



2023

Annual Review

 **ability first**
AUSTRALIA



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About Ability First Australia

Ability First Australia is one of the largest not for profit strategic alliances between 15 of Australia's leading disability service providers. Our members represent the interests of over \$2 billion worth of support services to over 92,000 people with disability, their families and carers.

Ability First is a national body of leading disability service providers with member organisations in all states and territories. Our members have a long and trusted history, having supported people with disability for between 50 and 90 years.

Each member delivers services to people with disability independently. Ability First provides a national brand for promotion, awareness raising, cost efficiencies, strategic alliances both domestically and globally and advocacy. Our members share information and best practice, benefit from economies of scale and are involved in research and learnings that benefit people with disability.



VISION

An Australia that puts ability first and ensures inclusion for all.



MISSION

To support members to be the first choice for people with disabilities and their families.



VALUES

Inclusion – We understand that diversity is a strength. We will particularly ensure that the thoughts and aspirations of people with disability, and their families, underpin everything that we do.

Collaboration – We achieve the best outcomes by working together constructively and by striving for consensus.

Generosity – We bring a spirit of willingness to our work and actively consider how we as individuals and organisations can add value to the lives of Australians with disability, and their families, through the work of Ability First Australia.

Innovation – We are keenly focused on finding better, smarter ways to do things.

Respect – Our decisions are stronger when we listen closely and when we acknowledge and take into account the different views and circumstances of others.

Integrity – We are open and honest in our communication and operate according to the highest ethical standards.



Chairman and CEO Report



Andrew Rowley
CEO

Phil Cave AM
Chairman

It has been a challenging year for the disability sector, but we remain focussed on ensuring that we support Ability First Australia members to continue to provide the best quality services to their customers.

Ability First has itself enjoyed a period of sustained growth, due to the addition of three new members, continued collaboration and our strong partnership with Government and our involvement in national initiatives.

We continue to work constructively with Government to advocate for our members, people with disability, and the sector more broadly. Our government engagement strategy continues to be a priority, and we are working closely with the Hon Bill Shorten MP, Minister for the NDIS and Government Services and his office, as well as the Department of Social Services and the Department of Health. Our major focus throughout the year has been engaging with the Royal Commission and the Independent Review of the NDIS, with both reports due to be handed down towards the end of 2023.

As part of our collaborative efforts with Government, we continue to provide a number of submissions that have helped influence the policy and price settings of the National Disability Insurance Scheme, as well as a number of reviews being conducted by the National Disability Insurance Agency, Department of Social Services and the Independent Review.

Ability First Australia was successful in tendering for the Younger People in Residential Aged Care

(YPIRAC) Systems Coordinator program, which focuses on supporting people with disability under the age of 65 to find appropriate accommodation, enabling them to move out of residential aged care and hospitals. This program is due to finish at the end of 2025.

The Frontline Leadership Diploma, a workforce initiative funded as part of the Department of Social Services Jobs and Market Fund, was completed this year. We have begun rolling the program out across tertiary and secondary institutions across Australia, predominantly via the TAFE network. We are extremely proud of the work we have done with University of New England Partnerships (UNEP) on delivering the Diploma of Leadership in Disability Services, which received Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) accreditation and is now available for Registered Training Authorities (RTOs) to add to their scope. The Department of Social Services recently asked Ability First to support the program further by overseeing its national roll-out. We are working with Government on additional support for the program, ensuring it is up to date, and supporting its rollout across the care economy.

Ability First remains focussed on facilitating the voice of people with disability, their carers and families. With the support of, and investment from, our members, our consumer panel, the Ability Forum, has grown to 3,540 panel members nationally, lending their voice and opinions to surveys on products, services, and policies. The panel continues to be well utilised by members and these

surveys have been a valuable resource as part of our government engagement and advocacy efforts. As part of its growth and sustainability strategy, the Forum is now being rolled out to external organisations, irrespective of sector, who seek insights and opinions from people with disability.

With the disability sector's need for quality data, Ability First's national benchmarking platform, the Ability Roundtable, continues to grow. Membership has increased to over 78 organisations and now houses several specific service improvement groups: for Allied Health, for Supported Independent Living, Financial and Workforce, and for Attendant Care and Community Support. With membership now providing over \$6.5 billion of services every year, the Ability Roundtable has established itself as a true sector level 'designed by industry for industry' benchmarking vehicle. This year saw an increase in staffing with the appointment of Garry Simpson, a former senior advisor to NDIS Ministers, as General Manager, and Milena Snoekas as data scientist.

Our not-for-profit housing fund, Ability First Australia Community Housing Ltd, has seen some significant changes this year. Peter Hartnett and May Cheung joined the team and have had a huge impact given their expertise, both having worked previously for Ability First member organisations, and know the SDA and service provider sector well. Ability First Housing has now acquired, and operates, 6 properties since seed funding was secured last year. The first sites in Western Australia are the product of a partnership with Ability First member, Ability WA and a leading local property developer, and comprise five two-bedroom apartments as part of the \$75 million redevelopment of state heritage-listed Victoria House in Shenton Park. The most recent acquisition, another Ability First partnership with Queensland member CPL, is in Coopers Plains. Thanks to CPL and Ability WA for identifying these important opportunities for the fund. We are also working closely with many of the members and other industry partners to support their new housing strategies.

The past 12 months have seen stronger collaboration amongst Ability First members. Following the merger between Cootharinga North Queensland and CPL, Montrose announced its merger with fellow Ability First member, Northcott, in 2022. Members also agreed to expand the membership with approaches to large service

providers in New South Wales, Victoria, and the Northern Territory.

Ability First's whole-owned subsidiary, Cerebral Palsy Australia, together with a consortium of other cerebral palsy focused organisations, successfully launched "My CP Guide", Australia's first national online platform for people with cerebral palsy, their families and wider circles of support. "My CP Guide" has been funded via the NDIS's Information Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) program. We are at the early stages of redefining CP Australia's mission and focus and look forward to showcasing the plan for CP Australia in the not-too-distant future.

We have reengaged with EasterSeals, our US based partner. The impact of the pandemic on their organisations and a change in their executive leadership had led to a hiatus in some of our joint activities, such as the staff exchange program. However, we have recommenced our Exchange program. Aman Sing from Ability WA recently travelled to California, and New York to visit EasterSeals affiliates there. The program has provided valuable opportunities for scholarship winners to understand disability organisations in different environments and gain insights that they can utilise within an Australian context.

