



PHYSICAL DISABILITY AUSTRALIA MEMBER UPDATE SEPTEMBER 2025

Hello Members,

Welcome to the latest version of your member update. The first thing you will notice is that this edition is a tad longer than the previous edition and jam-packed with information. This update also shows how much PDA is doing in the systemic advocacy space and how we are punching above our weight in participation, input and output.

This edition also includes 'Sarah's Spot', written by your new Policy/Project Officer, Sarah McInnes. Sarah is proving to be a valuable asset to PDA who has already become an intrinsic part of the Team. I have found it extremely useful having another voice contributing to our advocacy work.

Much has happened in the disability sector over the last few months with major announcements from Minister Mark Butler around NDIS reforms involving changes for neurodiverse children and the proposed implementation of the 'Thriving Kids' program in July 2026. The House Standing Committee on Health, Aged Care and Disability has commenced an inquiry into the Thriving Kids initiative. I believe we are looking at a 'watch this space' over the next 9 months.

Board Chair Update – Sharon Boyce

Our Chair, Sharon Boyce, has been actively engaged in national conversations around the evolving disability landscape, particularly in regards to recent NDIS reforms and broader legislative changes. Key topics include foundational supports, inclusive education, and ongoing concerns around accessibility in health and transport.

Highlights:

- **NDIS & Legislation:** Significant changes are underway, affecting both NDIS participants and those outside it, with an urgent need to ensure people are informed and supported through these transitions.
- **Health & Disability:** Access to medical equipment and inclusive healthcare remains a critical issue. The recent PDA webinar on this subject opened important

discussions, and we encourage you to watch the "[Fair and Accessible Healthcare](#)" Webinar recording on [Physical Disability Australia's YouTube channel](#).

- **Hospital Access:** There's growing concern about the NDIS not funding support workers in hospitals, leading to serious health and safety risks.
- **Transport in Queensland:** Improvements are underway, especially ahead of the 2032 Olympic Games. However, barriers still exist for people using power chairs on buses.
- **Community Engagement:** Members are encouraged to share their lived experiences to help shift public understanding on disability. [Jeremy's recent ABC interview](#) which explores disability models is a great example of this.

CEO Overview – Jeremy Muir

July 8 & 29 & August 27 – Community Visitor Scheme Subject Matter Expert Consultations

I've attended three consultations so far, discussing the current role and challenges of the Community Visitor Scheme (CVS) in safeguarding people with disability in accommodation settings.

Key Issues Raised:

- **Inconsistent Access Across Jurisdictions:** CVS access varies by state/territory laws, meaning some people with disability are excluded; particularly those in settings not covered by local legislation (e.g. some NDIS-funded or private accommodations).
- **Lack of National Recognition:** CVS plays a vital, independent safeguarding role, but it's not formally recognised in the NDIS Act or national safeguarding framework, creating a disconnect between state and federal systems.
- **Role Clarity:** CVS focuses on rights-based, person-centred advocacy, distinct from the NDIS Commission, which regulates providers and responds to complaints. The two roles need to work together, but confusion about responsibilities remains.
- **Poor Information Sharing:** Current protocols make it hard for CVS to share concerns with the NDIS Commission or NDIA. Privacy rules and lack of feedback prevent collaborative safeguarding.

- **Limited Resources:** An increase in accommodation sites has stretched CVS resources. Some schemes have reduced visit frequency, risking gaps in oversight and responsiveness.

July 16 & August 13 – AFDO Education Policy Working Group and AFDO Inclusive Education Statement & Sector Collaborations

AFDO has led a coordinated response to proposed changes to the Disability Standards for Education. Due to my previous work in the Higher Education sector, I had the opportunity to participate and contribute to the statement. With other subject matter experts, I contributed to this joint effort across five meetings. A shared commitment remains to uphold inclusive education rights for students with disability. The final statement will be endorsed on September 30, with its release shortly after.

July 17 & August 12 – Self-Management Advisory Group

These meetings focus on how self-managing NDIS participants will navigate the new participant pathways. PDA continues to advocate for clear and practical approaches to ensure people who self-manage are not disadvantaged by system changes.

The August 12 meeting concentrated on ‘Short Term Accommodation and Respite’ and potential NDIA rule changes around both. Further consultation will take place with the sector prior to any rule changes being implemented.

