



OUR
HEALTHCARE
FUTURE

Disability Health
Strategy

2025

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Acknowledgement of Country

The Tasmanian Department of Health respectfully acknowledges Tasmanian Aboriginal people as the traditional custodians of the land on which we live, work and play, and pays respect to Aboriginal Elders past and present.

Recognition Statement


Tasmanian Aboriginal people's traditional lifestyle promoted physical and emotional health and wellbeing, centred around Country, Kin, Community and Spirituality. Aboriginal people continue to value the importance of culture, community connection and being on Country as vital components of health and wellness.

Through colonisation, Aboriginal people experienced displacement and disconnection, which has significantly affected their health and wellbeing. We recognise that Aboriginal people are the knowledge holders and provide best practice in promoting health and wellbeing for Aboriginal people. We acknowledge and learn from the ongoing work of Aboriginal organisations in ensuring continued health and wellness. We commit to working in partnership with Tasmanian Aboriginal communities and health leaders, both now and into the future, to improve health and wellbeing.

Nationally, we also acknowledge that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are almost twice as likely to be living with disability than non-Aboriginal people¹ and continue to experience inequities in health outcomes and increased difficulty in accessing healthcare.

This Strategy aims to ensure that our public health services meet the needs of all Tasmanians with disability, including Tasmanian Aboriginal people.

¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2015. The health and welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples 2015. Cat. no. IHW 147. Canberra: AIHW.



Buttongrass plains at Dempster Plains, south of Maytim (the Arthur River), site of the first Aboriginal cultural burn to take place on a state managed park or reserve in Lutruwita (Tasmania) in 2021. Photographer – Jillian Mundy.



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Foreword



The Tasmanian Government is creating a more inclusive and accessible Tasmania for people with disability.

To support this, I am pleased to present the Department of Health's *Disability Health Strategy 2025* (the Strategy) – a roadmap to guide us in providing high-quality, inclusive health services that meet the needs of people with disability in Tasmania.

All Tasmanians should be able to access healthcare which is suited to their individual needs. We acknowledge that people with disability often face a range of barriers in accessing quality healthcare, which can lead to poorer health outcomes compared to those without disability. This Strategy aims to assist in addressing these barriers.

This Strategy is our commitment to improving how we provide healthcare to people with disability in Tasmania, and how we engage with their families, carers, advocates and providers of disability support services. The Strategy aims to support people with disability of all ages who use, access services, or are employed within our health system.

To develop the Strategy, we spoke with Tasmanians with disability. We heard about the challenges you have encountered in accessing and using our services, your experiences (both positive and negative), and your suggestions for improvement. I would like to acknowledge and thank everyone who shared their experiences through the consultation sessions. Your insights were integral to the development of this Strategy.

I would also like to thank independent consultant, Annie Curtis Consulting, for leading the community consultation process and for helping to ensure the consultation was accessible and inclusive.

In developing the Strategy, we also investigated best practice approaches, and considered the wider context of disability reforms that are currently underway both in Tasmania and nationally. This includes the findings and recommendations of the *Final Report of the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability* (the Royal Commission) and the *Final Report of the Independent Review of the National Disability Insurance Scheme* (the NDIS Review), as well as the development of Tasmania's new *Disability Rights, Inclusion and Safeguarding Act 2024*.

This Strategy will also sit alongside other key reform activities the Department of Health is delivering, such as the *Long-Term Plan for Healthcare in Tasmania 2040* (the Long-Term Plan), *Health Workforce 2040*, the *Digital Health Transformation – Improving Patient Outcomes 2022–2032*, and our hospital masterplans.

The Strategy will be an enduring document which guides the Department of Health in providing high-quality, inclusive health services to people with disability for years to come. Given the long-term focus of this Strategy, some aspects of its implementation will need to be phased over several years through rolling Action Plans. This will allow us to effectively plan for and implement long-term reforms, including the national reforms we expect will result from the recommendations of the Royal Commission and the NDIS Review, and to further build on progress achieved.

Over time, these Action Plans will support the achievement of the overarching vision of the Strategy. Many of the actions are informed by what Tasmanians with disability told us they want to see in Tasmania's health system. The first Action Plan, which is released alongside this Strategy, contains 38 foundational actions which the Department of Health will implement by the end of 2025. Progress achieved under this first Action Plan will be further built upon in subsequent Action Plans. Regular public reporting on our progress will also help us to identify how we are progressing in achieving the target outcomes of the Strategy.

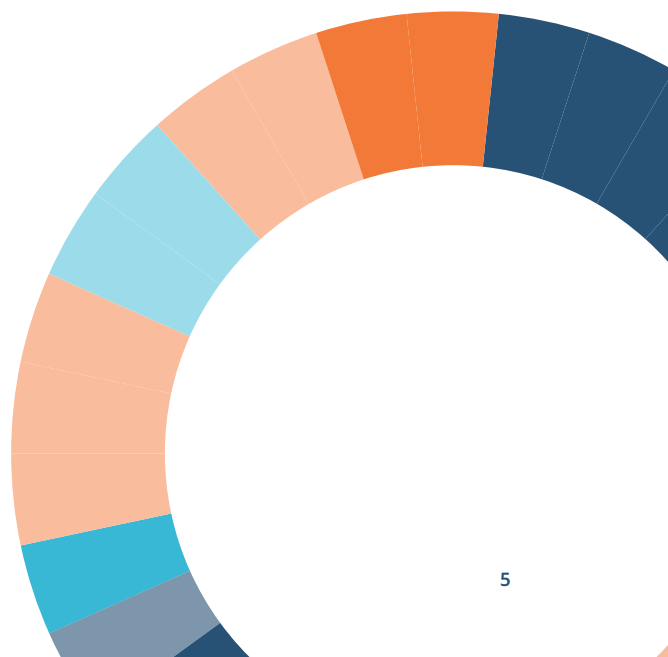
In delivering this Strategy, we will continue to engage with Tasmanians with disability to ensure we achieve a more inclusive, accessible and responsive healthcare system in Tasmania – which will benefit every Tasmanian.

Hon Jacqui Petrusma MP

Minister for Health

Minister for Aboriginal Affairs

Minister for Veterans' Affairs



Introduction



All Tasmanians have the right to experience optimal health and wellbeing, and our health system is for

everyone in our community. With the highest rates of disability of any Australian state or territory and an ageing population, it is crucial that Tasmania's public health services proactively meet the needs of all Tasmanians with disability, and that these services are accessible, inclusive, and responsive.

The Department of Health has developed the Disability Health Strategy to guide efforts to achieve this vision and the Strategy will act as an overarching framework for the Department to enhance the way it provides services for all people with disability.

