



**WESTERN SYDNEY**  
UNIVERSITY

# LEADING DISABILITY RESEARCH AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT:

A WESTERN SYDNEY COLLABORATION

**WHITE PAPER**

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Western Sydney University acknowledges the peoples of the Darug, Tharawal, Eora and Wiradjuri nations. We acknowledge that the teaching, learning and research undertaken across our campuses continues the teaching, learning and research that has occurred on these lands for tens of thousands of years.

Western Sydney University 2023

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Around 4.4 million Australians live with disability, representing 1 in 6 people across the total Australian population.<sup>1</sup> Greater Western Sydney is home to 320,858 people with disability. People with disability are often multi-marginalised, facing a range of intersecting barriers that can contribute to increased disadvantage and exclusion. They experience multiple forms of discrimination and disadvantage based on their disability as well as on other factors such as race, gender, and socio-economic status. People with disability are more likely to live in poverty, have poorer health, and to experience higher rates of unemployment and underemployment. They are also over-represented in the homeless population and in the justice-involved populations. People with intellectual disability experience further marginalisation and exclusion compared to other people with disability; they face barriers in accessing education and health care, and they experience loneliness and social isolation due to limited opportunities for social participation. Addressing these complex issues requires a comprehensive, targeted and intersectoral approach that addresses the root causes of marginalisation, discrimination, and disadvantage faced by people with disability.**

In this white paper we draw attention to how excellence in research and workforce development may help foster greater inclusion and participation for people with disability. We present a critique of the current limitations in research and workforce development and highlight the urgency of addressing such shortcomings so that inclusion of people with disability can be realised within our communities. We demonstrate that Western Sydney University is well positioned as a leading institution to address many of these concerns. This credential is best exemplified by Western Sydney University's ranking as first in the world for addressing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).<sup>2</sup>

Western Sydney University has dedicated expert disability researchers and educators across disciplines, who work collaboratively with people with lived experience of disability and with industry and community leaders. In tackling the complex issues facing people with disability our approach is co-created, intersectional, applied, and interdisciplinary to address the root causes of many layers of marginalisation, discrimination, and disadvantage faced by people with disability. This white paper showcases the innovative work of our team and calls for seven key actions to advance inclusion and participation for people and communities in Greater Western Sydney, Australia, and beyond.

## **CALLS TO ACTION**

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**1**

**Build capacity and leadership in people with lived experience of disability to drive research and workforce education agendas**

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**2**

**Establish Western Sydney University as a beacon for exemplary interdisciplinary disability research impacting practice and policy in Greater Western Sydney and beyond**

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**3**

**Promote and conduct impactful research leading to policy and practice translation**

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**4**

**Develop a model of interdisciplinary education for a future disability workforce informed by co-creation and research, led by Western Sydney University**

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**5**

**Encourage more researchers to adopt inclusive approaches**

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**6**

**Encourage universities to adopt inclusive approaches**

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**7**

**Build community and industry awareness of disability justice, and support capacity development of inclusive practices**

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# INTRODUCTION

**In Australia, 4.4 million people (1 in 6) live with disability, representing 18.5% of the total Australian population.<sup>1</sup> Greater Western Sydney is home to 320,858 people with disability. Disability rates tend to be higher in areas of socio-economic disadvantage and in regions influenced by factors such as poor access to health care, education, and employment opportunities.<sup>3</sup> The prevalence of disability increases with advancing age, and around 50% of those 65 years and older have a disability, with 35% having profound or severe impairments.<sup>3</sup> People with disability are often multi-marginalised, facing a range of intersecting social and structural barriers that can contribute to increased disadvantage and exclusion.**

They experience multiple forms of disability-based discrimination and disadvantage, as well as discrimination and disadvantage arising from other factors such as ethnicity, gender, age, and socio-economic status. The experience of disability is a cross-cutting issue that requires understanding and sustainable solutions for inclusion at all levels of the community and all stages across the lifespan. Specialised researchers and educators across schools, centres, and institutes at Western Sydney University are working on addressing many of these inequalities with and for people with disability through advancing research and workforce development, achieving excellent outcomes and meaningful impact. A co-created, applied, intersectional, and interdisciplinary approach supported by the university will further enhance the capacity of academics, communities, and industry across Greater Western Sydney to work collaboratively to address the

root causes of the many layers of marginalisation, discrimination, and disadvantage faced by people with disability. This white paper will illustrate such an approach.

## DEFINING DISABILITY

Disability is a natural part of the human condition that intersects with all other human experiences across the globe and affects every person, either directly or indirectly, during their lifetime. However, disability is a broad and diverse category that includes a wide range of physical, psychological, sensory, and intellectual impairments. The prevalence of disability may also vary depending on the specific types of disabilities being considered. As such, there are a range of ways to define disability and the projects presented later in this white paper have adopted multiple conceptualisations of disability. The NSW Disability Inclusion Act<sup>4</sup> defines disability as: *'a long-term physical, psychiatric,*

*intellectual or sensory impairment that, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder the person's full and effective participation in the community on an equal basis with others.'*<sup>4</sup> Australia's Disability Discrimination Act<sup>5</sup> describes disability as a loss of a person's functioning, capacity or part of the body brought about by illness or disorder which can be genetic, developmental or acquired.<sup>5</sup> Such conceptualisations of disability are considered by some to be medical and reductive, with many rejecting the notion that disability-related problems reside within the person.<sup>6</sup> Critical disability studies principles, which have grown from the social model of disability,<sup>7</sup> maintain that limitations to participation placed on persons with disability are caused by persistent social, structural, political, and cultural barriers.<sup>6</sup> Critical disability studies as an interdisciplinary field is moving toward universal accessibility,

and incorporates a complex understanding of disability. The many ways to understand and define disability are illustrated by the diverse approaches our team has to disability research and workforce development. The heterogenous and diverse nature of our work at Western Sydney University and with our partners is a particular strength.

There are currently diverse views about how to refer to people with disability collectively and there are variations in preferences between individuals and between distinct disability communities. Some have argued that person-first language is most respectful (person with disability).<sup>8</sup> Others, particularly in the autistic community, have argued that identity-first language is preferred (disabled person).<sup>9</sup> In this white paper, person-first language has been adopted when talking about people with disability generally and identity-first language has been adopted when talking about autistic people (consistent with the preferred approach of this community).

## THE RIGHT TO PARTICIPATION

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities<sup>10</sup> (UNCRPD) (ratified by Australia in 2008) recognises the barriers that people with disability may face in realising their human rights. While all other human rights treaties apply equally to people with disability, the UNCRPD recognises *‘the need to promote and protect the human rights of all persons with disabilities, including those who require more intensive support’*. The general principles of the Convention include: *‘Respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy including the freedom to make one’s own choices, and independence of persons; Non-discrimination; Full and effective participation and inclusion in society; Respect for difference and acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity; Equality of opportunity; Accessibility ...’*.<sup>11</sup> However, in Australia, despite advances in this area, people with disability routinely face challenges and do not enjoy the same degree of participation as people without disability.<sup>12</sup>

## BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION AND A GOOD LIFE

Sixteen per cent of people with disability in Australia have reported experiencing some form of discrimination in the previous year,<sup>12</sup> including being treated unequally or missing opportunities. People with disability are also twice as likely as people without disability to experience social isolation, loneliness, and dissatisfaction with community life (1 in 6 with disability, compared with 1 in 12 without disability).<sup>12</sup> People with intellectual disability experience particular social isolation due to limited opportunities for social participation opportunities, and many are excluded from community activities.<sup>13</sup> People with a range of physical disabilities also experience specific barriers in accessing health and rehabilitation services and in being able to physically participate in community activities.<sup>14,15</sup> Among school-aged children and young people with disability (aged 5–18 years), 80% experience restrictions related to schooling,<sup>12</sup> negatively impacting their participation in education.