With the support of members at the last AGM, Alison Quinn was appointed to the Board as Independent Director. Alison brings an extensive knowledge of the aged care, infrastructure, property and superannuation industries. Alison also joins Geoff Lovell and Phil Cave as Independent Directors on the Board of Ability First Housing.

It has been a tough year for our members as we navigate the challenges of the fluid policy environment of the NDIS. We are very optimistic for the future once the independent reviews findings have been published. We remain committed to support the state and federal government in the implementation of the Review's findings. We are extremely proud of the work that our members continue to deliver, which goes a long way in supporting their customers and delivering material benefits to the disability sector.

Thank you as well to the Ability First Australia Board, our sponsors, corporate partners and our generous donors for their continued support. We look forward to many more successes in the year ahead.

Current Position Summary

Established in 2003, Ability First Australia is a not-for-profit strategic alliance of 15 leading disability service providers operating across Australia.

Our membership is responsible for the care and coordination of services to over 92,000 Australians every day, around 20% of the NDIS market.

Ability First members employ more than 20,000 staff and provide over \$2 billion worth of services each year, primarily with government funding.

Services are provided from ages 0-65+. They cover the whole range of Core Supports, Capital Supports and Capacity Building Supports outlined in the NDIS Price Guide, although this varies from member to member.

Our members specialise in services for people with multiple and complex disabilities.

Ability First provides a national focus for our members and helps to build their collective capacity to maintain best practice services. We do this by providing platforms for shared problem solving and innovation, and developing strategic partnerships with relevant partners.

Ability First's purpose is to support members to be the first choice for people with disabilities and their families.

Ability First operates primarily without government funding, providing a return on investment on membership fees, with additional revenue streams through fee-for-service and commercial products.

Strategic Objectives

Ability First has three Strategic Pillars. While the overarching vision of each pillar remains consistent, the priorities under each are reviewed annually.



Partnerships

Shaping policy for NDIA and Government

The go-to organisation for information on complexity and intensity

Speak with one voice



Knowledge

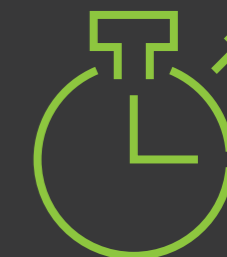
Best practice

Market research

NDIS

Benchmarking (productivity, innovation)

Shape the Future



Organisational Sustainability

Procurement

Shared service

Commercial opportunities

Work smarter

Member Services

Our members deliver the following adult and children's services:

- ✔ Support Coordination
- ✔ Respite/Short Term Accommodation
- ✔ Housing (Permanent or Long Term)
- ✔ Transport
- ✔ Personal Equipment/Technical Support (i.e. for self)
- ✔ Assistive Technology
- ✔ Therapy (including Behavioural)
- ✔ In Home Care/Support (periodic)
- ✔ Complex high needs care
- ✔ School holiday programs
- ✔ School Supports
- ✔ Before and after school care
- ✔ Community Activities
- ✔ Centre Based Activities
- ✔ Life Skills
- ✔ Vocational Programs
- ✔ Australian Disability Enterprises (ADE)
- ✔ Disability Employment Services (DES)
- ✔ Specialist/Allied Health Services (e.g podiatry)
- ✔ Sexuality/Relationship Services
- ✔ Partner in Community (ECEI)



Our Members



Ability WA has been supporting Western Australian families for more than 60 years. We are committed to providing our customers and their families the services and supports they need, from early infancy through to adulthood. Ability Centre has built its reputation as a leading disability services provider by providing excellent service, allowing our customers to thrive. abilitywa.com.au



Annecto is a profit-for-purpose community-inclusion organisation. We're best at building relationships and creating connections; helping people define their own goals to realise their full potential. We do this by connecting older people, people with disabilities and their families and carers with others who will help them achieve what's important to them. annecto.org.au



Aruma is one of Australia's largest not-for-profit disability service providers, supporting over 5000 people with a disability throughout the east coast of Australia. Aruma provides a range of disability supports for people with a disability to make sure they have a suitable home, and support with everyday tasks at home, and employment. aruma.com.au



Cara is one of South Australia's leading disability service providers. We work in partnership with people living with disability, their families and the community, to create a better life. Our services include full-time supported accommodation, recreation and respite, with Home & Community Support and we have a dedicated Specialist Services team. cara.org.au



carpentaria

Carpentaria is a not-for-profit organisation providing Disability and Therapy Services for children, adolescents and adults, through Supported Independent Living, Short/ Medium Term Accommodation, Pathways Program, Employment & Training, Specialist Disability Accommodation and Allied Health therapy programs (including Speech Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy, Psychology and Counselling). They deliver innovative, flexible services to empower people to thrive and live a great life, and are committed to a philosophy that respects the rights of individuals to make informed choices about their lives. carpentaria.org.au



For more than 66 years, Cootharinga North Queensland has been proudly supporting North Queenslanders with disability. We are committed to providing a range of tailored services that are relevant to the goals, choice and needs of our diverse and varied customers and to achieving our vision of "Building a better world with people of all abilities!" cootharinga.org.au



CPL – Choice, Passion, Life is a profit-for-purpose organisation that works with people at every stage in their life, from early intervention and education, to personal growth, independence and employment. We're one of Queensland's only integrated service providers where, in all of our locations, our clients can access therapy, employment, home and community support services all from CPL. cpl.org.au



LiveBetter is a provider of customer-focused aged and disability services in regional Australia, centred on support in the home and connections to the community. LiveBetter takes a person-centred approach, ensuring services provide practical assistance to help people live their best lives. They deliver over 80 programs from offices, homes and centres in more than 45 communities across regional NSW and Queensland. livebetter.org.au



Montrose has 85 years of experience working with people with a disability. They provide psychology, physiotherapy, occupational therapy and speech therapy along with in-home care, respite and a Lifestyle & Leisure service. They are a profit for purpose organisation with any surpluses invested back into providing services for children and families. montrose.org.au



Multicap is one of Queensland's largest disability service providers. We are focused on achieving one goal – a better quality of life for people with disability. Multicap's services including supported independent living, short term accommodation, in-home support, assisted employment, life skills development and recreational activities are delivered from over 100 different locations across Queensland and Northern New South Wales. multicap.org.au