The Strategy is informed by detailed consultation with people with disability, best-practice approaches and consideration of broader state and national disability policy reforms. This includes the new *Tasmanian Disability Rights, Inclusion and Safeguarding Act 2024*, the findings and recommendations of both the Royal Commission and the NDIS Review, and our commitments under *Australia's Disability Strategy 2021–2031* (Australia's Disability Strategy).

The Strategy identifies five priority areas for action, which were confirmed through consultation with people with disability, as well as the key focus areas of broader disability policy and reform processes.

The Strategy's five priority areas, which will guide us to improve health service delivery for Tasmanians with disability, are:



Quality: ensuring health services meet the diverse needs of people with disability through best practice approaches.



Accessibility: supporting a holistic approach to healthcare delivery, addressing physical, communication, and social barriers to access.



Decision making: empowering people with disability to make informed decisions about their healthcare.



Information systems: enhancing health data relating to people with disability and ensuring accessibility to information.



Workforce: ensuring the health workforce has the awareness and knowledge to provide healthcare that meets the diverse needs of people with disability, and building a health workforce profile which reflects the diversity of Tasmania's population with disability.

While the Strategy has no specified end date, we will refresh and update the Strategy regularly based on feedback from people with disability and the evolving national disability reform agenda.

Action Plans

The Strategy will be underpinned by regular Action Plans, which will set out a range of actions for the Department of Health against each of the five priority areas. These action plans will include a combination of short-term and longer-term actions for the Department.

The actions in the Strategy's first Action Plan, for the period 2024 and 2025, are foundational and will support the success of the Strategy moving forward. The first Action Plan contains actions already underway in 2024 and continuing in 2025, and has been released alongside this Strategy.

The Department will develop future action plans to build upon the first Action Plan and outline how it will implement national reform activities (such as the Royal Commission, NDIS Review and Australia's Disability Strategy) and state-based reforms. We will also take forward learnings from prior action plans and apply these to future plans to maximise their impact.

A person's health and wellbeing is influenced by a number of factors such as education, access to transport and where they live. These wider determinants of health often sit outside the health sector and require collaboration and cross-sector action to effectively address. This Strategy focusses specifically on enhancing both the services delivered by the Department of Health and the experience of the people accessing our services. It also seeks to complement the work underway at a whole-of-government level to consider cross-sector themes and approaches to support Tasmanians with disability.

For example, Tasmania's new *Disability Rights, Inclusion and Safeguarding Act 2024* provides a whole-of-government approach to improving the inclusion and safeguarding of people with disability. Where appropriate, the Department of Health will progress improvements to support inclusion and safeguarding of people with disability through the action plans under this Strategy.

Governance and Evaluation

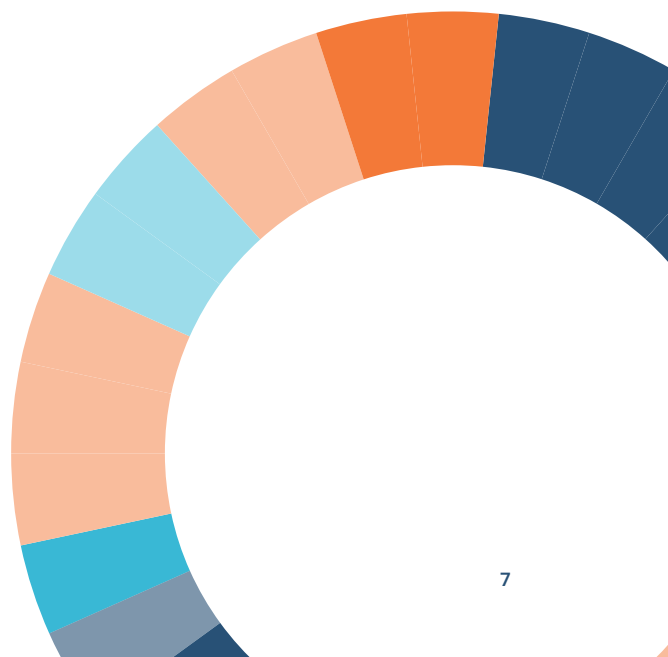
The Department of Health will establish a governance group, which will oversee the development of the Strategy's action plans and monitor and report on the Department's implementation progress. The Department will seek nominations from people with disability, their family and carers to join the governance group.

We will report against the progress of the action plans each year.



Dale Webster

Secretary
Tasmanian Department of Health



Who is this Strategy for?

The Strategy aims to improve the way the Department of Health delivers health services to people with disability, and how these services engage with people with disability, their family members, carers, and advocates. The Strategy aims to improve supports to all people with disability, regardless of whether they receive supports through the NDIS or other disability support programs.

The Strategy is relevant for all staff working across Tasmania's health system and state government-funded health organisations.

This Strategy adopts the definition of 'disability' used by the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability*, that refers to people with a diverse range of long-term physical, mental, cognitive, intellectual or sensory impairments, which in interaction with barriers, may limit the person's full and effective participation in society.

Language in this Strategy

We acknowledge that people use different words to talk about disability and that each person will have a preferred way of talking about disability and about themselves. As outlined in the People with Disability Australia Language Guide, some people prefer to use the term 'people with disability' (person-first language) while other people like to use the term 'disabled people', and some people like to use either term.²

This document uses person-first language through using the term 'person with disability'. This language is not intended to diminish an individual's identity as a person with disability. We recognise that preferred language varies between individuals and disability communities and acknowledges the importance of having conversations with individuals to understand their preferences.

In this document, the term 'people with disability' includes health consumers with disability who interact with Tasmania's public health system, as well as employees of the Department with disability.

² People With Disability Australia, [PWDA Language Guide: A guide to language about disability](#), August 2021.

Disability and Health in Tasmania



The Department of Health recognises that people with disability have diverse support needs, and that accessibility will vary for different people. This Strategy aims to address the diverse needs of Tasmanians with disability, including (but not limited to) physical, sensory, cognitive, neurodevelopmental and psychosocial needs, by improving the way our health services and workforce provide care to the disability community.

Disability may affect people directly or indirectly and may have large or small impacts on people's daily lives. Increasingly, disability is recognised as something that affects most people, to varying degrees and at different life stages.³

Unfortunately, we know that people with disability are at risk of poorer health outcomes for a range of reasons, such as reduced access to health services, low health literacy rates and socioeconomic barriers to health and wellbeing.⁴ As articulated in the Long-Term Plan, the Department of Health recognises the systemic issues that impact on poorer health outcomes for people with disability, and we are committed to working to address the impact of these issues on access to health services.

