

Australian Autism Alliance

Submission to Treasury

2026 – 27 Federal Pre-Budget Submission

Reform for Productivity, Safety and System Sustainability

A Five-Stream Investment Framework for Autistic Australians and Strengthen National Productivity

Submitted to: The Hon. Treasurer of Australia via online submission portal

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Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the First Nations and Traditional Owners of the land, sea and waterways and pay respects to Elders past, and present and recognise those whose ongoing effort to protect and promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures will leave a lasting legacy for future Elders and leaders.

We recognise the enduring connection that First Nations peoples have to land, waters, culture, and community. This land was, is, and always will be Aboriginal land.

We acknowledge the individual and collective expertise of those with a living or lived experience of disability, as well as the lived experience of people who have been carers. We recognise their vital contribution at all levels and value the courage of those who share their unique perspective for the purpose of learning and growing together to achieve better outcomes for all.

Dear Treasurer,

The Australian Autism Alliance (Alliance) welcomes the opportunity to make this 2026-2027 pre-budget submission.

About the Australian Autism Alliance

www.australianautismalliance.org.au

The Australian Autism Alliance (the Alliance) was established in 2016 and aims to improve the life chances of autistic people and facilitate collaboration within the autism community. The members represent a cohesive national network of key organisations with a diverse focus on autism – that is led by autistic people, advocacy groups, peak bodies, service providers, and researchers.

We reach over half a million people through our communication channels and provide support to people with autism across the lifespan. Most importantly, our work is informed by Autistic people and the Australian Autism community.

The Alliance is a funded Disability Representative Organisation (DRO) and is Australia's strong voice for autism. The Alliance works across government and systems to translate lived experience into evidence-based policy, enforceable safeguards, and measurable outcomes. The Alliance supports Australian government in various roles and representations, including: DSS Disability, Representative Organisation, the NDIA Autism Advisory Group, the NDIA DRCO Co-Design Advisory and Reform groups, NDIS Commission Disability Sector Consultative group, National Autism Strategy Oversight Council member, and National Health and Mental Health Roadmap for Autistic people.

We:

- are Australia's first diverse collaborative network of autism organisations bringing together a range of autism interests.
- are a funded Disability Representative Organisation (DRO) since 2024 advocating reach well over half a million people through our communication channels and provide support to Autistic people across the lifespan from early childhood to adulthood. Most importantly, our work is informed by Autistic people and the Australian Autism community
- have significant national and international linkages for advocacy, research and service delivery.
- worked with government to secure pre-election commitments for the National Autism Strategy and National Health and Mental Health Roadmap
- continue to support government through being active in various roles and representations, including: DHDA DRO forums, the NDIA Autism Advisory Group, the NDIA DRCO Co-Design Advisory and Reform groups, NDIS Commission Disability Sector Consultative group, National Autism Strategy Oversight Council member, National Health and Mental Health Roadmap for Autistic people, and Children's Expert Advisory Group
- have been a witness at a number of inquiries including the Senate Inquiry into Autism and the NDIS Capability and Culture of the NDIA.
- commissioned the largest and most comprehensive community consultation survey of Autistic people and their families and carers in Australia to inform the Senate Inquiry into Autism with over 3,800 responses received.

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1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Australian Government is advancing major reforms across disability, early childhood, workforce participation, education and digital government systems to improve sustainability, productivity and service outcomes.

For Autistic Australians, these reforms present both opportunity and material fiscal risk. Without autism-specific evidence, participant safeguards, strong market oversight and inclusive education pathways, reform may shift costs into health, education, housing, justice and crisis systems rather than delivering long-term economic and social returns.

This submission presents a five-stream investment framework designed to:

- Improve national productivity, education completion and workforce participation
- Reduce long-term public expenditure through early, evidence-based intervention
- Strengthen market integrity and system governance
- Ensure measurable, cross-portfolio accountability for outcomes
- Protect public investment through validated, autism-specific reform design

The Alliance recommends targeted, staged investment in system infrastructure rather than fragmented program funding, aligning with Treasury priorities of fiscal discipline, productivity growth and risk management.

2.0 KEY PRIORITIES

2.1 Purpose

We submit that fully funding the National Autism Strategy, the National Health and Mental Health Roadmap, inclusive education pathways, autism-specific evidence and validation systems, and workforce participation measures are among the highest-return levers available to Treasury for improving national productivity while reducing long-term public expenditure.

