

Australia's Disability Strategy National Forum 2026

24-25 February 2026, Adelaide Convention Centre

The 2-day National Forum is your chance to learn, share experiences, and gain insights on health and safeguarding. Your ideas can influence the ongoing implementation of the Strategy.



Acknowledgements

Acknowledgment of Country

The Department of Health, Disability and Ageing acknowledges First Nations peoples as the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia, and their continuing connection to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to them and their cultures, and to all Elders both past and present.

Acknowledgement of Lived Experience

The Department of Health, Disability and Ageing acknowledges the lived experience of people with disability, their families, carers and advocates who share their personal stories with us. We recognise the insight, strength and emotional labour involved in reflecting on these experiences. Your lived experience is essential to shaping better policy, improving services and building a more inclusive Australia for all.

‘Nothing about us, without us’

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Event overview

Australia's Disability Strategy National Forum (Forum) is for:

- people with disability
- community leaders
- allies
- family members, carers, supporters
- governments.

The Forum will focus on 2 main topics. They are health and safeguarding. There will be keynote presentations and discussions.

The Forum will be an opportunity to:

- work together
- learn from good practice
- contribute
- shape future work.

There will be time to share learnings, good ideas and helpful tools from across the country.

We will talk about Australia's Disability Strategy. The Strategy aims to create a more inclusive and accessible Australia.

Through the Strategy governments are working together to:

- remove barriers
- create opportunities
- support the rights of people with disability.

Welcome to the National Forum!

Accessibility

Inclusion and accessibility are important to all of us.

You can get help or information at the registration desk in the foyer. The people there can help you find what you need.

Accessible features

- Program Booklet – available in print in your tote bag and online for people who use other accessibility features.
- Easy to understand agendas for each day – available in print from the reception desk or online.
- Auslan interpreters for each session – in-person and on the livestream.
- Live captions – on the screen in the room and online.
- Accessible and gender-neutral toilets – located across the venue.
- Sensory room – with space and equipment available for use.
- Quiet room.
- Space for wheelchairs, mobility devices and Assistance Animals – available across the venue.
- Infrared hearing system for all sessions on the program.
- Microphone – for asking questions in panel sessions. You can also ask a team member to write your question down for panel discussions.

The Forum offered funding to support people with disability to attend. 56 people with disability received funding support to enable them to travel to the Forum.

The Adelaide Convention Centre also has a range of accessibility features including a social story on accessing the venue and a virtual tour of the venue. You can find these details on their website.

www.adelaidecc.com.au/attending/accessibility-facilities

Photography

The Forum has hired a photographer to take photos and film activities. If you DO NOT want to be in the video or photos please go to the registration desk. They will give you a red dot for your name tag. The red dot tells the photographer not to take photos of you.

Special thanks

Kuma Kaaru – Cleansing ceremony

A cleansing ceremony, Welcome to Country in language and performance will be held by Kuma Kaaru.

Sketch Group – Live illustrators

Sketch Group are here to visually capture talks in real time. Their live illustrators listen to speakers, pick out the key points and turn them into drawings that help audiences understand and remember the content.

Poster sessions

On the afternoon of Day 1, a range of posters will be shared around the venue with useful and interesting information for you. People who know the work will be available to answer questions about some of the posters.

National Disability Research Partnership (NDRP)

The NDRP helps make sure disability research is done with people *with* disability, not just about them. Researchers from the NDRP will join us for afternoon tea on Day 1. There will be a short presentation of 3 projects funded by the National Disability Research Partnership:

- Diverse experiences of family violence among children and young people with disability project led by Children and Young People with Disability Australia
 - Exploring the mobility safety concerns of Australians with deafblindness Project led by Able Australia
 - Psychological safety for children with ‘behaviours of concern’ Project led by University of Melbourne.
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JFA Purple Orange

JFA Purple Orange will host a dedicated reflection and feedback space in the foyer titled Words that have not been said but should be heard.

This stand will be available throughout the Forum and can be visited at any time over the 2 days. Attendees are invited to pause, reflect on their experience of the Forum, and share thoughts, insights or messages they feel have not yet been voiced. Contributions can be added to the reflection wall and will form part of a collective record of participant perspectives.