Tasmania has the highest rate of disability out of any state and territory, with over thirty per cent of Tasmanians living with disability in 2022. This is significantly higher than the national average of 21.4 percent.⁵ The high rate of disability in Tasmania in part reflects the State having the oldest and fastest ageing population in Australia, given that the prevalence of disability generally increases with age. Additionally, almost two thirds (70.5%) of adults in Tasmania were overweight or obese in 2022, which creates challenges for our health system as overweight and obesity is a major risk factor for chronic disease.⁶ Overall, our demographic profile presents some unique considerations and challenges in the delivery and accessibility of healthcare in Tasmania.

3 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2024), 'People with disability in Australia 2024', catalogue number DIS 72, AIHW, Australian Government.

4 Tasmanian Department of Health (2023), 'Long-Term Plan for Healthcare in Tasmania 2040', [Long-Term Plan for Healthcare in Tasmania 2040](#)

5 Australian Bureau of Statistics (2024), *Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings*.

6 Australian Bureau of Statistics (2022), 'National Health Survey: State and territory findings', abs.gov.au/statistics/health/health-conditions-and-risks/national-health-survey-state-and-territory-findings/latest-release

Tasmanians with disability may receive health services and supports through multiple service systems across the State. This includes service systems offered by:



The Department of Health, which is responsible for services such as public hospitals, ambulance services, and community mental health services.



The Australian Government, which is responsible for areas such as general practice, primary care, and aged care services.

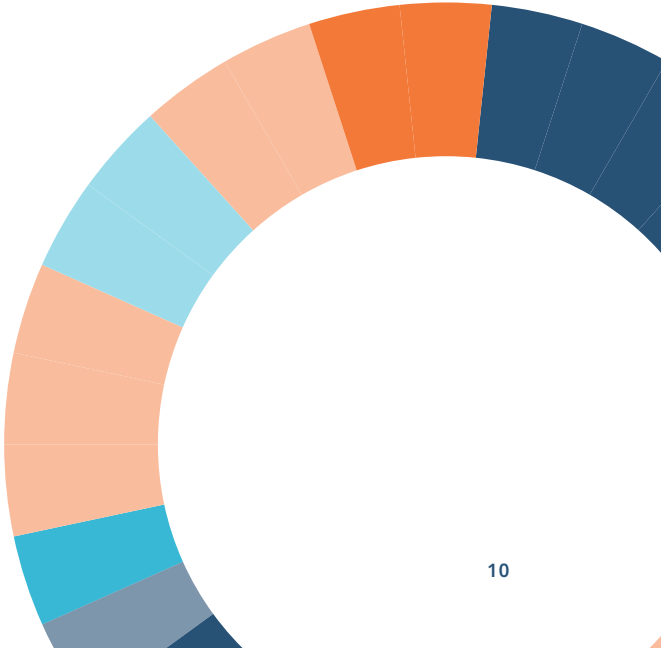


The NDIS, which provides supports for disability-related impairments that impact the functional capacity of people with disability.

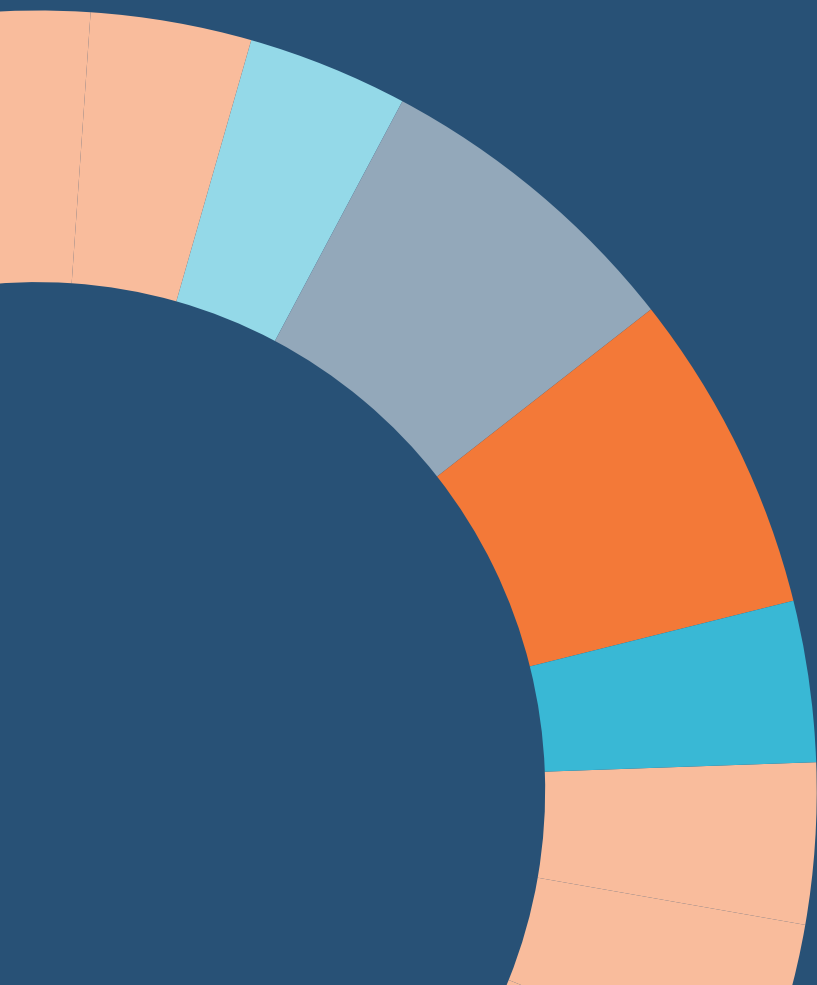


The non-government service sector.

While this Strategy specifically focusses on improving the services provided by the Department of Health for people with disability, we will continue to engage with our key partners outlined above to develop healthcare strategies that result in integrated, well-coordinated care for Tasmanians with disability.



Development of the Strategy



Developing the Disability Health Strategy



The Department of Health has developed this Strategy using research on best practice approaches to providing healthcare to people with disability, an analysis of known gaps and areas for improvement, and what we heard through community consultation.

In developing the Strategy, the Department also undertook an analysis of the key themes and focus areas of national disability reforms and initiatives (such as the Royal Commission and NDIS Review recommendations, and Australia's Disability Strategy).

Community Consultation

The community consultation was undertaken from mid-August to mid-September 2023, and provided a range of opportunities for participation including through online and in-person sessions across Tasmania, as well as via written and telephone submissions.

Over 230 people provided valuable input into the consultation on the Strategy. A broad range of groups and individuals participated in the consultation, in a range of settings. We heard directly from people with disability, their carers and families, support groups, service providers, and both Government and non-Government organisations.

