



2025

Annual Review

 **ability first**
AUSTRALIA



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About Ability First Australia

Ability First Australia is one of the largest not for profit industry alliances between 15 of Australia's leading disability service providers. Our members represent the interests of almost \$3 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.



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Year in Review

Reflecting on 2025, the sector has faced another year of challenges and change, echoing the sentiments of our 2024 report.

Before that, there was a strong sense of momentum and optimism across the sector following the release of the Independent Review of the NDIS. This was reinforced by the Government's response to the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability, which signalled a commitment to addressing the complex challenges in the sector and progressing NDIS reform. Together, these reviews laid a foundation for long-term sustainability of the NDIS and broader disability supports. While the six-month federal election campaign delayed a formal Government response to the Review, the post-election outlook is positive. With a majority government, Labor now has both the mandate and opportunity to deliver on its election commitments and implement the recommended reforms.

Early in its term, the Albanese Government established the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing (DHDA), a "super department" overseeing a harmonised care economy. Minister for Health, Disability and Ageing, the Hon Mark Butler MP, and Minister for Disability and the National Disability Insurance Scheme, Senator

the Hon Jenny McAllister, now lead the NDIS legislative and operational agenda, prioritising foundational supports, scheme regulation, and pricing reform—areas strongly advocated by Ability First and its members. The Department of Social Services retains responsibility for disability employment, benefiting members who provide these services. We congratulate Graeme Head AO on his recent appointment as CEO of the National Disability Insurance Agency; we have confidence in this leadership and ability to deliver key reforms to the Scheme.

Ability First continues to prioritise advocacy, data and insights, community networking, and operational efficiencies. A recent strategic review, undertaken earlier this year by the Ability First Australia board, and encompassing the views of member CEOs and Board Chairs, reinforced these priorities. The new plan will be put to the Board and members for approval in late 2025 and will guide our strategic planning into 2026. The new strategy will be future focussed, with a strong commitment to member value and supporting our members to provide high quality services.

We have strengthened our advocacy for support for people with disability, especially those not eligible for NDIS funding, through impactful government-funded projects like the Younger People in Residential Aged Care (YPIRAC) System Coordinator program. This program will conclude nationally in December 2025.

We continue to auspice the Frontline Leadership project, a workforce initiative funded as part of the Department of Social Services Jobs and Market Fund with seven Registered Training Organisations now having the course on scope across Australia. 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.

We remain focussed on leveraging the voice of people with disability, and the people who support them. The Ability Forum consumer panel now boasts over 3,900 members nationwide, providing valuable insights for advocacy and government engagement.

Ability First's national benchmarking platform, the Ability Roundtable, has surpassed several key milestones over the last 12 months. Ability Roundtable's membership has grown to over 90 organisations, delivering more than \$9 billion in services annually. New benchmarking programs for Quality and Safety and Supported Employment have been piloted, and strategic investments are planned to support future growth.

Ability First Australia Community Housing Ltd has fully allocated its Phase One capital, providing accommodation for 25 tenants across Queensland, Western Australia, and Victoria. We're especially grateful to Ability First members Scope and Ability WA for supporting the Phase One capital raise and to CPL, Ability WA, Scope, Aruma and Yooralla for identifying these important property opportunities for the fund to date. Phase Two will focus on acquiring new Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) properties and raising approximately \$50 million in new capital, with strong interest from investors and members.

Cerebral Palsy Australia has advanced initiatives for people with cerebral palsy, including the continued growth of the online platform My CP

Guide and a renewed strategic direction under a new board which includes four board members with lived experience.

It has been a challenging year financially for our members as we navigate the trials of the various NDIS reforms, and sadly we saw the closure of several quality not-for-profit services providers, including Ability First member, Annecto. Annecto had operations in Victoria, regional Queensland and NSW. We were very sad to see Annecto move into voluntary administration as the entire organisation was a great contributor and collaborator to the work of Ability First and our members. Importantly their clients were able to move to alternative services without too much disruption to their lives.