People with disability experience higher rates of unemployment and underemployment.<sup>16</sup> Only 48% of working-age people with disability (aged 15–64 years) are employed compared with 84.1% of people who do not have a disability.<sup>16</sup> People with cognitive impairment experience further marginalisation and exclusion compared to other people with disability and are less likely to be employed. For example, in 2018, 32% of people with intellectual disability, 29% of people with stroke or acquired head injury, and just 25.7% of people with psychosocial disability were employed.<sup>16</sup> These difficulties in securing paid employment commonly experienced by people with disability mean that they are more likely to live in poverty and are over-represented in populations who rely on government support.<sup>12</sup>

Disability and poverty are linked bi-directionally, with one condition leading to or being a cause of the other because of disabling social structures, negative social attitudes, and lack of opportunities.<sup>17</sup> Currently, 44% of people with disability are

receiving a government payment compared with 12% of those without a disability.<sup>12</sup> Unsurprisingly, 32% of adults with disability experience high or very high psychological distress, compared to 8% without disability.<sup>12</sup> Young people and adults with disability are over-represented in both the homeless population<sup>12</sup> and the justice-involved populations.<sup>18</sup> Western Sydney residents are more likely to require assistance in their daily lives in all age groups across the lifespan compared to those in the rest of Sydney,<sup>19</sup> and a higher proportion of Western Sydney residents require assistance with activities as a result of severe or profound disability (5.8% of Western Sydney residents, compared with 4.1% across the rest of Sydney).<sup>19</sup>

In addition to known barriers experienced by people with disability, their families and caregivers may also be negatively impacted. Parents and other unpaid carers play a significant role in meeting the support needs of people with disability across the lifespan and their involvement can have a significant positive impact on outcomes.<sup>20,21</sup> Despite this, parents

and carers have reported that their own needs were not considered in National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) planning for the participants they supported,<sup>22</sup> and caring can lead to significant economic disadvantage and isolation as parents and other carers may be less likely to work.<sup>22,23</sup> There is a critical need for a partnership between parents and carers and professionals in supporting people with disability, in addition to strategic planning which considers the needs of families at an individual level, a community level, and a state and federal policy level.<sup>20,23</sup>

It is important to note that the prevalence of disability may be under-reported in some communities, particularly in those where there are cultural or language barriers to accessing health and social services. This can be a particular issue in some areas of Western Sydney that have many culturally and linguistically diverse communities also known to be marginalised.



# THE CHALLENGES IN RESEARCH AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

**Despite Australia being a wealthy country, people with disability still experience significant disadvantage, and Australia has been falling short of several obligations set by the UNCRPD.<sup>24</sup> The production of high-quality disability research and workforce education and development are regarded as effective ways to achieve systemic changes that result in achieving better outcomes for people with disability.<sup>25</sup> However, there are numerous challenges in both research and workforce development.**

Significant workforce shortages have been noted in the disability sector, with over 90% of non-government service providers reporting they had difficulties recruiting sought-after professionals (including speech pathologists, occupational therapists, and psychologists) and over 60% reporting difficulties retaining these professionals.<sup>26</sup> These identified staff shortages have resulted in people with disability often not receiving much-needed health and disability services.<sup>26,27</sup> This shortage also has implications for future workforce development and highlights the critically important role that universities play in preparing graduates to work in the disability sector. For example, by 2024, approximately 500,000 NDIS participants will require support, necessitating industry growth of 83,000 workers, 8,000 of whom will be allied health workers.<sup>28</sup>

There are also significant issues with the quality and quantity of disability research that addresses the needs of people with disability to live well in their everyday lives. National research objectives and data collection mechanisms are needed to ensure that outcomes for particular groups are monitored in line with Australia's obligations under the UNCRPD.<sup>24</sup>

Furthermore, there is a need for investment in programs of research to build a substantial evidence base rather than focusing on individual, one-off projects.<sup>29</sup>

The following discussion seeks to define some of the main challenges and current shortcomings associated with systems around disability research and workforce education and development.

**The first critical challenge is the lack of co-design** in disability research and workforce development. The design and production of research is critically important, as research can change society but can also reproduce existing social injustices.<sup>30</sup> Restrictions on the co-production of research have been attributed to the neoliberal academic structure, where funding has limitations relating to timeliness.<sup>31</sup> Adequately addressing the social injustices people with disability face requires the involvement of people with lived experience within research creation and co-design. Liddiard and colleagues<sup>32</sup> write about how children with disability are less involved in research than children who do not have a disability; this can lead to marginalisation of the issues that are pertinent in the lives of these

children.<sup>33</sup> Even when children and young people with disability are involved in the research process, their involvement is often limited or occurs by proxy.<sup>34</sup>

Research can more readily improve the lives of people with disability if people with lived experience work with or in research teams and help to clearly define the priorities. This then allows policymakers, service providers, and other agencies to enact these priorities and address gaps in overall health and social wellbeing.<sup>35</sup> However, at present there is a reliance on researchers and government agencies to identify disability research priorities.<sup>35</sup> Historically, a culture of silence has developed, where the voices of marginalised groups, such as people with disability, have been suppressed; this has exacerbated difficulties in effectively identifying priorities for disability research.<sup>36</sup>

A recent mapping of disability research in Australia between 2018 and 2020 highlighted a troubling scarcity of research incorporating lived experiences and inclusive approaches, with only 50 of 1,646 research pieces identifying that people with lived experience participated in carrying out the

project. This highlights the need to place the voices of people with disability at the centre of research.<sup>29</sup> This lack of co-design also impacts universities in their task of preparing a disability workforce that is fit for purpose. Co-design of curriculum with those with lived experience of disability may be one strategy to help ensure that universities are offering courses that are accessible for all.<sup>37</sup> A 2023 scoping and gap analysis of undergraduate resources in intellectual disability health called for people with lived experience, to be 'front and centre of undergraduate curriculum development and delivery' (p. 7).<sup>25</sup>

### **The second challenge is a lack of appreciation of intersectionality.**

Intersectional disadvantage commonly experienced by people with disability is exacerbated by systems that do not take into account the multiple facets of a person's identity. Intersectionality was discussed by Crenshaw<sup>38</sup> in terms of how categories of disadvantage can converge, exacerbating the challenges experienced. Disability is one of many marginalised social categories through which disadvantage can be compounded when disability

intersects with other categories such as gender, ethnicity, and poverty.<sup>17,39</sup> The complexity associated with the concept of intersectionality has left some scholars arguing that attempts to consider and incorporate intersectionality into current practice in tertiary institutions have been lazy in their considerations of disadvantage.<sup>40</sup> For example, subtractive or selective intersectionality refers to circumstances where one particular type of potential disadvantage is considered for a person (for example gender or ethnicity) and their disability-related disadvantage is either seen as secondary or is completely overlooked.<sup>40</sup>

Failing to address the complexity associated with disability-based disadvantage when combined with other types of disadvantages may impact negatively on producing high-quality research and workforce development that meets the needs of people with disability. A significant gap remains in disability research with culturally and linguistically diverse communities, with only 1.3% of research papers and 3.5% of research reports about disability published between 2018 and 2020 focusing on such populations.<sup>29</sup>

**The third challenge is the critical need for research and workforce development that takes an applied approach** to solving real-world problems faced by people with disability individually, but also by the disability sector. This shift in approach requires the inclusion of people with disability as participants in research and workforce development to ensure their voices are present so that they can promote solutions for real-world problems. People with disability are routinely excluded from disability research due to research procedures not being inclusive or accessible, including some studies having rigid inclusion and exclusion criteria.<sup>41</sup> A failure to include people with disability as participants in research can result in research outcomes that are not applicable to the lived experience of people with disability.<sup>41</sup> There is also a need to focus on research translation to ensure disability-focused research applies to the real world.<sup>42</sup> Challenges to taking an applied approach can include varied perspectives among stakeholders and the cultures of organisations.<sup>43</sup>

Preliminary findings of a national survey conducted by the National Disability Research Partnership (NDRP)<sup>44</sup> indicate that only 61.4%

of respondents (including people with disability, family members, and disability service providers) reported currently using research. This suggests that research is not routinely being applied to address real-world issues or improve existing practices.

