

NT Disability Strategy Action Plan 2026-2029

Public Consultation - What We Heard

Introduction

What We Heard summarises the feedback we received during public consultation for the second Action Plan (Action Plan 2) under the 10-year Northern Territory Disability Strategy (the Strategy). When we say ‘We’ throughout this consultation document, we are referring to the Department of People, Sport, and Culture.

The invaluable feedback received throughout this process has been used to guide the co-design and development of Action Plan 2, ensuring our commitments reflect the voices, priorities, and needs of people with disability, their families, carers, and the broader disability sector across the Territory.

When we engaged

The Department of People, Sport and Culture (the Department) undertook public consultation for Action Plan 2 (2026-2029) from 27 October 2025 to 16 November 2025.

Targeted workshops and engagement with the Northern Territory Disability Advisory Committee (DAC) commenced in March 2025 and throughout the development of the Action Plan 2. Input from DAC members informed the initial actions drafted for Action Plan 2 that were included in the Consultation Paper.

How we engaged

A Consultation Paper was published on the Northern Territory Government *Have Your Say* website for public comment. Responses were gathered via the website, where participants could select their preferred way to provide their feedback. Participants could respond by completing an online survey or an Easy Read survey, or by uploading a written submission, or submitting a video or audio recording. Alternatively, people could engage directly with the Office of Disability by phone, in person, or through an engagement partner.

Three disability advocacy organisations were funded as engagement partners to support the community to participate in the consultation process. Integrated Disability Action Inc. (IDA), Darwin Community Legal Services Ltd (DCLS), and Disability Advocacy Service Inc. (DAS) supported engagement through targeted workshops, dedicated information sessions, roundtable discussions, and yarning circles across all six regions of the Territory.

Who did we hear from

Supported engagements helped reach more people, including those in our most remote communities, to ensure Action Plan 2 truly reflects the voices and needs of the Territory disability community.

Region	Number of contributors	Region	Number of contributors
Greater Darwin, Palmerston and Litchfield	59	Barkly	30
Top End	4	Big Rivers	12
East Arnhem	40	Central Australia	31
Sector contributions (no specific region)	15		

Summary

More than 190 voices from across the Territory were heard throughout the consultation period, with more than half of these from regional and remote areas.

People primarily chose to provide feedback through our engagement partners, however survey responses, written submissions from community members and representative organisations, and direct in-person feedback were also received.

All feedback received has been collated by theme in this document, with the Summary Snapshot outlining the most prominent themes and issues raised throughout the consultation period.

What We Heard

Summary Snapshot

Key Themes	What we heard
Rights, legislation and safeguarding	- Strengthen legislative protections and enforcement of laws - Review and modernise guardianship legislation to enhance supported decision-making principles - Resource access to independent, accessible and culturally safe advocacy and complaints processes, particularly in regional and remote communities - Improve screening and support of disability in custodial settings - Safeguarding and oversight should be increased in closed environments
Inclusive communities	- Improve acceptance and understanding of disability through public awareness and education campaigns - Increase delivery of accessible information on government websites, broadcasts and emergency alerts - Support businesses to make their spaces and services accessible
Accessible places and spaces	- Increase stocks of accessible housing across the Territory - Urgently improve physical accessibility of crisis shelters - Implement universal design principals in all public infrastructure works - Increase accessible parking and educate private businesses on their obligations to maintain accessible parking spaces
Education and employment	- Delivery of inclusive education should enable people with disability to choose the most suitable delivery of education for their needs - Barriers to employment are often structural and attitudinal, not because of an individual's disability - Take further action to boost employment of people with disability in the Northern Territory public sector - Businesses should be incentivised and supported to employ people with disability
Health and wellbeing	- Primary and specialist health professionals need additional support to understand how to prepare reports to support application for the disability support pension and NDIS - There are gaps between the support provided by the NDIS and My Aged Care, some seniors with disability need support from the NDIS

Outcome 1: People with disability have rights and choices which are protected and respected

Priorities

- 1.1 People with disability are appropriately safeguarded through strengthened legal protections and embedded human rights.
- 1.2 Enhance formal advocacy services, networks and resources.
- 1.3 Deliver disability confident and accessible justice, corrections and police services.