Key themes from the consultation

Throughout the consultation, participants shared a broad range of experiences and raised some challenges in relation to the services the Department provides. Through the consultation, five key themes were confirmed, which form the basis of the Strategy's priority areas.

At a high level, the consultation found that while many services provided by the Department are delivering effective, high-quality healthcare to people with disability, there are some areas where we can make improvements. Through the Strategy, we will continue to work to ensure that a high standard of healthcare for people with disability is delivered consistently across our services, so that all Tasmanians can access the care they need.

Key outcomes are identified to reflect the Department's ultimate goal for each priority area to help focus our efforts to enhance the delivery of healthcare to Tasmanians with disability. More information on these priority areas and the key outcomes are provided in the following sections.



Theme one: Providing quality health services

More could be done to ensure the Department's health services are able to meet the diverse needs of people with disability. This includes ensuring that people with disability can access appropriate health services, in a timely way.



Theme two: Improving the accessibility of health services

The Department's health services could be further enhanced, to ensure its services are accessible for all people with disability. Key areas raised through the consultation included the importance of accessible parking, low stimulus and sensory-safe environments, and the need for all forms and documents to be accessible and available in a range of formats.



Theme three: Empowering decision making

The Department should provide people with disability with further supports in order to make informed decisions when accessing health services. Consultation participants suggested this could be achieved by ensuring that all health information is accessible for people with disability, further supporting the health literacy of people with disability, and enhancing systems so that people with disability and their families and carers are better supported to participate in decisions relating to their health.



Theme four: Building the health workforce

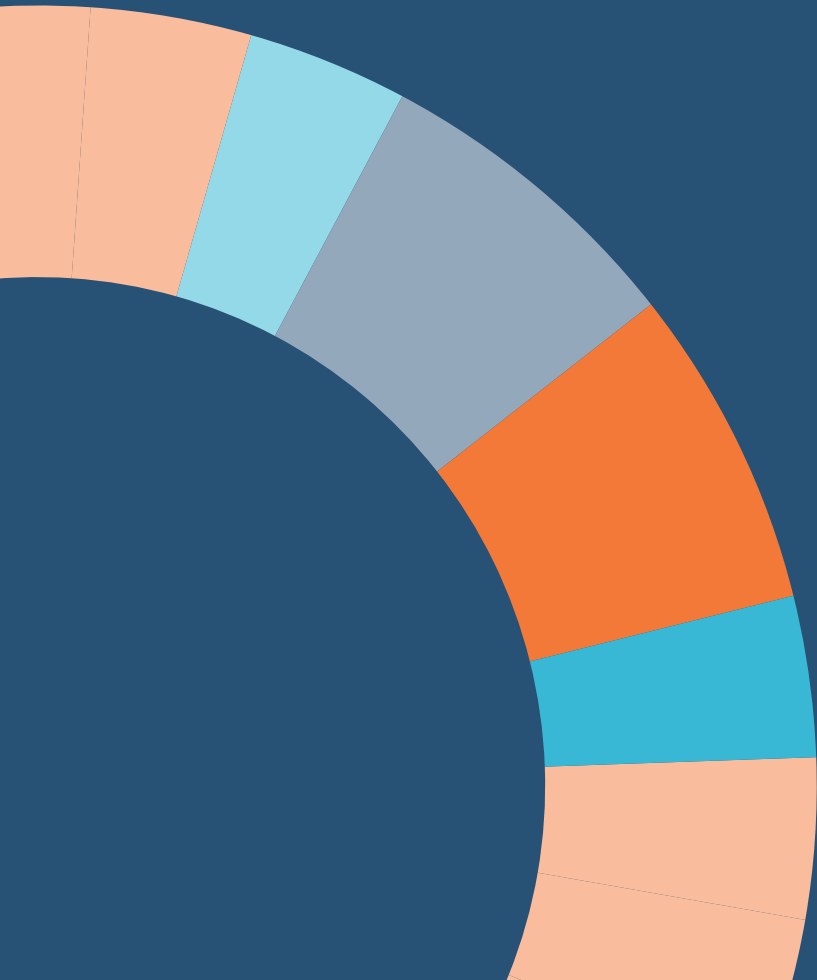
The Department could enhance the way its workforce provides care to people with disability. Consultation participants raised the importance of improving disability awareness among healthcare workers and their understanding of the challenges people with disability face when accessing healthcare, as well as ensuring Tasmania's health workforce reflects the diversity of the population with disability.



Theme five: Improving information systems and processes

The collection and sharing of data relating to people with disability who engage with Tasmania's health services should be improved. Consultation participants spoke about the need for patient information to be shared across health services and settings (with appropriate security and access controls) to support the coordination of care and raised the importance of encouraging people with disability to provide feedback on health services in order to identify areas for improvement.

Priority Areas



Priority Area One: Quality



Intent: Health services meet the diverse needs of people with disability through best practice approaches.

Key outcomes:

- People with disability are provided with timely, flexible, inclusive, and accessible health services.
- People with disability are supported through transition points in their care, and services are coordinated and responsive to movement through systems and at different life stages.
- Health services are delivered in line with best practice standards, and there is a focus on continually identifying and implementing improvements to our services and clinical outcomes.

People with disability require access to a combination of mainstream and specialist health services. It is essential that all services are able to meet the needs of people with disability and facilitate the delivery of high-quality healthcare. Through the 'Quality' priority area, the Department of Health will continue working to ensure our health services meet the needs of people with disability, to support access to appropriate healthcare in a timely way.

What we do now

The Department is committed to ensuring that all Tasmanians, including those with disability, have access to the right care, in the right place, at the right time. Across the Department, we have several services designed to support the provision of high-quality healthcare to people with disability.

For example:

- Tasmania's public hospitals in the South, North and North West each have an **Integrated Operations Centre (IOC)**, with these centres supporting the discharge and coordination of care, including those with disability. To support those with disability, the IOCs maintain strong relationships with disability stakeholders, including the NDIA, Homes Tasmania, and the non-government sector, and work to achieve timely outcomes that ensure people with disability receive care in the most appropriate setting. Under the Long-Term Plan, the Department is working to establish a statewide IOC, which will bring together the three existing IOCs with information from other care settings.

- **Cognitive Assessment and Pathways Service (CAPS)**, which provides specialist assessments and pathways to support people who are experiencing cognitive difficulties (such as changes in memory or problems with language, attention, personality and behaviour). The CAPS operates across the North West.
- **Special Care Dentistry Program**, which provides dental assessment and treatment for patients with complex medical needs including people with disability. The Program comprises three dental units situated at the Royal Hobart Hospital, Launceston General Hospital and North West Regional Hospital.