There is a need for stakeholder and practitioner involvement in university teaching so that curriculum is drawn from, and can be applied to, the real world.<sup>43</sup> Universities are well placed to adopt a more visible disability-inclusive approach to educational practice to diversify the student body in ways that reflect Australian communities. There is a need for program learning outcomes which contain disability-specific knowledge and competencies to ensure the future workforce is prepared for disability contexts that are in need of competent practitioners.<sup>45</sup> Competencies which are co-developed with key stakeholders may be an important step towards the training of competent professionals.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, there are recurrent calls for the education of professionals to address the theory-to-practice divide, with pre-service and in-service training recognised as a key predictor of professional self-efficacy and competence. Despite this, applied approaches in such training are currently limited (e.g., placements with people with disability for teachers<sup>47</sup> and health professionals<sup>25</sup>).

**The final challenge discussed in this white paper is the siloed nature of systems and disciplines, with a lack of interdisciplinary collaboration.**

In Australia, individual states and territories have responsibility for general health care.<sup>48</sup> The NDIS acts as the specialist funding scheme for disability service at the Commonwealth level, but each state and territory has its own implementation model. As people with disability approach older adulthood, they experience barriers to integrated care, as silos have been created through the separation of the aged care, health, and disability sectors.<sup>48</sup> The overlapping needs of people with disability are increasingly difficult to address with this siloing of individual sectors. The isolation of people with disability due to 'a lack of inter-sectorial collaboration between ageing and disability support services' is well documented.<sup>48</sup> An approach that has intersectoral integration could streamline supports and reduce the inefficiencies throughout all systems.

Green and colleagues<sup>49</sup> noted the structural challenge created by the lack of communication and integration between government departments in Australia. Addressing the social determinants of health and achieving the UN's SDGs requires input, resources, and collaboration from a range of

government departments.<sup>49</sup> Evidence suggests that the difficulty arises as government departments within Australia are compartmentalised, with department boundaries creating complexity as to which department has responsibility for addressing widespread inequality.<sup>49</sup> While siloed departments have their individual role in achieving specific goals, it is the lack of effective collaboration that results in isolated attempts to address broader social inequalities.<sup>49</sup>

Disability researchers have been urged to build interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary teams and strong links with industry and communities so that creative solutions can be generated that are central for disability inclusion.<sup>29</sup> Likewise, interdisciplinary education has been identified as a precursor to intersectoral and interprofessional practice that could provide cross-disciplinary care in the health sector to improve health care for people with disability.<sup>25</sup>

# THE OPPORTUNITY FOR LEADERSHIP IN WESTERN SYDNEY

**Whilst the challenges are significant, in recent years there has been an increased focus on disability issues in Australia, cultivating an environment where innovations and improvements may be realised. Policy changes, such as the introduction of the NDIS, have fuelled a burgeoning discourse about inclusion and participation. Additionally, the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (the Disability Royal Commission) has highlighted the numerous and nuanced contexts in which new approaches are required to ensure people with disability are included, supported, heard, empowered, and respected.**

A heightened focus on, and need for, evidence-based practice is championed in the Australian Disability Strategy (2021–2031),<sup>50</sup> with a number of initiatives to bolster the volume and quality of disability research. These include the NDRP, which will invest \$12.5 million, and the National Disability Data Asset with an investment of \$40 million. Two of the priorities in the NDRP are to bolster research to enhance social participation and inclusion for people with disability, and to improve employment outcomes for people with disability. Similarly, the Australian Government has recently committed to improving the health of people with intellectual disability through the establishment of a National Centre of Excellence in Intellectual Disability Health.

The Australian Government has also launched several initiatives to attract and retain workers in the disability sector, including the NDIS National Workforce Plan and the Disability Workforce Innovation Network, resulting in funding to support training and education in the disability sector through the Disability Workforce Innovation Fund and the

NDIS Sector Development Fund. In sum, there is national commitment to addressing the appalling shortcomings in participation and inclusion for people with disability by strengthening disability research and workforce education.

As part of Australia's third largest and fastest growing economy, Western Sydney University is embedded within a thriving community which is home to two million people. As noted earlier, a high prevalence of disability is observed in Western Sydney when compared with the rest of Sydney, with more Western Sydney residents seeking assistance with activities.<sup>19</sup> Ranked in the top 2% in the world, Western Sydney University is well positioned as a leading institution to make an important and unique contribution to these endeavours.

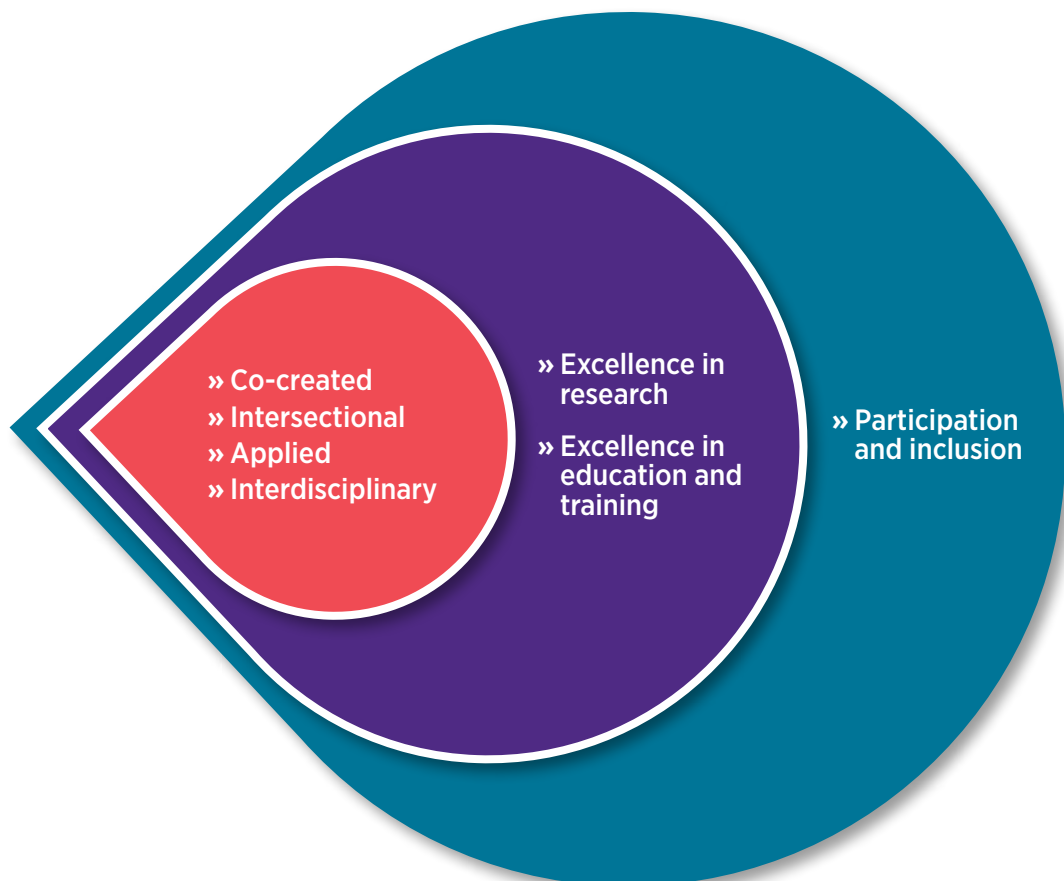
Western Sydney University has a strong commitment to the Greater Western Sydney area, and equity is one of the university's four core values in its 2021–2026 strategic plan. More specifically, it seeks to be a globally recognised university of and for the Western Sydney region,

setting the benchmark for diversity, inclusiveness, and equity.<sup>51</sup> The body of work presented in this white paper has strengthened our impact on several of the UN's SDGs, including: Good Health and Wellbeing (SDG Goal 3), for which we are placed fourth in the world; Quality Education (SDG Goal 4); Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG Goal 8); and Reduced Inequalities (SDG Goal 10), for which we are placed third in the world.<sup>2</sup> Collaboration and partnership are hallmarks of our work, demonstrated best by our ranking as first in the world for SDG 17: Partnership for the Goals.<sup>2</sup>

With teaching strengths in core disciplines that support the disability workforce, accomplished disability researchers across most Schools and Institutes, and rich and meaningful co-creation with our community partners, Western Sydney University is uniquely well positioned to lead the disability research and workforce education agenda for and with Greater Western Sydney communities.

