



MEDIA RELEASE

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Highly competitive funding round reveals demand and opportunity for disability-led research

A highly competitive funding round attracted 176 applications requesting a combined \$46 million, with 19 disability-led and inclusive research projects selected to share \$4.92 million in funding.

The National Disability Research Partnership (NDRP) has awarded almost \$5 million to 19 disability-led and inclusive research projects focused on addressing issues that affect the safety, rights, independence and community participation of people with disability.

The funding supports research shaped and led by people with disability, recognising the expertise that comes from lived experience and its importance in improving policy and practice.

NDRP CEO Mary Sayers said having people with disability at the centre of research provides real-world evidence to policy and decision makers.

“This funding is vital for bringing organisations, researchers and people with disability together on some of Australia’s most under-researched areas.

The strong response for this funding shows growing demand for disability-led research in the sector, and the importance of lived experience design,” Ms Sayers said.

Seven of the funded projects build on early co-design work supported through NDRP’s first funding round in 2025, progressing ideas developed with and by people with disability into the next phase of research.

“Australia is going through a significant period of disability reform, and investing in co-designed research is an urgent national priority to inform this change.”

“Research is stronger and more relevant when people with disability help set its direction, make decisions and lead the work,” Ms Sayers said.

The 19 funded projects in Round 2 tackle complex issues including safety and dignity in the criminal justice system, restrictive practices and chemical restraint, inclusive living arrangements,



family advocacy, relationships and sexuality, accessible mental health care, and community participation for people with disability from First Nations, refugee and migrant backgrounds.

NDRP Chair Clare Gibellini said the funded projects place people with disability at the centre of research intended to improve their lives.

“These projects are grounded in the priorities and experiences of people with disability and have the potential to generate evidence that makes a practical difference in people's lives.

“Our goal is to make inclusive research practices business as usual, and help make sure disability research informs more meaningful disability policy.”

“This includes supporting these funded projects to share their findings in accessible ways with people with disability, communities, policymakers, practitioners and service providers.”

The funding round supports the priorities of [*Australia's Disability Strategy 2021–2031*](#). Projects were selected through a competitive assessment process involving people with disability and research expertise.

- [Link to detailed project list and descriptions](#)
- [Access Media FAQ](#) and [NDRP Media guidance](#): reporting disability-led research respectfully and accurately
- To arrange an interview or discuss a story angle please [submit a media enquiry via this form](#) or call 0407126351



2026 NDRP Funded Projects

Safety of People with Disability

Hidden in plain sight: Culturally responsive continence care for First Nations women with disability

One in three people with disability experience incontinence, but there is little research and few resources tailored to First Nations women with disability. This project will listen to women, families, communities and service providers to identify priorities and inform culturally safe solutions.

Building on co-design funded through NDRP's first round, First Nations women with disability will lead research with the Deaf Indigenous Community Consultancy. Project partnerships the NPY Women's Council, VACCHO, the University of Melbourne, Continence Nurses Australia and Continence Health Australia.

Co-Navigating Our World: A deafblind-led initiative to codesign improved Orientation and Mobility services

People with deafblindness consistently identify safe and independent mobility as a major challenge, yet orientation and mobility professionals receive little formal training in how to support deafblind people.

Building on research co-designed through NDRP's first funding round, people with deafblindness will lead research into what Orientation and Mobility Specialists need to provide safe and effective support. Guided by deafblind peer-led organisations, the project brings together Able Australia, NextSense, Deafblind Victoria, Deafblind West Australians and the NSW Deafblind Community to strengthen professional training, policy and practice, supporting greater independence and community participation.

Cultivating Safety for Persons with Disability in Agriculture Stage 2

Safety for people with disability in agriculture depends on systems working together. This project will identify gaps across the sector and develop practical solutions to improve safety, inclusion and access to meaningful work.

Building on co-design funded through NDRP's first round, the project will be led by lived-experience researcher Josie Clarke, in a partnership between Ability Agriculture and CQUniversity to bring together farmers, people with disability, rural health professionals and industry bodies to strengthen disability confidence and create safer, more accessible pathways into agricultural work.



Sometimes I'm too safe. Exploring the dignity of risk with adults with intellectual disability (Phase 2)

Adults with intellectual disability want to make choices, take part in everyday life and learn from experience, but a strong focus on safety can sometimes limit these opportunities. This project will explore how duty of care can be balanced with dignity of risk, helping inform safer and more enabling support.

Building on co-design funded through NDRP's first round, researchers with intellectual disability will lead fieldwork across metropolitan, regional and rural Australia. Working with researchers with and without disability, the project will gather views from people with disability and those who support them to help guide NDIS workers, parents and carers.