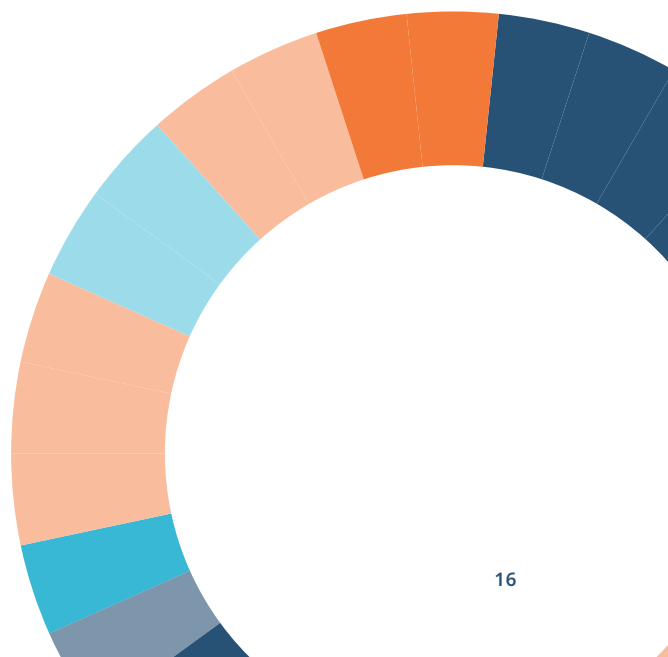
Through the Long-Term Plan, the Department is focusing on enhancing home- and community-based health services to increase the capacity to care for people outside of a hospital setting, in their home or community. Under the Long-Term Plan, we are also working to provide greater specialist support into supported accommodation, as well as to establish enhanced and integrated community and home-based services in supported accommodation for people with disability. These initiatives will help to ensure that more people with disability have equitable access to home-based services, thereby supporting better health outcomes for those with disability.

We are also working to enhance the provision of complex care across the Tasmanian Health Service, which will also benefit people with disability. For example, a Complex Care Review Panel has been established for the Department's Statewide Mental Health Services, which provides support to clinicians to develop care plans for patients with complex care requirements and pathways to review cases to help ensure these patients can access appropriate care for their needs. This Panel also develops and promotes consistent statewide practices and processes to be implemented at a local level.

The Rapid Access In-reach Service also supports people with chronic complex conditions by providing rapid medical advice and support to GPs and other primary care health professionals, to help these patients receive care in the community and reduce the need for hospitalisation. The Department launched this patient-centred service in 2023 and it is currently available to those living in Launceston's suburbs and surrounding regional areas.

What we will do

Through the Quality Priority Area, we will continue to build on initiatives already underway to provide people with disability high-quality healthcare and will work to ensure that all public health services meet the diverse needs of people with disability. In addition to building on the existing initiatives outlined above, the Department will progress a number of actions for this Priority Area as part of the 2024–2025 Action Plan under the Strategy.



Priority Area Two: Accessibility



Intent: Support a holistic approach to healthcare delivery and provide reasonable adjustments to address barriers to access.

Key outcomes:

- People with disability can understand and confidently navigate our health services and processes, and are consulted in the planning, design and implementation of our services.
- Health services are inclusive and account for the diverse needs of people with disability.
- The needs of people with disability are considered and reflected in both the physical environment of our health services and our service system processes.

People with disability have diverse needs and therefore may face a number of barriers in accessing health services and healthcare. Supporting improved access not only means improving the physical accessibility of health services for people with disability, but also ensuring that these services better meet the cognitive, sensory and neurodiverse needs of people with disability.

What we do now

Delivering health services that are inclusive and accessible for all Tasmanians, including people with disability, is a core priority for the Department of Health, and we are already progressing several initiatives to deliver on this priority.

One example is the *Health Facility Design Principles*, which require that universal design is incorporated into capital works projects to ensure our public health facilities

are accessible to people, regardless of age, disability and other factors.

In addition, the Department recognises that people with disability are at greater risk of poor oral health, including gum disease, tooth decay, loss of teeth and other illnesses. This can have a detrimental effect on the person and their health, wellbeing, and quality of life.⁶ The dental needs of patients with disability are, in many cases, greater than other patients in the general community.

To support people with disability in accessing the oral care they need, there is a branch of dentistry, known as Special Needs Dentistry, which provides care to patients where intellectual disability, medical, physical or psychiatric conditions require special methods or techniques to prevent or treat oral health problems, or where such conditions require the use of special dental

⁶ NDIS Commission (2023), 'Practice Alert Oral health', [Practice alert: Oral health \(ndiscommission.gov.au\)](https://www.ndiscommission.gov.au)



treatment plans. However, Australia-wide, a lack of dentists with adequate skills in treating people with disability is the most frequently reported problem in obtaining dental care.⁷

To support Tasmanians with disability in accessing the dental care they need, the Department of Health's public dental services, Oral Health Services Tasmania, Oral Health Services Tasmania, provides special needs dental care to patients with additional needs. Education is also provided to Oral Health Services Tasmania staff to ensure they can provide high-quality oral care to people with disability. Oral Health Services Tasmania is currently exploring opportunities to expand its additional special needs dental workforce, given the prevalence of disability in Tasmania and the State's ageing population.

What we will do

While the Department of Health is already working to support the accessibility of our health services, further work is needed to ensure that all elements of Tasmania's public health services are accessible and meet the diverse needs of people with disability.

The Department will work to achieve this through the Accessibility Priority Area, and will commence our work with a number of actions for this Priority Area in the 2024–2025 Action Plan under the Strategy.

7 Australian Government (2015), 'Australia's National Oral Health Plan 2015–2024', [Australia's National Oral Health Plan 2015–2024](#)

Priority Area Three: Decision making



Intent: Empower people with disability to make informed decisions about their healthcare.

Key outcomes:

- People with disability are recognised as the experts of their own lives and are empowered and supported to make informed decisions about their healthcare.
- People with disability are provided with the tools to advocate for themselves in healthcare settings.
- People with disability are meaningfully consulted in the development of the Department of Health's relevant strategies, plans and programs, and engaged in the co-design for resources to support decision making (to be provided in a range of formats that account for accessibility needs and literacy levels).

It is important that people with disability are empowered to make informed decisions about their healthcare and actively participate in the decision-making process. To make these informed decisions, people with disability must be provided with the appropriate information, and have access to adequate supports.

What we do now

Ensuring that all Tasmanians have the right information to make informed decisions about their health is a priority for the Department of Health. This priority is articulated in the THS Consumer and Community Engagement Principles and related Consumer Community Engagement Councils which operate in each region, and is also in line with the National Safety and Quality Health Service Standards.

