

# Centre for Disability Research and Policy

## Strategic Plan

2026-2031

Our Centre's mission, vision,  
and objectives for the next  
five years.



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**SYDNEY**



Artwork: details of 'Life'  
by Shai Vletter-Sont



Artwork: details of 'Where  
Flowers Bloom, So Does  
Hope' by Deanne Renee



|                                                                         |           |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>Our vision, our mission, and our values</b>                          | <b>03</b> |
| <b>Our Objectives</b>                                                   |           |
| Our centre’s key objectives and strategies                              | 04        |
| How these objectives align with our Faculty and University’s priorities | 05        |
| <b>Our Performance Indicators</b>                                       |           |
| Our centre’s key performance indicator (KPI) targets and timeline       | 06        |
| How our centre measures success                                         | 07        |
| <b>Our Research Agenda</b>                                              |           |
| Our centre’s research plan and six interdisciplinary research streams   | 08        |
| <b>Our Leadership</b>                                                   |           |
| Our centre’s critical leadership roles                                  | 10        |

We acknowledge the tradition of custodianship and law of the Country on which the University of Sydney campuses stand. We pay our respects to those who have cared and continue to care for Country.



## Our vision

A more inclusive world where people with disability have the autonomy and support to flourish in all spheres of life.

## Our mission

To use collaborative research to drive policy and practice reform. We aim to address ableism and discrimination and improve the social and economic participation, health and wellbeing of people with disability.

## Our values

Our work is guided by five core principles:

**Elevating lived experience leadership:** guided by the principle of “nothing about us without us”, we codesign and coproduce our research to empower people with disability to drive meaningful change.

**Promoting disability thinking and human rights:** we draw on social and critical disability theories and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) to promote human rights and ensure equitable outcomes

**Emphasising a strength-based approach:** while acknowledging ableism and the structural challenges people with a disability face, we focus on abilities, solutions, and the diverse ways of thinking, being, and doing within disability communities.

**Collaborating for inclusion:** we partner with a wide network, including people with disability, caregivers, professionals, organisations, and government, to understand barriers and build an evidence base for creative and effective solutions.

**Recognising intersectionality:** we recognise that disability intersects with other aspects of a person's identity, such as age, gender, sexuality, culture, and socioeconomic status, shaping both unique forms of discrimination and diverse strengths within disability communities. Notably, First Nations people with disability often face double discrimination, however, they also bring the strength and richness of indigenous culture to research and broader society.

## Our Objectives

The Centre for Disability Research and Policy's (CDRP) objectives align strongly with the strategic priorities of both the Faculty of Medicine and Health (FMH) and the University of Sydney's 2032 Strategy. Through our six strategic objectives, the Centre contributes to transformational education, inclusive leadership, impactful research, and global engagement—core pillars of both institutional strategies.

CDRP's commitment to intersectionality and lived experience leadership also directly supports FMH's Leadership & Culture principles and the University's 2032 commitment to fostering inclusive communities and advancing Indigenous knowledge. The Centre's work with First Nations people with disability demonstrates our alignment with these strategic priorities, with emphasis on culturally safe engagement, representation in research, and implementation of Indigenous strategies.

