

# ‘Living our ways’

A community driven research program responding to the unmet needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability

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# About First Peoples Disability Network



- A national Indigenous Disabled Peoples Organisation.
- A community organisation, we are governed by a Board of Directors entirely comprising First Peoples with a lived experience of disability.
- Active advocates nationally, principally through both the *National Disability Strategy* and *Indigenous Advancement Strategy*, and internationally through various UN forums.
- FPDN is the lead organisation on a two-year community directed research grant, supported by the National Disability Research Development Scheme.

# The reported prevalence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disability



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander - prevalence of disability (NATSISS Analysis)*	
Prevalence of disability within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population	45%
Prevalence of severe and profound disability – raw	7.7%
Prevalence of severe and profound disability – age standardised (to allow for comparison with non-Indigenous)	9.1%
Prevalence differential compared to other Australians	2.1 times
Estimated number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with severe and profound disability (2016 population estimate)	58,000
Annual growth rate using Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population projections	2.2%

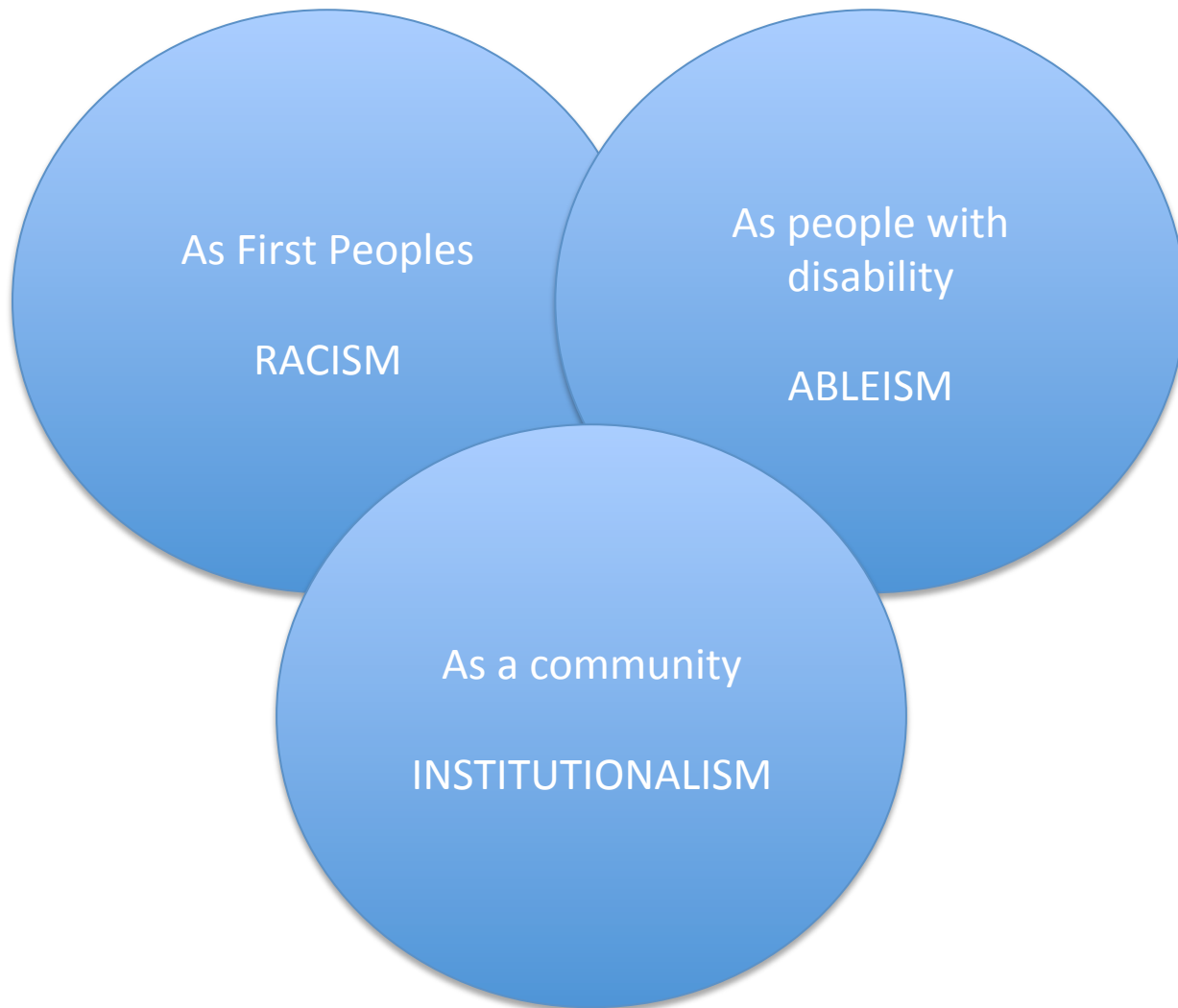
\* Aged 15 and over, private households

# What the numbers don't count



- 'Private households, 15 years and over' excludes:
  - Prisons and other institutions
  - People who are homeless
  - The full impact of disability in childhood eg. FASD
- The living environment (eg. urban compared to remote)
- Trauma and 'spiritual disability'
- Mis-trust, stigma and demonisation of disability
- Understanding of disability in Aboriginal communities - no comparable word for 'disability' (Ariotti, 1999)

# Dimensions of intersectional discrimination affecting the First Peoples disability community



## What is at stake in getting it wrong...

1. 'Standard issue' disability supports, based on assumed need rather than actual need
2. Unfulfilled educational aspirations

*"Before I leave this earth, I want to complete a degree in human rights..."*

*"I wanted to learn more about my Country and culture... but I was the Deaf kid put in the corner"*

(Participants in FPDN's 'Living Our Ways' research)

# What is at stake in getting it wrong...

## 3. A matriculation pathway to prison

LIFE-STAGE ASPECT	Peri-Natal	Early childhood	Schooling years	Young people	Justice	Health	Ageing