Priority What we heard

1.1 Rights awareness

Community members want more accessible resources and information that promote the rights of Territorians living with disability. This should be available in multiple accessible formats, including online, radio, print, Braille and Auslan.

We heard that this would help build individual capacity and empower people with disability to exercise their rights, educate businesses and service providers about their obligations, and increase community awareness of disability rights.

1.1 Legislation and safeguarding

Submission data from the Northern Territory Anti-Discrimination Commission highlights that during their 2024–2025 reporting period:

- 39% of discrimination complainants identified as people living with a disability; and
- 21% of all enquiries received by the Commission were related to disability.

Some feedback pointed to concerns that the Northern Territory *Anti-Discrimination Act 1992* needed to be strengthened to adequately safeguard and enforce the rights of people with disability.

Contributors made the following recommendations to strengthen disability rights and safeguarding in the Northern Territory:

- Establishing a Northern Territory Disability Commissioner with independent investigative powers to monitor safeguarding, advocacy and disability rights compliance.
- Implement a nationally consistent Community Visitor Scheme with stronger integration into the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission, in line with recommendations 11.12 and 11.13 of the Disability Royal Commission.

1.1 Supported decision making

The Northern Territory Public Guardian and Trustee provided a comprehensive submission calling for the following improvements to Northern Territory supported decision making legislation and principles:

- Reviewing and modernising the *Guardianship of Adults Act 2016* to bring it in line with national and international developments best practice guardianship and supported decision-making principles.
- The introduction of formal supporters or support agreements (Disability Royal Commission recommendation 6.8).

Priority	What we heard
	Supported decision making (continued). • A shift from deficit-based tests to support-based assessments including a requirement to consider the person's available supports and communication needs (Disability Royal Commission recommendation 6.7). • The shift from a 'best interests' approach to a 'will and preferences' model that promotes supported decision-making including adoption of the 'supported decision making principles' (Disability Royal Commission recommendation 6.6). • A requirement for supported decision-making options to be fully exhausted before substituted decision-making occurs and that any substitute decisions are made consistent with the person's will and preferences, rather than paternalistic standards (Disability Royal Commission recommendation 6.10). • A move away from paternalistic terminology toward language and practices that emphasise autonomy, dignity, and a person's right to make decisions (Disability Royal Commission recommendation 6.4).
1.1	Complaint mechanisms Access to independent, accessible, and culturally safe complaints mechanisms is a significant issue across the Territory. <i>"People don't know who to speak to if someone feels unsafe."</i> – Nauiya community member Significant barriers preventing people from submitting complaints include: • Fear of losing services • Lack of knowledge about how to complain • Distrust of services • Service providers may hassle them or their family for raising a complaint <i>"If I complain, they'll stop helping."</i> – Consultation contributor Feedback provided highlighted that the current overlapping complaints processes are difficult to understand and navigate without assistance. Residents in remote communities shared that it is very difficult to access culturally safe support and nearly impossible submit a complaint without access to a phone, computer, or internet. Consistent with recommendations from the Disability Royal Commission, we heard that community members want a supported 'one-stop-shop' complaints process. <i>"We need a single place to go for help, not ten different services."</i> – Consultation contributor
1.2	Access to advocacy services We received detailed submissions from four Northern Territory disability advocacy providers: Darwin Community Legal Service, Integrated Disability Action Inc, Disability Advocacy Service, and NPY Women's Council. These submissions were informed by extensive community engagement, including direct consultations, roundtable discussions, and yarning circles held across the Territory. <i>"Well-resourced advocacy services help resolve issues early, preventing crisis and reducing reliance on more costly interventions."</i> – Consultation contributor Each provider emphasised independent advocacy is an essential tool to empower people with disability to navigate complex systems, exercise their rights, and hold governments

