



Creating  
an inclusive  
community  
together

# Australia's Disability Strategy

## 2024 Review

Summary

# ADS Review

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## Executive summary

**The Australian Government is committed to creating lasting change through disability reform. Achieving this will take a coordinated effort from everyone. Australia's Disability Strategy (ADS) is the overarching governance framework across the broad scope of disability reforms in Australia. To achieve an inclusive Australian community, we need to make sure ADS is working as planned.**

The Review has focused on identifying practical, process improvements we can make now. We have heard what the disability community has said and used this feedback to guide our actions.

Australia's Disability Strategy 2021–2031 is Australia's national disability policy framework. Launched in December 2021, it sets out a plan for continuing to improve the lives of people with disability in Australia.

The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (Disability Royal Commission) and the work of everyone involved in the inquiry informed the development of ADS and will help shape future updates to ADS. Under ADS, governments were committed to reviewing ADS upon the release of the Disability Royal Commission's Final Report.

This document provides an overview of the Review of ADS (the Review). This document is a summary of the ADS Review Report, available on ADS Hub on Disability Gateway.

The Review is not intended to replace the independent evaluations of ADS, the first progressing in 2025.

The Review has focused on practical changes which can be made now, with some potential reforms under ADS deferred for consideration until post the Independent Evaluation in 2025. This will give people with disability time and opportunities to be involved in the development and implementation of future reforms.

We undertook a thorough literature review, collating feedback from the disability community into meaningful insights on ADS. We received 146 submissions during public consultation for the Review.

People with disability and representative organisations consistently told us they want to see an improvement on how governments work together, more accessible information and communication, and more opportunities to participate and engage with ADS.

We have used what we have heard to propose changes to ADS. The Review's findings and actions are provided under Actions in this summary document.

The Review honours our commitment to listen to what people with disability have said about ADS and to be led by their advice on how we can take action now and into the future.

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## Review context

It is an extraordinary time for disability reform for Australia, as 2023 saw the completion of two major reports. The [Final Report](#) of the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation of People with Disability (Disability Royal Commission) was released on 29 September 2023. The findings of the Independent Review of the NDIS have also been released as the [Final Report](#) on 7 December 2023.

The Disability Royal Commission helped shape the development of ADS and will shape future updates to ADS.

There is a community expectation that the implementation of the Disability Royal Commission's recommendations will support a new era of disability inclusion in Australian communities, workplaces and other systems.

The Australian Government supports the Disability Royal Commission's vision for an inclusive Australia, in which:

- people with disability live free from violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation
- human rights are protected
- people with disability live with dignity, equality and respect and can fulfil their potential.

These key principles are at the heart of the Government's broader disability reform agenda and will shape development and implementation of reforms.

The NDIS Review's desired outcomes are to ensure NDIS can sustainably and for the long term, invest in and empower people with disability to achieve their goals and participate in the community and economy.

The Review of ADS is focused on identifying practical, process improvements to ADS that reflect what the disability community have said are important.

These planned evaluations of ADS will be undertaken by an independent evaluator, will focus on the outcomes achieved against ADS Policy Priorities and vision, and will include a much more significant and broad ranging consultation component with greater engagement with people with disability.



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## Scope

The Review has been guided by its Terms of Reference. We will defer some potential reforms under ADS until the Independent Evaluation of ADS in 2025–26.

In early 2024, the Australian Government worked with the ADS Advisory Council, and state and territory governments, to develop Terms of Reference for the Review Project. The Terms of Reference define what issues a group, project or investigation will look into, and how it will be done.

The Review Project's Terms of Reference align with the Disability Royal Commission's recommendation 5.2. The Terms of Reference acknowledge that the Review will consider ADS and its implementation mechanisms and be undertaken with people with disability and their representative organisations.

All states and territories have, or are developing, their own disability plans or strategies. While many governments use their own disability plan or strategy for their ADS activities, local and state/territory-level disability plans and strategies are out-of-scope of the Review.

