

Disability  
philanthropy  
in Australia

# THE CASE OF THE MISSING FOUNDATION(S)

the  
**achieve**  
foundation

## Introduction



The current state of disability philanthropy in Australia is fragmented and small.

Disability advocates have spent decades working to shift the conversation away from disability ‘types’ towards the barriers to inclusion.

However, a study commissioned by The Achieve Foundation has found disability philanthropy remains highly specialised without any direct focus on inclusion.

The Achieve Foundation is a new philanthropic organisation with a bold vision of an inclusive Australia for people with disability.

We commissioned Queensland University of Technology (QUT) to carry out this research to get a clear picture of disability giving in Australia.

In this short report, we present an overview of QUT’s findings to stimulate an informed dialogue about strengthening philanthropy’s contribution to improving the wellbeing of people with disability in Australia.

The study found that a ‘typical’ Australian disability philanthropic funder only focuses on a single condition or disability health issue and thus adopting a particular support strategy. Philanthropists also tend to fund a disability issue in only one Australian state or territory.

The report found that the disability philanthropy field in Australia is operating at small scale, with no indications of collaborative funding to achieve greater impact. There is no apparent big picture plan or informed vision for the future.

## The research



The QUT research findings are detailed in its report, *Philanthropy for people with disability in Australia: Actors and Insights*. The Achieve Foundation commissioned this work to:

- inform its own strategic direction
- investigate underexplored areas of disability philanthropy and fundraising in Australia
- start a conversation about the future of disability philanthropy in Australia.

The report was completed by the Australian Centre for Philanthropy and Nonprofit Studies (ACPNS) at QUT and provides valuable insights into the characteristics of the under-studied field of disability philanthropy.

### So, what is missing?

The study identified 624 grantmaking charities that include people with disability as either their primary or secondary beneficiary group, using data from the 2017-18 Annual Information Statements provided to the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC). The analysis suggests that the sector lacks coherence, scale and strength.

The incidence of people with disability in Australia – 1 in 6 – is not reflected in the scale of disability philanthropy. This signifies the absence of leadership and a guiding vision for the sector as a whole.

Grantmaking charities in Australia rarely have people with disability as their sole beneficiary group, choosing rather to fund disability amongst a wider selection of causes.

This may have significant implications for funding focus, coherence, and impact.

Taking a broader perspective, few foundations exclusively support and advocate for people with disability as a wider cohort, instead targeting individuals with specific disabilities.

The current patchy and unfocused state of

disability philanthropy presents a significant opportunity for the sector to chart a new way forward.

This new path should seek to understand the challenges for people with disability, to explore how philanthropy can contribute to improving outcomes for all people with disability, and to build a more inclusive, diverse and vibrant Australia.



## What's at stake?



It is well documented that despite hard won progress, people with disability continue to experience poorer outcomes in all aspects of their life experiences than other Australians.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's 2020 web report on People with disability in Australia found that their wellbeing indicators are significantly worse across many areas.

offered preventative healthcare because they are rarely the target audience for public health messages.

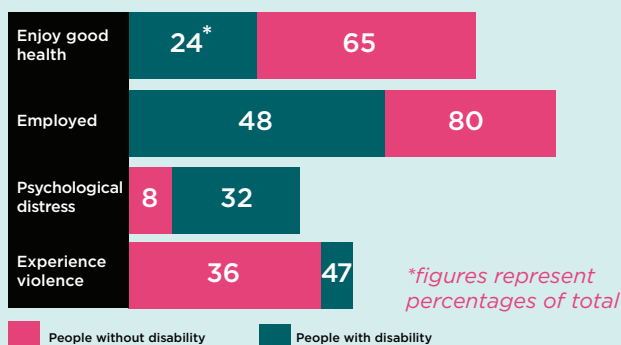
Employers look past people with disability because they worry about 'fit' or costs. Local businesses don't see people with disability as important consumers so don't make their premises more accessible. Because premises are inaccessible, people with disability can't express their demand.

- Inclusion is contained within the legislation establishing the NDIS
- The imperative to build a more inclusive society is under consideration at the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability
- Inclusion once again figures prominently as an overarching theme in the draft consultation paper on the next national disability strategy.

Despite this, there is still no coherent, coordinated plan of action for how to bring about inclusion.

Delivering a plan for social inclusion across the whole of Australia is a mammoth task, but it can and should be done. And while ultimate responsibility rests with Australian governments, the scale and importance of the work requires civil society and the private sector to step up. We cannot wait for government to drive change in the status quo, nor should the work be left to people with disability and their supporters. This is a task for all of us. It is time for the broader community to come to the party, informed and driven by a deliberate and deep dialogue with people with disability.