Safe Homes: Evidence on individualised support for policy impact – living arrangements and the service-for-one model for people with intellectual disability

Many people with intellectual disability and complex support needs experience violence, harm, trauma and restrictive practices in group homes. This project will evaluate whether individualised "service-for-one" arrangements, where people directly employ their own support workers using NDIS funding, provide safer, better and more cost-effective outcomes than group homes.

Building on co-design funded through NDRP's first round, the project brings together people with lived experience of disability, researchers from the University of Melbourne, UNSW, Deakin University and The University of Queensland, and disability advocates. People with lived experience will be involved as researchers and leaders throughout the project, helping to shape the research, interpret findings and guide project decisions.

Relationships, Sexuality, Rights & Safety: Co-designing and co-producing a program for people with intellectual disability and autistic people

People with intellectual disability and autistic people can face barriers to accessing accessible, trusted information and support about relationships, sexuality, consent, safety and their rights. This project will co-design and test a practical program shaped by the priorities of people with intellectual disability and autistic people, including relationships and connection, sexuality, consent and safety, online safety, health and wellbeing, and rights and inclusion.

Building on co-design with 15 young people with intellectual disability and autistic young people, the project will work with Co-Hive and Self Advocacy Sydney to co-design, pilot and evaluate the Relationships, Sexuality, Rights & Safety program. The project will produce practical, accessible and freely available resources that disability organisations across Australia can use to support people to make informed choices, understand their rights and navigate relationships and sexuality.



What children with disability can teach us about safeguarding in playgroups

Young children with disability may face a greater risk of harm, but their views, communication needs and experiences are often missing from the way services plan for children's safety. This project will work with children with disability aged 3-8 years, their families and playgroup staff to understand what helps children feel safe, included and able to speak up.

Led by people with disability as researchers, co-researchers and decision-makers, the project will bring together children, young people and adults with disability, families and playgroup staff to co-design the research and the resources it produces. Children with disability and their families will help shape the research, while people with disability will contribute to decisions about how the project is carried out, how findings are interpreted and how resources are developed and tested.

Nothing Without Us: A Disability-Led Research Priority-Setting Study for People with Intracranial Hypertension in Australia

People living with intracranial hypertension (IH) in Australia often experience fragmented healthcare, limited access to disability and community supports, and few opportunities to influence the research that affects their lives. This project will support people with IH to identify what gets in the way of safety and wellbeing, including gaps in coordinated multidisciplinary healthcare and access to the supports needed to manage everyday life.

The project brings together a small group of community members to identify priority issues, share lived experience and determine what future research should focus on. People with IH will co-lead the research process and shape the findings, ensuring the project reflects lived safety concerns, unmet needs, and priorities for better care and support.

Co-design and validation of a Community-Led Reintegration and Safety Model for People with Disability at System Transition Points

People with disability can face increased risk when moving between systems or when essential supports break down, including when leaving hospital, the justice system or homelessness services. These risks can be greater for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability and people living in regional and rural communities, where services may be fragmented or difficult to access.

This project aims to make life safer for people with disability during times of major change, such as leaving hospital, leaving custody, experiencing homelessness, or when support services stop working. The project will work with people with lived experience of disability to identify where problems and risks occur and develop practical ways to address them.



BlakAbility: Barriers Beyond Bars - Indigenous Disability and Intersectional Inequity Across the Criminal Justice System

Indigenous people with disability often experience disability that is unrecognised, misunderstood or punished across the criminal justice system, contributing to significant harm for individuals, families and communities. Building on co-design funded through NDRP's first round, this project will work with Indigenous people with disability to better understand these experiences and strengthen the evidence needed to support responses based on recognition, support and care rather than punishment and confinement.

Led by Indigenous researchers with lived experience of disability, the project is guided by A/Professor Sheelagh Daniels-Mayes and co-led by Aunty Dr Roslyn Sackley, in partnership with researchers, cultural brokers and Indigenous people with disability. The project will use culturally grounded and relationship-based approaches that help people feel safe, respected and understood, ensuring lived experience informs every stage of the research. Cultural brokers will guide engagement and support accessible communication so participants can share their experiences in ways that work for them.

Pathways to elimination of restrictive practices

Surviving restrictive practices: The experiences of people with disability

Restrictive practices can cause lasting harm, yet there is limited research on how people with disability experience these practices across their lives. This project will use inclusive interview methods to support people with disability to reflect on the impacts of restrictive practices, including how past experiences continue to affect their safety, rights and wellbeing.