# OUR APPROACH

The work pioneered by the white paper team adopts four key principles to achieve excellence in research and excellence in workforce education, ultimately seeking to realise inclusion and participation. These four principles, depicted in the diagram below, characterise our work as co-created, intersectional, applied, and interdisciplinary. We provide insight into our unique approach by spotlighting key projects across our research and workforce education.





## CO-CREATED RESEARCH AND WORKFORCE EDUCATION

Our research prioritises participation of people with lived experience of disability so that their voices are heard on issues that directly impact their lives. In research and curriculum initiatives, we commonly establish advisory committees so that the agendas and processes, and the subsequent practices or policies that may result, are meaningful and relevant. Often, we have research and curriculum co-leaders who themselves identify as having a disability; however, more can be achieved in this area, as we strive to move from co-creation to centring the leadership of those most impacted by the work.

## FEATURED PROJECTS:

### WESTERN SYDNEY DISABILITY RESEARCH ADVOCACY AND PRACTICE HUB

**Leaders:** Danielle Tracey, Christine Johnston, Jeff Scobie, Grace Fava, Angela Gillespie, Harrison Cooper, Kerry Staples, Kitty Mach, Lise Mogensen, Caroline Mills, William Nketsia

**Summary:** Established in 2021 with a mission for its members to work together to improve equitable, high-quality and inclusive education and community participation for and with people with disability in Western Sydney. Meetings are held bimonthly, and members comprise individuals with disability, parents/carers, disability-focused organisations, and Western Sydney University academics. Workforce shortage issues and the high-quality training of allied health professionals have become a focus for the hub. The hub recently collaborated with two of the university's occupational therapy honours students who created a report entitled 'Allied health workforce shortages in disability sectors' which will be presented at a Western Sydney University Thought Leadership Event in 2023.

### FROM UNIVERSITY-TO-WORK: AN IN-DEPTH EXPLORATION INTO THE TRANSITION JOURNEY OF GRADUATES WITH SENSORY DISABILITIES IN GHANA

**Leaders:** Lois Odame, Maxwell Peprah Opoku, William Nketsia, Patrick Swanzy, Mohammed Alzyoudi, Fred Adusei Nsowah

**Partners:** Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Ghana; Ghana Institute of Management and Professional Administration, Accra, Ghana

**Summary:** This qualitative study conducted semi-structured interviews with 27 university graduates with sensory impairments to explore their experiences with their transition journey from university to work. The study found a lack of transition programs that provided them with information about employment opportunities (e.g., job training fairs, job search, guidance) and support services that would enable them to have access to employment. The few available job fairs and information sessions failed to consider their needs, such as the use of sign language interpreters for the students with hearing impairments and did not benefit them. The participants

indicated that they could not complete the internship component of their program because employers did not give them internship opportunities. In addition, the participants faced a lot of rejection and discrimination during their job search due to their impairments, which led them to accept any offer that came their way. The study recommended the need for attitudinal change among employers, financial support for persons with disabilities to create employment in society, and the creation of transition programs for students with disabilities that are tailored to meet their unique needs.

**Find out more:**

Odame L, Opoku MP, Nketsia W, Swanzy P, Alzyoudi M, Nsowah FA. From university-to-work: an in-depth exploration into the transition journey of graduates with sensory disabilities in Ghana. *Disability & Society*. 2020;36(9):1399-21422. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2020.1804328>

**‘I WANT TO DO MORE IN LIFE THAN JUST, BE A DISABILITY PERSON’: YOUNG PEOPLE WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY SPEAK OUT ABOUT LIFE AFTER SCHOOL**

**Leaders:** Lise Mogensen, Gabrielle Drake, Jenny McDonald, Nicole Sharp

**Partners:** The Endeavour Foundation

**Summary:** This project explored the transition from high school to adult life with young people with intellectual disability, their parent/carers, educators, and service providers. A youth advisory group and researchers co-designed a multi-staged study, including surveys, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups. This article presents the experiences of 27 young people with intellectual disability from six Australian states in the years before, during, and after leaving school. Participants found transition planning at school inconsistent or lacking and felt excluded from decision-making about their lives. Accessing meaningful services, training, and

employment beyond volunteering was challenging and these challenges endured, leaving participants in a perpetual state of transition, feeling lost, and missing out on adult milestones. The project identified the need for a nationally consistent and accountable approach to support choice and control for young people with intellectual disability in transitioning from school into meaningful adult lives.

**Find out more:** Mogensen, L., Drake, G., McDonald, J., & Sharp, N. (2023). Young people with intellectual disability speak out about life after school: “I want to do more in life than just... be a disability person”. *Journal of Intellectual and Developmental Disability*. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.3109/13668250.2023.2245276>

Future-Makers: <https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/future-makers/issue-four/supporting-change>

## INTERSECTIONAL RESEARCH AND WORKFORCE EDUCATION

People's experiences and identities are shaped by multiple intersecting factors. Our research adopts an approach to intersectionality which recognises that these factors cannot be siloed for study, but rather must be considered holistically. Likewise, power and disadvantage work in complex and intersecting ways and social and systemic structures prevent participation. This is particularly relevant for Greater Western Sydney communities where diversity is rich. Our research, and in emerging ways our curriculum design, endeavours to centre the voices of disadvantaged individuals and communities.

### FEATURED PROJECTS:

#### QUEER AND DISABLED: AN INTIMATE LOOK AT A SEX POSITIVE ART PROJECT, OUTING DISABILITY

**Leader:** George Turner

**Partners:** Family Planning NSW (FPNSW)

**Summary:** This funded project examines 'OUTing Disability', a photographic journey documenting the stories of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer (LGBTIQ) people with disability. Through photographic panels, audio stories, and a documentary, 26 people share their stories of coming out, exploring identity, discovering love, and finding pride. OUTing Disability encourages the viewer to reflect on the diverse and often challenging experiences of LGBTIQ people with disability. OUTing Disability premiered its original 19 images at the 2014 Sydney Mardi Gras.

Case studies are being created to understand the lived experiences of the adults with disabilities who identify as LGBTQ+ and participated in the "'OUTing Disability' project. Participants will reflect on their experience of participating in the project, describe their experience of being disabled and queer, and finally answer questions regarding their experience of love, romance, intimacy, and physical affection. Participants in OUTing Disability will be interviewed to: a) explore how they describe their experience

and expression of romance, desire, intimacy, love, relationships, and sexuality in the intersection between disability, gender, and sexual identity; b) illuminate the sexual voice of participants; and c) identify their experience of participating in a FPNSW art project.

#### Find out more:

Turner GW. A vision of justice: seeing the sex-ABILITY of people with intellectual disabilities. In Dodd SJ, editor. The Routledge international handbook of social work and sexualities. New York (US): Taylor & Francis; 2021. 285-299.

Kattari SK, Turner GW. Examining more inclusive approaches to social work, physical disability, and sexuality. *Journal of Social Work in Disability & Rehabilitation* [Internet]. 2017;16(1): 38-53. Available from <https://doi.org/10.1080/1536710X.2017.1260517>

Turner GW, Crane B. Sexually silenced no more, adults with learning disabilities speak up: a call to action for social work to frame sexual voice as a social justice issue. *British Journal of Social Work: Special Issue: Sexualities and social work in the contemporary world*. 2016;46(8):1-18.