Northcott is a not-for-profit disability service provider that works with customers to realise their potential. As one of Australia's largest not-for-profit disability service organisations, we provide services from metropolitan and regional locations throughout NSW and the ACT, employing over 2,000 staff and providing empowering, personalised services to over 14,000 people with disability, their families and carers each year. northcott.com.au



Novita is one of South Australia's largest community-based disability services organisations. Novita provides a range of high quality services including rehabilitation, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, psychology, speech pathology, diagnostic services and more. We also offer a range of programs including day options, group activities and Outside School Hours Care (OSHC), and mobile services such as in-home support. novita.org.au



Rocky Bay is a leading provider of disability services, offering choice and independence to thousands of people of all ages living with disability in Western Australia. With a focus on quality and service excellence, Rocky Bay works with people of all ages living with any disability, to deliver innovative therapies, leisure and learning programs, the latest equipment and technology and training and employment opportunities, in the home, at our centres and in the community. rockybay.org.au



Scope is one of the largest not-for-profit disability service providers in Australia, supporting more than 6,000 people and their families, particularly those with complex needs. Our mission is to enable each person we support to live as an equal and empowered citizen, through a range of services including: Integrated therapy, supported independent living, short-term accommodation and assistance, lifestyle options for individuals and groups, communication access and support coordination. scopeaust.org.au



St Giles Society Limited is a not for profit organisation who has been supporting Tasmanians living with disability since 1937. Based in Launceston with operations in Hobart, Devonport, Burnie and Penguin the organisation was formed to provide after care support to children with polio. Overtime it has developed to now provide therapy, accommodation and attendant care support to Tasmanians aged from birth to 65. stgiles.org.au



Yooralla is Victoria's most established and recognised for purpose disability service provider with more than one hundred years of experience offering high quality support services to people with disability. Yooralla's 2,000+ staff provide a wide range of quality services, including accommodation and residential supports, specialist accommodation for people with complex health conditions, employment, training, support coordination, kindergarten assistance, recreational and therapy services, including assistive technology. yooralla.com.au

Partnerships

Ability First continues to be represented on a number of key advisory groups run by Government agencies and Department of Social Services (DSS) and has been an active consultation partner with the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) on various initiatives.

We have developed a reputation as a valuable contributor to government policy, and this has allowed us to continue achieving progress in a range of areas:

- Consultation with the Agency on policy and pricing reviews
- Representative on an Industry Reference Group for the NDIA, alongside National Disability Services and key peak organisations
- Representative on a Market Oversight Advisory Group for the Department of Social Services
- Representative on NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission
- Representative on Young People in Aged Care Stakeholder Reference Group
- Representative on the Minister for NDIS' Disability Dialogue roundtable

- Successful engagement with local and federal government MPs
- Co-chaired meetings between members of the NDIS Independent Review Panel and Ability First Australia executive leadership teams

We continue to engage with the Hon Bill Shorten MP, Minister for NDIS and Government Services, and collaborated on a number of submissions related to key issues facing the disability sector, including Supported Independent Living and Disability Supports for Older Australians.

Our continued engagement with Government has enabled us to play an active role in the policy process, which has been vital in developing initiatives, strategic directions and changes that will impact Ability First Australia member organisations.



Ability First Australia Board, Board Chairs and Executive Committee with The Hon Bill Shorten MP.

Ability First Australia Community Housing Ltd



Artist impression of Victoria House development, image supplied with thanks to Hesperia

Ability First Australia Community Housing Ltd (Ability First Housing) is wholly owned, managed, and governed by Ability First. Ability First Housing is Australia's first not for profit housing fund designed to acquire Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) for renting by people with disability. The fund is focused on building and owning new, high-quality housing to address the significant shortage and poor quality and condition of SDA stock nationally. Ability First Housing will develop and own SDA suited to the requirements of people living with disability, to provide a home that maximizes their independence and quality of life.

Ability First Housing's relationship with Ability First members is fundamental to its operations. Partnering with these organisations ensures the fund is grounded in the needs of people with disability and that Ability First Housing tenants have access to the highest quality disability supports. Ability First also provides an unrivalled pipeline of customers.

In addition to providing housing for new SDA residents, a key market for Ability First Housing will be existing SDA residents who are

Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) is housing that has been purpose built for people who are unable to live in mainstream housing because of their extreme functional impairment or very high support needs. The SDA model aligns with the National Disability Insurance Scheme's core principles of choice and control: it aims to give people with disability more choice about where and who they live with, ultimately delivering better outcomes and greater quality of life.

currently living in inappropriate housing. This is the greatest need expressed by Ability First member organizations.

During 2023 Ability First Housing acquired five off-the-plan apartments in Perth, in close collaboration with AFA member, Ability WA. The apartments are located in the redeveloped, award-winning, heritage-listed Victoria House in Shenton Park, recently completed by developer, Hesperia. A second acquisition, in partnership with AFA member organisation CPL, was of a three-bedroom house in Coopers Plains, Brisbane.

Diploma of Leadership in Disability Services

The only accredited qualification designed for frontline leaders in the disability sector.

The 2021-25 NDIS National Disability Plan cites the Frontline Leadership Role Clarity Project as helping to “identify the capabilities, qualities and values required for frontline leadership in the sector” (p. 5 NDIS National Disability Workforce Plan 2021-2025). Following the completion of the first phase of the Frontline Leadership project, an initiative funded as part of the Department of Social Services Jobs and Market Fund, Ability First was further funded by the Department of Social Services to develop a diploma level qualification for leaders in the care and support workforce.

We are extremely proud of the work we’ve done with the Industry Reference Group and UNE Partnerships on delivering the Diploma of Leadership in Disability Services (11076NAT). This is the only accredited qualification designed for Frontline and aspiring Frontline leaders in the National Disability Insurance Scheme to equip them with the skills and knowledge to lead a high performing team, deliver effective services to NDIS participants, and contribute to organisational growth.

The Diploma is now available for Registered Training Organisations to download from the Ability First website and the information is open source meaning it is freely available to any interested parties, acknowledging the copyright of DSS. It aims to support the career development of experienced and emerging leaders in the disability services sector and includes practical assessments and the opportunity to demonstrate skills in the workplace.