At the conclusion of the Forum, JFA Purple Orange will also facilitate a group reflection session, accompanied by afternoon tea. This session will provide an opportunity for attendees to come together, share reflections, and discuss key themes, learnings and experiences from across the event in a relaxed and inclusive setting.

Everyone is welcome to attend the reflection session. Feedback gathered through both the foyer stand and the facilitated discussion will support the Department in capturing reflections and lessons learned to inform future work.

First Nations reflections

Join Dr Scott Avery and First Peoples Disability Network (FPDN) to reflect on learnings from a First Nations perspective. Your feedback will help the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing create their reflections and lessons learned.

Government of South Australia

We would also like to acknowledge the support from allies in the Government of South Australia and for opening their state for us to host the Forum.



Master of Ceremonies

Jane Spring AM



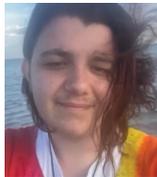
Jane will be the Master of Ceremonies (MC) at the Forum. She brings extensive knowledge and experience to the role. Jane is the Chair of Australia's Disability Strategy Advisory Council, Chair of Disability Council NSW and is a board director and advocate for disability rights, safeguarding and inclusive public-sector governance.

Meet the Keynote Speakers

Independent Evaluator of Australia's Disability Strategy – ARTD Consultants



ARTD Consultants are the evaluators preparing to take a deep dive into Australia's Disability Strategy this year.



ARTD Consultants have worked with people with disability for 35 years. They believe in 'nothing about us, without us'. This means that their team includes people with lived experience in key roles. It also means they listen to people with lived experience throughout their projects. This centres the experiences of people with disability in their work. They have developed a lived experience evaluation framework with people with lived experience to guide how they design, deliver and report on evaluations. Their goal is to make evaluations accessible, inclusive and useful.

Dr Ellen Skladzien and Audrey O'Connor



Dr Ellen Skladzien is a respected disability sector leader and advocate, currently leading Down Syndrome Australia's involvement in the National Centre of Excellence in Intellectual Disability Health.

Ellen is co-presenting with Audrey O'Connor. Audrey is an actor, writer and film maker. Audrey also works at the National Centre of Excellence in Intellectual Disability Health and is an ambassador for Human Rights Australia (IncludeAbility) and Bus Stop Films.

Emeritus Professor Christine Bigby AO



Christine Bigby has a long track record of working in partnership with disability support and advocacy organisations. Her work investigates the effectiveness of programs and practice to support the social inclusion of adults and older people with intellectual disability. She has led a team studying the practice of supported decision making since 2015 and a longitudinal study of the quality of support in group homes since 2009.

Christine is currently serving as president of the Australasian Society for Intellectual Disability and is a Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences in Australia.

The Hon Mark Butler MP



Minister Butler has been the Labor Member for Port Adelaide and Hindmarsh in the Federal Parliament since 2007 and is the Minister for Health and Ageing, and the Minister for Disability and the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

The Minister has long been a champion for society's most vulnerable. He was a member of the South Australian Social Inclusion Board during its major review of the South Australian mental health system.

Professor Sally Robinson



Professor Sally Robinson has worked with people with intellectual disability for more than 30 years. She is a Professor at Flinders University, a researcher on Australian Research Council projects and a disabled woman. Sally brings strong skills in safety, inclusion and supported decision-making. She believes people with disability must be at the centre of the decisions that affect their lives.

Dr Scott Avery



Dr Scott Avery is a professor of Indigenous disability health and wellbeing at Girra Maa Indigenous Health, University of Technology Sydney. He is an Aboriginal man from the Worimi people and is profoundly deaf. Dr Avery is a recognised educator, researcher and policy adviser on Indigenous cultural approaches for the inclusion of people with disability.

Panel sessions – Safeguarding & Health

Each panel begins with introductions from panel members, followed by a discussion led by the Chair and time for questions from the audience. The sessions will be livestreamed, however questions from the audience in the room will not be included in the livestream.

