

MARCH 2025



## BALLARAT STATION PROGRESS UPDATE

The long battle fought by GdA's Central Highlands Region Advocacy Group (CHRAG) for improved disability access at Ballarat Station is now seeing results.

Plans have been approved to build a new disability accessible, all-weather overpass just east (Melbourne end) of what is known as the train hall and work has started on implementing those plans.

A works base is being established near Eastern Oval. The bus interchange is to be closed for all of 2025 and into 2026 (the duration of the works), with temporary bus pick-up and drop off bays being established for that period in Lydiard Street North just west of the Goods Shed because the current bus interchange will close while the works are underway. This will mean that 31 car parking spaces on Lydiard Street North will be temporarily lost. There'll be new road line markings and signage to make this clear.

In February, parts of the roof and walls of the southern station building to the east of the main station building and the northern station platform where it joins the bus interchange were removed to allow for the main works on the overpass to begin after February.

This work included installing temporary supports in the southern station building. We are very happy with this progress.

Of course, what's proposed is not everything we asked for or everything we'd like to see and expect. Consequently, CHRAG and GdA will continue advocating into the future for more accessibility improvements at the Station – an accessible toilet on the northern platform, adult changing

places on both platforms, sensory sensitive spaces on both platforms and second lifts on both pillars of the new overpass. Congratulations to all Involved in getting this Redevelopment this far. Let's keep it up!



An artists impression of the overpass



GdA has completed its Quality Assurance Audit. GdA Board and Staff would like to thank all those who participated or volunteered their time to assist with the audit. Your feedback about our service is of the utmost importance to ensure that we are giving our clients the very best service. The Audit gives us the opportunity to make any improvements necessary to meet the disability advocacy standards. We have received praise from the auditors and await our recertification.

# CONGRATULATIONS AUSSIES

an extract of an article from the PWDA newsletter and webpage [www.pwda.org.au](http://www.pwda.org.au)

GdA congratulates People with Disability Australia (PWDA) former President **Samantha (Sam) Connor** who has been recognised as a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) for her services and contributions to the disability community. Samantha's tireless advocacy, leadership, and unwavering commitment to the principles of "Nothing About Us, Without Us" have shaped PWDA and advanced the rights of people with disability across Australia.

From championing the defeat of the NDIS Independent Assessments proposal to guiding PWDA through the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, Samantha consistently fought for the rights, safety, and dignity of people with disability. Her leadership extended to mentoring future leaders, strengthening PWDA's governance, and ensuring the voices of people with disability were front and centre in public conversations about our futures. It is wonderful that Samantha's contributions both inside and outside of PWDA have been recognised and will stand as a reminder that people are at the heart of the disability activist movement and drive progress for our rights and inclusion.

**GdA also congratulates the many people with disability, Paralympians and leaders in the wider disability community whose achievements have been acknowledged in this year's Honours List.**

- **Neale Daniher AO** – 2025 Australian of the Year, Co-founder of Fight MND and former Australian rules footballer
- **Matthew Formston** – For significant service to people with disability and para sports.
- **Lauren Parker** – For service to sport as a gold medallist at the Paris Paralympic Games 2024.
- **Jesse Bage Aungles** – For service to sport as a gold medallist at the Paris Paralympic Games 2024.
- **Nikki Louise Ayers** – For service to sport as a gold medallist at the Paris Paralympic Games 2024.
- **Jed Norman Altschwager** – For service to sport as a gold medallist at the Paris Paralympic Games 2024.
- **Korey Richard Boddington** – For service to sport as a gold medallist at the Paris Paralympic Games 2024.
- **Thomas James Gallagher** – For service to sport as a gold medallist at the Paris Paralympic Games 2024.
- **Adam Johnston** – For significant service to community health, the law, and people living with disability.
- **James (Jim) Simpson** – For distinguished service to people with disability through legal and advocacy leadership.
- **Penelope Gerstle** – For her significant service to human rights, community health, and people with disability.
- **Brother Thomas Oliver Pickett AM** – 2025 Senior Australian of the Year, Co-founder of Wheelchairs For Kids.

## Huge Crowds Turn Out For Midsumma Pride Despite Controversy

Tens of thousands of people have come together today to celebrate *Midsumma Pride*, despite recent controversy surrounding the event. Members of the community joined community groups and politicians to celebrate the annual event marching the streets of Melbourne.