July 17 – Roundtable with Disability Discrimination Commissioner

Commissioner Rosemary Kayess discussed how the UNCRPD can be used to challenge NDIA decisions, reinforcing the importance of rights-based advocacy within the NDIS.

July 18 – Rural and Remote Advisory Group (RRAG)

Key issues discussed included the unequal impacts of the Annual Pricing Review and market failure in rural/remote areas. First Nations participants are especially affected. RRAG is pushing for urgent remediation measures from the NDIA. Sarah attended the September 3rd meeting and has provided further notes on what was covered in this meeting in her section.

July 21 & August 29 – Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) National Disability Data Asset (NDDA) Health Usage Research Project – Meeting 1

The six-month project began with an exploration of how disability-related health data is collected. PDA is contributing to shaping a more accurate, inclusive, and responsive data framework.

Issues discussed are:

- The influence of NDIS participation and hospitalisation

- Better understanding around the factors influencing hospitalisation rates and avoidance of care of people with disabilities.

July 22 – Assessment & Budgeting Co-Design Working Group

This working group has and is going through some changes. A new co-chair has been appointed and a refocus is currently occurring. The next meeting occurs next week so I will have a better idea of what the future holds for this working group. Early discussions took place on 'Targeted Assessment Modules' under the proposed new NDIS planning framework, ahead of planned deeper consultation. We have been informed that the procurement process for the new 'Need Assessment Tool' has been finalised but the sector is waiting for an announcement from the NDIA on the tool/s.

July 23 – DANA Leadership Meeting

These are regular meetings where we discuss a range of topics including:

- NDIS reforms
- inclusive employment
- national violence prevention planning
- safe work standards

PDA contributed to a joint DRO submission on NDIS supports –

<https://dana.org.au/disability-representative-organisations-call-for-ndis-support-decisions-to-be-clear-fair-and-inclusive/>

July 23, 29 & August 8 - Disability Aviation Standards Consultations

Workshop 1 – Planning and Booking Air Travel

People with disability have the right to equitable, safe, and accessible air travel. However, barriers remain. Key considerations include:

- **Accessible Information:** Booking and travel info must be clear, consistent, and available in accessible formats.
- **Mobility Aids:** Travellers can bring essential mobility devices (e.g. wheelchairs, scooters) and should not face discrimination in doing so. Advance notice (48–72 hours) is often required.
- **Medical Equipment:** Travelling with necessary medical devices or medications is a right. Airlines may request notice or documentation, but must not create unreasonable barriers.
- **Dangerous Goods:** Items like lithium batteries may need approval. These rules must be applied transparently and fairly.

- **Medical Clearance:** Airlines’ “fitness to fly” rules must respect the rights of people with disability and not impose unjust restrictions.
- **Support Persons:** Where support is needed, airlines must ensure policies are inclusive and avoid additional financial or access burdens.

Workshop 2 – On the Plane

Air travel must be safe and dignified for all passengers, including people with disability. However, many access and safety challenges remain during boarding, in-flight, and disembarkation. Key issues include:

- **Boarding & Disembarking:** Step-free access is not always available, especially at regional airports. Lifts or ramps may be unsafe or absent, creating significant barriers.
- **Mobility Aids:** Travellers may need to check in their wheelchairs or scooters due to size or battery type. Not all aircraft can accommodate all devices. Restrictions also exist on how many wheelchair users can board per flight.
- **Seating & Transfers:** Travellers using mobility aids or assistance animals are entitled to priority seating. However, assistance with transferring to seats is often inconsistent, and staff may lack proper training in safe or respectful handling.
- **Toilet Access:** Aircraft toilets are often not accessible, especially for those needing carer assistance or mobility aids; impacting comfort, dignity, and even the decision to fly.
- **In-Flight Mobility:** Moving around the cabin can be difficult or impossible for many, with limited or unsafe assistance available.
- **Assistance Animals:** Travellers can fly with an assistance animal, but rules around seating, restraint, and handling vary and may restrict access.
- **Support Persons:** Where travellers require a support person, rules around boarding and transfers must not impose unfair burdens or compromise safety.
- **Emergency Procedures:** Travellers with disability are often told to wait for evacuation assistance until after others have exited, raising concerns around equitable safety.

Workshop 3 – At the Airport

I attended the third Aviation Access Workshop in Sydney, focused on airport experiences—arrival, parking, check-in, navigation, and facilities. A key issue raised by all participants was the **lack of consistency** across airlines, airports, and services. I experienced this myself—every transfer between wheelchair and seat was handled differently.