Under the Long-Term Plan, the Department is working to provide enhanced information and navigation tools for all Tasmanians to help people make decisions and manage their care. As part of this work, we will ensure that people with disability have access to tools and information, which is tailored to their diverse needs.

We acknowledge the importance of health literacy in the delivery of healthcare, noting that low health literacy contributes to poor health outcomes for individuals, families and communities. Through our Health Literacy Action Plan, the Department is working to improve health literacy of all Tasmanians, including those with disability, so they can take control of their own health and engage effectively with health services.

Additionally, through our *Healthy Tasmania Five-Year Strategic Plan 2022–2026* (Healthy Tasmania), we are delivering health promotion programs for people living with chronic conditions, including disability, throughout the State.

Additionally, the Department is developing a new 20-Year Preventive Health Strategy, which will be the next phase of Healthy Tasmania. This Strategy will further support all Tasmanians to live healthy, active lives in communities that support connections to people, place and culture. People with disability will be consulted in the development of the 20-year Preventive Health Strategy, with the Strategy to consider the preventive health needs of people with disability.

The Department also recognises that two-way conversations between patients and their health practitioners are needed for informed decision-making. As a result, healthcare workers need the skills to effectively support these conversations and have a strong understanding of health literacy. The Department will progress further action in this area under the Workforce Priority Area.

What we will do

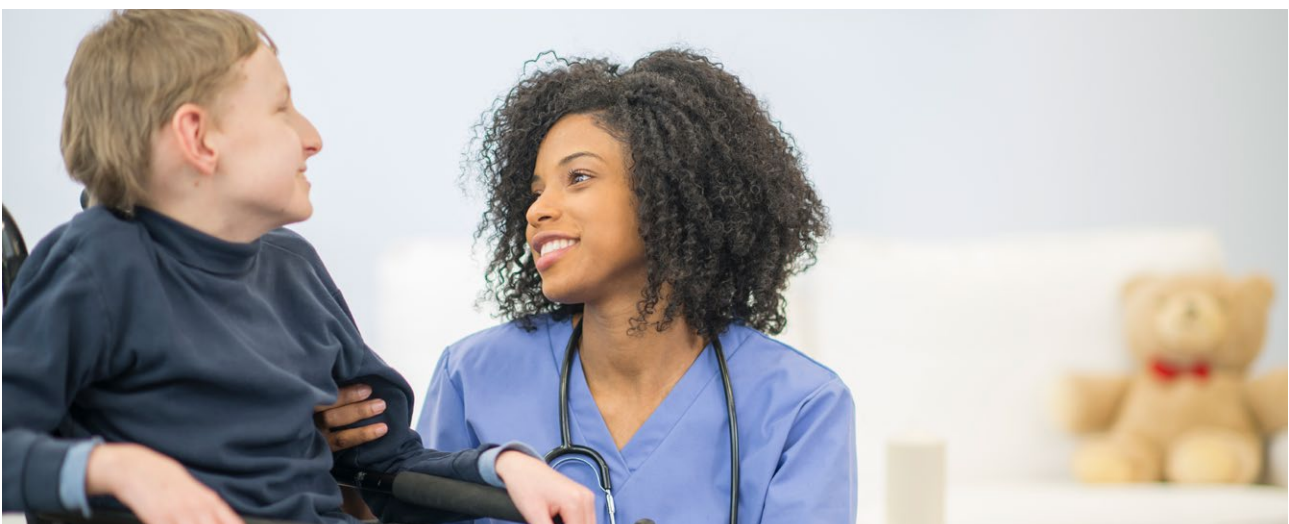
We will build on the work already underway through the Long-Term Plan, the Health Literacy Action Plan and Healthy Tasmania

to ensure people with disability, their family members and their carers are supported and empowered to make informed decisions about healthcare when engaging with the Department’s health services.

Importantly, ensuring people with disability are empowered to make informed decisions about their healthcare requires the Department to progress action not just at the individual patient level but also at a system-wide level. People with disability know what does and does not work for them. The Department acknowledges this and commits to the principle of ‘nothing about us without us’. We will ensure that people with disability are meaningfully consulted in the development of Department policies, strategies, plans and programs that impact their lives.

We will also work to support our health workforce and service system to work in a trauma-informed way, under which healthcare is responsive of the individual needs and preferences of people with disability – with appropriate supports and services provided for these individuals to make informed decisions and communicate their choices.

The Department will commence work to achieve these aims through the actions included for the Decision Making Priority Area as part of the 2024–2025 Action Plan under the Strategy.



Priority Area Four: Workforce



Intent: Ensure our health workforce has the knowledge to provide healthcare that meets the diverse needs of people with disability, and build a health workforce profile which reflects the diversity of our population with disability.

Key outcomes:

- Health professionals are equipped with the knowledge and capability to understand diversity across disability types, engage respectfully with people with disability, and provide high-quality person-centred care.
- The experiences of people with disability and their support people are embedded into training and education materials.
- Workplaces are diverse and inclusive and aim to increase the employment of people with disability.

The health workforce is the backbone of our health system and has a direct influence on health and wellbeing outcomes for all Tasmanians – including those with disability. As a result, having a workforce which is aware of the diverse needs of people with disability is essential to deliver upon the vision of this Strategy, as well as achieve the target outcomes under the other priority areas.

To best meet the needs of people with disability, we must ensure that our health workforce is able to provide services that are inclusive, safe and high-quality. Inclusive practices help address the diverse needs and experiences of individuals, including those from underrepresented or marginalised groups. By considering the unique perspectives, backgrounds, and circumstances of each person, the Department of Health can deliver care

that is sensitive, culturally competent, and tailored to their specific needs. This not only improves the overall patient experience, but also helps reduce inequities in healthcare access and outcomes.

What we do now

We recognise that the greatest asset of our healthcare system is our workforce. Work is already underway that aims to ensure Tasmania's health workforce has the awareness and knowledge to provide healthcare that meets the diverse needs of people with disability. Through the Long-Term Plan, we are working to ensure that healthcare workers in our health services are trained to consider varying health literacy and support cultural safety, to ensure care and patient communication is respectful and responsive to the needs of all Tasmanians accessing our health services.



Additionally, all Department staff are encouraged to complete the Disability Confident Workforce Training, which contains information about disability, communication and key concepts, and creating enabling environments. This training package was developed by the Australian Network on Disability in partnership with the Tasmanian Government. The course is free and available to all Department staff through the Tasmanian Health Education Online portal.

The Department has also partnered with Primary Health Tasmania to support the delivery of the Primary Care Enhancement Program. This Program supports health professionals in caring for people with intellectual disability, provides practical training and resources to general practitioners and other primary healthcare professionals to improve their capability in this area.