BUDGETS

Responsibly manage a budget within the competitive pressures of the disability sector

DECISIONS

Understand how decision making should align with business objectives and support improved customer outcomes.

COMPLIANCE

Comply with legislative, regulatory and procedural requirements of the NDIS and manage business risks.

COMMUNICATION

Facilitate clear communication to foster accountability, authenticity, and inclusion.

ADVOCACY

Advocate, negotiate and collaborate to promote the effective and strategic use of resources and improve customer outcomes.

LEADERSHIP

Lead, inspire and support frontline workers in the disability sector to deliver effective services.



Image supplied with thanks to Northcott



Younger People In Residential Aged Care (YPIRAC) System Coordinator program

A national initiative funded by the Department of Health and Aged Care and operated by Ability First Australia.

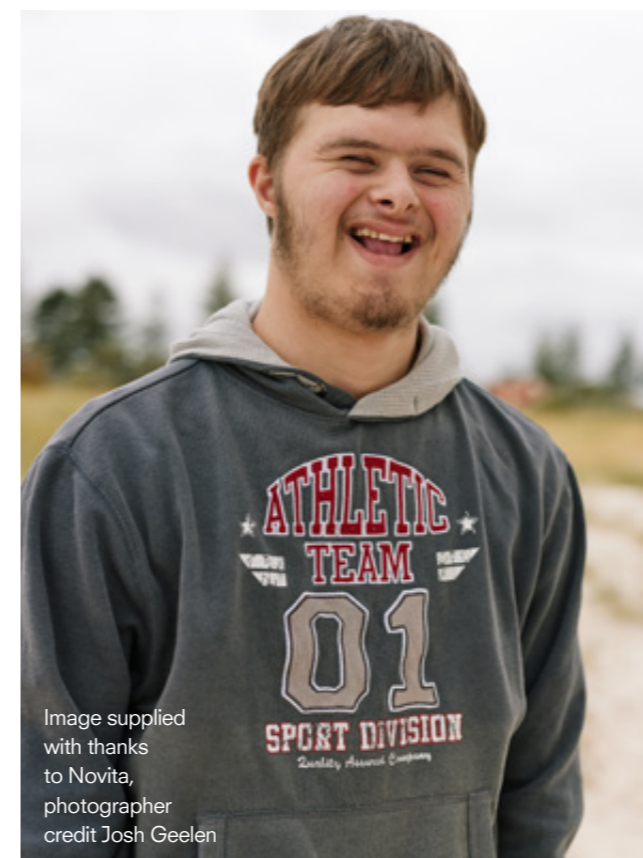


Image supplied with thanks to Novita, photographer credit Josh Geelen

2023 was the second full year of AFA operating this national initiative funded by the Department of Health and Aged Care and as such a very full year of work nationally for the team.

In response to targets outlined in the recommendation from the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety to have more age-appropriate options for people under the age of 65 years, AFA's efforts remain focused on reducing the number of younger people at risk of entering and, supporting those who are currently living in residential aged age care, to explore alternatives.

The Program's advocacy to find pathways and solutions for those who are not NDIS participants is critical and many meetings were held with state governments to discuss what is needed. The Program was asked to present to the Joint Agency Taskforce and the Senior Officers Group.

Additionally, another 139 younger people secured a pathway through the NDIS with the support from Program staff in assisting with their NDIS applications.

Key milestones achieved last year:



Workforce

The Program's staffing levels remained steady with 35 Systems Coordinators employed across NSW, QLD, SA, WA VIC, and TAS.

The creation of a new role of Operational Data Scientist allowed the Program to significantly enhance its reporting to state and federal government about the profile of those being supported by the Program and critical unmet needs of this cohort.



Program reach

This year the Program responded to a further 780 referrals accepted via its 1800 enquiry line – this was 230 more than in the previous year.

Twenty-two (22) younger people living permanently in residential aged care consented to join the Program.



Research studies

The University of Melbourne and Scope completed their research study. A summary of findings was published on the AFA website in January 2023.

As part of the Program's funding, it commissioned a second research study with La Trobe University to explore the issue of supporting those at risk of entry into residential aged care who have life-limiting conditions and palliative care needs. This second study is due for completion in December 2024.

Benchmarking to drive sector-level innovation and best practice.

- ✔ Collects benchmark data to support sophisticated, real-time analysis of performance
- ✔ Promotes interstate collaboration and networking amongst disability service organisations
- ✔ Encourages innovation and shared problem solving to drive improvements across the sector

the
ability
roundtable

The Ability Roundtable was established in 2013. The Roundtable fosters innovation and service improvement in the disability services sector by providing a confidential and trusted platform for disability service providers to benchmark their services across Australia.

The opportunity for participating organisations to uncover and share innovations and service improvements through Roundtable communities of practice rapidly accelerates efficiency and effectiveness of services, leading to better service outcomes for customers. The Roundtable is governed by its own Board and supports a growing membership that includes many of Australia's leading disability service providers.

The Roundtable hosts benchmarking activities across different service types. This includes financial and workforce benchmarking across core supports, allied health and support coordination, as well as separate operational performance benchmarking for allied health services, and shared independent living services. Each benchmarking activity collects, analyses, and publishes information comparing organisations to identify ways to improve operational practice.

Collection of deeply granular data enables powerful and nuanced analysis of service performance. The aggregate information is also beneficial for government policymakers, particularly the NDIA in its primary role as a market steward for the NDIS market.

We had a number of successes during the year. Highlights include:

Membership has grown to 70 organisations, who participate in one or more of our benchmarking groups – 30% growth from the previous year;

Strengthen the SIL and Allied Health specific communities of practice and annual cycle of events to ensure members maximise the opportunities to explore shared solutions and improve operational practices.

The release of four White Papers to support sector development and to support evidence-based policy by governments and policymakers. This included:

- Financial Performance and Disability Support Workforce FY21
- Supported Independent Living Insights
- Older Residents in Legacy Stock
- Telling the Sector's Story – Financial and Workforce FY22

Developed strategic partnership across the sector and governments to support growth opportunities into the 2023–24 financial year;

The Ability Roundtable team has grown with the appointment of a General Manager, Data Scientist and Administration Officer



Image supplied with thanks to Novita, photographer credit Josh Geelen



Join our community. Have your say.