Priority	What we heard
	and service providers accountable. They also highlighted that demand for disability advocacy services in the Territory significantly exceeds supply, with wait times of more than eight weeks in urban areas and little to no access to regular advocacy services in remote communities. <i>"No supports, no stability."</i> – Arnhem Land consultation participant Prominent themes arising from these consultations include: - Existing advocacy funding only covers limited individual support - There is no systemic or safeguarding focused advocacy funded in the Territory - Many regions have no regular or on-country advocates Many contributors suggested an adequately resourced Territory-wide advocacy system would offer the support people need to stay safe, access services, and participate fully in community life.
1.2	First Nations advisory committee Contributors recommended an NT wide First Nations advisory committee and regional working groups in remote communities be established to ensure consultation, engagement and co-design of new initiatives genuinely responds to the needs of First Nations Peoples.
1.3	Screening and assessment custodial settings Early identification and support for people with disability in custodial settings, and those at risk of entering the justice system requires urgent improvement. <i>"The Office of the Children's Commissioner remains concerned that children with unmet disability needs are ending up in contact with the youth justice system and subsequently becoming entrenched in this system due to the absence of adequate, comprehensive assessments and support."</i> – Office of the Children's Commissioner Contributors expressed concerns that young people with disability are being incarcerated before their disability is identified, leaving them without appropriate supports and safeguards. The Office of the Children's Commissioner stressed the need for stronger protections to uphold the rights of these individuals and called for the Northern Territory Government to fully implement the Disability Royal Commission's recommendations relating to the youth justice system. We also received recommendations to support minimisation of re-offending by offering capacity-building programs for people with disability whilst incarcerated.
1.3	Safeguarding in closed environments A joint submission from the Northern Territory Anti-Discrimination Commission and the Community Visitor Program identified significant and ongoing risks for people with complex cognitive disability under the <i>Northern Territory's Disability Services Act 1993 and Mental Health and Related Services Act 1998</i>, particularly in forensic contexts. Crucially, the Northern Territory remains the only jurisdiction without a dedicated forensic mental health hospital, meaning that people who are found unfit to plead continue to be detained in general correctional facilities that are not fit for purpose.

Priority	What we heard
	We heard from the Community Visitor Program that conditions within these closed settings breach disability rights, increase exposure to risk, and undermine national human rights standards. Feedback also raised that the Community Visitor Program's oversight should be expanded to oversee and support people with disability leaving hospitalisation and incarceration, and those living in NDIS funded Supported Independent Living.
1.3	Mandatory training If not already required, police, corrections, and justice personnel should incorporate mandatory training focused on understanding, supporting and upholding the rights of people with disability.

Outcome 2: People with disability are included and can engage, participate and contribute to community life

Priorities	
2.1	Address barriers and enhance pathways to participation in social, recreation, sporting, arts, cultural events and activities.
2.2	Support business and community services to be disability confident and inclusive.
2.3	Increase the community's visibility, understanding and acceptance of people with disability.

Priority	What we heard
2.1, 2.3	Communities People with disability experience isolation and depression, compounded by financial pressures, limited access to transport, meaningful employment, and restricted opportunities for community participation. Feedback highlighted that inclusion often depends on the ability to access places and spaces of choice. Contributors also emphasised that true community inclusion requires greater visibility, awareness, and understanding of people with disability. Contributors highlighted positive changes occurring in the community: • Installation of Changing Places in public spaces • Greater awareness of the Companion Card • Increased focus on inclusion at major events Specifically, events and services that incorporate initiatives such as downloadable accessibility guides and the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Lanyard were acknowledged for promoting visibility and consideration of individual needs.