To secure targeted Federal Budget investment that ensures national reforms across the NDIS, health, mental health, education, early intervention, and workforce systems are trialled, validated and fiscally sustainable for Autistic Australians as a distinct neurodevelopmental cohort, supported by transparent, Parliament-facing outcomes and investment review.

Policy Context - Why Autism Requires Targeted Investment

Autistic Australians experience significantly lower education completion rates, reduced workforce participation, and higher rates of mental health crisis, housing insecurity, and carer dependence. These outcomes drive whole-of-government costs across health, welfare, justice, housing, and lost productivity.

Economic modelling indicates that modest improvements in Autistic employment participation and informal carer workforce return could generate between \$1.4 billion and \$4 billion annually in productivity and GDP gains alongside reductions in welfare dependency, hospital admissions, and crisis service demand. This return is contingent on systems being autism-informed, evidence-based, and accountable.

The National Autism Strategy and the National Roadmap to Improve the Health and Mental Health of Autistic People provide a strong policy foundation. However, their effectiveness depends on funded delivery, cross-jurisdictional coordination, and transparent accountability mechanisms.

Also major national reforms are currently being advanced without autism-specific clinical validation, cohort trials, or transition safeguards. This creates a material risk of cost shifting rather than cost containment, and system harm rather than system efficiency

2.2 Five-Stream Budget Framework

2.2.1 Stream 1 - Fully Funded National Autism Strategy Delivery, Evaluation and Accountability Investment

Objective

Convert national commitments into measurable, cross-portfolio outcomes through funded coordination, independent evaluation and public accountability.

Key Components

- a) Establish a **National Autism Strategy Delivery and Evaluation Framework** hosted within the existing Autism Policy Team in DHDA
- b) Create a **small, fixed-term delivery and evaluation function** focused on cross-portfolio coordination, outcomes reporting and investment performance — not policy development

- c) Fund **annual public reporting** against national indicators in health, education, employment, disability and housing
- d) Support **state and territory alignment agreements** tied to shared performance measures

Budget Impact

A low-cost, high-leverage governance investment that protects return on all downstream spending by identifying underperforming programs early and reducing fragmentation and duplication.

2.2.2 Stream 2 - Fully Funded National Health and Mental Health Roadmap, Crisis Prevention and Early Intervention Investment

Objective

Reduce preventable hospitalisation, mental health crises and long-term system disengagement through validated, autism-informed health and early intervention systems.

Key Components

- a) Fund implementation of the National Roadmap to Improve the Health and Mental Health of Autistic People (2025–2035)
- b) Expand Medicare access for autism-informed assessments and therapies, including removal of age caps and increased rebates
- c) Implement national early autism screening standards in primary healthcare
- d) Fund national autism-informed crisis response standards, workforce training frameworks and intergovernmental agreements across mental health, hospital and emergency systems

Budget Impact

Targeted prevention reduces high-cost emergency admissions, acute psychiatric care and long-term welfare reliance, generating cross-portfolio savings.

2.2.3 Stream 3 - Economic Participation, Carer Workforce Return and Inclusive Education Package

Objective

Increase national productivity and education completion by improving employment outcomes for Autistic Australians, enabling informal carers to return to the workforce, and ensuring safe, inclusive education pathways across the lifespan.

Key Components

- a) Develop a **National Autism Economic Independence Framework** linking education, employment services, NDIS supports and employer incentives.
- b) Fund **employer capability programs** for neurodiversity-inclusive hiring and workplace design
- c) Introduce a **Carer Workforce Return Package**, including phased income supports, flexible employment pathways and small business and self-employment assistance.
- d) Deliver a **National Roadmap for Safe, Quality and Inclusive Education** across early learning and care, primary, secondary, vocational and tertiary settings.
- e) Establish targeted measures to address the growing “**school can’t**” crisis, including autism-informed attendance, engagement and transition supports.

Budget Impact

Improves labour force participation, education completion, household income and tax receipts, and reduces long-term welfare, health and justice system costs. Conservative modelling indicates multi-billion-dollar annual productivity gains.

2.2.4 Stream 4 — Market Integrity, Safeguards and System Sustainability Investment

Objective

Protect vulnerable participants and public expenditure through stronger provider oversight, transparency and system performance monitoring.