An online consumer panel which has the potential to gain real-time market insights from people with disability and carers.

Launched in 2019, Ability Forum is a world-first online community that disability service providers can use to seek consumer insights in real time to better target their services and products.

Putting consumers at the centre of service provider decision making, the Ability Forum aligns exceptionally well with the NDIS and its emphasis on consumer choice and control in a market context.

The Ability Forum runs regular surveys that allow us to better understand the views of people with disability and their carers on a range of subjects such as current services, possible new services and products, and even how implementation of the NDIS is going.

Since launching, Ability Forum has grown to over 3540 active panelists and has conducted over 45 surveys (with capacity to undertake up to 50 surveys each year).

Insights from Ability Forum surveys have played a critical role in influencing policy and organizational strategy, as well as providing unique opportunities for the voices of people with disability to be heard, both individually and collectively.

From late 2022, Ability Forum has been offered as a product to the broader market on a commercial basis.

This expansion promotes increased self-advocacy for people with disability and bring their voice and perspective to the centre of decision-making by a wider range of business and government stakeholders. It extends the “nothing about me without me” ethos, which is inherent in the Ability Forum, in line with the National Disability Strategy, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the NDIA’s “choice and control” philosophy.

My CP Guide

Australia’s first national online platform for people with cerebral palsy, their families and wider circles of support has been available to the public for over twelve months.

My CP Guide, a project led by Cerebral Palsy Australia, Ability First Australia, the Cerebral Palsy Alliance, and Cerebral Palsy Support Network, has focussed on authentically representing their members, clients and participants on the issues that are most important to people with cerebral palsy. Most significantly, the partnership between the organisations, and the project, has facilitated and embedded people with cerebral palsy at the very centre of its development and implementation.

Funded as part of an Information, Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) funding round, the platform:

- Increases the quality and consistency of information available to people with cerebral palsy, families, carers and relevant supports and services,
- Improves the capacity of people with cerebral palsy to exercise choice and control, and

- Enhances the ability of relevant supports and services to respond to the needs and expectations of people with cerebral palsy. The platform design enables users to search via topics or by ‘life stages’ to help them navigate the information most relevant to them. Users can also create accounts to receive personalised content relevant to their needs.

Ongoing funded activities will enhance and maximise opportunities to increase the platform’s reach and usage amongst the CP community and will include design refinement, improvement of personalisation of content, integrated newsletter bulletins, Easy English and LOTE options, more video content on housing, employment, education and assistive technology.

Based on user feedback we will also:

- Develop webinars and podcasts
- Foster aspects of community (facilitation of online community connections)

www.mycpguide.org.au





the national voice

Cerebral Palsy Australia a national voice for cerebral palsy awareness

Since 1952, Cerebral Palsy Australia (formerly known as CP Australia and the Australian Cerebral Palsy Association) has provided a national voice for cerebral palsy awareness.

Furthermore, Cerebral Palsy Australia has positively contributed to the community through research and service development for children and adults with cerebral palsy.

Cerebral Palsy Australia focuses on the promotion and advancement of the rights, interests, welfare and social inclusion for people with cerebral palsy by:

- Assisting in obtaining appropriate funding
- Supporting and encouraging innovation and improved service practices
- Encouraging, conducting and supporting research concerning cerebral palsy
- Working with governments in developing policies for services and support of organisations working with people with cerebral palsy and the people who support them

Cerebral Palsy Australia is operated by Ability First Australia.



A game changing strategy to improve outcomes for people with cerebral palsy

Ability First is a founding member of an Australia-New Zealand coalition which, together with Cerebral Palsy Alliance Research Institute, Australasian Academy for Cerebral Palsy and Developmental Medicine and Cerebral Palsy New Zealand, has developed an Australian and New Zealand Cerebral Palsy Strategy.

This is the first comprehensive strategy designed to improve the quality of life of Australians with cerebral palsy.

Backed by an economic study by Deloitte on the impact of cerebral palsy in Australia, the strategy, which launched in March 2020, will provide a framework for key stakeholders, including governments, to improve the quality of life of people living with cerebral palsy through:

- Improving social and economic inclusion
- Improving health and disability support
- Increased funding, research and innovation

The Australian coalition produced an Impact Report in 2022 reviewing the progress the strategy had made since inception.

Structured under the four success indicators; Prevention and cures, Intervention and disability support, health and well-being, Inclusion and engagement the report reviews the progress and opportunities within the national economic, political, social environment of cerebral palsy in Australia. Each included project area provides both a status update and a “what’s next” section to recognise the progress made and future opportunities.

In summary,

- There are a wide range of projects currently achieving Strategy goal areas,
- More support can be provided to further the research, projects and opportunities improving the environment of cerebral palsy in Australia.
- Ultimately, the report guides key decision makers to deliver support, promote excellence in research, leverage funding avenues and enhance community knowledge

The report can be found at:
<https://cerebralpalsystrategy.com.au>



In developing this Strategy, our mission is to improve the quality of life for Australians and New Zealanders with cerebral palsy, and their families. Drawing on our vast experience, together we can make a real difference.”

Rhys Kennedy, Chair of Cerebral Palsy Australia



Better Start Early Days Workshops

Supporting over 2050 families in taking the first steps of the journey with their child with disability.

Cerebral Palsy Australia is the lead agency of the First Step Alliance, a consortium that has a national contract to deliver workshops to families and carers of children up to seven years with disabilities who are eligible for Better Start funding.

The Early Days Workshops are designed to orient families to the disability landscape. They provide families with information about funding, equip them with skills to get the best value from the supports they receive, provide them with tools to plan for the future and allow them an opportunity to build resilience and share experiences and lessons learnt.

We have offered workshops across Australia, in remote communities, regional centres and major cities. This broad reach is made possible by the extensive local networks of our member organisations who delivered the workshops. We have also run many webinars for people who are not able to make it to our workshops, extending our reach even further.