2.1	Local development In addition to physical accessibility, contributors also called for greater emphasis and support for the development of local, place-based programs, peer support and community-led initiatives.
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2.1	Digital access Digital access is increasingly essential for engaging in services, education and social connection. People in rural, regional and remote communities often lack reliable access to the internet and people with disability may need additional support or assistive technology to access these services. Government and local councils should support access to digital accessibility through libraries, hubs or new initiatives that address these concerns.
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2.2	Businesses and services Businesses may find it challenging to understand how to improve the accessibility of their premises and services. <i>"Businesses don't know what they don't know. It's great to see an action to educate the community and support them with little steps of progress as this can be overwhelming for them too."</i> – Consultation contributor
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Priority	What we heard
	Businesses and services Data provided by the Northern Territory Anti-Discrimination Commission shows that 37% of complaints received relate to discrimination in goods, services, and facilities, indicating that more needs to be done to support disability-confident businesses and services. The Commission also highlighted the important role of the Northern Territory Positive Duty legislation in guiding businesses and service providers to proactively reduce or eliminate discrimination.
2.2, 2.3	Place-based inclusion audits Funded accessibility and inclusion audits should be available to businesses and services who want to improve accessibility and compliance.
2.3	Awareness campaigns Public campaigns focused on promoting different forms of inclusion could help build community awareness and visibility of people with disability. This could be similar to the Department of Logistics and Infrastructure's <i>Ride with Respect</i> and <i>Respect your Driver</i> campaigns.

Outcome 3: People with disability can access the places, information and services they need

Priorities

- 3.1 Improve the availability and accessibility of new and existing housing.
- 3.2 Enhance the accessibility of transport, buildings and public places.
- 3.3 Improve the accessibility of public information, technology and communications.
- 3.4 Increase the quality, availability and cultural responsiveness of disability services across the Territory.

Priority What we heard

3.1 Housing

Housing options for people with disability remain a significant issue across the Territory. Contributors noted that while housing is supposed to be accessible under government building programs and codes, available properties are not.

*"They say the house is accessible, but the ramp is just dirt.
It's gone after the first wet season."*
– Consultation contributor

We received a case study submission of a woman living in a remote community who had a ramp installed at her home, but it was unsuitable as the entry/exit threshold dropped off into a muddy puddle. This impacted her safety and independence by preventing her from leaving her home.

We also heard that, due to factors such as systemic disadvantage, financial hardship and caring responsibilities, people with disability disproportionately struggle to find and maintain private accommodation. This situation forces many to rely on public housing; however, waitlists can exceed eight years or more in some Territory regions.

The most prominent housing concerns raised include:

- Long waits for repairs or accessibility modifications
- Limited affordable private housing
- No accessible crisis housing options
- Unsafe or unsuitable homes in remote communities
- Overcrowding

3.1 Crisis accommodation and transitional housing

People with disability are more likely to experience family, domestic and sexual violence than people without disability, and can experience greater difficulty getting support¹.

We heard from the community that a sustained lack of capital funding within the domestic, family and sexual violence sector has left existing shelters and transitional accommodation buildings across the Territory in a state of disrepair. Katherine Women's Crisis Centre and Dawn House expressed an urgent need for increased crisis and transitional housing to support the needs of women and children with disability, fleeing violence.

¹ <https://www.aihw.gov.au/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/population-groups/people-with-disability>.