Finally, Ability First's inaugural Chairman, Phil Cave AM, has announced that he will be stepping down from his role as Chair at the end of 2025. In the 22 years Phil has been involved in Ability First, he has contributed far beyond the conventional remit of a chairman; his insights, integrity and commitment to disability have underpinned Ability First's success and growth. We are grateful for Phil's leadership and service over the past 2 decades and wish him well in retirement; we know he won't be too far away.

Ability First Australia thanks its Board, members, partners, and donors for their ongoing support and looks forward to continued success in the year ahead.

We remain focussed on leveraging the voice of people with disability, and the people who support them.



Andrew Rowley
CEO

Phil Cave AM
Chairman

Ability First Australia

At a Glance

Established in 2003, Ability First Australia is a not-for-profit industry 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 almost \$3 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 Plan

FY2026-28

 VISION What success looks like ...	A not-for-profit disability services sector that enables people to thrive.		
 MISSION Why we exist ...	To build a robust community that accelerates members' capacity to deliver high quality services.		
 STRATEGY What we are focused on ...	Fostering collaboration, championing reform and incubating scalable innovative solutions for our members.		
Community Facilitate collaboration; inform and engage members to develop policy positions	Advocacy Promote member views and sector reform to government and other stakeholders	Innovation Pilot, incubate and grow industry solutions that require collective action	Effectiveness Operate a sustainable, effective and capable organisation
 MEASURES What success looks like ...	Member engagement External stakeholder regard Innovative solutions Financial surplus Talent succession		
 VALUES How we show up ...	Bold Trusted Inclusive		

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)



Image supplied with thanks to Achieve Australia

Our Members



Ability WA has been supporting Western Australian families for more than 70 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



Achieve Australia is a for-purpose community organisation that has been providing accommodation and services to people with disability since 1952. We champion social inclusion, focusing on the individual needs and lives of the people we support. An NDIS-registered provider, Achieve delivers expert disability support services in greater Sydney, Northern Rivers regions of NSW and South East Queensland. achieveaustralia.org.au



Aruma is one of Australia's largest not-for-profit disability service providers, supporting over 4000 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 is a Northern Territory not-for-profit organisation providing Disability and Therapy Services for children, adolescents and adults, through Independent Living services, Pathway programs, Allied Health therapy and Specialist Disability Accommodation. 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 70 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



For over 50 years, Melba has stood beside Victorians with disability, championing choice, dignity, and dreams. As a proud NDIS provider, we offer personalised support, from independent living to community connection. Melba's services extend from Melbourne's outer eastern suburbs throughout east and west Gippsland, along the Mornington Peninsula and across the Central Highlands and Wimmera regions. Our approach is driven by the people we support and is built on a human rights values-based framework. melbasupport.com.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, QLD and the ACT, employing over 3,000 staff and providing empowering, personalised services to over 16,000 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



Vertaview Group is a collective of leading human and social service organisations, (All About Living, Allinto, Arbourwell, Multicap, and Open Minds) working together to amplify social impact across Queensland, New South Wales, and Victoria. Supporting over 8,000 individuals, Vertaview delivers personalised services that empower people to connect, thrive, and live a good life. With a diverse and inclusive workforce, Vertaview leverages shared expertise and resources to drive enduring change in the communities it serves. multicap.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

achieve australia

More than 70 years of practical innovation

For more than 70 years, Achieve Australia has been innovating around one simple idea: people with disability deserve more than inclusion, they deserve opportunity, voice and choice. What began in 1945 with families creating alternatives to institutions has become a multi-state organisation supporting more than 600 people to live in their communities, on their own terms.



That belief in self-directed lives has always made innovation in our language. From pioneering some of Australia's first community-based homes to today's partnership with Inclusive Housing Australia, we have continually reshaped what "home" can mean. By separating housing from support, we are giving people the power to choose where and how they live, a shift that places control firmly in their hands.

The same spirit flows into our programs. *Quality Champions* puts people with lived experience in charge of auditing services, challenging providers to do better. *My Life My Say*, co-designed with young people with disability and their families, builds skills for independence and confidence. And our social enterprises, including AchievAble Enterprise and The Sewing Basket, prove that supported employment can also change community attitudes, stitching inclusion into the fabric of everyday life.