Key Components

- Fund **proactive, intelligence-led auditing and high-risk service monitoring** within the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission
- Establish a **Vulnerable Participant Protection Pathway**, including independent review triggers for proposed reductions in essential supports
- Implement **public reporting** on provider performance, sanctions, service gaps and complaint outcomes
- Fund a **participant-centred digital and analytics pilot** to improve provider matching, detect service failure risks, forecast workforce gaps and support consistent decision-making

Budget Impact

Strengthens value-for-money in public expenditure, reduces system leakage and protects participant safety and scheme sustainability.

2.2.5 Stream 5 — National Autism Evidence, Trials and Validation Program

Objective

Ensure reforms affecting Autistic Australians are clinically safe, effective and economically sound before national rollout.

Key Components

- a) Fund autism-specific cohort trials across:
 - i. Early intervention and Thriving Kids models
 - ii. NDIS access and pathway reforms (including ICAN)
 - iii. Mainstream education, health and employment systems

Deliverables

- a) Longitudinal outcomes tracking across health, education, employment, disability and justice
- b) Public reporting on effectiveness, risks and fiscal impact
- c) **Evidence thresholds for national scaling**, aligned with staged public investment and infrastructure-style funding models

Budget Impact

Protects public investment by preventing large-scale rollout of unvalidated reforms and reducing downstream crisis expenditure.

2.3 Cross-Cutting Governance and Investment Discipline

This function underpins and evaluates **all five budget streams** by providing independent, Parliament-facing analysis of outcomes, cost-effectiveness, and return on public investment. It ensures that funding decisions across health, education, disability, employment, and market reform are guided by **measurable performance, fiscal impact, and value-for-money**, rather than process or activity alone.

2.4 Independent National Autism Outcomes and Investment Review Function (Cross-Cutting)

Objective

Strengthen Parliament and Treasury's visibility of the **economic, social, and fiscal return** on autism-related public investment across all five streams.

Design

Establish an **independent outcomes and investment review function**, hosted within an existing national agency or independent evaluation framework, reporting annually to Parliament. The function will operate at arm's length from policy and program delivery bodies and will complement — not duplicate — National Autism Strategy governance structures.

Scope

- Whole-of-government **fiscal and productivity impacts** of delayed, fragmented, or inaccessible autism support
- **Return on investment** from early intervention, health and mental health system accessibility, inclusive education completion, and workforce participation initiatives
- **System performance and value-for-money** across disability, health, education, housing, employment, and justice portfolios
- Performance benchmarking of all five budget streams against agreed national outcomes indicators

2.6 Implementation Approach

- Pilot programs with defined performance benchmarks
- Independent evaluation at two-year intervals
- National scaling only where outcome and cost-effectiveness thresholds are met
- Formal co-design with Autistic people embedded in governance and evaluation structures

3.0 CONCLUSION

The Alliance supports the Government's commitment to sustainable, evidence-based reform and national productivity growth. For Autistic Australians, these objectives are best achieved through targeted investment in governance, health systems, economic participation, inclusive education, market integrity and reform validation.

By adopting this five-stream framework, the 2026–27 Budget can deliver measurable improvements in life outcomes while strengthening fiscal sustainability across health, education, employment and disability systems.

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Attachments:

a) Economic Reform Roundtable Submission — Australian Autism Alliance

ATTACHMENT A Economic Reform Roundtable 2025 Submission

Turning Commitments into Measurable Gains: for Autistic Australians and Enabling Carers to Re-enter the Workforce

Via Email: ReformRoundtable@treasury.gov.au

Dear Economic Reform Roundtable Secretary,

The Australian Autism Alliance (Alliance) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Economic Reform Roundtable. Autistic Australians face unemployment rates nearly six times higher than non-disabled peers, lower educational completion, and significantly higher risk of poverty, homelessness, and poor health outcomes. Informal carers—often parents—experience large lifetime income losses and reduced workforce participation.

Autistic Australians face far higher unemployment and lower educational completion than peers; informal carers shoulder large labour-force and lifetime income losses. The statistics in Appendix 1 outlines why this matters and the basis for a compelling economic model to show the payoffs if Australia were to close the education and employment gaps for Autistic people and enable their informal carers to rejoin the workforce.

The indirect economic costs of caring are well known and were one of the factors that led to the establishment of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).¹ An Alliance 2020 national survey (with ACU Engagement, 3,800+ respondents) found that **42.1% of Autistic adults** and **31.5% of parents/carers** had lost employment because of their or their dependent's autism. Carer lost income is projected to reach **\$432 million annually by 2030**.

