



National Disability  
Research Partnership

# Evidence to action:

Exploring the evidence to  
enable the elimination of  
restrictive practices in  
Australia

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National Disability  
Research Partnership

# Evidence to action

Speakers using slides

1. Associate Professor Linda Steele
2. Megan Spindler-Smith
3. Professor Sally Robinson



Linda Steele

Overview of restrictive practices

Human rights

Harm and lifelong impacts

Cultural and systemic impacts

# Defining restrictive practices

- Restrictive practices are legally authorised and/or socially and professionally sanctioned violence that targets people with disability on a discriminatory basis and are at odds with the human rights of people with disability.
- Restrictive practices include, but are not limited to, chemical, mechanical, physical and environmental restraint and seclusion, guardianship, forced sterilisation, menstrual suppression and anti-libidinal medication, financial management, involuntary mental health treatment, and other non-consensual or coercive interventions said to be undertaken for protective, behavioural or medical reasons.

# Restrictive practices are at odds with international human rights

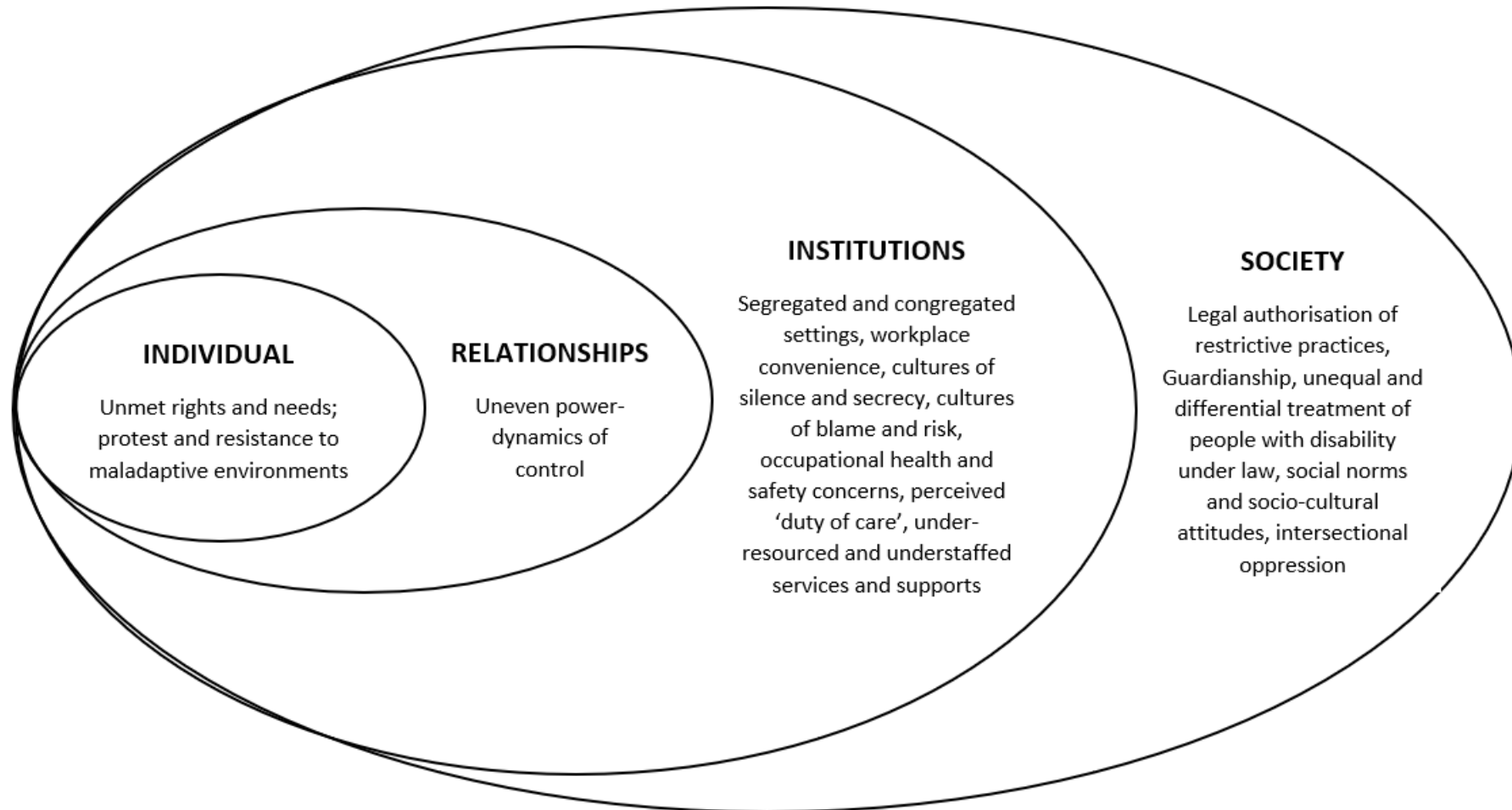
- Absolute non-derogable prohibition on torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment
- Prohibition of discrimination against people with disability
- Rights to protection from violence