Led and shaped by people with disability, the project brings together people with lived experience, Inclusion Australia and People with Disability Australia. Findings will help centre the voices of people who have experienced restrictive practices and provide evidence and resources to support efforts to reduce and eliminate their use.

From Restriction to Relational Safety: Understanding and Transforming Pathways Affecting First Nations Women Living with Disability in Justice

First Nations women with disability who experience the justice system can encounter restrictive practices across multiple systems and services, yet their experiences and perspectives are largely absent from the evidence used to shape policy and practice. The project recognises that restrictive practices do not occur in isolation but can be shaped by interactions between disability, justice, health and other service systems.

Led by First Nations researchers and grounded in cultural governance and self-determination, the project brings together First Nations women with disability and justice system experience,



researchers, community organisations and service partners, including The Torch, Flat Out and Western Health Drug Health Services. First Nations women with lived experience will provide leadership throughout the project, shaping the research questions, interpretation of findings and development of recommendations, ensuring the project is informed by their cultural knowledge, lived expertise and priorities for change. The project will identify culturally safe and practical opportunities to strengthen cultural and relational safety and contribute to the prevention and elimination of restrictive practices.

Building family advocacy to reduce and eliminate chemical restraint

Many children with intellectual and developmental disabilities are given medicines to manage behaviours of concern, even though these medicines often do not address the underlying causes of a child's distress. This project will work with people with disability, families, doctors and support providers to better understand why these medicines are used and identify practical ways to reduce and ultimately eliminate the use of chemical restraint.

Building on the vital role families play in protecting their children's rights and advocating for safer alternatives, the project will bring together people with disability, families and professionals to develop practical resources that strengthen family knowledge, confidence and involvement in decision-making. Through this collaborative approach, the project will identify barriers to change and support families to advocate for safe, respectful supports that address the causes of distress.

Accessible and inclusive communities projects

Embedding Peer Support and Community Capacity Building: accessible and inclusive regional communities for people with disability and family members from refugee backgrounds

People with disability and family members from refugee backgrounds face significant barriers accessing disability and other community supports and services and often experience limited opportunities to participate in community and cultural life. This project will work with people with disability and family members who have settled in Australia on Humanitarian Visas to increase awareness of available supports and create pathways for greater participation and inclusion.

Building on co-design funded through NDRP's first round, the project will partner with people with disability, family members, service providers and local government to co-design peer support groups, cultural safety training and practical resources. People with disability and family members will help shape how the peer support groups operate and contribute directly to the development of training, ensuring it reflects their experiences, priorities and cultural needs.

Playing Together: Creating moments of social connection in hospital care through digital play



Young people who are neurodivergent or have disability can experience social isolation, particularly when receiving hospital care. This project will pilot and evaluate a safe, supported online Minecraft program at The Royal Children's Hospital to promote authentic social connections, a sense of belonging, and positive engagement with hospital settings.

Led by a research team with lived experience of neurodivergence and disability, the project will work with children, young adults with disability, families and hospital staff to co-design and evaluate the program. Young adults with lived experience will be employed as Minecraft session facilitators, supporting child-led participation in a safe and protected online environment. Children and facilitators will help shape the research and the development of practical recommendations.

Children as Changemakers in Public Libraries: Co-designing Accessible and Inclusive Communities through Participatory Research with Diverse Children with Disability

Children with disability are often excluded from research and decisions about the places and services they use. This project will work alongside children with disability in regional communities to understand what makes public places welcoming, accessible and inclusive for all children.

Led by researchers with disability, the project will partner with children, families, Bathurst Library and other regional NSW libraries, community organisations and First Nations stakeholders. Through creative and accessible workshops, children will share experiences and ideas through drawing, storytelling, photography, Braille, Auslan and other forms of communication that work for each child. Children will help shape the research, findings and resources through project workshops and an ongoing Children's Advisory Group.

(Re)discovering Music Australia - inclusive and accessible music participation for deaf and hard-of-hearing children, adolescents, and adults

Music is an important part of everyday life, yet many people with hearing loss face barriers to meaningful music participation. This project will develop practical approaches to support deaf and hard-of-hearing children, adolescents and adults to engage with and enjoy music throughout their lives and explore its role in clinical care.

Building on lived experience and research, the project will be led by an early career researcher who is a cochlear implant user and has firsthand experience of rediscovering music after hearing loss. Working with people who use hearing devices, families, clinicians, educators and community partners, the project will identify and promote inclusive and accessible pathways that enable more people with hearing loss to reconnect with music and participate with confidence.



