisibility means the unique needs and compounding disadvantages of this cohort are overlooked in policy, funding, and service design.

### **Compounding harm, not just "double disadvantage."**

First Nations people with disability already face the combined effects of racism and ableism. The addition of homophobia, transphobia, or discrimination on the basis of intersex status intensifies this burden, producing distinct experiences of exclusion, violence, and poor health outcomes that no single-axis policy framework can address.

### **Brotherboy and Sistergirl identities are sovereign.**

Brotherboy and Sistergirl are culturally specific First Nations identity terms that pre-date colonisation and are not direct translations of Western transgender or non-binary categories. Policy responses must respect the cultural distinctiveness of these identities and not subsume them within mainstream LGBTIQ+ frameworks.

### **Culture is the pathway to inclusion.**

FPDN's Cultural Model of Inclusion demonstrates that connection to, and participation in, cultural and community life is powerful in mitigating the adverse effects of discrimination and exclusion for First Nations people with disability. This model has direct, as yet formally unarticulated, relevance to LGBTQIA+SB+ inclusion and must underpin all policy responses.

**Self-determination must lead.**

First Nations LGBTQIA+SB+ people with disability must lead the design of any response, not as consultants to mainstream processes, but as architects of their own solutions, consistent with Closing the Gap Priority Reform One and the right to self-determination affirmed by UNDRIP.

**Services fall between three systems.**

Indigenous health services may lack LGBTIQ+ competency, LGBTIQ+ services may lack cultural safety, and disability services may lack both. This triple service gap leaves First Nations LGBTQIA+SB+ people with disability without safe, affirming, and accessible support.



7 Genders Artwork by © Uncle Paul Constable Calcott

## Key evidence and statistics

- Approximately **25.3%** of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have disability, with **11.6%** having a profound or severe limitation. After age-standardisation, Indigenous Australians are **2.6** times as likely as non-Indigenous Australians to have a profound or severe core activity limitation (ABS, 2023; AIHW, 2023). These figures likely underestimate prevalence, as the ABS Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers excludes very remote areas and discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- **The Walkern Katatdjin (Rainbow Knowledge) Phase 2 National Survey** (Liddelow-Hunt, Uink et al., 2023), the first national study of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQA+ young people (619 participants aged 14-25), found that **nearly half had attempted suicide in their lifetime, 19% had attempted suicide in the past 12 months, and more than 90% reported high or very high levels of psychological distress.** The survey does not report disability prevalence data among this cohort, despite capturing mental health outcomes that may constitute psychosocial disability.
- **La Trobe University's ARCSHS research for the DRC** (Hill, Amos, Bourne et al., 2022) found **LGBTQA+ people with disability experienced significantly higher rates of violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation than LGBTQA+ people without disability, with 81.4% of those with severe disability reporting family violence and only 34.5% of LGBTIQ+ adults with disability feeling accepted when accessing a health service.** This data is not disaggregated by Indigenous status.

Content warning: the following quote contains references to housing instability, disability, and discrimination. **"Being on the list and housing, being an amputee, being gay, transgender, it's like, it's hard. Especially when you don't have a place to stay."** (Crystal Love Johnson, Tiwi Island Sistergirl and Elder) (SBS Audio, 2023/2024).

**90%**

More than 90% [of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQA+ study participants] reported high or very high levels of psychological distress

**~50%**

In the first national study of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQA+ young people nearly half had attempted suicide in their lifetime, 19% had attempted suicide in the past 12 months.

**81%**

of [LGBTQA+ people] with severe disability report[ed] family violence.

Sources: Liddelow-Hunt, Uink et al., 2023, Hill, Amos, Bourne et al., 2022.

Content warning: the following quote contains references to transphobia in health services.

**A young Aboriginal trans person described a GP dismissing their mental health needs: their depression and anxiety were treated as symptoms of being trans, rather than as conditions requiring treatment in their own right** (Briskman et al., 2022, p. 112).