### HEALTH AND WELFARE OUTCOMES



Years of research and advocacy have led us to understand that these outcomes are not because of 'impairments' but primarily the result of social exclusion - inaccessible spaces, negative mindsets and assumptions.

People with intellectual disability are not



Armed with this information, every major policy document since the 2009 *Shut Out Report* has identified participation and inclusion as a national policy priority:

- The vision of the National Disability Strategy (2010-2020) is for 'an inclusive Australian society that enables people with disability to fulfil their potential as equal citizens'

We have the NDIS.  
Do we really need  
philanthropy as well?



**Yes, we do.**

Around 4.4 million Australians live with disability. The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) currently funds just over 400,000 people.

Social exclusion and structural barriers are an issue for all people with disability in Australia, not only those on the NDIS.

Further, while the NDIS is a transformative and world leading reform, it is directed towards providing the goods and services that support people with disability to reach their individual goals.

It is not designed or intended to remove the barriers to inclusion, which lie in the attitudes of others and in the world through which people move. Plus, the Scheme does not have a remit to provide support that is the responsibility of another government department, such as ensuring that health provision is equitable or that local communities are inclusive.

Research and innovative solutions to overcome the barriers to inclusion are an essential complement to the individual focus of the NDIS. The NDIS will not dismantle the structural obstacles for people with disability, such as attitudes, accessible spaces and communication.

Support for the individual and reform of their environment are complementary and mutually reinforcing.

## Disability and philanthropy: the findings?



There is no unified vision or agreement about how philanthropy can contribute to disability. Overall, our research suggests that within Australia, disability philanthropy is small-scale, fragmented and highly focussed on specific impairment types and support strategies (for example, technical aids, carer respite, and medical research) within particular age cohorts and geographical locations. This may be because disability philanthropy currently reflects the needs of Australians with disability prior to the introduction of the NDIS, when the private sector stepped forward to fill gaps in the service system.

### Size of the sector

Disability is not on philanthropy's wider radar. Based on the ACNC data, the amount granted to disability within Australia was \$26.6 million, with an additional \$31.3 million committed to people with disability outside Australia. This is only a small proportion of the overall philanthropic pie worth approximately \$1.3 billion.

As stated in our introduction, the report found that the disability philanthropy field in Australia is operating at small scale, with no indications of collaborative funding to

achieve greater impact. Key supporting statistics relating to donations and grants include:

**\$10k**

In the 2017-2018 financial year, the average amount of donations and bequests to charities working in disability was \$484,000 – however the median or midpoint was only \$10,000.

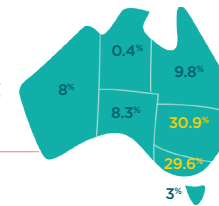
Grants to organisations within Australia that support people with disability in the same period was \$402,000, with a median of \$6,000. It is not certain how much went to programs and services for people with a disability, as many beneficiary organisations provide services for various causes.

**\$6k**

The striking gap between the mean and median averages demonstrates the dominance of a small number of large recipient charities and a profusion of smaller ones.

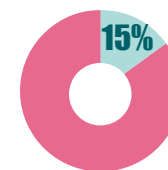
**23%**

Many organisations engage in grantmaking beyond the higher-profile Private and Public Ancillary Funds. Interestingly, only 23% of our sample of charities described



their main activity as grantmaking, followed by economic, social and community development (15%), other philanthropic intermediaries and voluntarism promotion (9%), and social services (8%).

Small charities predominate (56%), and those based in the states of Victoria and New South Wales account for more than 60%.



Despite all organisations in the sample including people with disabilities in their beneficiary groups, only 15% described people with disabilities as their main beneficiary group. Of those, few organisations had people with disabilities as their main beneficiary group without also identifying additional secondary groups they supported. This finding suggests that grantmaking or philanthropic charities in Australia rarely focus solely on disability, choosing rather to fund people with disability amongst a wider group of beneficiaries.



## Literature Review – what is already known?

Our review of key research in disability, philanthropy and social inclusion identified significant themes and insights.

### **Disability, rights and philanthropy**

Historically speaking, appeals by disability charities have often emphasised the dependence of disabled people, generating feelings of sympathy, guilt, and pity. This may do harm by reinforcing negative stereotypes and attitudes. On the other hand, creating positive portrayals of people with disability promotes positive attitudes, important for generating societal change and greater inclusion.

People with disability have been subject to a ‘double branding’ and invalidation - both abject (good to mistreat) and vulnerable (good to be good to). The social response to the abject is seen as exclusion - ‘belonging denied’ - whereas the social response to the vulnerable is seen as charity.