### We seek to meet these objectives:

| Objective                                                            | Aim                                                                                                                                                                   | Projects                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1.<br><b>Drive Impactful Knowledge Creation and Translation</b>      | To generate and effectively translate research into tangible improvements in disability-inclusive practices and policies.                                             | <b>Project 1.1:</b> Enhance Lived Experience-Led Research<br><b>Project 1.2:</b> Inform Policy through Strategic Engagement<br><b>Project 1.3:</b> Develop Practical Tools for Inclusive Practices                                                    |
| 2.<br><b>Champion Lived Experience Leadership and Capacity</b>       | To empower and integrate individuals with lived experience across all facets of the Centre's research, teaching, and community engagement.                            | <b>Project 2.1:</b> Build Lived Experience Research Career Pathways<br><b>Project 2.2:</b> Embed Lived Experience in Research<br><b>Project 2.3:</b> Promote Community-Informed Disability Leadership                                                 |
| 3.<br><b>Strengthen Early-Mid Career Researcher (EMCR) Capacity</b>  | To foster professional growth, mentorship, and opportunities for EMCRs to thrive, ensuring sustainability and future leadership.                                      | <b>Project 3.1:</b> Build a Culture of Mentorship<br><b>Project 3.2:</b> Foster Inclusive Collaborative Research<br><b>Project 3.3:</b> Develop EMCR Leadership Pathways                                                                              |
| 4.<br><b>Foster Collaborative Partnerships for Collective Impact</b> | To expand the Centre's reach and influence through strategic collaborations with internal, national, and international partners.                                      | <b>Project 4.1:</b> Contribute to Disability Inclusion at the University of Sydney<br><b>Project 4.2:</b> Strengthen Internal and National Interdisciplinary Research<br><b>Project 4.3:</b> Expand International Disability Inclusion and Leadership |
| 5.<br><b>Diversify and Strengthen Funding Streams</b>                | To ensure the Centre's long-term sustainability and growth through a diversified and robust funding portfolio.                                                        | <b>Project 5.1:</b> Enhance Category 1 Grant Success<br><b>Project 5.2:</b> Pursue Category 2, 3, and Philanthropic Opportunities<br><b>Project 5.3:</b> Increase Early/Mid-Career Researcher Grant Participation                                     |
| 6.<br><b>Advance Disability-Inclusive Teaching and Learning</b>      | To promote inclusive education by embedding disability perspectives and lived experience into teaching, curriculum design, and student engagement across disciplines. | <b>Project 6.1:</b> Promote Lived Experience in Curriculum and Pedagogy<br><b>Project 6.2:</b> Build Institutional Capacity for Inclusive Education<br><b>Project 6.3:</b> Evaluate and Track Inclusive Teaching Practices                            |

## How do our objectives align with the Faculty of Medicine and Health and the University of Sydney's Strategic priorities?

**Objective 1: Drive Impactful Knowledge Creation and Translation** aligns with Faculty of Medicine and Health's (FMH) and the University's shared focus on research translation and societal impact. Through co-designed research, policy engagement, and the development of practical tools, the Centre addresses real-world challenges and contributes to the University's mission of research for the common good.

**Objective 2: Champion Lived Experience Leadership and Capacity** supports FMH's goals to build capability in research co-design and inclusive authorship. It also reflects the University's values of equity and participation by embedding lived experience at every stage of the research process. This objective ensures that CDRP's work is not only academically rigorous but also socially grounded and inclusive.

**Objective 3: Strengthen Early-Mid Career Researcher (EMCR) Capacity** reinforces our alignment by embedding mentoring, leadership development, and collaborative opportunities for early and mid-career researchers—contributing to the University's aspiration to be a better place to work and grow.

**Objective 4: Foster Collaborative Partnerships for Collective Impact** aligns with both FMH's and the University's emphasis on strategic partnerships. By nurturing collaborations across faculties, with government, and internationally—particularly in the Asia-Pacific region—CDRP enhances the University's global impact and leadership in disability-inclusive research and policy.

**Objective 5: Diversify and Strengthen Funding Streams** supports FMH's research investment strategy by enhancing Category 1 grant success, expanding philanthropic and collaborative funding, and increasing EMCR participation. This also aligns with the University's goal to build a sustainable research ecosystem and support emerging researchers.

**Objective 6: Advance Disability-Inclusive Teaching and Learning** promotes Universal Design for Learning and embeds lived experience perspectives into curriculum design. This supports FMH's goals to recruit and retain diverse students and aligns with the University's 2032 vision for transformational education that is inclusive, accessible, and student-centred.

In summary, CDRP's strategic plan is deeply integrated with the Faculty and University's strategic directions. It advances inclusive education, impactful research, and leadership development while fostering a culture of collaboration and equity. Through its objectives, the Centre contributes meaningfully to the University of Sydney's 2032 vision of a more inclusive, innovative, and globally engaged institution.