# Restrictive practices are harmful and have lifelong impacts

- Strip people with disability of dignity
- Trauma, pain, harm and violation
- Abandonment and neglect
- Fear
- Disempowering, humiliating and dehumanising
- Cruel and punishing treatment
- Lifelong trauma and life-altering effects

# Cultural and systemic drivers of restrictive practices



# Eight steps to eliminating restrictive practices

## **Society**

1. Prohibit Restrictive Practices: End legal authorisation for use of restrictive practices
2. Change Attitudes and Norms: Support awareness raising to address discriminatory attitudes and norms
3. Acknowledge and Address Historical Injustice: Publicly acknowledge past wrongs, support truth telling

## **Institutions**

4. Deinstitutionalise and Desegregate: Deinstitutionalise and desegregate environments

## **Relationships**

5. Recognise the Autonomy and Leadership of People with Disability: Support exercise of legal capacity
6. Utilise Trauma Informed Support Approaches: Reform service systems to recognise and respond to people with disability using trauma informed approaches

## **Individual**

7. Adequately Resource Independent Living and Inclusion: Fully resource and realise Article 19 CRPD rights to independent living and inclusion
8. Provide Redress for Victim-Survivors: Seek to rectify injustice through law reform and a national redress scheme





Megan Spindler-Smith

Eliminating Restrictive Practices: Consistency and  
Empowerment

A rights-based approach to advocacy and  
research

# What is missing?

- **Defining Restrictive Practices:** Actions that limit freedom, including seclusion, restraint, and chemical intervention. Used as a default in challenging situations.
- **Problem with Inconsistency:** Confusion across sectors and jurisdictions weakens safeguards and advocacy efforts.
- **Shared Understanding:** Unified definitions and standards promote dignity and drive consistent advocacy.



# Empowerment through participatory research

- Safety and respect is essential: reducing fears around the impacts of when and how restrictive practices are applied.
- Understanding the long-term impacts: trauma, loss of autonomy, disempowerment and dehumanisation.

## Building Knowledge:

- Development of tools and resources that educate, recognise reality and empower self-advocacy for alternatives.



# Co-led and designed research

- Participatory action research and community-based participatory research
- Lived experiences shape solutions
- Addressing systemic and individual advocacy issues through inclusive research methods
- Research priorities focusing on the long-term impacts
- Understanding systemic drivers and opportunities to build the pathway for elimination
- Trauma-informed approaches to elimination
- Co-developing tools for rights awareness and supported decision making




# Where to from here?

- Research led, developed by and with directly impacted people with disability
- Co-development ensures solutions address systemic drivers and empower individuals
- Consistent definitions and standards are crucial for elimination
- Elimination pathways must integrate the lived experiences of people with disability for meaningful, rights-based change



Sally Robinson

What has worked well in research?



How can research contribute to deepening and extending knowledge in useful ways, particularly in difficult spaces such as this?

# NDRP Guiding Principles

- Advance high-quality research that informs disability policy and practice in Australia
- Value the knowledge of people with disability in research
- Strengthen disability research capacity
- Share research findings widely in useful and accessible ways



# Share research findings widely in useful and accessible ways



The screenshot shows the APO (Analysis & Policy Observatory) website. At the top left is the APO logo. To the right is a navigation menu with links for 'About', 'Browse', 'Collections', 'How to use APO', 'My APO+', and 'Services'. Below the navigation is a banner image featuring three photos: a young girl using sign language, two men smiling together, and a young woman holding a tablet. A dark blue banner across the middle of the image contains the text 'Disability Research Collection'. Below the banner, there is a paragraph of text describing the collection's purpose and a 'Sponsors' section featuring the NDRP logo.

**APO** ANALYSIS & POLICY OBSERVATORY

[About](#) [Browse](#) [Collections](#) [How to use APO](#) [My APO+](#) [Services](#)

## Disability Research Collection

Designed to improve policies and practices, this Collection is for people with disability, their family, caregivers, allies or supporters, disabled people's organisations, policymakers, researchers, advocacy organisations, service providers and practitioners. The Collection aims to share evidence and knowledge on a range of topics to help advance the rights of people with disability.

Established in November 2020, the Collection supports the work of the [National Disability Research Partnership](#) to facilitate a collaborative and inclusive disability research program that builds the evidence for successful innovation in policy and practice. Wherever possible, accessible versions of documents such as plain language summaries, Easy English or audio versions have been included in the Collection.

**Sponsors**

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