Safeguarding panel members

Clare Gibellini – Chair, National Disability Research Partnership



Clare (she/her) is an Autistic woman with multiple disabilities. She works to make life fairer and safer for people with disability.

Clare is the Chair of the National Disability Research Partnership. This group studies what is happening in the lives of people with disability. They share information to help governments make better decisions.

She also works for Women with Disabilities Australia, giving advice on safety, equality and human rights.

Catherine Whitington – Tasmanian Disability Commissioner



Catherine is a disabled woman who has university degrees in Psychology, Human Rights and Law. Over her career Catherine has worked as a practitioner (therapist/advocate) and a senior executive in government, non-government and statutory organisations across health, child protection, disability, justice and community building.

Catherine is passionate about the role quality safeguarding can play in achieving true access and inclusion so Tasmanians with disability can truly lead good lives and be connected in their community.

Catherine is a mum of 3 and a community musician. Sometimes you might even find her performing with the Hobart Wind Symphony.

Chris Meyer – CEO, Community Living Project South Australia



Chris leads Community Living Project (CLP) with a focus on quality supports that assist people and their families to achieve their life's vision.

CLP partner with people with disabilities and their families who want to self-direct their day-to-day support and live purposeful, connected and valued lives in their communities.

CLP has provided 40 years of building a good life in partnership with people with disability, their families and local communities. Circles of Support is a key tool that brings together a network of trusted people to support a better life.

Chris has always passionately believed in social justice and sees disability as a social construct. He strives to build communities where individuals are cherished for their contributions and not their status.

Rosemary Kayess – Disability Discrimination Commissioner



Rosemary Kayess began her 5-year term as Disability Discrimination Commissioner in January 2024. She has a background in law and social science and has worked in senior academic roles at the University of New South Wales.

Ms Kayess helped draft the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and is currently a member of the UN committee that oversees it. She received the 2019 Human Rights Medal for her work.

Ms Kayess is involved in several disability-focused groups, including the NDIA Independent Advisory Council and the Australian Discrimination Law Experts Group.

Anne Gale – Public Advocate and Principal Community Visitor South Australia



Ms Anne Gale is the Public Advocate and Principal Community Visitor for South Australia.

As Public Advocate Anne is the statutory guardian for people living with disability. As Principal Community Visitor, Anne is responsible for overseeing community visitors, and visiting mental health services, state-run disability services and clients of the Public Advocate. In 2026, the Community Visitor Scheme will expand and be available to all South Australians living with disability to request a visit if they choose.

Prior to her current roles, Anne was Commissioner for Equal Opportunity; Deputy Commissioner, Consumer and Business Services; and Deputy Chief Executive, SA Department for Families and Communities. She also held executive leadership roles in Ageing, Disability and Housing.

Natalie Wade – Associate Commissioner, NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission



Natalie Wade is a pioneer in advancing disability rights, committed to driving systemic change and ensuring equality for people with disabilities. In October 2024, she was appointed as the Associate Commissioner of the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission.

Ms Wade is regarded as one of Australia's foremost disability human rights lawyers and was appointed to lead the first reform to the National Disability Insurance Scheme in response to the NDIS Review.

Her contributions span across law reform and human rights campaigns, advancing the rights of women and girls with disabilities, migrants with disabilities and leading advocacy for a Human Rights Act in South Australia.

Ms Wade authored Disability Rights in Real Life, a disability rights law handbook for people with disabilities and represented Australia at the United Nations Conference of State Parties to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (16th session).

Damian Griffis – CEO, First Peoples Disability Network



Damian Griffis is a Worimi man and a long-time advocate for the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability. He helped establish both the Aboriginal Disability Network NSW and the national First Peoples Disability Network to represent communities in national and international forums.

Damian is an award-winning human rights leader and serves as Co-Chair of the Change the Record campaign.

Daniel Stubbs – Victorian Public Advocate



Dan Stubbs is Victoria's Public Advocate and Australia's first Public Advocate with a declared disability.

He is strongly committed to the rights, safety and independence of people with disability. As a person with vision impairment who uses a screen reader, he understands how important accessible information and support are for full participation in community life.