## Our Key Performance Indicators

The CDRP utilises a multi-tiered KPI framework to monitor progress across its six strategic objectives. Performance is measured through annual audits of research outputs, financial reports, teaching evaluations, and qualitative impact narratives. A summary of these KPI's is set out in the chart below.

| Objective                                                     | Short-Term (Year 1)                                                                                                                                           | Medium-Term (Years 2-3)                                                                                                                                                           | Long-Term (Years 4-5)                                                                                                                          |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1.<br>Drive Impactful Knowledge Creation and Translation      | 1.1: ≥ 60% co-designed projects<br>1.2: ≥ 60% open access publications<br>1.3: ≥ 70% Q1 journal articles<br>1.4: ≥ 10 policy-related outputs p/year           | 1.5: 40% lived experience authorship<br>1.6: ≥ 50 policy citations over five years<br>1.7: ≥ 50% successful tenders                                                               | - Report policies influenced<br>- Sustained policy partnerships                                                                                |
| 2.<br>Champion Lived Experience Leadership and Capacity       | 2.1: Baseline lived experience representation<br>2.2: Outputs by LE Fellows (academic framework)<br>2.3: ≥ 1 event p/year<br>2.4: ≥ 2 university partnerships | 2.5: LE Fellow Career progression, above expectations                                                                                                                             | 2.6: Partnership with disability-led orgs<br>2.7: ≥ 2 LE Fellows independently funding                                                         |
| 3.<br>Strengthen Early-Mid Career Researcher (EMCR) Capacity  | 3.1: ≥ 80% EMCR's mentored<br>3.2: ≥ 50% projects with EMCR collaboration                                                                                     | 3.3: ≥ 15% growth on EMCR co-authorship<br>3.4: ≥ 2 EMCR-led projects p/year                                                                                                      | 3.5: ≥ EMCR's in leadership roles<br>- Track mentoring impact                                                                                  |
| 4.<br>Foster Collaborative Partnerships for Collective Impact | 4.1: ≥ 2 collaborative initiatives<br>4.2: ≥ 3 external partnerships<br>- Network Mapping Tool development                                                    | 4.3: ≥ 4 shared grants<br>4.4: Shared HDR supervision baseline<br>4.5: ≥ 20% growth on partners co-authorship<br>4.6: 3 international collaborations<br>4.7: Network Tool piloted | 4.8: ≥ 3 Asia Western Pacific collaborations<br>4.9: Network Tool operational                                                                  |
| 5.<br>Diversify and Strengthen Funding Streams                | 5.1: ≥ 3 Cat. 1 grants<br>5.2: ≥ 5 projects inc. EMCR<br>5.3: ≥ 3 Cat. 2 and 3 scoped<br>5.4: ≥ 2 philanthropic leads                                         | 5.5: ≥ 750K Cat. 2 and 3 p/year<br>5.6: ≥ 1 philanthropic project<br>5.7: ≥ 80% EMCR's mentored<br>5.8: ≥ 1 workshop p/year<br>- Monitoring/peer-review process                   | 5.9: ≥ 5 EMCR-led grants<br>5.10: ≥ 1 national collaboration grant/s<br>5.11: ≥ 2 philanthropic partnerships<br>5.12: ≥ 4 Cat. 1 grants p/year |
| 6.<br>Advance Disability-Inclusive Teaching and Learning      | 6.1: ≥ 2 leadership engagements<br>6.2: ≥ 1 school presentation p/year<br>6.3: ≥ 1 research project                                                           | 6.4: ≥ 2 LE teaching-focused initiatives<br>6.5: ≥ 2 HDR students on disability inclusive teaching<br>6.6: Design tool to track lived experience teaching in school               | 6.7: ≥ 3 university-wide engagements<br>- Evaluate faculty perceptions of inclusive education                                                  |

## How are we measuring success in our objectives?

### Objective 1: Drive Impactful Knowledge Creation and Translation

From 2026 to 2031, CDRP will drive high-quality, impactful disability research by embedding lived experience across research design, outputs and translation. Early priorities include co-designed projects, open-access dissemination, and publication in leading journals, alongside systematic tracking of policy-relevant outputs. Medium-term efforts will strengthen inclusive authorship, increase policy citations, and expand commissioned and tendered work with government partners. By the later stages of the plan, CDRP will demonstrate sustained policy partnerships and clearly articulate its influence on policy development, supported by tools that capture and visualise real-world impact beyond traditional academic measures.