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## Methodology

The Review has taken a rapid and targeted approach. Consultation provided an opportunity to test out our findings about ADS and where people with disability and the broader community could share their ideas and experiences.

We looked at existing research and consultation reports and used themes to identify ideas, suggestions and concepts occurring across the advice available. We collated this feedback into meaningful insights, to identify what is important to people with disability.

We have refined this feedback through further engagement with people with disability. In June 2024, we undertook workshops with ADS governance groups, including ADS Advisory Council, Disability Representative Organisations (DROs), state and territory officials, and across Australian Government agencies.

We held 4 workshops with ADS Advisory Council members, and a further 5 workshops with DRO representatives. Additionally, Advisory Council members and DROs were provided opportunities to submit their feedback on ADS after the workshops.

We also held a public engagement process from August to September 2024. We released a discussion paper to support people in making a submission to the Review. Participants could answer a short questionnaire on the digital DSS Engage platform, and make submissions through alternative pathways, such as email, phone and video call. We received 146 submissions, including from 66 individuals and 80 organisations.

We have used what we have learned and heard across ADS Review engagement activities to refine and propose changes to ADS.

# Actions

The Review is an opportunity to make practical changes to processes and structures to respond to what we have heard through the first three years of ADS.

The Review has considered the views of people with disability and DROs, progress made and future commitments under ADS, the Disability Royal Commission’s Final Report, the NDIS Review Final Report, and opportunities for meaningful reform. The findings and actions of the Review are outlined below.

Findings	Actions
More needs to be done to support a coordinated approach to ADS implementation across governments	Refine ADS mechanisms to support a nationally coordinated approach to implementing ADS, and improve the role of local government in ADS
For ADS to achieve its goals, it is critical that people with disability are genuinely involved in the design, implementation and governance of ADS	Develop and implement an ADS Community Engagement Plan, in addition to the existing ADS engagement commitments.  Lift awareness of ADS
There is strong support for new Targeted Action Plans	Develop new streamlined TAPs on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Inclusive Homes and Communities (including action on housing)</li><li>• Safety, Rights and Justice</li><li>• Community Attitudes</li></ul>
Accessible information and communication are vital for safe and inclusive communities	Develop an Associated Plan to support best practice accessible information and communication
ADS reporting does not support government accountability, implementation compliance or recognition of the intersectional experiences of people with disability	Extend ADS reporting to improve visibility of intersectional experiences  Embed mechanisms that will support the early identification of delayed and undelivered TAPs actions  Update ADS Data Improvement Plan
People with disability face significant barriers to accessing a home and are disproportionately represented in homelessness and social housing statistics	Develop a new Policy Priority area addressing homelessness in the Inclusive Homes and Communities Outcome Area of ADS

In addition to the Review findings, we have identified topics important to people with disability that require further engagement with the disability community. These topics are associated with ADS Outcome Areas.

We will engage further with the disability community as part of existing planned events such as the 2025 ADS National Forum, 2025 ADS Evaluation engagements and additional activities through the proposed ADS Community Engagement Plan. This will support us, in partnership with people with disability, to develop and implement appropriate and effective responses to improve outcomes for people with disability.

The findings and actions of the Review will support the development of a refreshed ADS.

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## What we have heard

We have listened to what people with disability have told us about ADS and its implementation mechanisms since its launch. The Review provided opportunities for people to share their ideas and experiences of ADS.

The following sections provide an overview of the recurring themes identified through engagement and the literature review, where there is broad support or agreement from across the disability community, focusing on what people with disability have said is important to them.

### Implementation mechanisms

ADS implementation mechanisms are the activities that support the delivery of ADS; this includes things like the Targeted Action Plans and Outcomes Framework. We will use what we heard about ADS implementation mechanisms to develop a list of practical changes.