Turner GW, Crane B. Pleasure is paramount: adults with intellectual disabilities discuss sensuality and intimacy. *Sexualities Special Issue: Intellectual Disability and Sexuality: On the Agenda?* 2016;19(5-6):677-697. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460715620573>

### **CLOSING THE GAP – DISABILITY SECTOR STRENGTHENING PROPOSAL**

**Leader:** Scott Avery

**Partners:** First Peoples Disability Network (Australia)

**Summary:** Western Sydney University has been funded to provide the research and data development support to a First Nations Disability Sector Strengthening Proposal under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. There are three components of the program: a data development project to intersect Indigenous and disability datasets, with an interpretive guide to assist policymakers in program investment decisions; an evaluation of First Nations community approaches to inclusion of people with disability; and a cultural competency assessment tool for the provision of disability support services to First Nations people with disability. This program is being conducted in partnership with

the First Peoples Disability Network, an Indigenous disabled peoples organisation.

#### **Find out more:**

Avery S. Closing the Gap disability dialogues 2022: a co-production and delivery model for elevating issues and policy responses affecting First Nations people with disability within Australian government agencies. Canberra (AU): Commonwealth Department of Social Services; 2022. Commissioned report.

Avery S. Intersections in human rights and public policy for Indigenous people with disability. In Felder F, Davy, L, Kayess R, editors. Disability law and human rights: theory and policy. Springer International Publishing AG; 2022.p. 221-238.

Avery S. Culture is inclusion; a narrative of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability. Sydney (AU): First Peoples Disability Network (Australia); 2018.

### **CARE TRANSITION FOR AGEING CARERS AND THEIR ADULT FAMILY MEMBER/S WITH DISABILITY/IES IN MIGRANT (CALD & CARM) COMMUNITIES IN WESTERN SYDNEY**

**Leaders:** Daniel Doh, Karen Soldatic, Lise Mogensen, Nichole Georgeou, Rohini Balram

**Partners:** Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association (MDAA)

**Summary:** People with disability and their informal carers are living longer and growing older. This combined ageing process of informal carers and their adult children living with disability presents an uncertain future of care for both groups. If not appropriately understood and supported this can lead to significant compromises in the care quality for both groups. Navigating this transition process is challenging, and considerably so for ageing people with disability from minority migrant communities. Historically, they have lacked access to disability systems support and care, largely relying on informal family care and support. The project will co-produce a resource for families from ethnic, racial, and minority backgrounds to support planning the transition to end of life care for all family members (parents who have been lifelong carers and household members with a disability).

#### **Find out more:**

The Double Bind: Care Transition Experiences of Ageing Informal Carers and People with Disability in Minority Migrant Communities <https://doi.org/10.26183/v6sx-nz30>

## MEDICINE IN CONTEXT

**Leader:** Grace Fava OAM (Autism Advisory and Support Service)

**Partners:** School of Medicine, Western Sydney University

**Summary:** As an Adjunct Fellow with the School of Medicine, and Founder and CEO of Autism Advisory and Support Service, Grace contributes to the training of students in the School of Medicine via workplace experiences and workshops. The students are exposed to a multidisciplinary

team of allied health therapists and the family support team/support coordinators, where they engage with families. The students are shown first-hand what autism is like and they explore issues around how a diagnosis affects each member of the family, not just the person with the diagnosis, as well as learning about the NDIS, the importance of a holistic approach when meeting a family, and how to advocate effectively. Importantly, the students are exposed to the complex needs of families in varying circumstances, who may be

culturally and linguistically diverse, refugees, low income, or experiencing domestic violence, or where a parent themselves might have a disability. Workshops provide students with complex scenarios and ask them to hypothesise how they would support the families as a treating doctor. Reflections demonstrate that systems are often not built to support those with complex needs and remind the future doctors how they can be the change the families are looking for.





## APPLIED RESEARCH AND WORKFORCE EDUCATION

Our approach to research and workforce development is embedded in the everyday lived experiences of people with disability. Our work generates research findings and curriculum outcomes that can be used to address real-world issues. This is achieved via ongoing collaboration with practitioners in the field and with communities.

### FEATURED PROJECTS:

#### EVERY NURSE'S BUSINESS: ENHANCING THE CAPACITY OF AUSTRALIAN REGISTERED NURSES TO CARE FOR AND SUPPORT PEOPLE WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY AND/OR AUTISM

**Leaders:** Nathan Wilson, Andrew Cashin

**Partners:** Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation, Australian College of Critical Care Nurses, Australian Primary Health Care Nurses Association, The Professional Association of Nurses in Developmental Disability Australia, the College of Emergency Nursing, and the University of New South Wales.

**Summary:** People with intellectual disability and/or autism have some of the worst health outcomes when compared to the general population. They are also admitted to hospital more frequently, have longer stays,

and are at risk of potentially avoidable death. A range of issues contribute to these disparities, including health workers having a lack of knowledge about how to adjust their care and support to promote person-centred care. Australian registered nurses learn little to nothing about the health needs of people with intellectual disability and/or autism while undertaking their undergraduate education. In addition, there are few, if any, comprehensive continuing professional development (CPD) or postgraduate opportunities to increase knowledge and confidence in this vital area of practice. Every Nurse's Business is a free CPD program designed with participation from a lived experience advisory group. Containing three levels – foundation, intermediate, advanced – the CPD program offers registered nurses with an interest in this area the opportunity to become champions in their workplace.

#### Find out more:

Cashin A, Pracilio A, Buckley T, Kersten M, Trollor J, Morphet J, Howie V, Wilson NJ. A survey of Australian registered nurses' educational experiences and self-perceived capability to care for people with intellectual disability and/or autism. *Journal of Intellectual and Developmental Disability*. 2021; 47(3):227-239. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.3109/13668250.2021.1967897>

Cashin A, Pracilio A, Buckley T, Morphet J, Kersten M, Trollor J, Griffin K, Bryce J, Wilson NJ. A cross practice context exploration of preparedness, knowledge and comfort to care for people with intellectual disability and autism to inform continuing professional development learning design. *Journal of Clinical Nursing*. 2022; 31(19-20):2871-2980. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1111/jocn.16131>

Wilson NJ, Pracilio A, Morphet J, Kersten M, Trollor JN, Griffin K, Bryce J, Cashin A. Registered nurses' awareness and implementation of reasonable adjustments for people with intellectual disability and/or autism. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*. 2022; 78(8):2426-2435. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1111/jan.15171>

Cashin A, Kersten M, Howie V, Pracilio A, Morphet J, Griffith K, Trollor J, Wilson NJ. The experience of facilitating inclusive research advisory groups with parents and people with intellectual disability and/or autism spectrum disorder. *Advances in Nursing Science*. DOI: [10.1097/ANS.0000000000000497](https://doi.org/10.1097/ANS.0000000000000497).

Pracilio A, Cashin A, Wilson NJ. Barriers and enablers to nurses' engagement with continuing professional development: a survey. *The Journal of Continuing Education in Nursing*. In press.

Watch 'Every Nurse's Business' promotional video, <https://vimeo.com/563106195/4e3957c5ea>

## LIVING WELL WITH GLOBAL DEVELOPMENTAL DELAY

**Leaders:** Christine Johnston, Danielle Tracey, Tim Moore, John Forster, Kerry Dominish

**Partners:** EarlyEd, Noah's Ark, Murdoch Children's Research Institute

Summary: Western Sydney University, along with three project partners, has been funded for this four-and-a-half-year project to develop detailed, easily accessible information that is evidence-based and takes account of the literacy levels and learning needs of individuals and families living with global developmental delay (GDD). Materials are being produced in multiple formats, including written materials, videos, and podcasts featuring those living with GDD. Most importantly, the resources are being co-designed with family members living with GDD. This national online resource was launched in November 2022 and will both enhance the knowledge base of users and provide interactive opportunities for skill development and self-reflection, enabling action for change. The first journal article arising from the project is currently being written.