Growth, too, has become a vehicle for innovation. In recent years, Achieve has welcomed services transitioned from Mercy Community, St Vincent

Our social enterprises ... prove that supported employment can also change community attitudes, stitching inclusion into the fabric of everyday life

de Paul, Windara Communities and Northcott, ensuring continuity of service for many of our participants while introducing new ways of working. Every transition becomes not just a handover but a chance to refine, adapt and scale what works best.

Through it all, we are guided by principles of inclusion, voice and capacity-building. These principles anchor our forward focus: dismantling barriers through the Achieve Foundation and shaping housing and service models that reflect the future, not the past.

And that is the heart of Achieve's story. Innovation in disability services is about people, partnerships, and the courage to reimagine what is possible.

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
- NDIS Workforce Dialogue



We continue to engage with The Hon Mark Butler MP, Minister for Health, Disability and Ageing, and Senator The Hon Jenny McAllister, Minister for Disability and the National Disability Insurance Scheme, as well as collaborating on submissions related to key issues facing the disability sector.

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 Community Housing Ltd



Image supplied with thanks to Shane O'Connor

Ability First Housing continues to transform lives through the delivery of high-quality, purpose-built Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA).

In 2024-25, we successfully committed our Phase One capital, raised through our Loan Notes program with the support of member organisations. This structure has enabled disciplined portfolio growth while maximising social impact.

With this funding now fully committed, Ability First Housing has expanded to five SDA properties across Queensland, Western Australia and Victoria. These homes can support more than 25 people with disability and are designed to foster independence, dignity and inclusion. Current residents are supported by trusted providers such as Ability WA, Aruma, CPL, Scope and various independent providers of their choice — ensuring genuine choice and control over their supports.

The impact of our work extends far beyond bricks and mortar. Residents have shared the joy of living with partners, parents and pets, reconnecting with family, and participating more fully in community life. These outcomes demonstrate our commitment to empowering people with disability to make their own choices and live with dignity, safety and inclusion.

Looking ahead, we will continue to build on this foundation. Further capital raisings are planned to support new SDA acquisitions, with a continued focus on partnering with trusted support providers, developers and investors. Every new home represents more than a property — it is an investment in independence, community connection and a better quality of life for people with disability.

Benchmarking to compare performance and drive sector-level innovation and best practice.

- ✓ Australia's largest national platform that supports disability service providers to benchmark their performance with their peers.
- ✓ Supports a national dialogue amongst members designed to identify best practice and innovation through communities of practice.
- ✓ A source of truth to help influence policy decision using robust industry data.

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

- Membership has grown to 90 organisations, who participate in one or more of our benchmarking groups – representing more than \$9.3 billion in combined annual revenue;
- Continued to strengthen the Home and Living and Allied Health specific benchmarking products and communities of practice which includes an annual cycle of events to ensure members maximise the opportunities to explore shared solutions and improve operational practices.
- Delivered a pilot Disability Employment benchmarking program and community of practice, with further program of work scheduled in late 2025
- Commenced a pilot Quality and Safety benchmarking program which will provide the first national comparison of client quality and worker safety performance within the disability sector. ,
- The release of several policy papers to support sector development and to support evidence-based policy by governments and policymakers. This included:
 - o NDIS Price Modelling Update for FY 2024-2025
 - o Submission: IHACPA Consultation – NDIS Pricing Reform Opportunities
 - o Submission: Independent Pricing Committee – NDIS Pricing Reform Opportunities
 - o FY25 Insights Paper – What's happening to the group and centre-based supports markets
 - o FY25 Mid-Year insights paper – Workers Compensation Premiums
 - o In early FY26, the release of the Quality Quandary – What next for quality registered therapy providers in response to the NDIA's therapy pricing announcements in June 2025
- Ability Roundtable continued to build strong relationships with policymakers and participated in strategic sector dialogues, being recognised as a thought leader and a source of truth for robust industry-led insights.
- Ability Roundtable also developed important strategic partnerships across the sector to support growth opportunities into the 2025-26 financial year;

The Ability Roundtable was established in 2013. The Roundtable fosters best practice 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 capacity building

supports, as well as separate operational performance benchmarking for allied health services, and supported 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 uses robust industry data to tell the sector's story and is also beneficial for government policymakers, particularly the NDIA in its primary role as a market steward for the NDIS market.