Economic opportunity: Targeted, accountable government action where government uses its levers—that is, stronger accountability in education, targeted employment support, NDIS alignment with employment outcomes, and enforceable human-rights/standards—modest improvements in employment participation among Autistic people will (1) raise household incomes, (2) reduce welfare and support costs, and (3) enable many informal carers to return to paid work. A credible, staged package of interventions could generate **annual economic gains in the order of \$1.4–\$4 billion** (conservative to ambitious scenarios) and meaningful social returns (better health, housing stability, reduced emergency costs). Refer Appendix 2.

The use of AI initiatives (including applied to NDIS) to support this reform are included in Appendix 3. This provides **direct savings of at least \$60M/year** from a 10% operational cost reduction; up to **\$3.5B/year**.

POLICY LEVERS: FOUR INTEGRATED COMMITMENT AREAS

1. Make education settings and early childhood settings accountable for inclusion and attendance

- Fund a National Roadmap for Safe, Quality & Inclusive Education across all settings.
 - Attendance recovery programs, specialist school support teams, and early-childhood inclusion standards.
 - Tie state/federal education funding to measurable KPIs: halving chronic non-attendance in three years, increasing Year 10 completion by 15%, public reporting of VET/university outcomes. Halve permanent childcare exclusion for pre-school Autistic children in funded centres by Year 3
 - Effective Inclusive Design Certification for early learning, schools, VET, and universities with tied federal funding.
 - Tie Commonwealth disability-accessibility funding to university outcomes (completion rates, employment outcomes for Autistic students), with public reporting.

Economic effect: Better education increases employability and reduce dropout-related unemployment. Accounts for approx. 30–50% of the projected lift in autistic employment rates. KPI Increase autistic employment rate to 50% by Year 3 (or +7.8 pp).

2. Economic Independence, Housing, Crisis Prevention Investment and Carer Return

- National Autism Economic Independence Framework with targeted employment pathways, DES reform to pay for sustained employment, and employer incentives for inclusive hiring.
- Introduce gradual tapering of disability payments (avoid cliff effects), allow simplified reporting for people combining work and partial support.
- “Carer return” package with wage top-ups, phased benefits, flexible work options and grants for self-employment /free accounting and tax advice, legal advice and website establishment/ funded education to kickstart career / mentor / peer support.
- Affordable, inclusive housing to reduce dependence on family care; expand supported accommodation alternatives

¹ The Productivity Commission estimated that about \$1.5 billion per annum of economic benefits would occur from carers re-entering the workforce.

- Support autistic-led enterprises through grants, mentorship, and incubators as many Autistic individuals thrive in non-traditional work environments.
- Targeted employment pathways and scholarships for Autistic people from marginalised backgrounds.
- Access to autism-informed independent advocacy services.
- **Leverage existing Employer education programs** on neurodiversity and inclusive hiring practices and mandate **neurodiversity training** for all Commonwealth public sector departments.

Economic effect: Each 10% reduction in long-term parental care recovers 5–8% of lost carer income.²

KPI: Reduce aggregated informal carer lost income by 15–30% within 3 years.

3. Accessible, Autism-Informed Health & Mental Health

- Remove Medicare age caps for autism assessments; increase rebates for assessments and neurodivergent-specific therapies; national early-screening standards in primary care.
- Prioritise early mental-health supports integrated with schools, NDIS plan-funded counselling, and wraparound supports to reduce crises and emergency hospital costs.
- Target: 15% reduction in acute psychiatric admissions and emergency presentations in 3 years.

Economic effect: Crisis prevention could save \$200–\$500 million/year and reduce lost working days (mental-health costs previously estimated at ~\$6.1b for mental illness/suicide across population are partially reducible with targeted interventions).³

4. Enduring outcomes: governance, foundational supports, Productivity Commission inquiry

- Establish a Federal **Human Rights Act** to underpin disability governance-based framework for an integrated disability ecosystem to have a positive duty to take proactive steps before harms crystallise — strengthening the accountability of states and providers (recent PJCHR inquiry recommendation).^{4 5}
- Drive cross-government accountability with a National Coordination Governance and Evaluation Roadmap, so there is an overarching intentional and coherent shared vision and accountabilities for delivery, co-ordinated funding and measurable joint outcomes to be delivered through multiple service systems.
- Execute a nationally consistent model for Foundational Supports to cover those ineligible for individual NDIS plans and ensure this is in place effectively before transitioned out of the NDIS.
- Build on recent national instruments - National Autism Strategy First Action Plan and the **National Roadmap to Improve Health & Mental Health of Autistic People 2025–2035**.
- Create an Autism Implementation Unit to drive cross-jurisdiction delivery and public reporting.
- Commission a Productivity Commission Inquiry into Autism (terms to include fiscal costs of under-support and benefits of proactive investment).
- Establish a small central “Autism Implementation Unit” (AIU) in the DHDA to monitor NAS delivery, with state/territory alignment agreements and public reporting.