Image supplied with thanks to Montrose



Affiliation with Easterseals

- Ability First has a strategic alliance with the largest Disability Service provider in the United States, Easterseals.
- Easterseals offers a variety of services to help people with disabilities address life's challenges and achieve personal goals. Easterseals provides over \$2 billion worth of services to their clients through over 550 sites nationally.
- Ability First is the only global affiliate of Easterseals in the Asia Pacific region. Our members enjoy all of the membership entitlements of the Easterseals US based affiliates, at no cost to them.
- In 2014, Easterseals and Ability First established a Professional Staff Scholarship Exchange Program for its US and Australian based affiliates and member organisations. To date over 60 people have benefitted from this program.
- Ability First is represented on the Global Partners Committee of Easterseals. This Committee comprises of affiliates from Canada, the United States and Mexico. They regularly discuss issues relating to the United Nations, global fundraising initiatives and sharing information, research and best practice.



Head office Easterseals Southern California (ESSC), Irvine

Easterseals Professional Staff Scholarship

Aman Singh, General Manager Human Resources at Ability WA, recounts his experiences of participating in the exchange program in 2023.

Earlier this year, I began planning my overseas trip to the USA as I was the recipient of the scholarship through Ability First Australia and its USA affiliate Easterseals. The main objective of my exchange program was to understand, compare and analyse the strategic workforce planning, Talent management strategies and Engagement drivers which is enabling the Easterseals to attract and retain talent in the American landscape.

My first leg of the journey started with the Catalight Foundation in Walnut Creek. I was very fortunate to be able to connect with the 20 senior staff members in a short period which helped me to attain a good working knowledge of the Catalight business. I gained a broader understanding of career advancement services that focus on ending barriers to neurodiverse employment and enabling employer matching.

The organisation has grown significantly and now comprises of five companies; Easterseals Northern

“It was amazing to see how the entire team is committed in creating universally accessible candidate and employee experience that allows them to attract, engage, develop and retain the right people.”

California, Easterseals Hawaii, XOLV, BHPN and Catalight. I was able to gain insight on organisation priorities and strategies which were focused on talent, retention, culture and engagement.

It was interesting and refreshing to see Catalight Foundation’s focus on Justice, Equity, and Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI) Principles which is an instrument in driving positive culture within their company.

The second stop of my journey was Fedcap Group in New York, Fedcap Group is the parent company of a growing set of top-tier agencies located throughout the United States, United Kingdom and Canada with a goal of changing the world. Fedcap group currently consists of 20 organisations including Easterseals of New York, Texas and Rhode Island. All of the companies are supported by the shared support services.

During my visit, I was able to understand the organisation’s four practice areas i.e. economic development, education, health and workforce development. During my various meetings with Fedcap team members, it was clear that the Organisation’s major focus is to help people achieve long-term economic well-being as they work with people at all stages of life. Starting with early education in the Easterseals programs to working with older adults in reserves, which is a program that connects the retired workforce to have a second career in a nonprofit.

I went to Fedcap new venture with Civic Hall in NYC, it is a brand-new building in the heart of New York City. The building will be a top-tier training

facility for technology jobs and based on the WeWork concept. This is an exciting endeavour for the Fedcap group as a whole as they are aiming to create pipelines in the critical jobs sector of technology. Followed by the visit to Liberty Island where maintenance of facilities is managed by people with disabilities employed by Fedcap group. I was able to talk to the employees who shared their positive experiences working for the group. I also managed to squeeze a quick look at the Statue of Liberty during my visit.

The last stop of my exchange was Easterseals Southern California (ESSC), which specialises in five areas Supported living options, Adult Day Services, Employment Services, Autism therapy Service and Child Development centre.

I was able to meet with the broader People Services team, it was amazing to see how the entire team is committed in creating universally accessible candidate and employee experience that allows them to attract, engage, develop and retain the right people. One of the highlights of the trip was to witness how the Talent team particularly focused on providing white glove treatment to candidates during the hiring process and how the team is using data to drive service excellence.

It was interesting to see that America is going through the same workforce issues post-pandemic as Australia, where the unemployment rate is sitting at 3.7% and sourcing and retaining talent is one of the top priorities for the companies, however, all three organisations, I visited have now adopted various flexible models such as permanent working from home arrangements without any geographical restrictions. This has opened the sourcing channels to the wider country workforce and has improved the employee’s work-life balance significantly thus improving employee morale, both ESSC and Catalight Foundation witnessed a rise in their employee net promoter scores.

Thank you to Easterseals, Ability First Australia and Ability WA for providing me with once in a lifetime opportunity. I learned so much about different ways of working, experiences and new cultures and looking forward to incorporating it into Ability WA. Through the connections I have made, there will be a prospect to share ideas and strategies that will mutually benefit our organisations.



Aman Singh, GM Human Resources (Ability WA), Tracey Gayeski Senior VP Catalight Care Services, Jamie Rarrick VP Clinical Operations, Sara Matthews VP Network Operations. Calatlight Foundation Walnut Creek, California



Debbie Nix Chief People Officer ESSC, Melanie Deyle VP Learning and Organisation Development, Marquis McCraw VP Talent Acquisition, Aman Singh GM Human Resources, Ability WA. ESSC, Irvine, Southern California



Sixth Annual Golf Day

On Thursday 9th March 2023 Ability First Australia's corporate partners participated in the Sixth Annual Golf Day fundraiser at the iconic Lakes Golf Club.

The weather was picture perfect and terrific conditions on course, leading Acrow Formwork & Scaffolding to take out first place.

We managed to raise well over \$100,000, which is officially our most successful event to date. This will go a long way in supporting our program to assist young people with disability who are currently living in aged care and hospitals find more appropriate housing.

Thank you to our major headline sponsor, Serco, our MC Matt de Groot, our guest speaker Granit Haliti from Northcott and all of our sponsors for their support.

We look forward to seeing everyone back next year.



Team GBST out on the green



MC Matt de Groot with guest speaker Granit Haliti

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Board Members



Phillip Cave AM – Chairman

Phillip is a merchant banker beginning his career as an Executive Director of Macquarie Bank Limited. He is an accomplished Chief Executive Officer, Director, Chairman, and Board Member and has over 40 year's experience with a proven track record in major corporate turnaround projects, structured finance and corporate advisory services within Australasia. Phillip is Executive Chair and Founder of Anchorage Capital Partners and through this investment vehicle, was formerly Chairman of Golden Circle, Bisalloy Steel Group and Dick Smith Electronics Limited and is current Chairman of GBST and Executive Director of David Jones. Prior to Anchorage, Phillip held major shareholdings and Director/Chairman roles of Parbury Limited, Wormald, Sunbeam-Victa and Hygienic Lily. Phillip is also currently Chairman of Excelsia College.