Image supplied with thanks to Northcott

Membership, Engagement, and Research Update

The Ability Forum is an established platform that brings together people with disability, organisations, and stakeholders to share experiences and insights. The Forum continues to grow in membership and involvement in research and advocacy.

Membership and Recruitment

The Forum currently has over 3,900 members. Recruitment efforts focus on both individuals with disability and organisations interested in hearing from and engaging with this community. Expanding membership helps ensure a wider range of perspectives and experiences are included.

Partnerships and External Engagement

The Forum has recently become a preferred supplier to Orima Research. This partnership has led to several quotes and greater participation in external surveys. In addition, discussions with other organisations, support ongoing awareness and relationship-building with key organisations.

Research Activities

The Forum's recent survey produced the Unmet Needs Index, which is summarised in a white paper. This white paper is also available on the Ability First website ([Unmet Needs Survey Summary](#)). It is intended to be used as a baseline to assess the progress

made by both foundational supports and the NDIS in future years. The white paper on the initial Unmet Needs Index has been widely distributed and has gained positive responses from both the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) and consumer groups.

The Forum's recent survey produced the Unmet Needs Index, which is summarised in a white paper.

The next survey is underway and focuses on the intersection of health and disability. Commissioned by Ability First Australia and developed with the Social Research Centre, this survey examines how mainstream healthcare—especially primary care—meets the needs of Australians with disability. The findings will be used to inform advocacy for better, more inclusive health services, and will be presented in an upcoming white paper.

The Ability Forum continues its work in recruitment, research, and external engagement, supporting the voices and interests of people with disability in Australia.



Image supplied with thanks to St Giles



the national voice

Cerebral Palsy Australia a fresh beginning

During this financial year, CPA firmly established itself as a Disability Representative Organisation (DRO), with a longer-term vision of becoming a Disabled Person's Organisation. Efforts focused on embedding robust governance, elevating voices of lived experience, and progressing its key strategic pillars.

Governance and lived experience

The agreed governance structure has been embedded. A new constitution was drafted and approved. A nine-member board was appointed, with four directors having lived experience of cerebral palsy. The Board Chair and Deputy Chair both have cerebral palsy. Additionally, CPA established an Advisory Panel of 22 people with lived experience of CP, from varied geographic and demographic backgrounds. This group is also chaired by people with lived experience of CP.

Knowledge and Advocacy Pillars

With these foundational elements in place CPA has been able to focus on progressing with its strategic priorities. As part of the Knowledge pillar, the Advisory Panel has begun advising on CPA priority areas – with the primary area of concern being healthcare. Under the Advocacy pillar the organisation progressed in getting the commitment of four parliamentarians across political platforms to co-convene a Parliamentary Friends of Cerebral Palsy group. This friendship group will give people with lived experience of cerebral palsy a front row seat to raise awareness of the issues that impact them the most and to influence policy makers.

Information and Awareness Pillars

My CP Guide website, the go-to resource for credible information about all aspects of life with CP, is in its third year, with government funding extended for a further year. The resources on the site are updated on a regular basis, with strong governance in place, to ensure that relevant, evidenced-based information for people living with CP and their supporters is provided on an easy to navigate platform. The Easy English section of the site went live, making key information accessible to the 50% of the CP community with intellectual disability.

The site has been accessed by over 130,000 users since its launch, through extensive digital marketing and leveraging a \$10K/month google ad grant. The site has also established a strong community with regular webinars, blogs and newsletter updates.

Collaboration Pillar

Cerebral Palsy Australia remains active in the ANZ CP Strategy collaboration group, which it co-founded, through quarterly meetings. The ANZ CP Strategy outlines key priorities and guides decision makers in supporting people with CP, advancing research, securing funding, and building community knowledge.