Since November 2025, Dan has led the Office of the Public Advocate (OPA), an independent Victorian organisation that works to protect people with disability from abuse, neglect and exploitation.

As well as providing guardianship, investigations, medical treatment decision support, advice and education, OPA advocates for systemic changes. OPA recently made a Submission to the Disability Safeguards Consultation, highlighting important reforms to strengthen safety and rights.

OPA also trains and supports more than 500 volunteers who deliver key safeguarding programs across Victoria.

Jen Cush and Leigh Creighton – Hunter Circles



Jen Cush is the founder and Executive Officer of Hunter Circles. Hunter Circles is an organisation committed to building Circles of Support with people with disability who are profoundly isolated, including people who have lived in institutions or experienced long-term exclusion. Circles of Support are grounded in belonging and the belief that safety and a good life are built through relationships – that it's people who keep people safe and give life meaning.

With 30 years' experience in advocacy and community development, Jen is committed to building communities where everyone belongs, where responsibility is shared and where safeguarding is built into everyday life – through human connection, shared power and communities where people are known and expected.

Leigh Creighton is a peer leader at Hunter Circles and a passionate disability and human rights advocate. Leigh's work is grounded in lived experience and the power of relationships, connection and being included in everyday community life.

As a person with Down syndrome, Leigh uses his own experiences to raise awareness about mental health – an area that is often ignored or misunderstood for people with intellectual disability.

Leigh regularly speaks at events and on panels across Australia, sharing what helps people feel safe, well and included. He has extensive experience in co-design, peer mentoring and training. He works alongside others to challenge exclusion and build communities where people are known, listened to and respected. Leigh's leadership is grounded in relationships and a strong commitment to inclusion as a human right.

Jeff Smith – New South Wales Ageing and Disability Commissioner



Mr Smith is a solicitor with a lifelong commitment to social justice and the environment. He brings a strong background in disability advocacy, social justice, community legal services, and environmental law advocacy.

Mr Smith is a person with disability who has moved into the disability sector in recent years. Prior to joining the Ageing and Disability Commission, Mr Smith held the role of CEO of Disability Advocacy Network Australia, the peak body for independent advocates in Australia. He has also served as CEO of the Environmental Defenders Office NSW for 15 years, and later led People with Disability Australia.



Health panel members

Dr Keran Howe OAM – Australia’s Disability Strategy Advisory Council member



Keran has a social work background and has lived experience of disability. She has been a leader in health and disability over many years, advising national and state governments on policy reform related to women’s health, violence prevention and the rights of people with disabilities.

A Churchill Fellow, Keran has chaired Women with Disabilities Australia and the Disability Advisory Council Victoria, and co-chaired the National Disability and Carers Advisory Council.

Keran continues to work for the human rights of people with disability through consultancy and board membership.

Dr Jacqueline Small – New South Wales Health



Dr Jacqueline Small is a community paediatrician who has worked for nearly 30 years in multidisciplinary teams for children, adolescents and adults with intellectual and developmental disability. She currently works in the Specialist Team for Intellectual Disability Sydney (STrIDeS) and Disability Specialist Unit (DSU), Sydney Local Health District.

Jacki is currently Chair Academy of Child and Adolescent Health that promotes the health and wellbeing of newborns, children and adolescents. She served as President Royal Australian College of Physicians from 2022 to 2024.

Jacki was privileged to participate in the Implementation Governance Group for the National Roadmap for Improving the Health of People with Intellectual Disability as well as other national committees.

Jacki has increasingly pursued collaborative and integrated models of care as a vital component of the health, disability and social care system’s responses to poorer health of people with intellectual disability.

Professor Nick Lennox – Department of Health, Disability and Ageing



Professor Nick Lennox was the Director of the Queensland Centre for Intellectual and Developmental Disability at the University of Queensland.

He has provided physical and mental healthcare to adults with developmental disabilities over a 28-year period in Melbourne and Brisbane. He has also led innovations in education and applied research, which has changed healthcare delivery. Most notably, he led 3 complex pragmatic randomised controlled trials of the Comprehensive Health Assessment Program, which is available for free throughout Australia.