Key Issues & Solutions Raised:

- **Accessible Parking & Drop-off:** More accessible bays, ramps, and recognition of disability permits at all airports.
- **Consistent Assistance:** Equal support for arrivals and departures. A concierge-style support service could guide travellers from drop-off, to boarding and arrival.
- **Clear Responsibility:** Airlines must remain accountable for access, even when services are contracted out.
- **Navigation & Information:** Consistent, accessible signage and real-time info in Easy Read, Braille, audio, and digital formats.
- **Inclusive Check-In:** Separate accessibility desks with trained staff and adjustable counters.
- **Security with Dignity:** Accessible screening lanes and staff trained in respectful, disability-aware procedures.
- **Accessible Facilities:** Clean toilets, quiet rooms, assistance animal areas, and private spaces for transfers.
- **Support for Autonomy:** Travellers should stay in their mobility devices as long as possible and be able to access shops and food outlets like everyone else.
- **Flight Updates:** Delays and gate changes must be communicated accessibly and promptly.
- **Staff Training:** Disability awareness must be embedded in all training—with respect for autonomy, aids, and communication needs.
- **National Consistency:** Accessibility policies and procedures must be the same across all airports and airlines.

August 7 - Women with Disabilities Australia Gender Strategy for the NDIS

As we continue to work across the sector to amplify the rights of all people with disability, PDA supported WWDA's recommendation for a NDIS Gender Strategy - [WWDA-Position-Statement-NDIS-Gender-Strategy.pdf](#) This strategy will sit alongside the First Nations Strategy, the LGBTQIA+ Strategy, the CALD Strategy, the Rural and Remote Strategy.

Recently, DRO's were advised that the work to develop this Strategy will be paused, following a review of the NDIA's strategies. We understand that the NDIA will instead look at developing a set of 'inclusion principles' for the Scheme. We were concerned to hear this change in direction and would be grateful for any further clarification the NDIA is able to provide. In particular, DRO's would like to understand:

- The future direction of the Gender Equity Strategy, and duration of the pause (including whether it will be temporary, long-term or indefinite).
- The rationale for the redirection to inclusion principles, noting that targeted and specific measures are required to promote equitable outcomes for women and girls with disability and other marginalised communities.
- The impact of this redirection on existing strategies, including the First Nations Strategy, the LGBTQIA+ Strategy, the CALD Strategy, the Rural and Remote Strategy, and whether these strategies will continue or be replaced by the incoming ‘inclusion principles’.
- The development of the ‘inclusion principles’, including any action plans arising from those principles.

DRO’s are awaiting a response from the NDIA.

August 19 - NDIS Quarterly Reform Forum

Discussions focused on the potential introduction of “Navigators” to assist participants. Details are confidential at this stage, but any implementation would likely be mid-2026 at the earliest. PDA will monitor and engage as further information is released.

August 20 – NDIS Reform & Minister’s Speech – Key Updates

Minister Mark Butler’s recent address to the National Press Club outlined sweeping reforms. Here’s what it means for our community:

- **NDIS Growth & Sustainability**

Participant numbers are at 740,000 and projected to reach 1 million by 2034. The government aims to reduce growth to 4–5%, raising concerns that this may mean participants could be removed from the scheme.

- **Thriving Kids Program**

A new \$2 billion program for children with developmental delay or autism (without permanent disability) will begin in 2026, with NDIS eligibility changes to follow in 2027. This was announced without consultation with the disability sector.

- **Focus on Original NDIS Intent**

The government is reaffirming that the NDIS is for people with permanent and significant disability—potentially excluding children currently on the scheme who do not meet this strict definition.

- **Fraud Prevention & Market Regulation**

Only 16,000 of 260,000 providers are registered. The Minister announced stronger fraud control and a push for more regulated services.

- **Governance & Co-Design**

A new NDIS Reform Advisory Committee has been created, with a stated commitment to “Nothing About Us Without Us.” PDA will engage to ensure this principle is upheld in practice.

Our Response & Advocacy

PDA is working with other Disability Representative Organisations to ensure:

- Transparent and genuine co-design in all reforms.
- Mainstream support systems (like Thriving Kids) are fully funded, consistent, and accessible.
- Foundational supports are delivered urgently for the 4.8 million Australians with disability outside the NDIS.
- The rights and safety of people with disability are not compromised by reform-driven cost-cutting.