My CP Guide

Work has continued in developing and strengthening the My CP Guide platform, which bolsters CP Australia's strategic information pillar (or objective). The My CP Guide platform is firmly established as the go-to resource for information about all aspects of life with CP, that is co-designed with people with CP. It is an accessible, easy to navigate site with relevant, evidenced-based information for people living with CP and their supporters. The site was accessed by over 80,000 this year and continues to attract over 5,000 users every month. CPA was successful in receiving an additional year of funding from Information, Linkages and Capacity Building grant to continue to strengthen the platform and maintain current staffing.

The site has over 1,000 high-quality, curated, information resources and blogs. Accessibility of the site is paramount to its success, and during this year, we launch an Easy English section with over 40 resources. In addition to the information resources on the site, the webinar program established the previous year attracted close to 600 registrations across the six webinars. Webinars form an additional source of information, bringing together the CP community. The CP community is also kept engaged with an e-newsletter to over 1,400 subscribers.

ANZ CP Strategy Collaboration Group

One of Cerebral Palsy Australia's strategic pillars is collaboration and as one of the founding members of the ANZ CP Strategy, CPA has continued collaboration and membership with this group. The strategy provides a framework to outline key priority areas for the collaboration and is intended to be used as a guide for key decision makers to deliver support, promote excellence in research, leverage funding avenues and enhance community knowledge. The collaboration group identified the top 3 priorities from the original strategy, as focus for the next two years, which will inform CPAs activity in the coming year.



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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.

The fourth year of AFA operating this national initiative funded by the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing had a number of successes.

These included:

- Continued collaboration with state and territory governments to find creative solutions for younger people (not eligible for the NDIS) to exit Residential Aged Care (RAC). This year three more individuals successfully moved out of RAC with the help from the Program, bringing the total to ten (10).
- Kath, who is the most recent individual to be supported by the Systems Coordinators to leave, shares her story in this edition of the Annual Review. Kath's exit illustrates the tenacity and commitment of our Program staff to find creative solutions to assist people to leave.
- Completion of Project Imagine & Explore 2 in April 2025. This 14-month collaboration with the NDIA saw fifty-four (54) NDIS participants living in RAC, without a goal to move, consenting

to work with AFA alongside their NDIA team. Taking a trauma informed approach to identifying the key barriers for moving out of RAC, AFA was able to facilitate twenty-six (26) participants to consider a change of goal and two (2) open to explore further what a change of goal might mean for them. Six (6) participants moved out of RAC during this timeframe and two (2) had planned move-out dates post the Project closure date.

- Program Data was included for the first time in the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) public data dashboard. This report charts the national progress against the Younger People in Residential Aged Care (YPIRAC) targets. The inclusion of the AFA data highlighted, for the first time, the number of individuals under 65 who are not NDIS participants who remain living in RAC.
- A virtual network forum for hospital discharge professionals was established and hosted by the Program. This national network of approximately 40 professionals now meets regularly to discuss issues faced by hospitals seeking to find suitable pathways and solutions for younger people with chronic health and complex needs 'at-risk' of entering residential aged care as a last resort.

- As a result of the Aged Care Act 2024 passing into law on 25 November 2024, the Program was instrumental in supporting the discussions between the Commonwealth and States. The Program provided critical data insights and modelling of the needs of those under 65 years, not eligible for the NDIS, who will become the

responsibility of the state/territory jurisdictions to support as of 1 November 2025.

- An additional thirty-two (32) younger people 'at-risk' of accessing aged care services were supported by the Program to find better solutions in their community.

Kath's story



Kath first engaged with Ability First's YPIRAC Systems Coordinator program in August 2023 as she was needing help to secure safe accommodation with appropriate care services.

Although accommodation was found in the community unfortunately Kath's health deteriorated and so she needed more supports than were available. Kath then moved into Residential Aged Care (RAC) in May 2024 following a thorough exploration of all other options available to her.