Economic effect: Strong governance improves program ROI by 10–15% through better coordination and reduced wastage and Productivity Commission evidence reduces uncertainty and provides an independent benefit-cost base improving the model’s assumed ROI by lowering program wastage and improving targeting.

KPI: State alignment agreements signed by all jurisdictions with NAS KPI annex/ Public annual NAS progress report, with education, employment and carer metrics.

Funding

This proposal combines targeted investment, strong accountability, and evidence-driven policy to deliver measurable economic and social returns. With modest reforms, Australia can close significant productivity gaps while improving lives for hundreds of thousands of citizens. The reforms are achievable within current fiscal settings by redirecting funds from inefficient crisis spending (health/hospital emergency costs, avoidable welfare), and phased so pilots begin immediately with national scaling if outcomes meet KPIs. AIHW & Productivity Commission figures show large public spending on mental health and large system costs in hospital/emergency settings. Early, targeted mental-health integration tied to education/employment supports can reduce crisis costs and improve retention – an important co-benefit.

Kind regards

Jenny Karavolos, MBA, CPA, GAICD

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² <https://www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/192C16F031EDA77B2BB5903D735D7BE/S0007125019002046a.pdf/div-class-title-intellectual-disability-and-autism-socioeconomic-impacts-of-informal-caring-projected-to-2030-div.pdf>

³ <https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/autism-australia-2022>

⁴ <https://www.hrtc.org.au/explainers/pjchr-summary/> Summary: Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights Inquiry into Australia’s Human Rights Framework

⁵ <https://lawnewsroom.deakin.edu.au/news/2024/06/report-finds-clear-need-for-australian-humans-rights-act>

Appendix 1: Key Statistics of Why This Matters

- Autistic students face higher non-attendance and drop-out rates due to a lack of appropriate support, limiting their contribution to the workforce. Autistic students are half as likely to complete Year 10 than the general population, and only half as likely to complete VET or Uni courses than those with other disabilities.
- Pre-school-aged Autistic children are 10 times more likely to be permanently excluded from childcare.
- Adverse childhood experiences are higher for Autistic children and young adults and cost at least \$500 million per year that can have life-long negative impacts on health, education, opportunity, and well-being.
- Autistic Australians face an unemployment rate nearly six times higher than non-disabled peers, despite many having valuable skills.
- Improved employment support programs and workplace adjustments could increase productivity by at least \$2 billion per year and improve the standard of living.
- Autistic individuals are 2.5 times more likely to experience depression with the majority (50-80%) experiencing co-occurring mental health issues and have higher emergency hospital admissions with a cost to Australia annually of mental illness and suicide of approx. \$6.1 billion.
- Research suggests that Autistic individuals are more likely to experience homelessness compared to the general population with an annual cost estimated to be around \$1.5 billion per year.
- Informal carers of people with intellectual disability and/or autism in Australia are projected to increase to aggregated lost income of AU\$432 million, lost taxation of AU\$129 million and increased welfare payments of AU\$254 million by 2030.
- A significantly larger percentage of parents whose children had autism spectrum disorder were not in the labour force due to demands on parents of Autistic people, which often surpass those of parents of non-Autistic parents. In a national survey with over 3000 respondents that the Australian Autism Alliance commissioned in 2020 undertaken by the ACU Engagement (ACU 2020 Survey) more than one-third of Autistic adults (42.1%) and about a third of parents/carers (31.5%) have lost their job due to their or the person they care for's autism.
- Autistic adults are likely to live with their parents. Parents of Autistic adults remain primary carers typically because reasonably they have little confidence in accommodation supports for Autistic adults. The majority of parents/carers responding on behalf of an Autistic person aged 18 or over to the Australian Autism Alliance survey reported that this person was living at home with parents/guardians (72.1%).