### Objective 2: Champion Lived Experience Leadership and Capacity

CDRP will foster a culture where lived experience leadership is embedded, supported and visible throughout the Centre. Initial actions focus on establishing a baseline of lived experience representation, supporting research outputs of Lived Experience Fellows, and promoting disability leadership through events and institutional partnerships. Medium-term priorities include developing tailored career pathways and leadership opportunities, with progression tracked against ambitious performance indicators. By 2031, CDRP will formalise partnerships with disability-led organisations and support multiple Lived Experience Fellows to transition into independently funded roles, strengthening sustainable leadership capacity within and beyond the Centre.

### Objective 3: Strengthen Early-Mid Career Researcher (EMCR) Capacity

CDRP will build EMCR capability through mentoring, collaboration and leadership development embedded in Centre activities. In the short term, most EMCRs will have access to mentoring and participate in collaborative research projects. Medium-term actions include strengthening EMCR track records through increased co-authorship, leadership of strategically aligned projects, and monitoring mentoring engagement. Over the long term, mentoring will be embedded into Centre culture via formal frameworks, and EMCRs will increasingly contribute to governance, leadership and external representation, supporting a resilient and future-focused research workforce.

### Objective 4: Foster Collaborative Partnerships for Collective Impact

Across the Strategy period, CDRP will strengthen collaborations to maximise collective impact across research, policy and practice. Early efforts focus on expanding internal, national and cross-sector partnerships, alongside developing tools to map collaboration networks and outcomes. Medium-term priorities include shared grants, co-authored publications, HDR supervision, and international collaborations. By 2031, CDRP will demonstrate regional leadership in disability-inclusive research within the Asia-Pacific, supported by an operational network mapping system that enables ongoing evaluation, visibility and learning from collective impact.

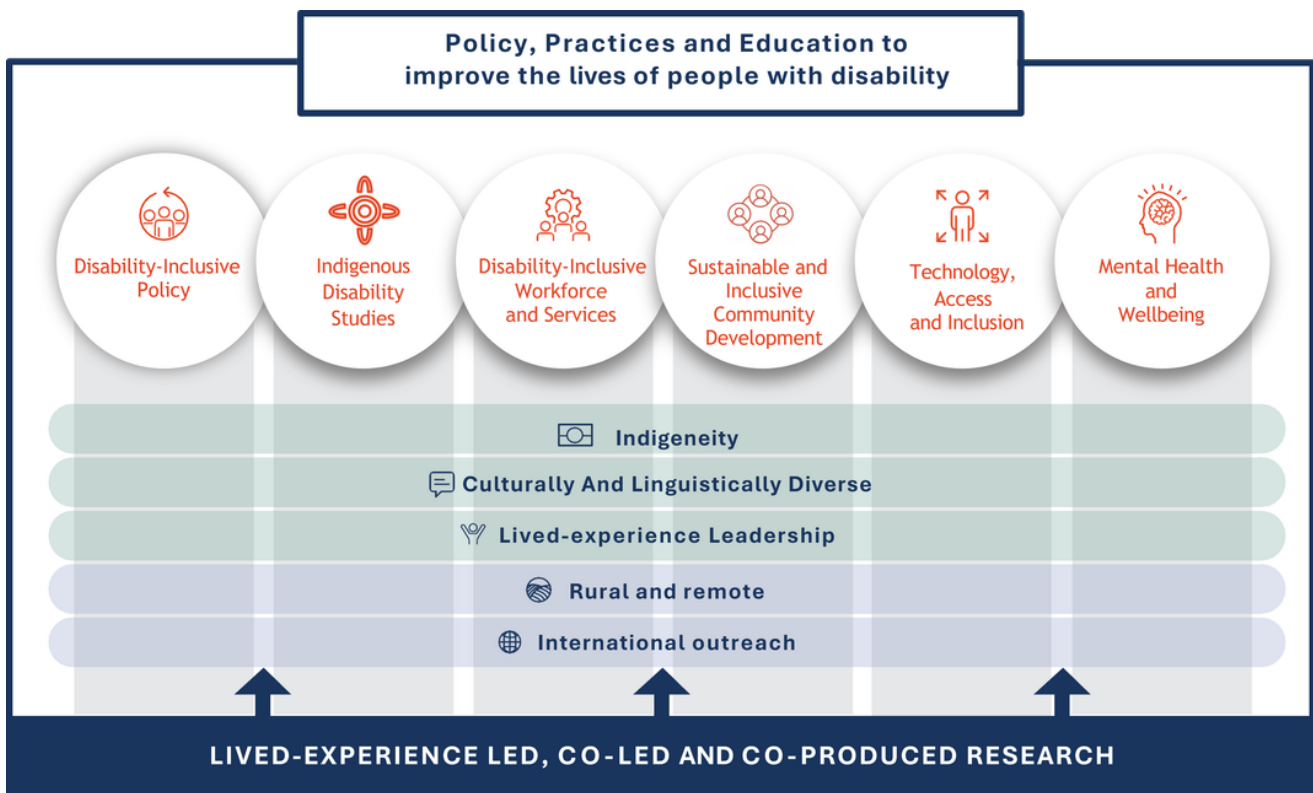
### Objective 5: Diversify and Strengthen Funding Streams

