

National Disability Footprint Evaluation

A high-level summary of the final evaluation report prepared for First Peoples Disability Network (FPDN) by New Era Advisory

10 July 2026



First Peoples
Disability Network

 **New Era Advisory**

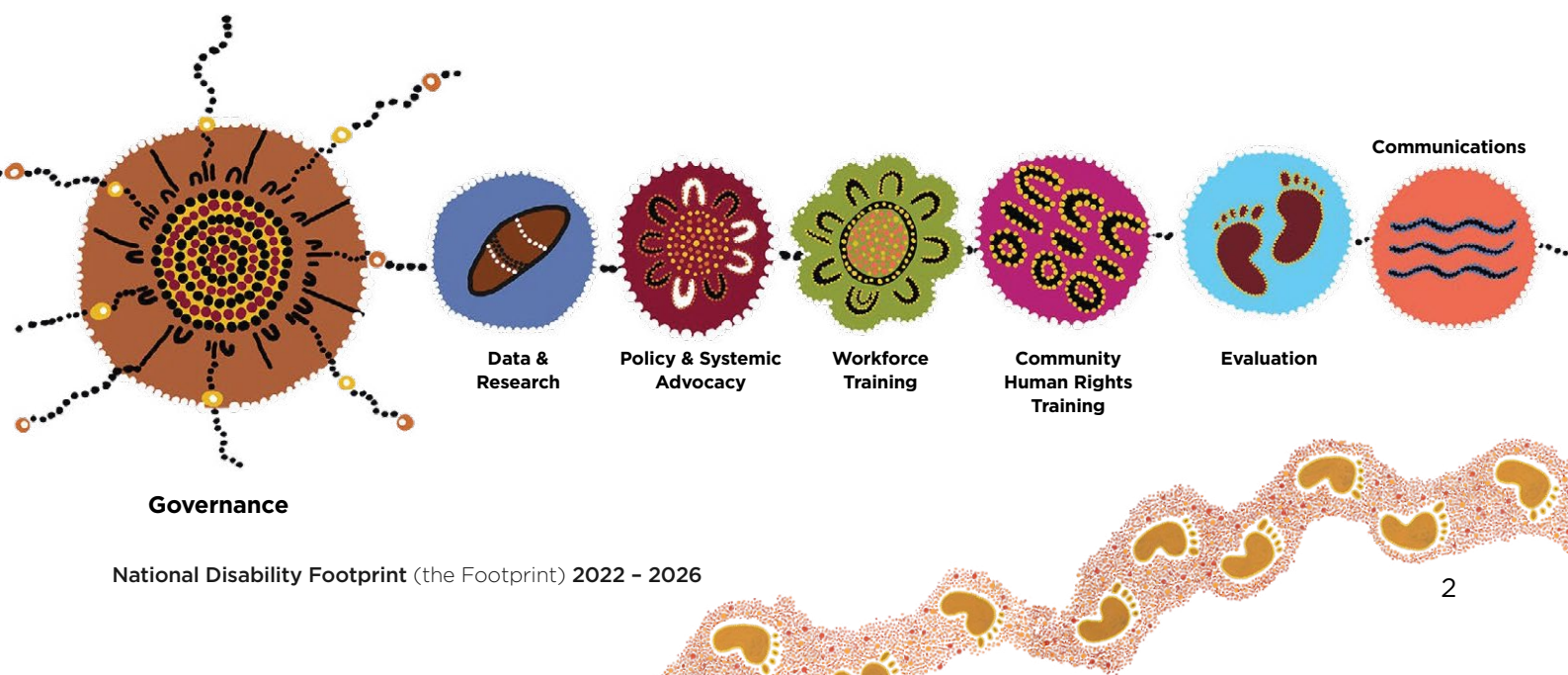
Summary

The evaluation found that the National Disability Footprint made a strong contribution to FPDN's growth, visibility and influence. It strengthened FPDN's national policy voice, expanded community engagement and rights education, improved communications reach, and helped build the foundations needed for FPDN to operate as a stronger national peak body. It also identified important lessons about the time, funding, systems and support needed to sustain this work.

First Peoples Disability Network Australia (FPDN) is the national peak body led by and for First Nations people with disability, their families and communities. From 2022 to 2026, FPDN delivered the National Disability Footprint (the Footprint), a major initiative funded by the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) to strengthen FPDN's role as a national peak body and support work under the Disability Sector Strengthening Plan (DSSP) and the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

The Footprint was made up of seven 'Elements':

1. Governance
2. Data and research
3. Policy and systemic advocacy
4. Workforce training
5. Community human rights training
6. Evaluation
7. Communications



About the evaluation

The evaluation looked at what the National Disability Footprint achieved, how it was implemented, and what can be learned for the future. It drew on more than 563 documents, 28 interviews with 30 internal and external stakeholders, and 71 survey responses. Because some survey response numbers were small, findings should be read as indicative and supported by the broader evidence gathered through interviews and document review.