He has been involved in Disability Services for over 30 years and was Chairman of Northcott Disability Services for seven years. He has participated in 25 Variety 'bashes' and in 2006 was admitted into the Hall of Fame of Variety, for the Children's Charity. In 2007 Phillip was awarded by the Australian Government, a Member of the Order of Australia (A.M.) for service to the community, particularly through the provision of support services to Children and Young Adults with Disabilities and to business as a Company Director.

Andrew Rowley – Managing Director and CEO



Andrew joined Ability first Australia as Managing Director in 2012. Andrew comes with over 20 years' experience in the not-for-profit, education and commercial sector. He has extensive experience in strategy and establishing and securing revenue streams. While being passionate about helping those less fortunate, he is focused on ensuring accountability and outcomes whilst maintaining core values and mission.

Under Andrew's leadership, Ability First Australia (AFA) has established itself as the only strategic alliance in the disability industry. AFA is playing a critical role in supporting 14 large service providers transition into the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), one of Australia's largest social reforms since the introduction of Medicare in the 1980s. Andrew is a fellow of ADAPE Australia, a member of the CEO Circle and is the Chair of WeFlex.

Guy Cowan – Independent Director



Guy Cowan has been a non-executive Director for the past 9 years. He is currently Chairman of Queensland Sugar Limited and a Director of Santos Ltd. He is also a Director of two private companies. Previously he was a Director of Coffey International and Ludowici Limited. He was a Shell appointed alternative director of Woodside between 1992 and 1995. Guy had a 23 year career with Shell International in various senior Commercial and Financial roles.

His last two roles were as CFO and Director of Shell Oil US and CFO of Shell Nigeria. Guy was CFO of Fonterra Co-operative Ltd between 2005 and 2009. He holds a BSc (Hons) Engineering from the University of Sussex and is a Fellow of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales.



Geoff Lovell – Independent Director

Geoff Lovell has more than 25 years of experience in the corporate and for-purpose sectors, across real estate, investment management, banking, risk management, corporate governance, education and Indigenous Australia.

Geoff is currently a Director of Sydney Community Housing Ltd, a senior executive with Citta Property Group and a Fellow of the Australian Institute of Company Directors.

Previously, Geoff has held senior executive roles at Lend Lease (1997-2001) and at Macquarie Group (2001-2015), where he was Chief Executive Officer of ASX-listed Macquarie ProLogis Trust and Head of Commercial Property Lending. In addition, Geoff has had extensive voluntary involvements in for-purpose enterprises, including as: Chairman of the Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME), Chairman of the Investment Committee of the Indigenous Real Estate Investment Trust (I-REIT), Chairman of the Council of St Paul's College, Deputy Chairman of the Council of Sydney Church of England Grammar School (Shore), and a member of the Investment Committee of the Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation (ILSC). Geoff holds first class honours degrees from the University of Sydney (in Civil Engineering) and the University of Oxford (in Philosophy, Politics and Economics), where he was the inaugural Bradman Scholar.



Alison Quinn – Independent Director

Alison is a professional non-executive director with more than 25 years' experience as a CEO and senior executive in the property development and aged care / seniors sectors.

Through her roles with public, private and government organisations, Alison has developed valuable operational and commercial expertise in the areas of property investment, funding, infrastructure and development. Uniquely, Alison has significant expertise on the impacts and challenges of Australia's ageing population and has been at the forefront of thought leadership regarding meeting the housing, care and other service needs of the baby boomer generation.

Alison brings to the board a depth of experience in developing strategies that drive sustainable growth, a strong customer perspective and a passion and understanding of how property as an enabler can deliver both financial and holistic outcomes.



Julie White – Independent Director Resigned October 2022

Julie White has over 35 years' experience in the not-for-profit and corporate sectors, including her former role as head of the Macquarie Group Foundation. She is also the former CEO of Chief Executive Women, Chair of Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia Australia, Chair of Reach Out Australia, Member of the Centre for Social Impact Advisory Council and a member of Chief Executive Women and the Australian Institute of Company Directors. Alongside her non-executive roles Julie is a strategic adviser on social investment to business and to not-for-profits in strategic planning, corporate governance and corporate and community engagement.

Julie was named as one of the Australian Financial Review BOSS Magazine's True Leaders in 2008 and was named in January 2009, by ABC Limelight magazine, as one of the top smart arts 09 executives. Julie was also named as a finalist in the Telstra Business Women's Awards for 2009. Previously, Julie has worked as a community social worker in local government in Australia and overseas, established state-wide community legal education programs for the NSW Government, and has worked in educational development and fundraising.



Liz Forsyth – Director, Member Representative

Liz is a skilled CEO and Senior Executive with experience leading at scale in a not-for-profit context, including in the child and family, and disability services sectors. As a social worker with management and governance qualifications, Liz has had an extensive career in human services. She is passionate about social justice, innovation, and leading for impact in the social and community sector. With an early career in child protection services, Liz spent over a decade working in disability for Northcott during the transformation of the industry through the NDIS. She then moved into the child and family sector as CEO of CareSouth, and returned to Northcott in 2020 as the CEO and Managing Director. Liz is a Director of The SpineCare Foundation, Northcott Innovation Ltd, Northcott Therapy ACT Pty Ltd and Montrose Therapy and Respite. Liz is also a member of the Australian Institute of Company Directors.



Jo Jessop – Director, Member Representative

Jo has been the Chief Executive Officer of Multicap since 2006, leading organisational renewal and transformational change including the transition to the National Disability Insurance Scheme. She has extensive senior management experience across a number of not-for-profit and commercial purpose-driven sectors.

She is a Director of both the Brisbane South Primary Health Network and National Disability Services. Jo is passionate about providing high-quality human services outcomes and improved opportunities for vulnerable people, especially those living with disability.



Jacquie Thomson – Director, Member Representative

Jacquie joined Ability WA as Chief Executive Officer in September 2018. She has held a wide range of senior strategic leadership roles for the past two decades at Lotterywest. She is committed to the not for profit sector and developing our community as one that is inclusive, strong and socially rich.

Jacquie holds a Bachelor of Arts (Social Sciences) from Curtin University, a Graduate Certificate in Management from Deakin University and is a Graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors.