CDRP will develop a strong and diversified funding portfolio aligned with research excellence and workforce development. Short-term priorities include Category 1 grant activity, increased EMCR participation in funding applications, and scoping Category 2/3 and philanthropic opportunities. Medium-term goals focus on securing significant non-Category 1 funding, developing philanthropic projects, and strengthening EMCR grant capability through mentoring and workshops. By the final phase, EMCRs will increasingly lead grants, large collaborative funding bids will be pursued, philanthropic partnerships sustained, and a consistently high level of Category 1 activity maintained.

### Objective 6: Advance Disability-Inclusive Teaching and Learning

CDRP will lead and influence disability-inclusive teaching through engagement, research and institutional change. Early actions include engaging education leaders, delivering school-level presentations on lived experience teaching, and initiating research on inclusive teaching practices. Medium-term efforts focus on promoting lived experience teaching across the University, supervising HDR students in inclusive education, and piloting tools to track inclusive teaching practice. By 2031, CDRP will extend its influence through university-wide engagement and systematic evaluation of faculty perceptions, supporting lasting cultural change in teaching and learning.

## Our Research Streams and Agenda



### Stream 1: Inclusive Policy

Led by Professor Jen Smith-Merry, this stream addresses the fact that policies for people with disability are often ineffective or tokenistic because they are developed without meaningful input from those they affect. Key researchers include Damian Mellifont and KC Stegley, who are developing evidence-based mental health policy models for trans and gender-diverse employees, and Kim Bulkeley and Gwynnyth Llewellyn, who lead the Health Equity Global Health Policy agenda with WHO Geneva.

The stream is currently supported by an ARC Industry Laureate fellowship of over \$6 million awarded to Professor Smith-Merry, which focuses on improving NDIS access for people with psychosocial disability until 2029. Working alongside researchers like Jade Chang, Joel Hollier, and Firew Bobo, the team provides evidence-based advice to reform NDIS operations and associated community supports. Milestones include strengthening partnerships with disability sector stakeholders and supporting EMCRs like Jodie Bailie in aligning evidence with policy opportunities for system change.

### Stream 2: Indigenous Disability Studies

The aim of the stream is to govern and foster the growth of Indigenous disability lead research at a global level. The theme engages with Indigenous peoples with disability in a research capacity within community traditional indigenous research methodologies, cultures, languages (oral and sign language), standpoints, and lores. The scope is to decolonise and Indigenise disability scholarship that involves Indigenous peoples, putting Indigenous peoples at the forefront of disability scholarship about their families and communities.

**Stream 3: Inclusive and Sustainable Community Development**

Professor Michelle Villeneuve leads this node, which champions disability-inclusive community development to combat the dual threats of overprotection—which limits independence—and neglect, where needs are ignored. The stream's goal is to transform protective measures into genuine supports for inclusion.

The primary focus is Disability Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction (DIDRR), with active projects including emergency planning in Western Australia (2025–2027), peer leadership programs, and local council partnerships for P-CEP implementation. Future milestones include attaining a major national grant to fund research beyond disaster reduction and creating a pilot program to train people with disability as advocates for inclusive community development.