Appendix 2: Economic Modelling

1. If the annual average full-time earnings are approximately **\$102,741.60** ⁶
2. Autistic working-age population \approx **75,200** ⁷.
3. Current employment rate (ABS 2022 figure for Autistic people employed approx. **42.2%**) ⁸
4. Carer lost income projections (aggregated lost income projected to **AU\$432 million** by 2030 for informal carers of people with intellectual disability and/or ASD) ⁹

Conservative scenario: 5% increase in employment among Autistic people i.e., from 42.2% to 47.2%)

- increase = $0.05 \times 75,200 =$ **3,760** additional employed
- additional annual wages = $3,760 \times 102,741.60 =$ **approx. \$386.3 million**
- with modest productivity multiplier (wages $\times 1.2$ to capture employer value-added, reduced welfare, tax effects) total economic impact \approx **\$463–\$580 million** per year.

Moderate scenario: 17.8% increase in employment among Autistic people i.e., 42.2% to 60.0%

- increase = $0.178 \times 75,200 =$ **13,386** additional employed
- additional annual wages = $13,386 \times 102,741.60 =$ **approx. \$1.375 billion**
- applying a productivity multiplier ($\times 1.5$ to capture broader GDP contribution, supply chain, tax and welfare offsets) = approx. **\$2.06 billion** annual GDP/productivity gain. This aligns with existing research estimates that improved supports could yield at least approx. \$2 billion per year. ^{10 11}

Ambitious scenario (systemic transformation over a decade): **30 % increase in employment among Autistic people i.e., 42.2% to 72.2%.**

- increase = $0.30 \times 75,200 =$ **22,560** additional employed
- additional annual wages = $22,560 \times 102,741.60 =$ **approx. \$2.319 billion**
- with multiplier $\times 1.7$ (bigger economy-wide impacts) = approx. **\$3.9 billion+** per year.

Carer impacts and financial offsets

- informal carer lost income aggregated approx. **AU\$432 million** (projected to 2030) with lost taxation **AU\$129m** and increased welfare **AU\$254m**.

By reducing carer non-participation (by enabling workplace adjustments, respite, better supported accommodation and trustworthy services) could recover a substantial share of the AU\$432m lost income - a 50% recovery would be **approx. \$216m** returned to households plus regained taxation and reduced welfare payments. ¹²

⁶ <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/earnings-and-working-conditions/average-weekly-earnings-australia> (Nov 2024 ABS).

⁷ <https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/autism-australia-2022>

⁸ <https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/autism-australia-2022>

⁹ <https://www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/192C16F031EDA77B2BBB5903D735D7BE/S0007125019002046a.pdf/div-class-title-intellectual-disability-and-autism-socioeconomic-impacts-of-informal-caring-projected-to-2030-div.pdf> - 2019

¹⁰ <https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/autism-australia-2022>

¹¹ <https://www.amaze.org.au/creating-change/research/employment> -2018

¹² <https://www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/192C16F031EDA77B2BBB5903D735D7BE/S0007125019002046a.pdf/div-class-title-intellectual-disability-and-autism-socioeconomic-impacts-of-informal-caring-projected-to-2030-div.pdf> 2019

Appendix 3: Use of AI to support reform

1. Use AI to Improve Labour Market Inclusion

Goal: Increase participation of people with disabilities in the workforce.

- **AI-powered job matching platforms:** Develop platforms that match people with disabilities to jobs based on skills, needs, and accessibility requirements.
- **Assistive technologies for work:** Promote and fund AI-driven tools (e.g., speech-to-text, computer vision, adaptive interfaces) that help people with disabilities perform jobs.
- **AI for remote work enablement:** Use AI to personalise remote work environments for different disability types.

Economic Outcome: Reduced unemployment, increased productivity, and higher GDP from broader workforce participation.

2. Improve Access to Education and Skills Training

Goal: Equip people with disabilities with future-ready skills.

- **AI tutors and adaptive learning:** Deploy AI tools that customise learning paths for students with disabilities.
- **Language and communication tools:** Support tools like AI sign language translators, voice recognition, and AAC (augmentative and alternative communication) systems.
- **Skill assessment AI:** Create government-funded platforms that use AI to assess skills and recommend reskilling pathways.

Economic Outcome: Better education leads to higher employability leads to increased earnings and reduced dependency on welfare systems.

3. Use AI in Public Services to Enhance Accessibility

Goal: Reduce barriers in health, transport, legal aid, and other public services.

