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Pathway to impact evaluation of the National Disability Research Partnership (NDRP)

Summary report

August 2026

Approach

This 2026 interim evaluation examined the progress of the NDRP over its first 2 years from June 2024 to April 2026. Both the design and implementation of the evaluation involved co-design with the NDRP and its stakeholders in keeping with the Guiding Principles of the organisation. The evaluation adopted a 'pathway to impact' approach to assess progress along a continuum, from the establishment of foundational activities through to the achievement of long-term, systemic change. Data sources included existing NDRP data and documentation, a wider desktop review and consultation with NDRP stakeholders through surveys and focus groups. However, there was only a short period available for stakeholder consultation and limited engagement with First Nations people. Future evaluation efforts will need the time and resources for more fulsome engagement.

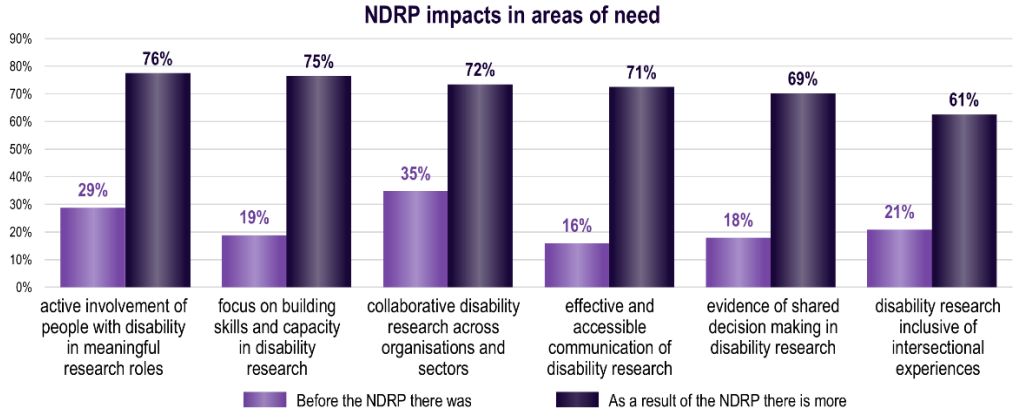
Evaluation findings

There is an established need for the NDRP to address the lack of research that is genuinely inclusive of people with disability and to bring distinct stakeholder groups together for a shared purpose.

The NDRP is an integral part of the policy and strategy landscape required to improve outcomes for people with disability in Australia. Direct linkages between the NDRP's Research Agenda and Australia's Disability Strategy provide for a program of disability led research that is directly linked to national policy priorities. The organisation is uniquely positioned at the interface of the disability community, researchers and government. As an independent organisation that seeks to foster collaboration, there is no directly comparable organisation fulfilling all of the NDRP's functions and, bringing these groups together at a national level. Without the NDRP, the disability research sector would revert to a system that has limited prioritisation of inclusion, lived experience and intersectionality. The progress undertaken to date to establish trusted relationships in the sector and community would be lost.

Just 2 years in, the NDRP is delivering on what it promised in securing the foundation of the organisation, delivering disability-led and policy relevant research, improving research capacity and capability and making research more accessible.

The NDRP has asserted itself as an enabler at the nexus between researchers, community, and government, exemplifying best practice in the sector. The response from stakeholders affirms that the NDRP is necessary, trusted, and it is doing the right things in the right way. In so doing, the NDRP is filling gaps in the sector:



There is robust evidence of the extensive efforts from the NDRP to establish trust among stakeholders and the return of these activities in paving the way for deeper collaboration. This should be recognised as a valuable outcome in its own right when seeking system-level change.

The evaluation also found that the NDRP is making impact across each of its strategic focus areas and has:

- established quality and accessible systems and processes for funding research which are directly linked to outcome areas identified in the organisation's Research Agenda and Australia's Disability Strategy
- established bespoke capability building streams with stakeholders receiving opportunities they would not have otherwise had access to
- supported improved sharing of evidence and knowledge translation.

Meaningful involvement of people with disability, building relationships and establishing trust takes time which must be recognised when assessing efficiency and value for money.

Almost all activities committed to in the NDRP's Work Plan have been delivered, are on track, or planned for upcoming implementation. However, the long-term sustainability of the NDRP is dependent on sufficient funding to deliver the organisation's objectives. Governments contribute the majority of health and medical research funding in Australia (92.6%). While diverse funding streams can supplement activities, they are unlikely to be able to cover magnitude of funding required to sustain the NDRP. Adequate funding over time will result in long-term efficiencies, through the development of a credible evidence base and resources which can be used in policy and practice to achieve the aspirations of Australia's Disability Strategy.

Future directions

While there have been significant achievements to date, the issues the NDRP seeks to address are deeply entrenched. Resolving these systemic challenges will take persistent time and effort across all stakeholders, reinforcing the ongoing need for the NDRP. The evaluation has identified future considerations for the organisation to realise the expectations of the disability community and transform the disability research landscape in a manner that can keep pace with the growing need for evidence informed policy decisions.

Resource considerations identify the need for a sustainable funding model that can enable the establishment of longer-term infrastructure and collaborations

- There is a need for continued government funding.
- Supplementary funding streams can provide an opportunity to grow impact, but it takes time to establish credibility within the philanthropic landscape and to activate new revenue streams.
- Despite the significant achievements made across short term outcomes, it will be challenging for the NDRP to scale up with current resources to reach longer term transformative impacts across each strategic focus area.

Design considerations demonstrate a need to grow partnerships and awareness to extend the reach and impact of the NDRP

- Government relationships are not yet as strong as those with community and research organisations, but this may require further support from government to position the NDRP as a leader for government stakeholders to connect with.
- There is opportunity to increase brand awareness and extend formal partnerships, particularly in areas that intersect with disability such as health, ageing and education.
- Where members of governance committees hold multiple roles within disability research, this can present conflicts that warrant further exploration to maintain integrity.

Delivery considerations point to tensions in some areas that require greater balance as the NDRP progresses its ambitious agenda.

- The established NDRP Research Agenda is directly linked to policy to address foundational evidence gaps, but there is a need to consider deeper dives into intersectional experiences or to give greater prominence to 'mainstreaming' intersectionality.
- There is demand for rapid, policy-relevant research, yet it takes time to undertake quality, inclusive research with proper co-design. There is benefit in considering both the utility of early research milestones for policy makers and building the understanding of government audiences on the requirements of meaningful co-design.
- Much of the enabling work of the NDRP is not formally captured as direct research costs and there are many less tangible elements, however, there is a need to fully capture direct research costs to plan for future resources and sustainability.