We will continue to keep you informed and involved as these significant changes unfold.

Sarah's Spot

Hello Members,

My name is Sarah McInnes, and I am Physical Disability Australia's new Policy & Project Officer. In my first 2 months since joining Physical Disability Australia, I have hit the ground running; representing PDA at several meetings, forums and webinars, building sector connections, and beginning work on several important projects. Here's a quick snapshot of what's been happening:

Conferences, Forums and Webinars:

Key Meetings Attended

 **July 21 – DSS Update on Inclusive Employment Australia (IEA)**

DROs received an update on the transition to the new employment program. The Department aims to increase provider diversity, especially those specialising in support for specific groups. More information expected soon.

July 23 – National Redress Scheme Webinar

This information session explained how the Redress Scheme works and how people with disability can access it. The panel addressed common questions and barriers, particularly around accessibility and support for applicants.

July 24 – National Disability Research Partnership (NDRP) Event: “Evidence to Action”

This forum explored how to use research to inform disability policy. Key themes included:

- Embedding lived experience in evidence gathering.
- Ensuring research leads to real systems change.
- Legal advocacy through evidence-based accountability.

August 15 – Disability Discrimination Act Review Webinar

This session launched the national review of the *Disability Discrimination Act (DDA)* in response to the Royal Commission. Key topics discussed:

- Positive duties on organisations to prevent discrimination.
- Updating definitions of disability.
- Improving access to justice and inclusive participation.
- Consultations remain open until October 24, with roundtables planned on employment, education, inclusion, and safety.
- There are 2 ways you can participate in the Disability Discrimination Act Review
 - 1. You can make a submission responding to the questions in the Issues Paper found on the Attorney-General's Department ([Review of the Disability Discrimination Act | Attorney-General's Department](#)).
 - 2. You can also use the community survey. This survey has a shorter set of questions for people in the community who do not want to respond to the questions in the Issues Paper but would still like to contribute to the review ([Disability Discrimination Act Review – Community Survey - Attorney-General's Department - Citizen Space](#)).

August 21 – Disability and Health Sector Consultation Committee (DHSCC)

This meeting included:

- An overview of the Disability Division in the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing.
- Updates on the Disability Health Navigation Scoping Project.
- Final report presentation on health advocacy barriers for people with disability.

August 25 – Disability Discrimination Act Review South Australia Community Forum

Key Points:

- The Disability Discrimination Act needs reform to better protect rights and reflect the social and human rights models of disability.
- Discussions emphasised:
 - Expanding the definition of disability
 - Introducing a positive duty on organisations to prevent discrimination
 - Making the law clearer, stronger, and more inclusive
- Speakers stressed that access is a right, and systems - not individuals - should bear the responsibility for inclusion.

PDA encourages members to contribute to the DDA Review before the consultation closes on October 24, 2025.

August 25 – Lessons from the UK for Australian Advocacy from the Summer Foundation and Ewin King

The Summer Foundation continues advocating to prevent young people with disability entering aged care. Ewin King provided an overview of the Shared Lives program (UK) which now supports 10,000 people through a model where individuals live with or regularly visit approved carers, sharing everyday life in community settings. It's safe, cost-effective, and delivers strong wellbeing outcomes especially for people with intellectual disability and mental health needs.

Key takeaways for Australia:

- Strong potential for Shared Lives-style models locally
- Need for supportive regulation, funding, and recruitment strategies
- Importance of public awareness and government engagement to scale inclusive alternatives to group homes

September 1 – August 2025 Disability Representative & Carers Organisation (DRCO) Forum

The August DRCO forum brought together NDIA leadership, government officials, and disability and carer representative bodies to discuss key updates across integrity, reforms, communication, and inclusion.

Key Highlights:

- **Debt Management & Integrity:** NDIA provided updates on debt recovery processes. Concerns were raised about nominee misuse, high error rates, and impacts on participants. Demographic analysis shows debt issues are widespread.
- **NDIS Reform Updates:** Acting CEO Scott McNaughton outlined the rollout of a new planning framework and Support Needs Assessments, starting mid-2026. Focus on longer, more flexible plans, workforce expansion, and pilot programs for SIL and therapy services.
- **Accessible Communication:** Down Syndrome Australia shared findings from a pilot to improve NDIS reform communication. Recommendations included shorter Easy Read materials and audio options.
- **DRCO 2025 Workplan:** Emphasis on codesign, growing forum membership, improving accessible communication, and progressing work on employment and S10 reforms.
- **NDIA Workforce Transition:** Plans to support the reform rollout with strategic recruitment, staff transition, and a focus on diversity and inclusion.