#### *Engaging people with disability*

People told us they want more opportunities to participate in or engage with ADS. We heard that current ADS engagements were not frequent enough and easier ways are needed to provide feedback or advice on ADS. Co-design as a mechanism was regularly raised in feedback. People also supported lifting awareness of ADS throughout the community and increasing the visibility of ADS.

#### *Intersectionality*

We heard that there needs to be better recognition of and improved responses to experiences of intersectionality through ADS. This includes addressing intersectionality across data and reporting.

#### *Coordination*

People said they want to see improvements in how governments work together on ADS, calling on governments to improve coordination across all ADS implementation mechanisms. Coordination was strongly associated with support for improving ADS reporting and increasing accountability and compliance.

There was strong support for increasing the role of local government in ADS, as well as aligning or linking ADS to other national strategies, plans or reforms.

## ***Targeted Action Plans***

There is strong support for new TAPs, particularly on housing, education, community attitudes, and safety. Notwithstanding this support for new TAPs, there were also calls to review the structure of TAPs, including how TAPs are developed, and targeting future TAP actions to specific cohorts. The ADS Advisory Council proposed future TAPs could be strengthened by harmonising efforts across governments and involving people with disability in the design and implementation of TAP actions.

## ***Associated Plans***

People have told us that future ADS Associated Plans need to be co-designed with people with disability, and that they need more oversight, including check-in points and improved reporting, to ensure they are working as planned. Advisory Council members have called for a stronger role for the ADS Advisory Council in the development of ADS Associated Plans.

On potential topics for future ADS Associated Plans, feedback strongly supported a plan for accessible information and communications. We received consistent feedback from the community about the importance of accessible information and communication, including addressing digital accessibility and inclusion.

## ***Reporting***

A consistent theme through the Review was the need to improve ADS data and reporting. This included how, what and when ADS reporting takes place. There was strong support for strengthening ADS compliance mechanisms (tools to make sure governments fulfil their commitments under ADS) and increasing accountability through improved ADS reporting.

We heard feedback on two specific aspects of reporting: there were calls for ADS reporting to reflect intersectional experiences, and for transparent reporting that holds government to account.

## ***Outcomes Framework and data***

People told us ADS needs to strengthen and expand the Outcomes Framework and data, including through data on intersectionality, expanding measures under the Outcomes Framework, new data collections on specific topics, and updating ADS Data Improvement Plan.

The Disability Royal Commission identified high-quality data and research as important for building policy evidence and holding governments to account. We also heard about opportunities to lean into the Outcomes Framework and data to ensure ADS implementation is working as planned.

## ***Evaluation and research***

The National Disability Research Partnership (NDRP) is the primary vehicle for developing a more coordinated approach to funding and undertaking disability research. Feedback on NDRP has acknowledged its importance and supported NDPR's alignment with the United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and ADS.

## ***Governance***

People told us that we need to strengthen ADS governance structures and oversight, with a view to strengthening compliance mechanisms, accountability and transparency. We heard proposals to formalise or expand existing advisory bodies as well as embedding Human Rights in the governance of ADS. We also heard about the need to provide support to increase the involvement of people with disability in ADS governance activities.

## **Outcomes Areas and Policy Priorities**

ADS Outcome Areas represent the topics people with disability have said are important to them, like jobs and housing. We will undertake further engagement with the disability community to develop and implement appropriate and effective responses to these topics.

Overall, we heard that the current 7 Outcome Areas still represent what is most important to people with disability. Applicable to all ADS Outcome Areas, people told us about the need to have accessible information and communication; to lift awareness of ADS; and to have monitoring and compliance mechanisms in place to make sure governments make good on their ADS commitments. We also heard about how community attitudes and disability awareness affect all Outcome Areas of ADS, and the need to improve community attitudes and disability awareness across the broader community.

