

## Policy Position Statement - First Nations Women and Girls with Disability



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

This document contains discussion of violence, abuse, forced sterilisation, and systemic discrimination experienced by First Nations women and girls with disability. It also reflects their strength, resilience, cultural knowledge, and leadership. If this content raises difficult feelings, support is available through 13YARN on 13 92 76, a free, confidential crisis support line for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

*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 Nations women and girls with disability experience compounding structural disadvantage at the intersection of race, gender, and disability. Yet, First Nations women and girls with disability are not adequately recognised in Australia’s data systems, policy frameworks, or service responses. Approximately one in four Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls has disability (ABS & Avery, 2025; AHRC, 2024).

This cohort experiences significantly higher rates of violence, incarceration, child removal, forced sterilisation, and exclusion from essential services, including the NDIS. No dedicated national policy, funding stream, or service system currently addresses this intersection. FPDN calls on all Australian governments to end the intersectional invisibility of First Nations women and girls with disability through targeted data reform, dedicated policy responses, legislative prohibition of forced sterilisation, and investment in community-controlled, culturally safe supports.

## Key messages

<b>Not captured in national datasets.</b>	No Australian government data system routinely cross-tabulates disability status, Indigenous status, and gender. As a result, outcomes for First Nations women and girls with disability are not visible in national reporting and cannot be tracked over time (ABS & Avery, 2025; FPDN, 2025).
<b>Violence risk is intensified at the intersection of race, gender and disability.</b>	First Nations women with disability face higher risks of violence than those captured in single-axis policy frameworks looking at disability or First Nations experiences independently. In many cases, violence also contributes to disability, including through brain injury and trauma (DRC, 2023; Wangkiny Yirra Project, 2022).
<b>Forced sterilisation remains lawful.</b>	Australia has not enacted national legislation to prohibit forced sterilisation of women and girls with disability, including First Nations women, despite repeated condemnation from seven UN treaty monitoring bodies (WWDA, 2013; FPDN, 2022; DRC, 2023).
<b>First Nations women are the fastest growing prison population in Australia.</b>	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are imprisoned at 21.2 times the rate of non-Indigenous women, with cognitive disability and psychosocial disability significantly over-represented among those incarcerated (ALRC, 2018; Baldry, 2015).
<b>Current NDIS settings do not adequately respond to First Nations women and girls with disability.</b>	Women and girls make up just 37% of all NDIS participants, and NDIS data is not disaggregated by both Indigenous status and gender. First Nations women face compounding barriers including thin markets, diagnostic gatekeeping, and culturally unsafe service delivery (NDIA, 2022; FPDN, 2024).
<b>Policy responses often fail to recognise strengths, leadership and cultural knowledge.</b>	First Nations women and girls with disability hold significant cultural knowledge, resilience, and leadership, but these strengths are not adequately reflected in deficit-based policy frameworks (Avery, 2018; Oscar, 2020).

## Key evidence and statistics

- **Approximately 25.9% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females had disability in 2022, roughly twice the non-Indigenous rate** (ABS & Avery, 2025). The ABS Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers excludes very remote communities (approximately 17% of the Indigenous population), meaning these figures likely undercount prevalence.
- **The proportion of First Nations women with profound or severe psychosocial disability rose sharply from 4.1% in 2018 to 7.1% in 2022**, signalling an escalating crisis in social and emotional wellbeing that demands urgent, gendered policy responses (ABS & Avery, 2025).
- **One in five (20%) First Nations adults with disability reported experiencing abuse or neglect in the past 12 months, with 17% reporting emotional abuse and 9.8% physical abuse** (ABS & Avery, 2025). The DRC's Wangkiny Yirra project found that one-third of First Nations women with disability in WA experienced sexual abuse in childhood, and that violence frequently caused their disability (DRC, 2022).
- **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are the fastest growing prisoner population in Australia, imprisoned at 21.2 times the rate of non-Indigenous women** (ALRC, 2018). Professor Baldry's research found that Aboriginal women with mental and cognitive disabilities accumulated an average of 23 convictions and were recorded as victims of crime an average of 23 times (Baldry, 2015). Data gap: no national statistic captures the intersection of Aboriginal women, cognitive disability, and incarceration.

**"The power imbalance between First Nations people with disability and these large and powerful systems has a long and dark history. Often the ability to self-advocate, or even the ability of parents, families and carers to advocate on behalf of women and girls is diminished in the face of these systems, not only because of cultural and language barriers, but also because of a lack of information about the rights of individuals."**  
(Tennille Lamb, Kanolu and Warrabul woman, National Policy Director of FPDN, 2024).