Nick feels passionate about empowering adults with a disability, their families and supporters, and healthcare providers to improve the care of people with developmental disability. In 2020, he joined the Federal Health Department as the Senior Medical Advisor on Health and Disability. In that role he has worked on the response to the pandemic and on implementation of the National Roadmap for Improving the Health of People with Intellectual Disability and the Autism Strategy.

Caitlin Blanch – 2026 Trailblazer, ABC Heywire



Diagnosed with osteogenesis imperfecta as a baby, Caitlin Blanch has been advocating for her own access and opportunities since childhood. Growing up on a farm outside Gomerai Country, Tamworth, NSW, Caitlin saw voices from her community rarely reach the rooms where decisions were made. She's determined to change that.

So she's launching a program to amplify the voices of young people living with disability in her community. Through storytelling across social media and podcasts Caitlin aims to champion inclusion and equity across regional Australia.

Caitlin hopes to dismantle stigma and empower young people with disability to shape the systems that affect them.

Michelle Moss – CEO, Queenslanders with Disability Network



Michelle Moss is the CEO of Queenslanders with Disability Network. Michelle has worked in the human services sectors for over 30 years, across disability, health, and women's services including sexual assault and domestic violence services. Michelle has worked in direct support work, counselling, behaviour support, consumer and community engagement, and social policy. Michelle is a strong advocate with a commitment to the voice of people with disability who use services, driving and influencing public policy and being active players in the planning, design, delivery and evaluation of services. Michelle has experience working across transport, housing and health – key advocate areas that impact people with disability in Queensland.

Tully Rosen – Department of Health, Disability and Ageing



Tully Rosen is the Director of Health and Disability Reforms at the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing. His section leads the Department's initiatives aimed at improving the health of people with disability and coordinates reforms where there are significant health and disability interfaces.

Tully is a board director of The Mental Health Services Learning Network, the largest organiser of mental health learning events across Australia and New Zealand. He also founded and volunteers for the homeless pet care charity Ruff Sleepers.

Sam Drummond – Powerd Media



Sam's career has spanned media, politics and law, and he now specialises in human rights and discrimination law.

He has contributed to Growing Up Disabled in Australia, Growing Up in Australia, and We've Got This: Stories of Disabled Parenting, and is a regular on ABC TV's Weekend Breakfast.

Sam's 2023 memoir Broke recounts his experiences as a disabled child in a single parent family in rural Australia, shining a light on multiple forms of disadvantage.

He is the host of Building Inclusion: Australia's Disability Strategy podcast, due for release in March 2026.

Poster sessions

There will be posters shared around the Forum to show examples of the work happening to create more inclusive, safer and healthier communities. These posters are on the Forum website.

- Building inclusion: Australia's Disability Strategy
Powerd Media
- Digital Champions Project
A collaboration between Down Syndrome Australia and Good Things Australia
- Disability health and wellbeing insights: pathways to better outcomes
Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
- Diverse experiences of family violence among children and young people with disability
Project led by Children and Young People with Disability Australia, funded by the National Disability Research Partnership
- Exploring the mobility safety concerns of Australians with deafblindness
Project led by Able Australia, funded by the National Disability Research Partnership
- Making disability inclusion happen
Australian Local Government Association
- Psychological safety for children with 'behaviours of concern'
Project led by University of Melbourne, funded by the National Disability Research Partnership
- Safeguarding in the justice system
Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
- Disability health navigation scoping project
Department of Health, Disability and Ageing
- Medicare bulk billing practices
Department of Health, Disability and Ageing
- Medicare urgent care clinics
Department of Health, Disability and Ageing
- MyMedicare
Department of Health, Disability and Ageing
- National Roadmap for improving the health of people with intellectual disability
Department of Health, Disability and Ageing
- Safeguarding Framework and Strategy
Department of Health, Disability and Ageing
- Yearly health checks for people with intellectual disability
Department of Health, Disability and Ageing