However the event went ahead despite police and paramedics withdrawing from the event following a uniform ban. *Midsumma 2025* pride march kicked off being led by the *Dykes on Bikes* procession as well as *Boon Wurrung* elders and a Rainbow Aboriginal Float.

Over 7,000 marchers were accompanied by the Victorian Premier **Jacinta Allan** and Equality Minister **Vicki Ward**. “Even though it’s 2025, we are seeing efforts not just to wind back the gains of equality that have been made over the past 30 years but worse, to continue to marginalise, continue to inflict hate and hurt on our LGBTIQ+ community,” the Premier said.

“And I say to any right wing leader who wants to take their cues or take their notes from the MAGA movement in the USA that they have to come through me, come through the Victorian Government and come through the Victorian community first who very resoundingly stand in support of our LGBTIQ+ community.” The 2025 celebration marked three decades of the event and was as vibrant as ever.

Joining the event for the first time this year was *PWDA*, [People with Disability Australia](#), the national cross-disability rights and representative organisation and national peak body for LGBTIQ+ people with disability. 40 *PWDA* members marched in the event for the first time and joined over 45,000 participants for the *Midsumma Festival* celebrations.

“We march because LGBTIQ+ people with disability belong in every space – proudly, unapologetically, and with the full freedom to be themselves. Our presence at Midsumma is a powerful statement against the invisibility and exclusion that too many in our community still face,” said *PWDA* President Trinity Ford. [Article from Star Observer Picture Below from Facebook](#)



# Justice and Equity Centre getting behind important issues!



## Systemic Advocacy

### **People in mental health crisis get healthcare, not police**

Following a series of lethal interactions between police and people in mental health crisis, in 2024 JEC co-convened a panel on improving responses to mental health emergencies. After hearing from experts and family members, NSW Minister for Mental Health Rose Jackson promised to develop a framework for an alternative response to people in mental health crisis.

JEC are yet to see this framework – or any serious consultation with key community stakeholders. With allied legal, First Nations, mental health and disability organisations, JEC are urging the Minister to progress this life-saving reform and hope to see action on a health-led response soon.

### **People with disability can fly in Australia without discrimination**

Equal access to air travel is a step closer after the Australian Government committed to co-designing aviation-specific disability standards, which will set minimum accessibility requirements for airlines and airports.

This was a big win in 2024 and we are now calling on the Government to follow through. Together with disability advocates and disability representative organisations, JEC have highlighted the need for robust standards to address the compounding barriers people with disability face during air travel, from booking a ticket to disembarking the plane.

Co-design of the standards should begin in the first half of 2025 and JEC will take an active role in ensuring the process is genuine, transparent and rigorous.

### **Qantas Changes Policy for Assistance Dogs on Flights**

- November 14, 2024

After more than 2 year-battle, Qantas will now change its processes to make it easier for people to travel with assistance dogs.

In 2022, Qantas refused to let passenger Rachael Fullerton fly with her assistance dog, Strike, claiming he did not meet the airline's particular requirements for assistance dogs. Strike is trained to do several tasks including getting medical help as well as providing physical and psychological support.

Rachael Fullerton was determined to fight Qantas on this issue so others wouldn't face the same discrimination. Justice and Equity Centre took on the case arguing it was disability discrimination as the airline's previous policy on assistance dogs was too narrow for the requirements mentioned in the Disability Discrimination Act.

### **Qantas to improve assistance dog processes after discrimination case**

- November 5, 2024

#### Excerpt from Nine News:

A Sydney woman has settled a discrimination case against Qantas after the airline refused to let her fly with her assistance dog.

Rachael Fullerton, who lives with a disability, was denied permission to travel with her assistance dog Strike in 2022.

...

Fullerton said although the changes were "well overdue", the result will make a huge difference for people who rely on assistance dogs to travel independently.

"It's inconceivable that people with disabilities are still facing so many barriers to service, but hopefully this will set a precedent for improved disability standards and better practices from many businesses moving forwards," she said.

"It's been a very long process to get to this point, but the outcome has definitely proven that it's been worth it."

You can visit JEC website: <https://iec.org.au/>

# NDIS NEWS CEO statement: listening to the community - eligibility reassessments

3 February 2025

At the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA), they are genuinely committed to listening and responding to the voices of people with disability.

This is vital to their goal of getting the right outcomes and supporting the welfare of every NDIS participant. Recently, they've heard feedback and concerns about their process for eligibility reassessments.

These assessments help them understand if a participant's support needs have changed and whether they still meet the eligibility criteria for the Scheme.