The CARE-ALIGN Toolkit to Build Practitioner Capability: Co-designed Autism Resources to support Equitable, Lived-Experience-Grounded, Neurodiversity-Affirming Mental Health Care

Autistic adults experience high rates of mental health challenges, yet many report that mental health services do not fully understand or meet their needs. This project will create practical resources that help practitioners deliver more accessible, respectful and effective mental health care for autistic adults.

Led by a partnership of autistic and neurodivergent researchers, mental health practitioners and academic experts, the project will build on years of co-designed research and lived experience. Autistic people will guide every stage of the work, from refining priorities to developing, testing and sharing a freely available toolkit that supports improved experiences of mental health care for autistic adults across Australia.

From Barriers to Belonging: Co-defining, Co-identifying and Co-designing Pathways to Inclusive Communities for South Asian Women with Disabilities in Australia

South Asian women with disability can face overlapping barriers related to disability, gender, culture, language and migration and lived experiences and ideas are often missing from the design of disability services, community programs and policies. This project will work with South Asian women with disability to understand what helps or prevents people from feeling included, safe and connected in their communities.

Co-led by a community leader with lived experience of disability and a parent-carer of a young adult with disability, the project will bring together South Asian women with disability, disability services, multicultural organisations and governments to identify practical ways to improve access, participation and belonging. South Asian women with disability will hold meaningful, paid leadership roles as co-designers, advisers and members of a lived-experience leadership group, with genuine decision-making authority throughout the project.



Media FAQ

What is the NDRP?

The National Disability Research Partnership (NDRP) is the independent, disability-led infrastructure that connects government, researchers and the disability community - building evidence and capability, so people with disability shape research that can improve their lives.

What has NDRP announced?

The NDRP has awarded **\$4.92 million to 19 research projects** addressing the safety, rights, independence and community participation of people with disability.

What areas will the research cover?

The projects sit across three funding streams:

- safety of people with disability
- pathways to the elimination of restrictive practices
- accessible and inclusive communities

The research covers issues including culturally responsive care, safe housing, justice system transitions, dignity of risk, inclusive services, accessible mental healthcare and participation in community life.

How are people with disability involved?

People with disability are involved in leading, governing, designing and delivering the funded research. Their lived experience can help determine the research questions, methods, priorities and intended outcomes.

Each project has its own leadership and governance arrangements. These may include researchers with disability, peer-led organisations, community partners, advisory groups and paid research roles for people with disability.

How is disability leadership embedded within NDRP?

NDRP is co-led by people with disability. Disability leadership informs its governance, research agenda, funding decisions and approach to building research capacity. NDRP also involves people with disability in assessing research proposals and shaping how funded research is conducted and shared.



What does disability-led research mean?

Disability-led research gives people with disability meaningful authority over the direction and delivery of research. This can include leading research teams, making governance decisions, collecting and analysing evidence, and determining how findings are shared and applied.

It recognises lived experience as essential expertise, not simply a source of consultation.

What is NDRP's role in Australia's disability research system?

NDRP invests in research by and for people with disability, builds disability research leadership and capability, and supports evidence to inform policy and practice. Our role is to help create a more inclusive research system in which lived experience is recognised as essential expertise and informs meaningful policy solutions, supporting progress on *Australia's Disability Strategy 2021–2031*.

What is co-design?

Co-design is a collaborative process in which people affected by an issue help define the problem and develop the research approach and potential solutions.

Effective co-design involves people with disability early, gives them genuine influence over decisions and recognises their contribution through appropriate support and payment.

How does this funding build on NDRP's first round?

Seven projects build on co-design funded through NDRP's inaugural 2025 round. These projects are moving into a more substantial phase of research based on questions and approaches developed with people with disability.

This demonstrates how early investment in co-design can create a strong foundation for relevant, inclusive and practical research.

Which projects are continuing from the first round in 2025?

T There are seven projects that received funding in the 2025 capacity strengthening seed funding who have been funded in this research round:

1. Hidden in plain sight: Culturally responsive continence care for First Nations women with disability
2. Co-Navigating Our World: A deafblind-led initiative to codesign improved Orientation and Mobility services
3. Cultivating Safety for Persons with Disability in Agriculture Stage 2



4. Sometimes I'm too safe. Exploring the dignity of risk with adults with intellectual disability. Phase 2
5. Safe Homes: Evidence on individualised support for policy impact
6. BlakAbility: Barriers Beyond Bars
7. Embedding Peer Support and Community Capacity Building

Why invest in co-design before funding larger research projects?

Early co-design helps research teams identify the questions that matter to people with disability and develop approaches that are accessible, relevant and grounded in lived experience.

It can also strengthen partnerships between people with disability, community organisations, researchers, policymakers and service providers before larger research begins.

How were the projects selected?