Priority	What we heard
3.2	Community places and spaces A strong theme that emerged from our public consultation was the need to improve accessibility within community places and spaces. Contributors called for adoption of universal design principles in all public spaces and urban planning, to ensure they are accessible to everyone, regardless of age, disability, background, or other factors. This should extend to all built environments including upgrading footpaths and road crossings, increasing the number of disability parking spaces, and enhancing safety in shared-use areas for pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers. Feedback also highlighted the need for consistent, user-friendly accessibility legislation and guidelines to clearly define roles and responsibilities when designing and implementing accessibility strategies, projects and improvements. Alternatively, the establishment of independent accessibility audits inspections for new builds may help ensure compliance. Contributors also told us they would like to see increased wayfinding, signage and accessible communication to assist with navigation and safety in public places.
3.2	Accessible parking Issues with accessible parking persist across the Territory. We heard that businesses and services need to maintain their parking spaces, so they are easily identifiable and encourage responsible use among their clientele. We also heard that some parking spaces are unsafe due to only allowing side access that opens into traffic or parks located far from the services and amenities being accessed, which becomes an issue during bad weather. <i>“Ensure that accessibility for disabled people is complied with. I see too many instances where disabled parking is located without easy access to buildings and often in places where vehicle movements are an immediate safety issue.” – Consultation contributor</i> Additionally, contributors noted that it can be difficult to raise and resolve concerns when accessible parking spaces are located on private premises, such as shopping centres, as these fall outside local government jurisdiction.
3.2	Accessible transport We heard that more needs to be done to improve transport options for people with disability. This includes better access to public transport, taxis, and transport options between regions of the Northern Territory. Community consultation conducted by Darwin Community Legal Service found that access to transport remains a significant barrier to inclusion, with: • 72% of contributors stating that transport limits their ability to access services or social activities • 60% of contributors stating they had missed appointments because of unreliable or unaffordable transport Contributors reinforced the need for government to facilitate accessible, reliable, affordable, and safe transportation available seven days a week, both day and night, to design and deliver transportation services for people with disability across the Territory.

Priority	What we heard
3.4	Supporting Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) ACCOs have deep community trust, cultural knowledge and existing service infrastructure. Formalising partnerships with ACCOs leverages these strengths to imbed culturally responsive disability services across the Territory. Resource mapping should be undertaken to understand community strengths, areas of need and opportunities for collaboration. ACCOs and other community-based organisations should be supported to explore alternative commissioning of supports to ensure service delivery meets the individual needs of each community.
3.5	Accessible information and communications Government services and websites need to present more information in Easy Read formats and be mobile-friendly, multilingual, and digitally accessible. The Northern Territory Government should conduct a communication audit across its departments, agencies and funded services to understand the scope of improvements needed.

Outcome 4: People with disability have the skills and opportunities to participate in the economy and be financially secure

Priorities

- 4.1 Provide education that meets an individual's lifelong learning needs.
- 4.2 Expand options for young people with disability transitioning from school to employment or other forms of economic participation.
- 4.3 Support employers and increase employment opportunities for people with disability and carers.

Priority What we heard

4.1 Education

We received varying opinions on how inclusive education should be provided to meet an individual's lifelong learning needs.

"Inclusive education is not about place, e.g., local school vs special school. It's about everyone having a choice of options for education that best meet the needs of the learner."

- Consultation contributor

Contributors shared suggestions such as:

- Increasing the number of educators and support staff trained to support people with disability in learning environments
- Improving assessment and screening for disability in early childhood
- Increase school-based traineeships and apprenticeships for young people with disability
- Greater educational supports for children and families through foundational supports and the Thriving Kids initiative

4.2 Transition from Education to Employment

Successful transitions require targeted training, clear information, and ongoing support for teachers, employers, and carers. These measures help ensure people with disability can build capacity, exercise choice and control, and engage in meaningful learning and employment opportunities.

Contributors emphasised the need for stronger community connection and collaboration to identify and fill areas of need.

4.3 Employment

People with disability continue to experience significant barriers in gaining and maintaining employment. People told us, working full-time, while living with or caring for someone with disability can be challenging, as it increases the prevalence of burnout and requires more time for self-care.

"Barriers to employment are structural and attitudinal, not individual. Employers often lack guidance on how to make adjustments or support people with higher support needs."

Consultation contributor.