**Stream 4: Inclusive Workforce and Services**

Led by Associate Professor Roxanna Pebdani and Doctor Rebecca Sutherland, this stream focuses on building a diverse, skilled workforce and effective services for underserved groups, including those in rural areas and First Nations communities.

A key initiative is the ARC Indigenous Discovery project (2025–2030, >\$2 million), led by Professor John Gilroy, aiming to attract and recruit Aboriginal people into the disability workforce. Additional research includes an ARC grant (2025–2028) regarding formal sector employment in Timor-Leste, and international efforts to strengthen the occupational therapy workforce in Vietnam. The stream also explores telehealth for autism assessments and the association between oral health and quality of life for individuals with developmental disabilities.

**Stream 5: Technology, Access and Inclusion**

This newly developing stream, led by Associate Professor Isabelle Boisvert, treats accessibility as a basic human right. Collaborating with Professor Alistair McEwan and the Faculty of Engineering, the node focuses on people with sensory loss, speech, or physical disabilities.

Research initiatives include soft-knee robotics, 3D-printable assistive technologies, and adapted voice-recognition software. Strategic milestones include securing competitive national grants, such as the NHMRC Ideas grant, to expand research into hearing loss and deafblindness, and continuing the growth of the Dual Sensory Impairment (DSI) web resources to disseminate practical materials and research outcomes.

**Stream 6: Mental Health and Wellbeing**

Led by Associate Professor Justin Scanlan, this stream aims to improve the lives of individuals with psychosocial disability by amplifying user voices in policy-making. Flagship projects include DRIV-R, a co-designed recovery app led by Nicola Hancock, Anne Honey, and Justin Scanlan.

Other initiatives include Sophie Lewis's work on young people and chronicity, and health equity interventions for young Australians led by Jodie Bailie and Gwynnyth Llewelyn. The stream is supported by an NHMRC Synergy Grant and the Moyira Elizabeth Vine Fund. Key milestones include the rollout of the DRIV-R app into government services and developing partnerships to support university success for students with psychosis.

## Our Leadership

The **Core Leadership Team** is responsible for supervision and day-to-day management of the centre. It reports to the core leadership group.

The **Leadership Group** meets monthly to guide the operations and collaborate to develop strategy and make critical decisions. Within the leadership group, stream leaders oversee the centre streams around which the CDRP is organised. The streams bring together researchers involved in a common area of work. Stream leaders provide mentoring to EMCRs, organise collaborative responses to tenders and projects, and help to disseminate knowledge.

### Core Leadership Team

| Director              | Deputy Director           | Centre Manager      |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|
| A/Prof. Shane Clifton | Prof. Michelle Villeneuve | Dr Virginie Lecomte |

### Centre Leadership Group

| Research Stream Leaders                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Focus Area Leads                                                                                                                                                                                                   | WHO CC Co-Lead       |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>&gt; <b>Inclusive Policy</b><br/>Prof. Jen Smith-Merry</li><li>&gt; <b>Indigenous Disability Studies</b><br/>Prof. John Gilroy</li><li>&gt; <b>Inclusive and Sustainable Development</b><br/>Prof. Michelle Villeneuve</li><li>&gt; <b>Inclusive Workforce and Services</b><br/>A/Prof. Roxanna Pebdani<br/>Dr Rebecca Sutherland</li><li>&gt; <b>Mental Health and Wellebing</b><br/>A/Prof. Justin Scanlan</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>&gt; <b>Lived Experience</b><br/>Dr Damian Mellifont</li><li>&gt; <b>Regional, Rural and Remote</b><br/>Dr Jodie Bailie</li><li>&gt; <b>EMCR</b><br/>Dr Jade Chang</li></ul> | A/Prof. Kim Bulkeley |



Centre for Disability Research and Policy  
Strategic Plan 2026 - 2031  
Pub. June 2026

Centre for Disability Research and Policy  
Faculty of Medicine and Health  
University of Sydney  
[disabilitypolicy.centre@sydney.edu.au](mailto:disabilitypolicy.centre@sydney.edu.au)

[www.sydney.edu.au/medicine-health/our-research/research-centres/centre-for-disability-research-and-policy](http://www.sydney.edu.au/medicine-health/our-research/research-centres/centre-for-disability-research-and-policy)

Centre for Disability  
Research and Policy