Projects were selected through a competitive assessment process involving reviewers in Independent Review Panels, from a diverse range of backgrounds and experience including, researchers, people with disability and lived expertise, policy makers and other specialist expertise.

The project review process included eligibility and process checks, screening, independent review, panel discussion and ranking, moderation, relevant First Nations review, portfolio analysis, Research Committee consideration and Board approval.

The final step was a portfolio decision. NDRP considered quality, opportunity fit, disability leadership, feasibility, policy and systems relevance, duplication, risk, available funding and the overall mix of recommended projects.

Who reviewed the projects?

Reviewers were selected for a mix of disability, lived experience, community, research, policy, practice and sector expertise. The majority (68%) of reviewers identify as people with disability and included a dedicated First Nations review process.

For applications involving intellectual disability as a target cohort, NDRP piloted input from an Intellectual Disability Advisory Group. Their role was to provide lived experience advice to inform panel discussion; they did not score applications or make funding decisions.

What has the interest in this round been?

The 2026 round was highly competitive. We received 176 applications, with approximately \$46.27 million requested against a funding envelope of \$5 million. Only one in nine proposals were able to be supported within the funding.



This shows there is significant demand for disability led research and investment in solutions that matter to people with disability. It reinforces the importance of NDRP's role in supporting research that is driven by lived experience and community priorities.

What practical difference will the projects make?

The projects aim to produce evidence, tools and approaches that can improve policy, services and practice. Intended outcomes include safer services and living arrangements, more culturally responsive care, better professional training, reduced use of restrictive practices, and more accessible and inclusive communities.

Research outcomes will vary by project and will be developed with the people and communities involved.

How does the funding support government policy?

The funding supports the objectives of *Australia's Disability Strategy 2021–2031*, including improving safety, rights, inclusion and community participation. It will build evidence that can help governments, services and communities make better-informed decisions.

When will the projects begin and finish?

Projects will commence during August to 1 October 2026 and run for 12 months.

How will findings be shared?

NDRP will support research teams to share findings in accessible formats with people with disability, communities, policymakers, practitioners and service providers. Each project will develop an approach suited to its participants, audiences and research outcomes.

Where can people find the full list of funded projects?

The full list, including project descriptions, funding recipients and awarded amounts, is available at www.ndrp.org.au.



NDRP Media guidance: reporting disability-led research respectfully and accurately

NDRP funded projects involve diverse communities and, in some cases, sensitive experiences. This guidance reflects common considerations raised by funded teams and is intended to support accurate, safe and respectful reporting.

Centre people with disability as experts and leaders

- NDRP generally uses “people with disability”, while some people and communities prefer identity-first language such as “Autistic people”, “Deaf people” or “deafblind people”. Follow the preference of the person or project.
- Describe lived experience as expertise and leadership where that is the person’s role. Family, carer, clinician and service-provider perspectives are valuable but are not substitutes for the perspectives of people with disability.

Use rights-based, strengths-based language

- Focus on rights, agency, accessibility, barriers, supports, systems and what needs to change.
- Avoid deficit, tragedy, charity or “inspiration” framing, and terms such as “suffers from”, “wheelchair-bound”, “confined to”, “special needs” or blanket descriptions of people as “vulnerable”.

Be precise about the research stage

- These are commencing research projects. Use language such as “will explore”, “will test”, “will co-design” or “will evaluate” unless reporting established evidence or completed prior research.
- Do not present intended outcomes, proposed tools or hypotheses as findings. One person’s experience should not be presented as representative of an entire disability, cultural or community group.

Protect consent, privacy and safety



- Names, images, recordings, quotes and personal stories should only be used where the relevant project has confirmed informed consent and any required organisational or community approvals.
- Take particular care with children, people with justice experience, First Nations communities, refugee and migrant communities, and small or identifiable cohorts. Do not pressure people to disclose trauma, health information or other sensitive experiences.

Respect cultural governance and community authority

- For First Nations research, respect First Nations leadership, cultural governance, Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property, data sovereignty and project-specific approval processes.
- Avoid victimising or sensationalised framing, particularly in coverage of justice, restrictive practices, safeguarding and other sensitive topics. Use the project's precise terminology.

Make the interview itself accessible

- Ask about access and communication requirements in advance. This may include Auslan or other interpreters, AAC, a support person, questions in advance, extra time, breaks or an alternative to a live interview.
- Speak directly to the person being interviewed and do not assume a communication difference means a lack of expertise or decision-making authority.

Project-specific checks: Terminology, consent and cultural protocols vary between projects. Please check with NDRP or the project media contact before publication if a story involves an individual participant, lived-experience story, sensitive finding or community-specific information.