In January 2025, Ability First reconnected with Kath after she had been living in RAC for six months to see how she was managing. Due to an improvement in her health and after some conversations about how Kath could become more independent, she became hopeful about moving out of RAC and living back in the community. Ability First continued to support Kath with exhaustively exploring many accommodation options in her preferred location including public housing, independent living and private rentals. During this time Kath met a visiting RSL member at the RAC which led to Kath acknowledging she had served in the Army Reserves for a short

period in her early twenties. Given this time of service, Kath was immediately linked in with Department of Veteran Affairs who assisted with securing an independent living unit in the RSL village located on the same premises as the RAC she was living in. Kath was thrilled to hear about this option, and with assistance from Ability First moved into her unit in May 2025. The Department of Veterans Affairs provided furniture and household goods to support her smooth transition.

Kath continues to visit her friends in RAC and now volunteers there weekly. Neighbours have become new friends, and she loves the opportunity to attend community BBQs, share books at the village library and enjoy the beautiful gardens. Kath's sister visits weekly and they enjoy a special lunch outing.

Kath is extremely grateful to Ability First and says that without us reconnecting with her to check in back in January she may never have considered moving out of RAC. Kath is delighted to gain back her independence both in the community and financially, along with enjoying her new home where she feels safe and comfortable and with complete freedom back in her life.



Above: Kath and YPIRAC Systems Coordinator, Michelle Hall and Left: Outlook from Kath's kitchen window

Frontline Leadership Diploma

Following on from the successful completion and launch of the Diploma of Leadership in Disability Services, Ability First was asked by the Department of Social Services (DSS) to house the Diploma on our website and provide access and support to RTOs seeking to include it on the scope.

Current status

In May Ability First Australia received confirmation of further funding of \$75,000 to manage the course, on DSS's behalf, for the FY26 year.

There are now seven Registered Training Organisations with the course on scope: Rocky Bay (WA); St Michaels (Tasmania); TAFE QLD (QLD); UNEP (National); Fulcrum People (National); Exell Training (National) and RMIT (Victoria).

Tasmania now provides a full subsidy for the course. St Michaels, a registered training organisation, now has over fifty students enrolled in the course and the Western Australian Government provides partial funding.

Future Directions

Ability First will continue to work with RTOs and state funding bodies as well as with HumanAbility regarding workforce needs for the sector. We will continue to advocate for funding on a state-by-state basis until a final decision is made as to where the Diploma sits on the career pathway, as assessed by HumanAbility. This assessment is expected to start later in 2025 and be finalised late next year.

There are now seven Registered Training Organisations with the course on scope



Image supplied with thanks to Achieve Australia

David Jones Employment Program

Fostering Inclusive Employment Opportunities

The David Jones Employment Program is a joint initiative between David Jones and Ability First Australia with Northcott and Yooralla being the first members to be involved in the program. The program is designed to create meaningful, inclusive employment pathways for people with disabilities through structured placements in David Jones retail stores. It serves as a model for promoting diversity and inclusion in the workplace.

Pilot program and expansion

Launched in 2024, the pilot phase of the program was developed in partnership with Ability First Australia. Northcott was the initial participating provider, placing two individuals in customer support roles in New South Wales stores. Building upon the success of the pilot, the program expanded to Victoria, where Yooralla facilitated placements at the Doncaster and Glen Waverley stores.

David Jones has demonstrated strong commitment to this initiative by fostering a welcoming and supportive environment. The company has taken proactive measures to accommodate the needs of participants, further embedding a culture of acceptance and inclusion.

A dedicated recruitment and on-boarding pathway

A dedicated recruitment pathway was established specifically for the program. Comprehensive training modules, including workplace safety and job-specific skills, were developed to equip both participants and existing staff with the necessary knowledge and tools for success. This training ensured participants were well-prepared for their roles and supported ongoing development and independence.

Impact

The program has received overwhelmingly positive feedback from both participants and David Jones

team members. Participants—clients of Northcott and Yooralla's employment services—have reported increased confidence, job satisfaction, and personal growth. Store teams have noted a more enriched workplace culture, citing enhanced empathy, understanding, and collaboration as key benefits.

Strategic Value

- Showcases the viability of inclusive employment models in mainstream retail settings.
- Strengthens partnerships with leading disability service providers across multiple states.
- Reinforces David Jones' ongoing commitment to diversity and inclusion, setting a positive example for corporate engagement.
- Enhances organisational culture through empathy, collaboration, and shared growth.