Agenda Timetable

Tuesday 24 February

All times are in Australian Central Daylight Time (ACDT)

Start time	Session and speakers
8:30 am	Registration and networking
8:45 am	Cleansing ceremony Kuma Kaaru In the plaza at the main east entrance
9:15 am	Welcome to Country Kuma Kaaru
9:35 am	Master of Ceremonies Introductions Jane Spring AM Setting the scene for the Forum
10:15 am	Meet the Evaluator of Australia's Disability Strategy ARTD Consultants
10:35 am	Morning tea and networking
11:05 am	Keynote on Health Dr Ellen Skladzien and Audrey O'Connor
11:45 am	Stretch break
11:55 am	Keynote on Safety Emeritus Professor Christine Bigby AO
12:35 pm	Lunch and networking

1:30 pm

Panel sessions: listening and discussing
Stretch break and discussion opportunity included

Safeguarding: What keeps people safe?

Chair - Clare Gibellini

National Disability Research Partnership
Digital Champions Project Lead

- **Catherine Whittington**
Disability Commissioner Tasmania
- **Chris Meyer**
CEO Community Living Project
- **Rosemary Kayess**
Disability Discrimination
Commissioner
- **Anne Gale**
Public Advocate and Principal
Community Visitor South Australia

Health: Steps toward better health outcomes

Chair - Dr Keran Howe OAM

Australia's Disability Strategy
Advisory Council member

- **Dr Jacqueline Small**
Chair Academy of Child and
Adolescent Health
- **Professor Nick Lennox**
Senior Medical Advisor
Department of Health,
Disability and Ageing
- **Caitlin Blanch**
2026 Trailblazer, ABC Heywire
- **Michelle Moss**
CEO Queenslanders with
Disability Network
- **Tully Rosen**
Director Health and
Disability Reforms
Department of Health,
Disability and Ageing

3:30 pm

Poster sessions and afternoon tea
**Presentation by National Disability Research Partnership
in foyer**

4:30 pm

Day close

Agenda Timetable

Wednesday 25 February

All times are in Australian Central Daylight Time (ACDT)

Start time

Session and speakers

9:00 am

Arrival and networking

9:30 am

Welcome and recap

MC Jane Spring AM

9:45 am

Minister's Address

The Hon Mark Butler MP

Minister for Health and Ageing, Minister for Disability and the National Disability Insurance Scheme

10:00 am

Keynote on Safety

Professor Sally Robinson

10:45 am

Morning tea and networking

11:15 am

Keynote on Health

Dr Scott Avery

12:00 pm

Lunch and networking

1:00 pm

Panel sessions: listening and discussing

Stretch break and discussion opportunity included

Safeguarding: What keeps people safe?

Chair - Natalie Wade

Associate Commissioner NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission

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- **Damian Griffis**
CEO First Peoples Disability Network
 - **Daniel Stubbs**
Public Advocate Victoria
 - **Jen Cush and Leigh Creighton**
Hunter Circles of Support
 - **Jeff Smith**
NSW Ageing and Disability Commissioner

Health: Steps toward better health outcomes

Chair - Dr Keran Howe OAM

Australia's Disability Strategy Advisory Council member

-
- **Dr Jacqueline Small**
Chair Academy of Child and Adolescent Health
 - **Professor Nick Lennox**
Senior Medical Advisor
Department of Health,
Disability and Ageing
 - **Michelle Moss**
CEO Queenslanders with Disability Network
 - **Sam Drummond**
Host of Building Inclusion: a podcast by Powerd Media

3:00 pm

Afternoon tea and reflection

3:30 pm – JFA Purple Orange

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- Listen and share words that need to be heard but may not have been said.
 - What we should take away from this Forum.

3:30 pm – First Nations Yarn

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- Yarn with Dr Scott Avery and First Peoples Disability Network.
 - Listen and share words that need to be heard but may not have been said.

4:10 pm

Closing address by **MC Jane Spring AM**

4:30 pm

Day close

Thank you for being involved in Australia's Disability Strategy National Forum 2026.

To read Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031 visit
www.disabilitygateway.gov.au/ads