# 26%

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# 20%

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# 21X

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are the fastest growing prisoner population in Australia, imprisoned at 21.2 times the rate of non-Indigenous women.

Sources: ABS & Avery, 2025, ALRC, 2018.

- **FPDN's 2022 UN Committee Against Torture submission describes forced sterilisation as "an ongoing weapon of genocide against First Nations women and those with uteruses, upholding racially violent ideas around eugenics"** (FPDN, 2022). Australia has received condemnation from seven UN treaty monitoring bodies since 2005, yet no national prohibition exists.
- **Women and girls constitute only 37% of all NDIS participants** (NDIA, 2022). NDIS data is not disaggregated by both Indigenous status and gender, meaning the scheme cannot report how many First Nations women are participants, their plan utilisation, or their outcomes. A 2025 analysis found the NDIS Review's final recommendations were "largely silent on gender" (Dimov et al., 2025).

**"I live in disability accommodation through NDIS with staff on site 24/7 and multiple times I have had male staff come into my house without properly announcing themselves or being welcomed in, even coming right to my bedroom door before making themselves announced. As a woman this makes me very uncomfortable and as if they have no cultural awareness of womens business."** (First Nations woman with disability, FPDN NDIS inquiry submission, 2024).

- **Only 40.2% of First Nations people with disability aged 15-64 were employed in 2022, compared with 74.5% without disability.** More than half (52.1%) were not in the labour force (ABS & Avery, 2025). Employment data is not available at the triple intersection of First Nations status, gender, and disability.



**FPDN's 2022 UN Committee Against Torture submission describes forced sterilisation as "an ongoing weapon of genocide against First Nations women and those with uteruses, upholding racially violent ideas around eugenics."**

**37%**

**Women and girls constitute only 37% of all NDIS participants.**

**40%**

**Only 40.2% of First Nations people with disability aged 15-64 were employed in 2022, compared with 74.5% without disability.**

Sources: FPDN, 2022, NDIA, 2022, ABS & Avery, 2025.

## Key recommendations

- **Mandate intersectional data disaggregation across all Commonwealth datasets.** All major government datasets, including the NDIS, Closing the Gap reporting, justice data, and housing data, must routinely cross-tabulate disability status, Indigenous status, and gender. This implements Closing the Gap Priority Reform 4 (shared access to data) and aligns with FPDN's Ten-Point Plan.
- **Enact national legislation prohibiting forced sterilisation without exception.** Implement the DRC's recommendation and the repeated findings of seven UN treaty monitoring bodies by legislating an absolute prohibition on non-therapeutic sterilisation of people with disability.
- **Develop a national action plan to end violence against First Nations women and girls with disability.** This must be a standalone, funded plan (separate to the disability lens applied to existing frameworks), co-designed, and embedded within the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032. Implements DRC Recommendation 8.23.
- **Fund First Nations women-specific disability services and advocacy.** No services currently exist specifically for First Nations women with disability. Invest in community-controlled, culturally safe services including family violence responses, legal advocacy, housing, and NDIS navigation. Aligns with Priority Reform 1 (formal partnerships and shared decision-making).
- **Require NDIS gender and Indigenous status disaggregation in all quarterly reporting.** The NDIA must publish quarterly dashboards showing participant numbers, plan budgets, utilisation rates, and outcomes disaggregated by Indigenous status, gender, region, and disability type. Implements FPDN's Ten-Point Plan.
- **Invest in First Nations women's disability workforce and leadership.** Fund dedicated pathways for First Nations women with disability into disability support, advocacy, and governance roles, including through Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations. Aligns with Priority Reform 3 (transforming government organisations).
- **Reform the criminal justice response to First Nations women with cognitive disability.** End indefinite detention of people found unfit to plead, invest in therapeutic and community-based alternatives to incarceration, and mandate disability screening at first contact with the justice system. Implements DRC Volume 8 recommendations.
- **Commission a national prevalence study of violence against First Nations women with disability.** No national study has quantified violence against this specific cohort. Fund community-controlled, culturally safe research led by First Nations women with disability. Aligns with Priority Reform 4.
- **Ensure DRC recommendations affecting First Nations women with disability are implemented with community oversight.** Establish a community-controlled monitoring mechanism, through the First Nations Disability Forum, to track implementation of all DRC recommendations affecting First Nations women and girls with disability.

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First Peoples Disability Network Limited

 [policy@fpdn.org.au](mailto:policy@fpdn.org.au)

 [fpdn.org.au/policy](https://fpdn.org.au/policy)



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