In terms of fundraising, the differences between these two social responses provokes different reactions. Charitable and philanthropic organisations can actively address, challenge, and counteract these issues through a strong focus on social inclusion and empowerment.



The perceptions of charitable giving can also change and evolve over time. In some countries, such as Sweden, the tradition of giving to those seen as less fortunate was prominent in the 1950s and 1960s but was replaced by social rights in the 1970s. It is likely that public perceptions will continue to change, and charities should allow sufficient flexibility in their funding principles to drive, embrace and benefit from these changes.

More broadly, the governance of disability charities is caught up in the politicised associations between the disabled peoples’ movement, the underlying ethos of charity, and how charitable organisations enact this ethos with the creation of ‘helpers’ and ‘those to be helped’. This notion of ‘trusteeship,’ or taking care of something on behalf of someone else, is what the disabled movement challenges and detests about charity. Disability charities may note tensions between both the legal origins and forms of charity and their own aims for empowerment and inclusion, which if realised may result in benevolence no longer being required.

### **Disability service sector insights**

The Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (2006) and the advocacy that preceded it have been fundamental in changing how people with disability are publicly represented.

Contemporary service delivery organisations support their clients as individual rights-bearing subjects with their own aspirations and preferences, not just ‘to help’. Representation in communication and fundraising have changed to reflect the Convention. These trends have been reinforced by the NDIS Practice Standards, which require that service providers respect the rights of people with disability. Vestiges of a paternalistic approach nonetheless remain in the practice and governance of some service providers. For example, controversy continues to adhere to fundraising activities that suggest disability is something that can or should always be fixed.

## What do we know about good practice in disability, philanthropy and inclusion?



A new approach to philanthropy, disability and inclusion should build on the thoughtful practice that is happening in Australia and around the world.

Identifying key exemplars has helped guide our understanding of what is currently happening within the philanthropic ecosystem, allowing us to recognise where and how these organisations have excelled, take inspiration from the achievements they have made, and collectively identify why these elements may be crucial for success.

We identified a number of exemplars, listed in the table below. These organisations are excelling in key areas including recognised leadership (Inspirasia took on a second mission ‘inspiring others to give’), meaningful giving (State Trustees Australia Foundation bequests), clear grantmaking principles (City Bridge Trust grant outlines), collaboration (Jack Petchey Foundation’s partnership with Panathlon), and evidence-based philosophy (Vision for a Nation and Genio publish research).

Key themes and insights derived from the Australian and international exemplars of philanthropy for people with disability are summarised below. These exemplars represent a wide range of national and cultural contexts. For more detailed information on these exemplars, please see *Philanthropy for people with disability in Australia: Actors and Insights*.

### Australian exemplars

- Disabled Children’s Foundation Inc(WA)
- Iwasaki Foundation
- Lord Mayor’s Charitable Trust (Brisbane)
- Reichstein Foundation
- Sisters of Charity Foundation
- State Trustees Australia Foundation
- The ASX Refinitiv Charity Foundation
- The Jack Brockhoff Foundation
- Variety: The Children’s Charity of Victoria

### International exemplars

- Inclusion Canada Foundation
- Jack Petchey Foundation
- City Bridge Trust
- Vision for a Nation
- Genio
- Inspirasia Foundation
- The Nippon Foundation
- Singapore Enable
- Khonthai Foundation



## Key themes and insights derived from the Australian and international exemplars



### Activities of foundations

The majority of statements made by foundations were concerned with the purposes or outcomes of their activities (why), rather than the mechanisms by which activities were undertaken (how). Additionally, there was a blurred distinction between the activities of the foundation itself, and the activities of others that were funded by the foundation. These roles were further co-mingled where a foundation existed to support a single beneficiary organisation. Activity types included medical aid, advocacy, and information access and/or facilitation.



### Advocacy

A specific subset of foundation activities concerned advocacy. Since the Aid-Watch/Australian Taxation Office case before the High Court of Australia in 2010, charities (including foundations) may engage in advocacy activities, providing their advocacy is for a charitable purpose. Examples of advocacy include the Jack Petchey Foundation (youth), Singapore Enable (stakeholder support and employment), and Khonthai Foundation (stakeholder support).



### Statements about inclusion

We examined the ways in which inclusion was framed and understood in the context of disability philanthropy. Each statement highlighted a specific focus within the broader sphere of 'inclusion' and there were a wide range of different, and specific ways in which 'inclusion' is explained to stakeholders.