Contributors acknowledged the positive work of the Northern Territory public service EmployAbility Strategy; however, they felt more needed to be done to strengthen and support public sector employment practices:

Priority	What we heard
	• Mandatory accessible recruitment practices and representation of people with disability on recruitment panels • Building the capacity of hiring managers and supervisors through disability-specific training • Develop resources such as practical checklists, modification advice and access to job coaches to support employers who hire people with disability Contributors also felt there should be greater financial support and incentives to reduce costs incurred by employers undertaking modifications and training needed, to support people with disability when entering the workforce.

Outcome 5: The health and wellbeing of people with disability is supported

Priorities	
5.1	Deliver disability confident, inclusive and accessible health services.
5.2	Improve accessibility and availability of specialised health education, prevention and supports for people with disability.
5.3	Enhance early identification of disability and strengthen early supports for children.
5.4	Support all services to work together to improve outcomes for people with disability.
5.5	Enhance data collection practices across government to build an accurate evidence base to inform policy and program development.

Priority	What we heard
5.1	Healthcare Views and experiences regarding access to disability confident health services varied significantly across consultation feedback. <i>“Even just accessing a GP is incredibly difficult and expensive in the NT.”</i> – Consultation contributor We heard that health professionals need additional support and training to best support people with disability in the following areas: • How to prepare reports to support Disability Support Pension and NDIS applications • Trauma-informed and culturally safe care to adequately support and respond to overlapping support needs A consistent theme was the need to provide people with disability the choice of education delivery.
5.2	Disability and aged care Aging with a disability makes it more difficult to maintain health, which may lead to additional health problems as people with disability grow older. We also heard that some people over 65 years of age need disability support, not aged care. Feedback highlighted the aged care system is not equipped to support people with higher support or care needs.
5.2	Mental Health Many people do not receive adequate support for depression and the isolation that often accompanies disability, financial hardship, and reduced community participation. Health delivery must address disability and mental health together, ensuring approaches are culturally safe and trauma-informed to meet the diverse needs of individuals and communities.
5.3	Early childhood and Foundational Supports There is limited community understanding of how early childhood and Foundational Supports will be funded or implemented as part of ongoing reforms to the NDIS. Given the Territory’s unique demographics and service delivery challenges, a consultation and co-design process is

Priority	What we heard
	essential to ensure that any foundational supports system is accessible, culturally safe, and fit for purpose in both urban and remote contexts.
5.5	Data collection Feedback highlighted that current systems do not consistently capture data related to the health, wellbeing and safeguarding of people with disability. Improvement of data collection will require new and updated processes and procedures to support inter-agency collaboration and upskilling of workforce capability. Comprehensive data collection is critical for monitoring progress, ensuring accountability and responding to need. Areas that would benefit from enhanced data collection include: • Sterilisation procedures involving people with disability • Guardianship and trustee support and representation arrangements • Participation of people with disability in Tribunal proceedings • Restrictive practices • Unmet need for disability advocacy

Other matters

As part of the consultation process, we received feedback that fell outside the scope of Action Plan 2. While this feedback is not directly addressed within the plan, it remains valuable for understanding the broader issues and concerns affecting people with disability. Where possible, this information has been shared with relevant stakeholders and agencies.

Theme	What we heard
Sharp practices	We received consistent feedback that more needs to be done to prevent sharp practices and safeguard NDIS participants rights and wellbeing. We were told NDIS providers are: • Coercing vulnerable people, especially those with disability, into switching providers through gifts such as money, food and phones • Misrepresentation of services and unauthorised plan changes • Providers posing as guardian or family to gain access to participants • Participant plans being exhausted, leaving them without support • Unethical providers commonly target participants around renal and hospital wards, offering free accommodation
Weak safeguarding oversight	Contributors expressed frustration with the lack of action from oversight bodies, including: • NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission often dismisses reports unless lodged by the participant directly • Unregistered providers operate freely with minimal scrutiny, especially in remote areas
Provider of last resort	Community members, particularly those in remote communities want to know what happens if strategies of supports fail, including who steps in to offer continuity of support. This is a particular issue for communities that experience thin markets and staff shortages.