What's next?

- Planned expansion to additional stores, including Highpoint (VIC), Miranda (NSW), Claremont Quarter (WA), Carindale (QLD), and Robina (QLD).
- Recruitment and onboarding for these locations will be scheduled later this year, with detailed position descriptions and role links shared with providers.
- Ongoing collaboration with Northcott and Yooralla to refine training and support.
- Integration of the inclusive employment pathway into David Jones' standard recruitment processes.

The David Jones Employment Program has already delivered significant benefits for both participants and the organisation. It stands as a powerful example of what can be achieved through thoughtful collaboration and a shared commitment to inclusion. Moving forward, the program aims to expand its reach and continue building on the successes of the past year.



Assistive Technology Rental and Refurbishment Pilot

for all People with Disabilities

Our Pilot program to recycle a wide range of Assistive Technology (AT) equipment is now established and has commenced supporting people with disability. This project is funded by the Federal Government through the Information, Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) program.

The pilot is professionally refurbishing AT equipment and making the equipment available for rent or purchase, in a way that is simpler, faster and more cost effective than purchasing new equipment.

The program, rebranded as Access Tech, is managed by Ability First and delivered through our partners, Novita and St Giles, is initially operating in South Australia and Tasmania and makes equipment available to all people with disability, not just NDIS participants. A third location, Western Australia, will commence in early 2026.

We have engaged the Social Research Centre to undertake a detailed evaluation of the pilot so

we can refine its operation and demonstrate the value of the project. We aim to then engage with government and other agencies to discuss the potential of expanding the service in the future.

To date, we have developed considerable infrastructure, skills and expertise in AT refurbishment, assessment and distribution that is making the pilot a beneficial resource for people with disability.



An abilityfirst initiative

Program partners



DAVID JONES



yooralla



Eighth Annual Golf Day

On Thursday 13th March 2025 Ability First Australia's corporate partners participated in the Eighth Annual Golf Day fundraiser at the iconic Lakes Golf Club.

With a record 34 teams registered, the sun shined down on us as we raised over \$95,000 which will go a long way to supporting our employment programs. A huge thank you to our headline sponsor David Jones and major sponsors Anchorage Capital Partners, RoboAI, Corrs Chambers Westgarth, Gilbert + Tobin, PwC, Acrow, Metrics Credit Partners and Rothschild & Co. Special thanks to our MC Ben Ware, our inspiring guest speakers Nicole & Jonathan from Northcott, auctioneer Bruce Plasto and the team at Charitbl. And of course - huge congratulations to Team Metrics for taking home the trophy!

We look forward to seeing everyone back next year.



Team Metrics were crowned winners of the day

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METRICS



MC Ben Ware interviewed Nicole from Northcott

Board Members



Phil Cave – Chair

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 years' 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 currently a Director of GBST and 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 University College and Leading the Way (Australia) and sits on the Board of Ability First Australia Community Housing Ltd (AFACHL).

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.

Guy Cowan – Independent Director

Guy has been a non-executive director since November 2017. He is currently Chairman of Queensland Sugar Limited and the Port of Brisbane Limited. He is also chairman of two private companies. Previously he was a director of Santos Limited, Coffey International Limited and Ludowici Limited.

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, a Fellow of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England & Wales and is a Fellow of the AICD.

Geoff Lovell – Independent Director

Geoff has more more than 30 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 a Fellow of the Australian Institute of Company Directors, Independent Director of Ability First Australia, Chairman of Ability First Australia Community Housing Ltd (AFACHL), President of the Cranbrook School Council, and Chief Investment Officer of Sustainable Development Group Ltd.

Previously, Geoff has held senior executive roles at Lend Lease and Macquarie Group, 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 Indigenous Real Estate Investment Trust (I-REIT) Investment Committee, Chairman of the Council of St Paul's College within the University of Sydney, 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.



Callen O'Brien – Independent Director

Callen is an experienced board member and corporate adviser with over 25 years' experience across a broad range of industries in Australia, New Zealand, the UK and the US.