We also acknowledge it is important that people with disability are adequately represented in the Department's

workforce. Supporting a diverse and inclusive workplace is a priority for the Department, with significant work underway to support this goal. For example, we are currently implementing the One Health Culture program, which will help build an inclusive and supportive working environment, and includes the Department's Equity, Inclusion and Diversity Framework. This Program will support all Departmental staff to work together, drawing on each other's diverse backgrounds, experiences, knowledge and skills.

What we will do

We will continue to focus on building and supporting the health workforce, to ensure all workers have a strong understanding of the diverse healthcare needs of people with disability. We will also ensure that people with disability are well represented in the Department's workforce.

The Department will commence work to achieve this through the actions included for the Workforce Priority Area in the 2024–2025 Action Plan under the Strategy.

Priority Area Five: Information systems



Intent: Improve health data relating to people with disability and ensure accessibility to information.

Key outcomes:

- People with disability are empowered and supported to enhance their digital health literacy.
- Information systems and processes are responsive to the needs of people with disability and the people who support them.
- Service improvements are informed by robust evidence and data and the lived experience of people with disability.

Improving the collection of health data relating to people with disability is essential, as it helps to identify any gaps in the health system, enables us to develop and implement evidence-based policies to address these gaps, and supports us to monitor the effectiveness of these solutions.

What we do now

The Department of Health is already making improvements to the accessibility of the information we publish.

Through *Digital Health Transformation-Improving Patient Outcomes 2022–2032*, all Tasmanians will experience a health system that is better integrated, more transparent and which allows clinicians and healthcare consumers to make better informed decisions around their health. The Digital Health Transformation aims to improve community care, engage patients in their care, optimise clinical and operational workflows and foster statewide clinical collaboration.

It is important to us that our information is accessible to everyone. Over the last 12 months, the Department has transitioned to using an internet platform with built-in accessibility capability to provide an accessible overlay to all Department internet and intranet sites. This new platform better supports our staff to publish more accessible pages on the Department's internet and intranet, which can be viewed on assistive devices.

Additionally, the Department's intranet and internet sites have the specific capability to meet Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (2.1 and 2.2). This capability means that our online sites can be made more accessible in multiple ways, including the ability to make the text bigger, hide images, pause animations, highlight weblinks, change the contrast, choose a dyslexia-friendly view, and change the reading speed of the screen reader.

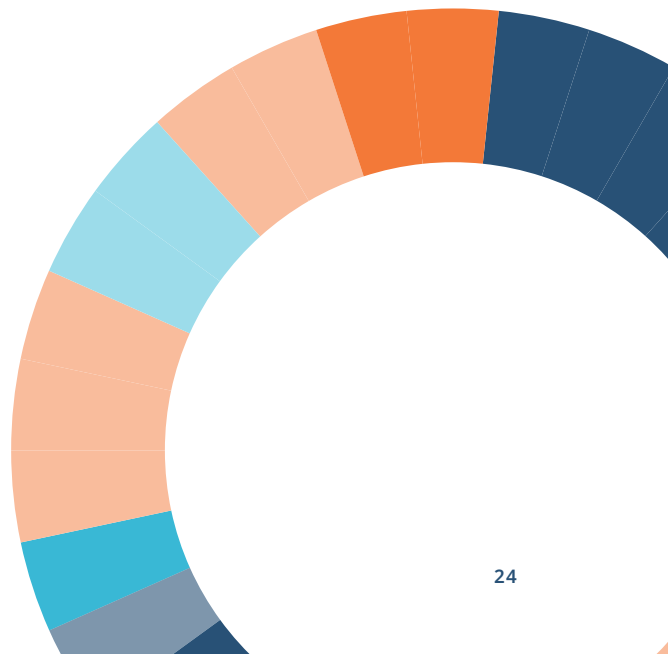


The Department is also finalising the *Business System Owner Policy*, which will embed a requirement for it to consider accessibility standards when procuring new information systems.

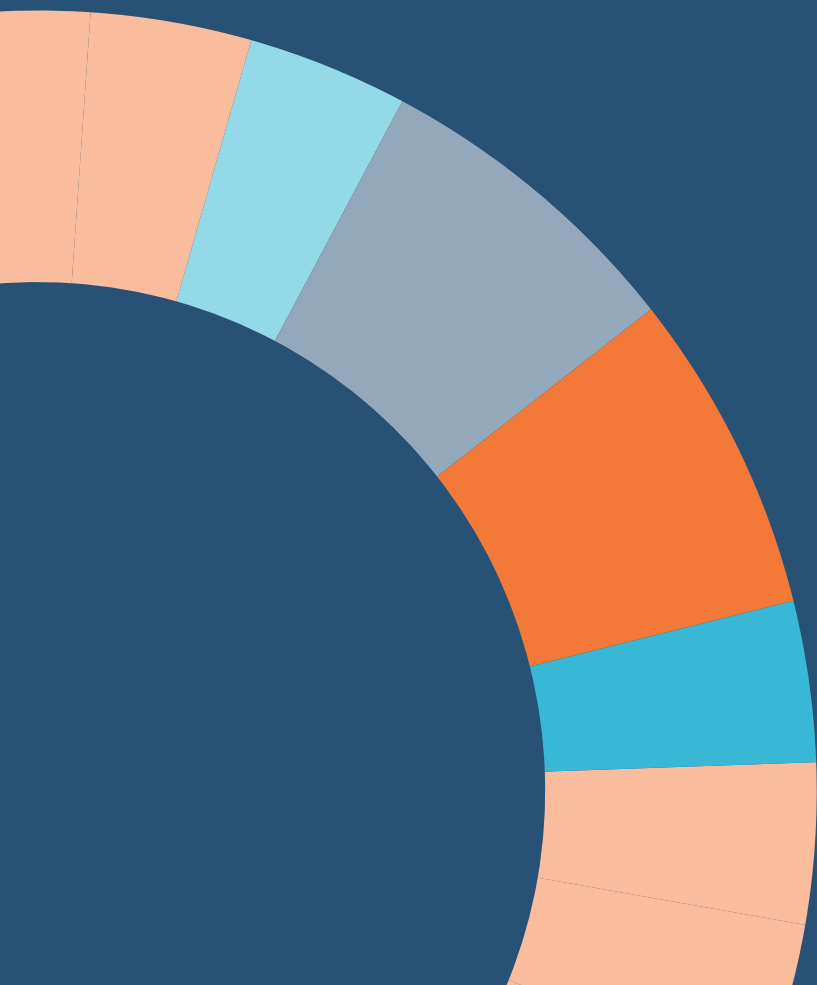
What we will do

The community consultation that informed the development of this Strategy reiterated that the Department needs to continue to enhance our current processes to respond to the needs of people with disability.