**Find out more:**  
<https://globaldevelopmentaldelay.com.au/>

## BUILDING A DISABILITY INCLUSIVE CULTURE IN MEDICAL EDUCATION AND PRACTICE

**Leader:** Lise Mogensen Co-authors: Wendy Hu, Duncan Shrewsbury (UK)

**Partners:** Giselle Gallego (UNDA), Lisa Meeks (US), Neera Jain (NZ), Tal Jarus (Canada)

**Summary:** Australian research about doctors and medical students with disability is scarce, but available statistics from university disability services suggest that people with disability are significantly under-represented in medical training and in the workforce. The two research articles listed below were the first Australian-based publications exploring disability in medical education and training. The collaborative critical analysis of disability inclusions in UK and Australian medical education policy (2018) was recognised by the Association for Medical Education in Europe (AMEE) with a 'best paper' award. The survey research exploring community attitudes toward doctors with disability (2019) demonstrated staunch support in the community for an inclusive approach in medical education. These two highly cited publications have directly influenced change in bi-national

medical education policy and the development of the 'Inclusive Medical Education Guide' (2021), resulting in new medical education accreditation standards to be implemented across Australia and New Zealand.

**Find out more:**  
 Shrewsbury D, Mogensen L, Hu WCY. Problematizing medical students with disabilities: a critical policy analysis. MedEdPublish. 2018. Available from: <https://www.mededpublish.org/articles/7-45>

Mogensen L, Hu W. 'A doctor who really knows...': a survey on community perspectives on medical students and practitioners with disability. BMC Medical Education; [Internet]. 2019; 19:288. Available from: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s12909-019-1715-7>

## **MEN'S SHED MENTORING PROGRAM FOR UNEMPLOYED YOUNG MALES WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY**

**Leaders:** Nathan Wilson, Reinie Cordier, Ben Milbourn, Angus Buchanan, Natasha Mahoney

**Partners:** Disability Services Commission WA and Therapy Focus

**Summary:** People with intellectual disability often experience multiple disadvantages in education, work, health, community, and social participation. The seeds of this lifelong multiple disadvantage are often sown during the transition to adulthood. Many young people with intellectual disability experience a suboptimal transition due to limited access to community and employment networks plus a lack of sustainable supports and relationships outside the family. International research about young people without a disability reveals that formal mentors can have important positive influences on this transition, for example in wellbeing and employment. Men's Sheds are ideally situated to support young adults with intellectual disability

due to their unique activity-based mentoring context along with their potential to develop and expand social, employment, and community networks. In this study, 18 young men with mild to moderate intellectual disability joined a local Men's Shed where a mentor worked alongside them for six months. There was a significant improvement in the young men's community-related quality of life, they attended more social events independently, and increased their skills and their community participation. Mentoring interventions can provide a sense of community and help people with intellectual disability develop work skills as they transition to adulthood.

### **Find out more:**

Wilson NJ, Cordier R, Milbourn B, Mahoney N, Hoey C, Buchanan A. Intergenerational mentoring for young adult males with intellectual disability: Intervention description and outcomes. *Journal of Intellectual and Developmental Disability* [Internet]. 2020; 45(2):99-109. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.3109/13668250.2019.1582758>

Mahoney N, Wilson NJ, Buchanan A, Milbourn B, Hoey C, Cordier R. Older male mentors: outcomes and perspectives of an intergenerational mentoring program for young adult males with intellectual disability. *Health Promotion Journal of Australia*. 2020; 31:16-25. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1002/hpja.250>

Milbourn B, Mahoney N, Trimboli C, Hoey C, Cordier R, Buchanan A, Wilson NJ. 'Just one of the guys'. An application of the Occupational Wellbeing framework to graduates of a Men's Shed program for young unemployed adult males with intellectual disability. *Australian Occupational Therapy Journal*. 2020; 67(2):121-130. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1440-1630.12630>

Wilson, NJ, Cordier R, Milbourn B, Hoey C, Buchanan A. Report of the research project: Building sustainable supports for young unemployed men with intellectual disability through intergenerational mentoring at Men's Sheds. Western Sydney University. 2019. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.26183/5cca869b745af>

### **PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE PLACEMENTS IN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY**

**Leaders:** Rosalind Bye, Bronwyn Gill, Kristy Coxon, School of Health Sciences Placement Team members

**Partners:** Jeff Scobie, Macarthur Disability Services (MDS), Grace Fava, Autism Advisory and Support Service (AASS), numerous disability context placement partners across all regions of Sydney and the Illawarra

**Summary:** The occupational therapy program at Western Sydney University is a highly regarded pre-service training program designed to prepare students for registration and

practice as occupational therapists. Across the four years of the Bachelor of Occupational Therapy program, students undertake 1,000 hours of professional placement where they are guided by key industry stakeholders to develop skills for future practice. Community partner organisations are critical to the success of the occupational therapy professional placements program, and in recent years occupational therapy students have been hosted at our disability partner organisations, gaining key disability industry experience. Innovative and flexible project placement models have also been adopted in the second year of

the program to support disability organisations and not-for-profit contexts who benefit from the outcomes of negotiated projects completed by students over 90 hours of placement. Students benefit by being immersed in disability contexts early in their program of study. Final year placements involve two long blocks of eight weeks of full-time placement, many taking place in disability contexts. Feedback from placement partners notes the high level of contribution being made by student occupational therapists to their service. In turn, many students gain employment within disability contexts post-placement.





## INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH AND WORKFORCE EDUCATION

The experience of disability is a cross-cutting issue. This white paper brings together Western Sydney University researchers from five Schools, one Centre, two Strategic Research Initiatives, and one Institute. These include the School of Education, School of Social Sciences, School of Health Sciences, School of Nursing and Midwifery, and School of Medicine, the Centre for Educational Research, the Translational Health Research Institute, the Transforming Early Education and Child Health Research Centre, and Young and Resilient Research Centre. As a group, our footprint in disability research and workforce development exceeds the projects presented in this white paper. We are looking for a more integrated approach for sectors to work together. Because we are an interdisciplinary team we can be at the forefront of this approach. The interdisciplinary approach to research and workforce development at Western Sydney University sees specialists from different fields collaborating to share knowledge and expertise, creating more comprehensive understandings and solutions than what could be achieved via a single discipline.

### FEATURED PROJECTS:

#### VIRTUAL REALITY SENSORY ROOMS FOR PEOPLE WITH NEURODEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

**Leaders:** Caroline Mills, Danielle Tracey, Robert Gorkin

**Partners:** Devika Opsco, The Disability Trust, University of Wollongong

**Summary:** Sensory processing difficulties are known to impact the mental health, wellbeing, and participation of those with neurodevelopmental disabilities. With much disagreement in the literature as to the most suitable approach to addressing these difficulties, more research is needed to explore suitable interventions. With the explosion of low-cost virtual reality, Devika Opsco created Evenness, a multisensory environment recreated in a virtual reality using a head-mounted display (<https://evenness.app/>). Thirty-one adults with disabilities, most of whom had intellectual disability and/or autism, used the Evenness VR sensory room over five months. Mixed methodology was used to evaluate the success of this program, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative measures. Significant improvements were observed in anxiety overall and in depression for those who had depression at pre-test according to clinically validated measures of depression and anxiety. Qualitative findings

were in line with the quantitative findings for anxiety, and the research found that a VR sensory room was acceptable and feasible for use by people with neurodevelopmental disabilities. This study was a world first pilot study identifying positive findings in relation to anxiety and depression, and echoing findings from studies on adults without disabilities. A VR sensory room could offer a promising tool to improve the immediate wellbeing of adults with neurodevelopmental disabilities.