Callen joined Anchorage Capital Partners in 2014 and was appointed Managing Partner in 2022. He is currently Chairman of GBST, Specialised Linen Services, Access Community Health (NZ) and Evolve Education Group (NZ) and was recently a council member of the Australian Investment Council. He was formerly Chairman of Contract Resources and executive director of Affinity Education and RailFirst. Prior to joining Anchorage, Callen was a senior partner at Minter Ellison where he advised many of Australia's leading private equity firms on their investments in the region.

Callen has also worked for a number of years with leading law firms in London and New York advising on international M&A transactions.

Callen holds a Bachelor of Commerce and a Bachelor of Laws from the University of NSW and had been admitted to practice law in Australia, England and New York.



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. Alison also sits on the Board of Ability First Australia Community Housing Ltd (AFACHL).



Liz Forsyth – Member Representative Director

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, Montrose Therapy and Respite, and Ability First Australia. Liz is also a member of the Australian Institute of Company Directors.



Rhys Kennedy – Member Representative Director

Rhys has been Chief Executive Officer of CPL since December 2016. Rhys brings a unique combination of knowledge, skills and experience to the role, many of which have been acquired from within the organisation.

After joining CPL as an Occupational Therapist in Rockhampton, Rhys held a number of local management roles before taking a leadership role in the organisation as General Manager – Strategy, a position which would ultimately lead him into the CEO role. Rhys is well known and respected in the human services sector, through his roles on a number of advisory groups. He is on the board of Ability First Australia. He also sits on the Boards of CPL subsidiaries, Cootharinga and Access Arts.

He holds a Bachelor of Occupational Therapy, Master of Business Administration and is a Graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors.



Jacquie Thomson – Member Representative Director

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 (the WA State Lottery) and also has extensive community sector experience. 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.



Andrew Rowley – Managing Director and Company Secretary

Andrew joined Ability first Australia as Managing Director in 2012. Andrew comes with over 25 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 has established itself as the only strategic alliance in the disability industry. Ability First played a critical role in supporting 15 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.



Aggregated Financials

Group Financials of Ability First Members

INCOME STATEMENT	2024 \$'000	2025 \$'000
Revenues		
- Government	2,498,342	2,733,984
- Fundraising	14,150	6,025
- Other	162,673	222,945
Total Revenues	2,675,165	2,962,954
Expenses	2,675,756	3,027,363
Surplus/ (deficit)	(591)*	(64,409)*
BALANCE SHEET		
Current Assets		
Cash and cash equivalents	245,829	301,081
Trade and other receivables	154,852	164,041
Inventories	5,652	9,463
Other financial assets	278,522	219,720
Other	81,560	82,276
Total Current Assets	766,415	776,581
Non-Current Assets		
Other financial assets	381,057	462,276
Property, plant and equipment	497,192	470,131
Other	148,808	201,540
Total Non-Current Assets	1,027,057	1,133,947
Total Assets	1,793,472	1,910,528
Current Liabilities		
Trade and other payables	153,375	192,787
Other financial liabilities	108,880	105,269
Borrowings	3,867	1,445
Provisions	179,779	235,616
Other	137,039	144,085
Total Current Liabilities	582,940	679,202
Non-Current Liabilities		
Provisions	51,488	70,583
Borrowings	162,042	134,172
Total Non-Current Liabilities	213,530	204,755
Total Liabilities	796,470	883,957
Net Assets	997,002	1,026,571
Members' Funds		
Retained Earnings	896,533	883,746
Reserves	100,469	142,825
Total Members' Funds	997,002	1,026,571

*two of our members received substantial State funding for transition disability services



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 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 Easterseals in the USA
 - Supporting members through their transition to providing services, including NDIS services, of 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 online 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 CONFÉ Mexico becoming global partners with Easterseals and Ability First Australia.



Image supplied with thanks to Achieve Australia

Supporters

We gratefully acknowledge the support we have received from our donors, sponsors and supporters:

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Allan Moss AO
Callen O'Brien
Assunta Pellicano
Nunzio Pellicano

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

Thank you for your outstanding support.

P. Jones



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