## ***Employment and financial security***

People told us about the need to reduce barriers to employment. The unemployment rate of working-age people with disability is more than double that of those without disability and has remained unchanged for decades. People with disability and DROs have told us employment outcomes are interconnected and have tangible impacts on other areas of life beyond financial independence, including opportunities for safe and affordable housing, health, mental health, and community inclusion.

Another consistent theme across the Review was support for improving post-school transitions, including supports for tertiary students with disability, and tertiary education reform.

## ***Inclusive homes and communities***

Across the Review there was strong support for governments to take action on housing. This included addressing homelessness in ADS Policy Priorities under the Inclusive Homes and Communities Outcome Area.

We heard feedback across the Review supporting increasing accessible information and communication, including addressing digital accessibility and inclusion. People told us about the value and popularity of accessibility formats (including Easy Read) and noted that accessible formats are not regularly available on topics of interest for people with disability. This interest in accessible communication extended across government, with people eager to see accessible communication not being restricted to 'disability-specific' areas.

## ***Safety, rights and justice***

A consistent theme across the Review was support for disability rights awareness, including among specific groups such as employers, educators and healthcare professionals. People told us they want to see action on discrimination, including enforcing laws and work towards eliminating discrimination. We also heard some support for legislative changes, such as establishing human rights or disability rights legislation.

We know that women, children and young people with disability are at a particularly heightened risk of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation. The disability community has raised concerns over the significantly increased likelihood women and girls with disability will experience gendered violence, including family, domestic and sexual violence. People told us they want action to stop the overrepresentation of people with disability in the criminal justice system.

## ***Personal and community support***

Across the Review, we heard strong support for governments to take action on improving mainstream systems, with particular interest in health and education systems. During the Review's public consultation, over 30% of participants identified improving mainstream systems as important to them. People also told us there needs to be more supports for people with disability that are not part of NDIS.

## ***Education and learning***

We heard broad support that people want to see education reform, including in specialist settings. People told us we need to improve community attitudes and disability awareness across education settings. We have also heard support for increasing the inclusivity of the education system through increased resourcing and educator professional development.

## ***Health and wellbeing***

A consistent theme across the Review was improving mainstream systems, with people regularly identifying improving the health system as important to them. Some people said governments need to address the cost of healthcare for people with disability, while others advocated increasing disability mental health services.

People also said we need to improve community attitudes and disability awareness across the health system. People have told us that negative attitudes and discrimination towards people with disability can limit access their healthcare, diagnosis and decision making about their own treatment.

## ***Community attitudes***

People told us that about the importance of community attitudes and disability awareness in their communities, and how this affects all Outcome Areas of ADS. We also heard DROs say that ADS has not been successful in improving community attitudes across key sectors (health, education, early childhood) or in driving improved access to services and support for people with disability who are not eligible for the NDIS.

We heard strong interest in authentic representation of people with disability in the community, in the media and the arts. There was support for increasing leadership by people with disability.

Throughout the Review, people who took part had a low understanding of ADS but supported lifting awareness of ADS throughout the community: increasing recognition of ADS, what it is, and what it does.

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## Next steps

We will take on board what we have heard, and make practical changes to ADS processes, structures, and implementation mechanisms.

Pending endorsement by the Disability Reform Ministerial Council, the Australian Government will work to update ADS and the Roadmap to reflect the Review's actions. We will publish the refreshed information at the end of 2024.

We will use what we have heard about ADS Outcome Areas and Policy Priorities to inform future engagement with the disability community to develop and implement appropriate and effective responses to those topics.

We will defer some reforms until the Independent Evaluation of ADS in 2025–26. The Independent Evaluation will have the potential for a wider range of data and insights, greater engagement with people with disability and their representative organisations, and research into more complex issues. This will give people with disability time and opportunities to be involved in the development and implementation of reforms to ADS.

The Review Project gratefully acknowledges the advice and feedback people with disability, Disability Representative Organisations, and ADS Advisory Council have provided to ADS Review.



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