September 2 – Policy Officer Round Table: Information Session for New Framework Planning

Key takeaways:

- A more person-centred and transparent planning process is being introduced.
- Your current plan stays active until a new one is in place.
- You will be involved in key decisions during your Support Needs Assessment.
- There will be more clarity about what supports you can access—and how to manage your budget.

PDA will continue to monitor these changes and advocate to ensure the voices of people with disability are central to all reforms.



September 3 – Rural and Remote Advisory Group (RRAG) Meeting

The forum highlighted efforts to improve NDIS access and support in remote communities, with a focus on culturally safe services and integrated care.

- Remote Service Solutions (NDIA):

Access Clinics and workforce initiatives are expanding NDIS access for First Nations and CALD communities. Local solutions are being co-designed to meet unique community needs.

- Integrated Care & Commissioning (ICC):

Pilot sites in regions like the Kimberley and Central West QLD are testing cross-sector approaches to improve care access and coordination across disability, health, aged care, and veterans' services.

- NDIS Engage Platform:

A new online tool for people with disability, families, and carers to contribute to NDIS reform. Users requested better accessibility and mobile compatibility.

September 4 – Disability Representative Organisation (DRO) Forum

Ministers Mark Butler and Jenny McAllister outlined the integration of health, ageing, and disability portfolios. Key priorities include

- improving participant experience,
- a careful rollout of the new planning framework, and
- culturally safe, trauma-informed navigation.

Community leaders raised urgent issues affecting First Nations people with disability, including deaths in NT/TAS, lack of advocacy funding, and barriers in the justice system.

The *Thriving Kids* program will launch in July 2026 to support children under 8 with low to moderate needs. Updates were also provided on the NDIS planning reforms, the development of a new national safeguarding framework, and broader policy efforts to align disability, health, and justice systems.

September 9,10 & 12 – Disability Discrimination Act Roundtables on Employment, Education & Access and Inclusion

Jeremy and I have attended 3 of the community roundtables for the DDA Review that discussed the above topics. We will be attending the fourth one on Tuesday September 16 which will discuss Community Safety.

A snapshot of the main discussion points from the roundtables:

- The importance of the new Act utilising “Positive Duty”; changing the legislation from being reactive to preventative. Duty holders must be proactively responsible for preventing discrimination, not just reacting to complaints.

- As per the Disability Royal Commission's recommendation, removing the 'reasonable' in 'reasonable adjustment from the Act, when employers or places of education are trying to claim "unjustifiable hardship".
- Consider a revise or standalone definition of "unjustifiable hardship" in the Act.
- Improve disability awareness and inclusive practices in education and for employers through professional development.
- Strengthen institutional planning and accountability through compulsory Disability Access & Inclusion Plans.
- Strengthen the legal force and standards of DAIPs, and embed them more consistently across housing, transport, education and local services.
- Close current loopholes and exceptions that undermine accountability.
- Modernise the language in the DDA to ensure the definitions of disability and discrimination reflect a human rights approach and intersectionality.
- Mandate that the DDA be interpreted in a way that is beneficial to people with disability.
- Establish clear standards and training requirements for assistance animals.
- Mandate accessibility standards.
- Empower the Australian Human Rights Commission to monitor and audit compliance and enforce penalties for non-compliance.
- Compliment the DDA with a Disability Inclusion Act that embeds positive duties, applies to government, businesses and services, include codesign, public reporting and enforceable mechanisms and drives systemic change.
- Ensure reforms utilise intersectional and culturally safe approaches and serves First Nations people and culturally and linguistically diverse communities and others facing compounded barriers.

Looking Ahead

It's been an energising start, and I'm proud to be representing PDA in these vital discussions. I look forward to continuing to ensure our community's voice is heard at every table, and in every decision that affects us.

If you'd like to know more about any of the projects above or get involved in consultations, don't hesitate to get in touch.

Conclusion from Jeremy

I know there is a lot of information in this update. We will try and provide the next update prior to our AGM in December. Look out for information about the AGM, which we will send out in November. If you have any questions or issues, you would like us to raise, please do not hesitate to contact [myself](#), [Sarah](#), or [Natasha](#).