Aboriginal	Low awareness of disability  Environmental factors, increased likelihood of low birth-weight	Low awareness of disability  Exposure to trauma  Increased likelihood of OOHC – off country, unstable home setting	Low awareness of disability  “Bad black kid syndrome” – punitive schooling over supported disability	Less likely to secure employment  Increased likelihood of police contact	Denial of rights- over incarceration	Subconscious bias – institutional racism	Reduced life expectancy  Disability happens earlier in life and with more co-morbidities.
Disability	Low birth weight and environmental factors in developmental disability	Disability assessments aren’t carried out to the extent that they need to be	Undiagnosed and unsupported disability	Less likely to secure employment  Communication impairments, reduced capacity to negotiate conflict	Denial of rights – indefinite detention and fitness to plea for people with cognitive and psychiatric disability	Subconscious bias – diagnostic overshadowing	Inadequate public infrastructure especially in remote communities.

Suggested citation: Avery S. (2016) ‘The life trajectory for an Aboriginal and Aboriginal or Torres Strait Persons with disability’. In: First Peoples Disability Network *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perspectives on the Recurrent and Indefinite Detention of People with Cognitive and Psychiatric Impairment*.

# An economic and social opportunity



- The National Disability Scheme (NDIS) is a \$28 bn national initiative to provide disability supports to people with severe and profound disability.
- Based on the quantifiable prevalence of disability, an equitable allocation of the NDIS to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people translates to around \$1.6 bn.
- This in turn equates to around 3,200 jobs working within the Scheme, and many more in the broader disability services sector.
- More opportunities exist in other areas of social policy including education, early childhood, justice, health transport, housing...



# Reanimation through 'Living our ways'



- A better understanding of disability in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is the foundation for better informed policy and practice.
- Respect the present reality that people with disability face. Accept the complexity and nuanced solutions that are needed to make a difference.
- Its not all about systems and services, it is also about attitudes. Challenge the prejudices that hold First Peoples with disability back from fulfilling their potential.
- Tap in the knowledge and wisdom that resides in lived experience of disability. Community direction will produce better results.

# Acknowledgements



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