#### Find out more:

Mills CJ, Tracey D, Kiddle R, Gorkin R. Evaluating a virtual reality sensory room for adults with disabilities. *Scientific Reports*, 2023; 13(1): 495. Available from: <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-022-26100-6>

Mills CJ, Tracey D. Exploring the Benefits of the Evenness Virtual Reality-Based Sensory Room. Western Sydney University; 2021. Available from: <https://researchdirect.westernsydney.edu.au/islandora/object/uws:61919>

Mills CJ, Tracey D, Nash S, Gorkin R. Perceptions of a virtual reality sensory room for adults with neurodevelopmental disabilities. *Disability and Rehabilitation*, 2023; 1-10. Available from: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09638288.2023.2169773>



### WESTERN SYDNEY UNIVERSITY-WIDE STUDENT SURVEY

**Leaders:** Caroline Mills, Danielle Tracey, Lise Mogensen, Chris Hastas, William Nketsia, Grace Fava, Terri Mears

**Summary:** In 2023 this team, together with the Equity, Safety and Wellbeing Division of the People Office at Western Sydney University, will design and implement a university-wide student survey to achieve two primary goals. Firstly, the full student cohort will be invited to respond to the survey so that the university may understand how best to educate and support students to cultivate an inclusive society as they embark upon their careers. Secondly, students who identify as having a disability will be invited to respond to a distinct part of the survey to indicate the policies and practices that best promote inclusion and participation, as well as those that may hinder it and thus require transformation. The interdisciplinary team seeks to identify these issues and understand the recommendations of all students, across all disciplines and professions.

### SCHOOL OF EDUCATION'S MASTER OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

**Leaders:** Kerry Staples, Christine Johnston, Danielle Tracey

**Summary:** The School of Education's Master of Inclusive Education provides unique opportunities for teachers and allied health professionals to study alongside each other. This postgraduate program recognises that advanced, specialist skills and capabilities are required, alongside skills in collaboration, to challenge discipline silos and foster interdisciplinary practice. Students' feedback tells us they value the opportunity to immerse themselves in their study whilst working. Assessments which predominately take an action research approach provide transformational experiences. Students say their attitudes and beliefs about disability change and that this has important implications for their work. For example, in one subject – Effective Working Relationships – students undertake a project to simultaneously focus on a shared outcome developed with a colleague and on enhancing

their collaborative practices with this colleague. Students rate this subject very highly and see the immediate connection to their work. One student said, 'I built my capacity as a reflective practitioner which led to a more informed insight and understanding of my workplace relationships and communication styles. I was able to make real life changes that positively impacted how I worked collaboratively with others'. The Inclusive Education Postgraduate Course Leadership Group was recognised by a Western Sydney University Citation for outstanding contributions to student learning for excellence in curricula design for practising teachers and allied health professionals.

# FUTURE DIRECTIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES

## SEVEN CALLS FOR ACTION

# 1

**Build capacity and leadership in people with lived experience of disability to drive research and workforce education agendas**

Increase the number of people with lived experience of disability taking professional and leadership roles to ensure research, workforce education, policy, and practice are driven by people with lived experience of disability.

# 2

**Establish Western Sydney University as a beacon for exemplary interdisciplinary disability research impacting practice and policy in Greater Western Sydney and beyond**

Leveraging their expertise and collaborative approach, Western Sydney University and Greater Western Sydney community partners are well placed to lead exemplary disability research and workforce education.

# 3

**Promote and conduct impactful research leading to policy and practice translation**

Establish a results-driven collective that leads research beyond describing the problem towards impactful policy change and applied practice solutions.

# 4

**Develop a model of interdisciplinary education for a future disability workforce informed by co-creation and research, led by Western Sydney University**

Work with key stakeholders to design and deliver interdisciplinary, research-informed programs at Western Sydney University that prepare students for employment in the disability services workforce and create better employment opportunities for skilled graduates across industry and workforce sectors.

# 5

**Encourage more researchers to adopt inclusive approaches**

Western Sydney University and Greater Western Sydney community partners to apply their expertise to promote the capacity of general research to include people with lived experience of disability via advancing methodological approaches and substantive focus.

# 6

**Encourage universities to adopt inclusive approaches**

With its commitment to diversity, inclusiveness, and equity, Western Sydney University is uniquely placed to work with its community partners and researchers to increase participation of people with disability within universities.

# 7

**Build community and industry awareness of disability justice, and support capacity development of inclusive practices**

Engage with communities to mutually share our collective work to overcome stigma and discrimination. Increase support in the broader workforce and industry sectors to be inclusive of people with disability and develop pathways to employment for students with disability.











# MEET OUR TEAM

**Our team is comprised of a group of leading researchers and educators, people with lived experience of disability, and sector leaders from Greater Western Sydney. Here, our team members describe their background, interests, and contributions to this field. We invite you to reach out and connect with us.**

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Middle-aged white woman smiling in front of a purple wall

## **PROFESSOR DANIELLE TRACEY**

Danielle is a Professor in the School of Education and the Translational Health Research Institute at Western Sydney University. Professor Tracey has a strong international reputation in the fields of educational and developmental psychology, disability studies, and evaluation.

Her career objective is to understand and advance the physical, psychological, and social wellbeing of vulnerable people and communities, especially people with disabilities. She works in partnership with communities to construct and complete meaningful research that fosters real-world impact. This expertise is underpinned by her substantial experience as an educational and developmental psychologist and program manager in the community sector.

Her most recent work sees her partnering with scholars in Papua New Guinea to enhance pre-service and in-service teacher training in Papua New Guinea to achieve inclusion and participation for vulnerable children and communities.

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Black and white photo of shoulders and head of woman with long brown hair smiling

## **DR CAROLINE MILLS**

Caroline (she/her) is an occupational therapist with 15 years' experience supporting children and young people with disability in schools and family homes. Caroline has practised across government and non-government settings in Australia, the UK, and China. She focused on supporting young autistic people with intellectual disability and often drew on person-centred, sensory processing and positive behaviour support frameworks in her practice. Her PhD work focused on supporting autistic children at school. She is currently a lecturer in the School of Health Sciences and the Translational Health Research Institute.

Her career objective is to work with communities and stakeholders on programs to enhance participation, health, and wellbeing for people with disabilities and other vulnerable communities across the lifespan. Caroline has been invited to speak at a number of conferences on her work supporting sensory processing and behaviour, including the Australian Autism in Education Conference, the Asia Pacific Autism Conference (APAC), and the Singapore Autism Congress.

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**X:** [@CarolineMillsOT](https://twitter.com/CarolineMillsOT)

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Middle aged, white woman, blond curly hair, smiling, wearing a blue top

### **ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR LISE MOGENSEN**

Lise Mogensen is a medical educator and a researcher at the School of Medicine and the Translational Health Research Institute. She has a strong international reach in disability studies and child wellbeing, with active collaborations across 15 countries.

Lise is a parent advocate and a critical disability studies scholar with more than 25 years' experience in working directly with children and adults with disability, personally, clinically, and in research. She has particular interest in community-based research, and in addressing social, attitudinal, and structural barriers to meaningful participation in daily life.

She is passionate about translational research that influences policy and practice change to disrupt ableism and injustice. Her publications addressing disability issues are highly cited and have influenced best practice guidelines for health service delivery and inclusive education, with demonstrated impact on medical education policy nationally.

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A Worimi man wearing a suit, wearing two cochlear implants, and smiling

### **ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR SCOTT AVERY**

Associate Professor Scott Avery is an Indigenous researcher who is profoundly deaf. He developed his interest and approach to disability and inclusion research whilst working in community roles in the Australian Indigenous disability community, where he maintains a close connection with the First Peoples Disability Network. He has authored the publication 'Culture is inclusion: A narrative of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability' (2018) based on his research. His extensive experience in conducting community-based research and policy in Indigenous and disability organisations has led to an expansive network in research and policy traversing the Indigenous and disability sectors. This includes being appointed as an expert advisor to numerous government bodies including the Disability Royal Commission, Australian Bureau of Statistics, National Disability Research Partnership, National Disability Data Asset, and the Research Committee of the Lowitja Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research.