We will continue this work through a range of actions included for the Information Systems Priority Area as part of the 2024–2025 Action Plan under the Strategy.



The current context: state and national disability reforms and initiatives



Legislation and Policy Context

There are many national and state-level reforms underway which are seeking to improve the health, inclusion and wellbeing of people with disability. The Disability Health Strategy will be the overarching framework the Department of Health will use to implement these reforms.

Tasmanian initiatives

In mid-2023, the Department released the Long-Term Plan, which provides a system-wide direction and strategy for the delivery of health services in Tasmania until 2040. The Disability Health Strategy and related action plans will support the Department to deliver on the key action areas outlined in the Long-Term Plan, as well as supporting the Department to provide healthcare that meets the needs of all people with disability.

There are strong linkages between this Strategy and the Long-Term Plan, as both are focussed on leveraging digital technology and infrastructure in the delivery of healthcare, building and supporting it's workforce capacity to deliver consumer-centred healthcare, and continuing to build an integrated statewide health system to deliver optimal healthcare. The action plans under the Strategy will further progress these priorities and will build upon this existing work.

The Department also has a number of initiatives and strategies that recognise the specific health needs of people with disability, and seek to prioritise their health and wellbeing, such as our Healthy

Tasmania plan and *Health Workforce 2040*. Other Departmental initiatives such as the 10-year strategy for *Digital Health Transformation – Improving Patient Outcomes* and hospital masterplans also support the vision and aims of the Strategy.

A key initiative at a whole-of-government level is the Tasmanian Government's new *Disability Rights, Inclusion and Safeguarding Act 2024*, the development of which has been led by the Tasmanian Department of Premier and Cabinet. The Act will advance and safeguard the rights of all people with disability and will advance the full and effective inclusion of all people with disability. The new Act will commence early in 2025.

National context

There is significant disability policy and reform work occurring at a national level, with all Australian governments working together to improve overall outcomes for all people with disability. Many of these national reforms are intended to improve health outcomes for people with disability and will influence the delivery of the Strategy. These key national reforms include:

The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability

The Royal Commission's Final Report was released in September 2023, containing a total of 222 recommendations aimed at improving laws, policies, structures and practices to ensure a more inclusive society for people with disability.

The key themes of recommendations relating to the health portfolio, health service delivery and improving the health outcomes of people with disability include building the capability of the health workforce to provide care to people with disability, reducing the use of restrictive practices, improving the delivery of healthcare to people with disability, establishing schemes to examine reviewable deaths, and improving the collection of health data relating to people with disability.

On 31 July 2024, all Australian governments released a joint response to the recommendations from the Royal Commission, acknowledging the shared responsibility of the Commonwealth, state and territory governments. This response outlines the commitment from all governments to work with people with disability to implement reforms that strengthen safeguards and embed the rights of people with disability.

Additionally, on 31 July 2024, the Tasmanian Government released its own response to the Royal Commission, which outlines Tasmania's commitment to reform systems and services to ensure they are universally accessible and responsive to the needs of all people with disability.

The Department is working closely with other Government agencies and our interjurisdictional counterparts to ensure the health-related recommendations are implemented in a meaningful way that responds to the needs of people with disability.

The key themes of the Royal Commission's Final Report align closely with the five Priority Areas of the Strategy, particularly in terms of building the capacity of our workforce to meet the needs of people with disability and improving our health data relating to people with disability. As work to respond to the Royal Commission's recommendations progress, we will work to ensure our actions in the Strategy's

action plans are aimed at delivering on this national reform work, where it is appropriate to do so, taking into account our local needs and context.

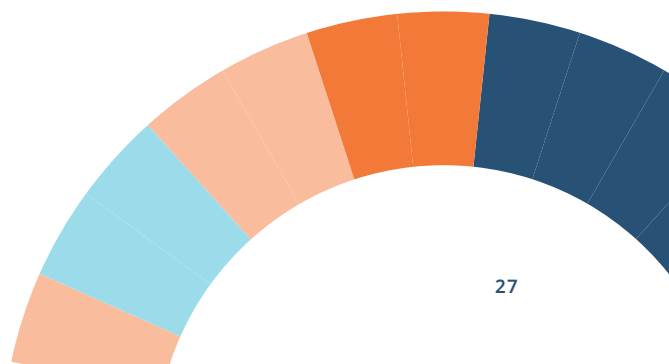
Final Report of the NDIS Review

The Working together to deliver the NDIS: Independent Review into the National Disability Insurance Scheme Final Report was publicly released in December 2023. The Final Report contains 26 recommendations, with 139 underpinning actions across the service sector.

Key recommendations relevant to health service delivery include establishing a foundational supports disability service category, creating a continuum of support for children under the age of nine and their families, and developing a new approach to NDIS supports for psychosocial disability.

In December 2023, as an initial response to the NDIS Review, National Cabinet agreed to work collaboratively to implement legislative changes and adjust state and territory financial contributions to the NDIS. National Cabinet also agreed to jointly design Foundational Supports as a third tier of support sitting between the mainstream service system and the NDIS, which intends to provide targeted and general support for all people with disability, with a primary focus on people aged under 65 years.

The Department is working with other Government agencies and other jurisdictions' health departments to analyse the recommendations of the NDIS Review and determine next steps. As part of this work to implement the broader reforms to the NDIS, we will continue to prioritise positive health outcomes for people with disability who are accessing our services.





Other national initiatives

Other key national disability reforms which relate to health service delivery and improving the health of people with disability include:

- *Australia's Disability Strategy 2021–2031*, which outlines a vision for a more inclusive and accessible Australian society where all people with disability can fulfil their potential as equal members of the community.
- *National Autism Strategy*, a Commonwealth-led strategy which will, once finalised, provide a national framework for improving outcomes for Australians with autism. It is expected this Strategy will be finalised in early 2025.
- *National Roadmap for Improving the Health of People with Intellectual Disability*, which aims to outline how Australia's health system can better support access to high-quality, timely and comprehensive healthcare for people with intellectual disability.

At the time of developing the Strategy, some of these national activities are in their initial stages with further work required to understand how they relate to health service delivery. The Disability Health Strategy has been designed to provide a broad and flexible foundation for service-wide improvements in the context of the above national reform activities, with future action plans to reflect the key actions Tasmania will take to respond to this work.

Quality and Safety

The Strategy's action plans will be implemented with regard to existing national quality and safety frameworks and standards, and the Department will continue to support our health services to confidently deliver safe, effective, integrated, and high-quality services to all Tasmanians, while aiming for continuous improvement of our services.