Liz Cohen – Director, Member Representative

Resigned November 2022

Liz led Cara through a period of significant change, transformation and celebrated organisational milestones since joining Cara in 2015. Under Liz's leadership, Cara has transformed from a block funded 'Not for Profit' to a values driven, commercially thinking 'Profit for Purpose' that is committed to providing high-quality services so that people with disabilities can lead fulfilling, everyday lives.

Cara now works alongside more than 700 children and adults with disability and employs more than 1000 staff, known as Possible People. Liz has led the organisation towards a new vision, business model, brand and promise, while welcoming record numbers of staff to the organisation, growing revenue and expanding Cara's services to new customers.

Liz has more than 30 years' experience in the disability, education and health sectors. In 2017, Liz was named a finalist in the SA Telstra Business Women's Awards. She is the Deputy Chair of the Health, Disability, Aged Care and Community Services Industry Skills Council SA. Liz has been elected to the board of Ability First Australia, which is a strategic alliance of leading disability service providers, and she is on the board of the YMCA of South Australia. Liz is also a member of the SA State Committee of National Disability Services (NDS).



Andrew Billing - Director, Member Representative

Resigned December 2022

Andrew Billing was Chief Executive Officer of Tasmanian disability service, St Giles, from 2019 – 2022.

St Giles has an annual turnover of close to \$40million and employs 400 Tasmanians and provides allied health, assistive technology, support and independent living services to 6000 Tasmanians from modern campuses in Hobart, Launceston (head office) and Burnie.

Andrew identified and implemented a successful restructure of the St Giles business model and organisational culture to accommodate the National Disability Insurance Scheme, while maintaining the organisation's strong and trusted 85-year reputation.

He is passionate about social enterprise and collaboration with like-purpose organisations.

Andrew is a strong presence in the Tasmanian not-for-profit sector, having previously held the role of Chief Executive Officer with the Tasmanian NFP The O Group for 14 years. Prior to his role at St Giles Andrew was Interim General Manager – Mission and Strategy at Baptcare (aged care, housing and community services) Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania.

Aggregated Financials

Group Financials of Ability First Members

INCOME STATEMENT	2022 \$'000	2023 \$'000
Revenues		
- Government	2,121,752	2,228,356
- Fundraising	12,882	9,693
- Other	132,188	191,995
Total Revenues	2,266,822	2,430,044
Expenses	2,269,642	2,471,056
Surplus/(deficit)	(2,820)	(41,012)
BALANCE SHEET		
Current Assets		
Cash and cash equivalents	397,033	422,972
Trade and other receivables	214,282	146,358
Inventories	2,881	2,872
Other financial assets	264,383	186,501
Other	36,909	51,610
Total Current Assets	915,488	810,313
Non-Current Assets		
Other financial assets	222,016	302,466
Property, plant and equipment	399,833	423,527
Other	152,246	141,652
Total Non-Current Assets	774,095	867,645
Total Assets	1,689,583	1,677,958
Current Liabilities		
Trade and other payables	140,104	151,225
Other financial liabilities	74,931	72,472
Borrowings	11,214	13,742
Provisions	164,096	163,320
Other	151,506	149,855
Total Current Liabilities	541,851	550,614
Non-Current Liabilities		
Provisions	48,157	57,969
Borrowings	163,031	159,279
Total Non-Current Liabilities	211,188	217,248
Total Liabilities	753,039	767,862
Net Assets	936,544	910,096
Members' Funds		
Retained Earnings	878,700	843,771
Reserves	57,844	66,325
Total Members' Funds	936,544	910,096



Governance

Background to Ability First Australia

Ability First Australia was incorporated in 2003 as a national company supporting seven of Australia's oldest and most respected disability NGOs. All were established from the 1920's onwards to support children living with the results of polio, cerebral palsy and related conditions.

Ability First Australia's establishment was an acknowledgement of the fact that the collective experience, knowledge and expertise of these NGOs acquired over a long period of time, would be enhanced even more if they were supported by strategies driven from a national office.

Today, Ability First Australia supports 15 of Australia's leading disability service providers who continuously provide innovative and responsive services aimed at meeting the needs of people living with a wide range of disabilities.

Ability First Australia's objectives are to build the capacity of its members by:

- Developing national strategies to raise funds in order to preserve the current level of service delivery across the nation, as well as to allow its members to engage in the creation of innovative service models
- Developing close working relationships between its members that will result in:
 - The professional training and development of staff and the sharing of knowledge, experience and expertise
 - National benchmarking and development of best practice in service delivery
 - Securing full advantage of Ability First Australia's and its members' affiliation with Easter Seals in the USA
 - Supporting the members through their transition to the NDIS services is close to \$2 billion per year of which approximately 80% is provided by State and Federal Governments

Our members provide these life changing services from 250 local sites to over 92,000 clients, their families and carers across all states and territories. These services range from early intervention, childhood and family support, independent living skills, respite and accommodation, leisure access and recreation and job training and open employment.

Ability First Australia Board

As of 1 July 2013 AFA's operating structure is as follows:

5 Independent Directors - "Independent Director" means a Director who:

- is not part of the Group's day-to-day management;
- is free of any business or other relationship that could materially interfere with – or could reasonably be perceived to interfere with – the independent exercise of their judgment; and
- has not been an employee or office-holder of, or consultant to, a Member or a Related Body Corporate of a Member, for a period of 24 consecutive months or such other period determined by the Board;

3 Member Directors:

- May be Board members or CEO's of the members.

International Affiliation

In recent years there has been growth in the relationship between Staff and Directors of Easterseals (USA) and Ability First Australia. There have been regular telephone conferences and face to face visits. On a number of occasions, staff from Australia have attended Easterseals Annual Training Conferences and some have even presented at these conferences.

The affiliation is valued highly by both Ability First Australia and Easterseals, recently this collaborative relationship has been strengthened by Easterseals Canada and CONFE Mexico becoming global partners with Easter Seals and Ability First Australia.



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Your generosity allows us to work towards an Australia that puts ability first and ensures inclusion for all.

Thank you for your outstanding support.



abilityfirstaustralia.org.au

info@abilityfirstaustralia.org.au

Phone: 61 2 8259 7725

Level 39, 259 George Street

Sydney NSW 2000