They've heard from both representatives in the disability sector as well as participants who are undergoing reassessments. They understand that eligibility reassessments can be stressful and feel overwhelming, their current communications can be confusing and 28 days is not long enough to gather information.

They're responding to these concerns by making some immediate changes to improve this process, and they will keep working in coming months to improve communications and the experience for participants and their families.

From today, participants will now have more time to get information to them. They have extended the timeframe for participants to provide additional information to support eligibility reassessments **from 28 to 90 days.**

They're also working to provide greater clarity through better communication and resources for participants and families about what is involved during an eligibility reassessment. This work involves listening directly to participants and the disability sector about ways they can improve their communications and ensure people can feel as supported as possible.

Work is already well underway and is expected to be finalised in March 2025.

While eligibility reassessments have always been a part of the NDIS, they know the experience is likely to be a new one for most participants. This means the process can make people feel stressed or unsure. For some participants, their support needs won't change. For others, they may reduce over time.

No matter a participant's circumstances, they want them to feel supported in every interaction they have with the NDIA. That's why they are committed to always improving the ways they work.

See frequently asked questions (click) > [for more information about eligibility reassessment.](#)

If you have any questions please them or your "my NDIS Contact" for help, or call **1800 800 110**

## Information/Resources

### Independent Advisory Council releases 2023-24 Annual Report

The IAC's role, outlined in the NDIS Act 2013, is to give independent advice to the NDIA Board. IAC advice aims to improve the NDIS, participant experience and outcomes.

The IAC comprises of a Principal Member and no more than 12 other [members](#), who represent a wide range of disability and advocacy sectors, bringing their own lived experience or expertise of disability. They are the voice of the participants at the highest level, bringing skills, expertise and knowledge that will help the IAC perform its function.

To view the report or listen to the report, go to: [NEWS — Independent Advisory Council](#)

For more information about the role of the IAC visit [Independent Advisory Council](#).

### Useful Contact Numbers

#### Latrobe Community Health Local Area Coordination

1800 242 696

#### NDIS National Contact Centre

1800 800 110

#### NDIS Safeguards Commission

1800 035 544

#### NDIS Complaints

1800 035 544

#### NDIS Fraud Line

1800 650 717

#### NDIS Price Concerns

1800 035 544

### Brain Teaser

How many words can you make using more than 3 letters? Must include the centre letter & one nine letter word

T	O	T
R	P	M
N	I	A



### National Autism Strategy 2025-2031



The strategy is a framework for improving outcomes for all Autistic people in the years ahead. It includes a vision, goal, guiding principles and commitments.

The strategy has also been summarised in a collection of snapshots:

#### [National Autism Strategy General Snapshot \(including language translations\)](#)

- [National Autism Strategy First Nations Snapshot](#)
- [National Autism Strategy CALD/CARM Snapshot](#)
- [National Autism Strategy LGBTQIA+ Snapshot](#)
- [National Autism Strategy Older Autistic People Snapshot](#)

# NDIS CHANGES YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT

From 3 October 2024, participants and their authorised representatives:

- can only spend NDIS funding on things that are in the approved list of NDIS supports
- cannot spend NDIS funding on things in the list of non-NDIS supports.

These lists are available on the NDIS website (click below)

<https://ourguidelines.ndis.gov.au/would-we-fund-it/what-does-ndis-fund>

## Eligibility Reassessment

Participants (or nominees) will receive a letter explaining eligibility reassessments and any required information.

Under new laws, the NDIS may request specific details, such as:

- A particular type of assessment.
- A report from an allied health professional.

Participants have **90 days** to provide the information, with extensions available if needed.

While no specific requests have been made yet, if the NDIS do ask, the NDIS will support participants to understand what is needed, why, and by when.

If someone **doesn't** respond within the timeframe or is found ineligible, their NDIS access may be revoked to ensure support is directed where it's needed most.

Mandatory eligibility reassessments will apply in some cases, such as when children turn 9.

For a full list of FAQs relating to legislation changes please visit the NDIS [website](#).



### What does GdA do?

- \*Help you write a letter or submission to represent your interests
- \*Make a telephone call with/for you or help get info to resolve a concern
- \*Find information about another agency that may be able to assist
- \*Provide information on disability issues
- \*Support people to advocate for themselves

### GdA Office Locations

- ❖ Ararat
- ❖ Horsham
- ❖ Daylesford
- ❖ Ballarat
- ❖ Clunes

**Central Intake 1800 552 272**

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