### Fundraising and donations

International exemplar foundations were funded by donors with revenue ranging from a single individual, to a company or group of companies, to income from physical assets, and the proceeds of sports gambling. None were solely reliant on public fundraising and donations. Legacies and bequests were noted as a source of funds by several foundations. Fundraising was closely tied with the larger concept of stakeholder engagement and one foundation also mentioned an application for significant government funding.



### Beneficiaries - who are they?

While all international exemplar organisations supported and funded people with disability, all focused their beneficiary group to a smaller subset. Several foundations stated that they also funded research, however none specified that this included disability research specifically (medical, health, or social).

*continued*

## Key themes and insights derived from the Australian and international exemplars



### Evaluation of their own work

In light of The Achieve Foundation's interest in evidence-based decision-making, we also looked for evaluation of the outcomes and impact of a foundation's work (both its own, and those of the organisations it funds to deliver programs and services). Three of the foundations specifically mentioned evaluations informing their work. One of these was the evaluation of their funded projects, while two were of the foundation's own internal work.



### Working with partners

Many foundations described working with a single beneficiary partner organisation, or of long-standing partnerships with a beneficiary. One foundation also described becoming part of a large international collaboration.



### Foundation staff with a disability

Only one Australian exemplar foundation, Disabled Children's Foundation Inc. demonstrated that they had board members with disabilities. One international exemplar, the Inspirasia Foundation, supported Puspadi Bali, and had 70% of employees with a physical disability.



### Evidence-based change

Certain exemplars particularly excelled at building evidence to support their work. These included the Jack Petchey Foundation who conducted grantee surveys on COVID-19 to guide plans for future grant programmes, City Bridge Trust, who developed an external evaluation report for one of their programs, and Vision for a Nation who are building a global evidence base for the impact of improved sight. Broadly speaking, the evaluation and analysis of programs assisted with the development and documentation of evidence.

## Recommendations



This report puts forward seven recommendations drawn from both literature and good practice to support the philanthropic community to rise to the challenge of charting a new approach to disability and philanthropy.

### 1. Set a new agenda

Establish a shared commitment to philanthropic giving and support for disability and social inclusion in partnership with people with disability.

### 2. Make giving meaningful and easy

Recognise achievements and champion donors by sharing stories and values. Lower barriers to giving by providing opportunities to give at higher levels, for example wills, co-funding, workplace giving.

### 3. Demonstrate diversity, equity, and inclusion

Lead by example. Engage more people with disability in leadership positions, advocating for inclusive design and influencing strategic direction. Actively include the voices of the 'beneficiaries' in decision making at multiple levels within philanthropic organisations.

### 4. Create and communicate grantmaking principles

Create grantmaking principles that guide the giving philosophy and approach to funding. Ensure understanding of funding opportunities and alignment with vision and principles. Be conscious of time as an expression of power in grantmaking.

### 5. Ensure collaboration and learning

Continually collaborate with and learn from other sectors and build a map of the disability sector for donors and the philanthropic sector. Collaborate with other like-minded organisations to achieve shared goals and outcomes with mutual benefits for both groups.

### 6. Actively advocate and establish policy positions

Engage in framing and advocacy activities around disability social inclusion, with clear and identified goals, for example, public education initiatives around disability and social inclusion, policy advocacy, awards, and recognition of exceptional innovation and/or generosity.

### 7. Practice an evidence-based philosophy

Support future research through think tanks, policy centres, academics, and independent journalists. Expand knowledge in fields of disability and social inclusion, including philanthropic support, through research inquiry, evaluations, and dissemination.



## Conclusion



The Achieve Foundation commissioned this research to investigate the underexplored area of disability philanthropy and fundraising in an Australian context, intending to foster and enhance social connectivity for people with disability.

We discovered that the field of disability philanthropy in Australia is fragmented, with little cohesion or convergence, and no apparent big picture emerging that indicates a planned or informed vision for future systems change.

Now is the time to change this. By showcasing key exemplars both in Australia and around the world, we have uncovered valuable insights which foundations and charitable organisations within the disability and social inclusion space can take hold of and champion within their wider communities.

Through highlighting the effective use of evidence-based decision-making, we can also unite to build a solid foundation for the sector that benefits all groups who are striving to improve social inclusion and create a sense of belonging for people with disability. This encompasses a very wide group of philanthropic collaborators,

co-funders, intermediaries, and nonprofit beneficiary organisations. We can work together to fill gaps and open up possibilities, especially at a time of great adversity and challenges within our society.

This research aims to help all organisations in the sector foster fruitful, beneficial, and long-term relationships with donors. Research, advocacy, and innovation are significant parts of a positive approach to re-framing Australian identity as truly inclusive of people with disability as part of a creative, and diverse community.

### Acknowledgments

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