Figure 1: Snapshot of Data Collected



What the evaluation found

Overall, the evaluation found that the Footprint made a substantial contribution to strengthening FPDN's capability, visibility and influence as a national First Nations disability peak body. It helped build organisational foundations, expand policy and advocacy work, strengthen communications, and deepen engagement with communities, government and the disability and community-controlled sectors.

The evaluation also found that progress was uneven across the seven Elements. This was partly because FPDN was growing rapidly while delivering a large and complex program. In many ways, the Footprint required FPDN to build new systems, roles and ways of working at the same time as delivering national policy, training, community engagement, research, evaluation and communications activities.

Progress across the seven Elements

Figure 2: High-level findings by Element

Element	High-level finding
1. Governance	Substantial progress was made in building the governance, accountability and operating systems needed for FPDN to function as a national peak body. The main future task is to keep embedding these systems consistently.
2. Data and Research	Important system-level progress was made, including work with the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the Culture is Inclusion Knowledge Circle. Delivery was slower and more uneven than intended, and some research and translation outputs remained incomplete at the time of evaluation.
3. Policy	Strong progress was made in strengthening FPDN's national policy and systemic advocacy role. Demand for FPDN's expertise was high, and sustained resourcing will be important to maintain this influence.
4. Workforce Training	Partial progress was made. The training model was redesigned several times, but the refreshed Walking Together approach provides a strong foundation for culturally grounded workforce development.
5. Community Human Rights Training	Strong progress was made through relationship-based, community-led engagement and rights education. Participants reported increased understanding of rights, confidence and early signs of empowerment.
6. Evaluation	Partial but important progress was made in building monitoring, evaluation and learning foundations. Future work will benefit from simple, practical data systems embedded in everyday workflows.
7. Communications	Strong progress was made in increasing FPDN's visibility, reach and public voice, particularly through digital platforms. Stable resourcing will be needed to support more strategic communications over time.

Key achievements

Stronger national voice:

FPDN strengthened its role as an authoritative national voice on First Nations disability rights, particularly through policy submissions, briefings, partnerships and participation in major national reform processes.



Greater visibility and reach:

FPDN's public profile grew through its website, social media, campaigns, storytelling and communications work. The refreshed website recorded around 8,400 users in its first year, and social media engagement increased across major platforms.



Community-led rights education:

FPDN delivered more than 180 community engagement activities and more than 60 community human rights training sessions across multiple states and territories. These activities helped build rights awareness, confidence and early signs of self-advocacy among First Nations people with disability, families and communities.



Culturally grounded workforce training:

FPDN developed and refined a culturally grounded workforce training approach for Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and related services. The refreshed Walking Together training was strongly received by participants, with 93 per cent of surveyed participants rating it as excellent or pretty good.



Policy influence:

FPDN's policy work helped bring a First Nations disability lens to national conversations across areas such as the NDIS, justice, health, housing, early childhood and Closing the Gap.



Organisational growth:

The Footprint supported FPDN's transition from a small organisation into a more structured national peak body, with stronger governance, finance, risk, policy, communications, training and evaluation foundations



What changed for community and the sector

The strongest outcomes were in visibility, awareness, engagement, relationships and policy influence. The evaluation found strong progress in increasing awareness of FPDN and its voice, increasing awareness of the needs and perspectives of First Nations people with disability, and strengthening engagement with community, government and sector partners.

At the community level, the Footprint contributed to early signs of increased rights awareness, confidence and self-advocacy among people who engaged in training and community activities. Medium-term changes, such as stronger service-level inclusion practices and sustained system change, are emerging but will require ongoing investment, follow-up and time.

Key lessons

Growing a national peak body takes time.

Large-scale sector-building work needs realistic timeframes, stable funding and clear sequencing, especially when an organisation is building internal systems while also delivering programs.



Organisational foundations are core work.

Governance, finance, risk, data, people and internal systems are not background tasks; they directly shape delivery quality and sustainability.



Cultural safety and accessibility must be properly resourced.

Inclusive governance, interpreters, accessible materials, reasonable adjustments and culturally safe engagement all carry real costs that need to be built into funding models.



Community-led work depends on relationships.

Trust-building, yarning, face-to-face engagement and follow-up are central to meaningful work with First Nations people with disability, families and communities.



Policy influence needs sustained capacity.

FPDN's policy role is highly valued, but ongoing influence requires enough staff and resources to respond to urgent reforms while also developing proactive, community-led policy positions.



Data and evaluation systems need to be practical.

Monitoring, evaluation and learning systems should be simple, useful and embedded in everyday work, rather than adding reporting burden.



Looking ahead

The evaluation shows that the National Disability Footprint was an important investment in FPDN and in the broader work of strengthening First Nations disability leadership, rights, visibility and sector capability. It also shows that this work is long-term. The Footprint has laid important foundations, but many outcomes will only be fully realised through sustained funding, continued organisational consolidation, and ongoing partnership with First Nations people with disability, communities, governments and the community-controlled sector.

The findings point to the importance of continuing to build strong First Nations disability leadership, increasing access to culturally safe and disability-inclusive services, supporting community-controlled approaches, and ensuring governments fund the full cost of doing this work well.

Accessibility Statement

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Many Tracks Across Country

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