A person with long hair wearing glasses

### **ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR ROSALIND BYE**

Associate Professor Rosalind Bye is a registered occupational therapist and a recognised leader in occupational therapy education in Australia. Ros has led the occupational therapy program at Western Sydney University since 2010 and held the position of Chair of the Australian and New Zealand Council of Occupational Therapy Educators from 2018 to 2020. Ros currently holds governance leadership roles in the School of Health Sciences related to educational program approval and student assessment.

Ros is a passionate educator with over 30 years' experience in the university sector. It is estimated that over 1,000 occupational therapists have graduated from the Western Sydney University program under her leadership, and the program is now one of the largest in Australia. Ros also supervises higher degree research students and honours students on topics related to disability, health, and professional workforce development.

Her research covers areas including workforce development, education of allied health professionals, palliative care, family life, and disability. One recent project includes a three-year full-time PhD scholarship which is being co-designed in collaboration with Spinal Cord Injuries Australia and its members to explore the rebuilding of meaningful life roles following spinal cord injury.

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A person wearing glasses and a black and white t-shirt

### **HARRISON COOPER**

Harry has just completed his traineeship with the Autism Advisory and Support Service. Harry's role consists of assisting and serving our customers, packing orders, restocking, and helping with the day-to-day running of the store. Harry loves working as part of a team and prides himself on his exceptional customer service skills. His friendly nature and attention to detail make him a joy to have on our team. The goal for Harry is to develop his knowledge and skills in retail so that he can transition to a larger retail environment in the future.



Middle aged lady with fair streaked hair smiling, wearing a blue shirt

### **GRACE FAVA OAM**

Grace is the CEO and Founder of the Autism Advisory and Support Service (AASS). She has a Certificate IV in Frontline Management and is an Adjunct Fellow in the Faculty of Health Sciences at Western Sydney University. Grace has worked in many diverse fields including pharmacy, office administration, and accounts receivable for various organisations. Her passion for autism was ignited when searching for services for her two boys who both regressed with autism and global developmental delay.

Grace sits on a number of committees in local council, Liverpool Hospital, and Western Sydney University. Grace is responsible for the day-to-day running of AASS and overseeing all aspects of the organisation.

### **ANGELA GILLESPIE**

Angela is the current Senior Manager of Practice and Programs at Connect Children and Families (Connect). Being formally trained as an early childhood teacher, it became clear early on in her career that access and equity for all children to high-quality and local early education and development programs can make lifelong impacts. She has a passion for mentoring and coaching teams and developed this skillset whilst working with TAFE NSW.

Being part of Connect for last eight years has provided opportunities for Angela to work with and build pathways for collaboration between Early Education, Early Intervention, and Family Support teams.



Young person with short brown hair, wearing glasses in an olive coloured top

### **CHRISTOPHER HASTAS**

Christopher Hastas has completed work as a Research Assistant for the Translational Health Research Institute. Christopher has completed three diverse degrees: a Bachelor of Business and Commerce, a Bachelor of Social Science, and a Master of Research. The title of his Master's thesis was 'Exploring the emancipatory potential of online video gaming for people with physical disabilities and their offline lifeworlds'. He has experience teaching Contemporary Social Issues and Professional Practice as well as Introduction to Indigenous Australia: Peoples, Places and Philosophies. His employment and academic pursuits aim to promote the autonomy and independence of people with physical disabilities through advocacy, awareness, and support.



A close-up of a person

### **ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR CHRISTINE JOHNSTON**

Associate Professor Christine Johnston is Associate Dean, International in the School of Education and a member of the TeEACH Research Centre at Western Sydney University. She has a proven record as a project coordinator and extensive experience in the use of multi-method approaches. A strong thread throughout her research program is that of linking research to practice.

Current projects include research around the implementation of the NDIS and the development of information resources for families and children living with global developmental delay and school readiness. Christine's focus and passion throughout her career has been in the implementation of best practice for young children with disabilities and their families. She maintains a strong involvement in the early childhood intervention field both nationally and internationally through her teaching, her work with professional groups, and her research.

### **KITTY MACH**

Kitty Mach is a provisional psychologist with a unique passion for working with individuals with disabilities. As a neurodiverse clinician herself, she possesses a strong understanding and empathy towards her clients. Kitty obtained her degree in psychology from the University of Western Australia and has since then committed herself to helping those in need. She believes that every individual's unique personality is what makes them special. In her free time, Kitty enjoys indulging in her favourite hobbies such as reading, drawing, and spending time with her cats.



Black African man in his middle years, bald-headed with a circle beard, smiling and wearing a black top

### **DR WILLIAM NKETSIA**

Dr William Nketsia (Cert 'A', BEd, MA, PhD) is a senior lecturer in the School of Education at Western Sydney University. His career goal has been to conduct studies that address research gaps in the field of educational, social, and economic inclusion for persons with disabilities and vulnerable people across Sub-Saharan African countries. Dr Nketsia has published in top-notch journals. Dr Nketsia is an international advisory board member, editorial board member, guest associate editor, review editor, and peer reviewer for international high-ranking journals. Dr Nketsia provides expert advice on inclusion to the Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association (MDAA). Dr Nketsia's current research is surveying pre-service teachers and teacher educators to determine their views regarding knowledge, attitudes, and self-efficacy for teacher preparation for inclusive education.

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A person wearing glasses and a suit

### **JEFF SCOBIE**

Jeff has a Masters in Management and is the current CEO of Macarthur Disability Services (MDS). His passion for working with people with a disability started when working as a registered nurse in the early 1980s. Since then, he has worked in a variety of disability-related areas including direct support, staff training, behaviour intervention and support, and senior leadership positions.

His passion for this work has seen him gain a wealth of experience in both government and the not-for-profit sectors and he now has over 40 years' experience working to improve and deliver services for people with a disability.



A person with glasses smiling

### **KERRY STAPLES**

Kerry Staples managed both inclusive early childhood education and care settings and specialist intervention services prior to working at Western Sydney University. She is the Director of Academic Program – Early Childhood and a current member of the TeEACH Research Centre. Her research and teaching focus on enhancing inclusion of children with disabilities through reciprocal and collaborative relationships, family-centred practices, and the role of early childhood educators as community leaders.





A middle-aged male person with spikey, short, platinum blond hair wearing a suit with yellow tie

### **DR GEORGE TURNER**

George Turner PhD, MEd, MSW (He, Him, His) is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Social Sciences where he teaches Practice Skills, Social Work & Health, and Disability and Sexuality. His research illuminates stories... the lived experiences within communities, families, and workplaces around sexuality, disability and mental health. Dr. Turner attempts to expose meaning using narrative enquiry to amplify often unheard voices, voices that have been left out of traditional research methodologies. As a researcher-practitioner, George's goal is to help people have deeper more meaningful physical and intimate relationships, especially those disadvantaged and marginalized. He is especially keen on exposing how a pathologizing sex negativity can be used to silence, shame and segregate. Overall, his research focuses on reducing health disparities by advancing sexual health equity in areas such as sexual justice. In addition to 15 years in private practice in the United States as a certified sex therapist and licensed clinical social worker, Dr. Turner bring to a project expertise navigating "challenging topics" and illuminating the "hidden". He excels at the intimate, up-close-and-personal interview complementing research teams needing skills around open-ended interviews, participant observation, content mapping, online surveys, and focus groups. As a sexual health leader dedicated to developing sexually competent health care professionals, Dr. Turner routinely presents his findings at national and international conferences as well as speaks to professional health groups, community clinics and providers and corporations.



Middle aged white man with glasses wearing a blue shirt and blazer

### **PROFESSOR NATHAN WILSON**

Professor Nathan Wilson is a registered nurse with over 30 years' experience in working with people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families as a nurse, manager, clinical specialist, clinical educator, applied researcher, and independent consultant. Nathan's applied research is focused on enhancing the health, wellbeing, and social participation of people with intellectual and developmental disability, with an underlying emphasis on chronic illness, men's health, oral health, participation, and social inclusion. He has published over 100 scientific papers about disability and regularly presents his findings at national and international conferences.

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