- **Kerry's (2014) discourse analysis documented that Indigenous Sistergirls and Brotherboys face a dual burden of racism from within LGBTIQ+ communities** and transphobia within Indigenous communities, alongside high rates of HIV, substance use, physical and sexual abuse, and community disengagement. Sullivan et al. (2023) documented customary retribution ("payback") enacted against Sistergirls and their families, including violence displaced onto kin.
- Piantedosi et al. (2025) found that although the term "intersectionality" appears 93 times in the 2023 NDIS Review, **it functions primarily as a listing device for overlapping disadvantages rather than as an analytical framework that generates specific, targeted actions.**
- Commonwealth anti-discrimination law operates through three single-attribute statutes, meaning a Sistergirl with disability experiencing compound discrimination based on her Aboriginality, gender identity, and disability cannot bring a complaint reflecting her full experience (WWDA, 2025).
- **No specific program or service was identified that simultaneously addresses the three-way intersection of Indigeneity, disability, and LGBTQIA+SB+ identity.**



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## Key recommendations

- **Establish a national LGBTQIA+SB+ First Nations Disability Advisory Mechanism.** Current advisory structures have not translated intersectional engagement into specific policy outcomes. A formal body, governed by First Nations LGBTQIA+SB+ people with disability, should have a mandated role in informing the NDIS First Nations Strategy, the NDIS LGBTQIASB+ Strategy, and Closing the Gap reporting. Responsible actors: NDIA, DSS, Coalition of Peaks. Aligns with Priority Reform One.
- **Fund community-controlled intersectional services and research.** Block funding to First Nations community-controlled organisations, working in partnership with LGBTQIA+SB+ peaks and disability peaks, should develop culturally grounded, disability-inclusive, LGBTQIA+SB+-affirming service models. The BlaQ Aboriginal Corporation model in NSW, where an Aboriginal LGBTQI organisation holds a formal Closing the Gap governance seat, provides a structural precedent. Responsible actors: DSS, NIAA, state/territory governments. Aligns with Priority Reform Two.
- **Close the data gap through community-controlled intersectional data collection.** This is the most consequential structural reform. It requires incorporating disability modules in future Walkern KatatdjIn survey waves, incorporating LGBTQIA+SB+ modules in First Nations disability data collection (including the NIAA Data Scoping Study), and implementing the ABS sexual orientation and gender identity standard across major national surveys including the Census and SDAC. All First Nations data sovereignty principles must apply. Responsible actors: ABS, AIHW, NIAA. Aligns with Priority Reform Four.
- **Reform anti-discrimination law to recognise intersectional discrimination.** The single-attribute framework of Commonwealth anti-discrimination law prevents First Nations LGBTQIA+SB+ people with disability from bringing complaints reflecting their compound experience. Legislative amendment, as advocated by WWDA (2025), is required. Responsible actor: Attorney-General's Department.
- **Connect DRC and NDIS Review implementation across identity streams.** The Australian Government must implement DRC Volume 9 (First Nations), Recommendation 6.23 (culturally safe advocacy including LGBTQIA+), and NDIS Review Actions 1.6 and 2.10 as connected workstreams, not parallel silos. Progress should be reported against the specific intersection. Responsible actors: DSS, NDIA, DRC Response Implementation Unit.
- **Invest in intersectional workforce development.** Develop and mandate co-designed training for all government and mainstream service staff on First Nations cultural safety, disability awareness, and LGBTQIA+SB+ competency, including Brotherboy and Sistergirl identities. Training must be led by First Nations LGBTQIA+SB+ people with disability and their representative organisations. Responsible actors: NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission, state/territory health departments, NIAA. Aligns with Priority Reform Three.
- **Extend conversion practices bans nationally with institutional care focus.** Conversion practices are banned in jurisdictions representing approximately 85% of the population, but Tasmania, the Northern Territory, and Western Australia have not yet enacted bans. Legislation must include specific attention to institutional and residential care settings where First Nations people with disability are disproportionately placed. Responsible actors: state/territory attorneys-general.

- **Apply FPDN's Cultural Model of Inclusion to LGBTQIA+SB+ inclusion.** FPDN will develop a published framework explicitly articulating the Cultural Model's application to LGBTQIA+SB+ inclusion, building on the Many Spirit Dreaming cultural framework and drawing on community engagement with First Nations LGBTQIA+SB+ people with disability.
- **Fund peer networks, leadership, and community healing.** Provide sustainable, long-term funding for First Nations LGBTQIA+SB+ peer support, leadership development, and community-led healing initiatives that are disability-inclusive and culturally grounded. The Walkern Katatdjin project's Youth Advisory Group governance model demonstrates effective community-led program design. Responsible actors: NIAA, DSS, Department of Health and Aged Care. Aligns with Priority Reform Two.

If the information here raises any concerns for you, support is available:



**13YARN**

**13 92 76**

24/7 crisis support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

**QLife**

**1800 184 527**

LGBTIQ+ peer support and referral, 3pm-midnight daily

**Lifeline**

**13 11 14**

24/7 crisis support

**1800RESPECT**

**1800 737 732**

Domestic, family and sexual violence support

**Beyond Blue**

**1300 22 4636**

Mental health support

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## 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.



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Information on this Statement

Date issued: June 2026

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