- **Healthcare access:** AI-assisted diagnosis and telehealth for individuals with limited mobility.
- **Smart mobility solutions:** Integrate AI in public transport systems to assist people with visual, mobility, or cognitive impairments.
- **Inclusive service bots:** Use AI chatbots that understand disability-specific communication styles.

Economic Outcome: Lower healthcare and support service costs, higher societal participation, and healthier populations.

4. Promote Inclusive AI Policy and Regulation

Goal: Ensure AI systems do not perpetuate discrimination.

- **Inclusive datasets:** Mandate diverse data representation (including disability-related data) to train unbiased AI models.
- **Accessible AI development guidelines:** Require accessibility standards in public procurement of AI systems.
- **AI ethics boards with disability advocates:** Include people with disabilities in AI oversight committees.

Economic Outcome: Fairer systems reduce legal risks and maximise the productive potential of all citizens.

5. Foster AI Innovation Ecosystems Centered on Disability

Goal: Encourage entrepreneurship and public-private partnerships.

- **Funding for AI-disability startups:** Offer grants or tax incentives to companies developing AI for disability inclusion.
- **AI R&D hubs:** Set up innovation labs focused on "AI for accessibility."
- **Inclusive procurement:** Prioritise AI tools that improve disability outcomes in government tenders.

Economic Outcome: Growth of AI sector, new markets, and leadership in accessible tech export.

6. Measure and Monitor Progress with AI

Goal: Use AI to track reform impact and adapt policies.

- **Real-time dashboards:** Use AI to analyse data on employment, education, and health outcomes among people with disabilities.
- **Predictive analytics:** Anticipate service needs or employment barriers before they arise.
- **Feedback loops:** Use AI to gather input from disabled communities on reforms and adjust programs accordingly.

Economic Outcome: Smarter, more cost-effective policy making.

7. Application of AI and emerging technologies to NDIS

The NDIS faces structural and operational challenges that are driving higher costs and reducing service efficiency:

- Processing **large volumes of disparate data** without integrated decision-making systems.
- Shortage of a **skilled, informed workforce** capable of supporting a diverse disability population.
- Fragmented information sharing within the NDIA and across service ecosystems.
- Need to uphold **safe, ethical practice** consistent with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

Current strategies rely heavily on labour-intensive processes, which are unsustainable given workforce shortages and rising scheme costs.

Goal: Create a NDIS Innovation Incubator to apply AI, emerging technologies, and systems integration leveraging partnerships in the intended Augmented Ability CRC (which included Defence industry partners and technology) to improve decision-making, workforce sustainability, and participant outcomes.

Key Reform Components

1. Workforce Planning & Decision Support

- Develop a competency framework planning tool using AI-driven mental workload reduction, adaptable decision-support, and immersive remote work systems.
- Estimated **10% annual cost saving** in training, management, and supervision, plus reduced staff turnover (replacement costs range from 0.5–2× salary).
- Consistent decision-making improves participant trust and reduces complaints-handling costs.

2. Cost Containment & Growth Cap Management

- Use incubator trials to test **risk/reward funding models** and innovative service payment structures (e.g., NDIS Blended Payments for School Leaver Employer Supports).

3. Big Data to Smart Decisions

- Build AI algorithms to:
 - Match participants with quality, outcome-based providers.
 - Identify trends from best practice, research, and participant preferences.
 - Improve decision-making consistency.
 - Detect fraud and high-risk participant/provider matches.
 - Forecast future demand and workforce needs.
- Ensure **interoperability and synchronisation** across NDIA systems for faster, evidence-based decisions.

4. Ethical and Rights-Based Practice

- Embed privacy, security, and CRPD compliance into all AI tools and systems.
- Use AI to prevent harm and rights violations rather than react to them.

Economic Impact

- **Direct savings:** \$60M/year from a 10% operational cost reduction; up to **\$3.5B/year**.
- **Productivity gains:** More efficient workforce allocation and reduced duplication of effort.
- **ROI protection:** Incubator model allows controlled trials, data collection, and scaling of proven innovations, reducing the risk of wasted investment.

Implementation Pathway

- Establish commercial **Alliance arrangements** between government, NDIA, research bodies, and intended Augmented Ability CRC collaboration to share risk and reward.
- Fund the incubator through reallocation of existing inefficiency savings, not new recurrent expenditure.
- Build licensing and export pathways for developed tools to generate revenue and offset investment.

