

**Queensland
Disability Conference
2025**

Unlocking Potential:
Reforms, Innovation and Inclusion

Program

Acknowledgement of Country

We would like to respectfully acknowledge the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land on which this event is taking place. We would also like to pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

Introduction

Welcome to the Queensland Disability Conference 2025, proudly hosted by Queenslanders with Disability Network (QDN) and the Department of Families, Seniors, Disability Services and Child Safety (DFSDSCS). We are delighted to have you join us for this event, now in its third year, as we continue to strive for inclusion and accessibility for all Queenslanders.

This year's theme, 'Unlocking Potential: Reforms, Innovation and Inclusion', highlights the imperative to harness policy reforms, technological and social innovation, and inclusive leadership, to improve the lives of people with disability, their families and carers and shape a more equitable Queensland.

Unlocking social and economic participation for people with disability, through employment and community initiatives, is crucial to identifying the talent and skills of people with disability and integrating workplaces for people of all abilities.

The Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games has the potential to transform Queensland's communities to advance the social and economic participation of people with disability, and redesign our places, spaces, and systems to be truly inclusive.

The conference program has been designed to elevate lived experience and cross-sector leadership, structured around three key panels:

- 1. Employment and Social Impact** - focusing on enterprise, small business, and inclusive community-led initiatives.
- 2. Disability Reforms** - unpacking federal and state reform agendas and exploring how implementation can be co-designed and effective.
- 3. Olympic and Paralympic Games** - exploring Brisbane 2032 as a platform for long-term inclusion and legacy.

The Queensland Government, non-government organisations, businesses and community, including people with disability and their families, all play vital roles in implementing the disability reforms. These efforts are guided by the Queensland Disability Reform Framework, *Queensland's Disability Plan 2022-27: Together, a better Queensland*, and *Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031*.

QDN and DFSDSCS invite you to engage in meaningful conversations, build connections, and share your ideas and energy to imagine what's possible, so we can lay the foundations for a more inclusive Queensland. Throughout the day, QDN members will be at the forefront as MCs, speakers, panelists, table hosts, and performers, highlighting the talents, skills, and leadership of people with disability.

We extend our thanks to all speakers and facilitators for their contribution. We also acknowledge the presence and leadership of people with disability in shaping this conference and in driving systemic change across Queensland.

We hope you find the conference enriching and leave inspired to continue the vital work of fostering an inclusive Queensland.

Event Overview

At this conference, people with lived experience of disability and other leaders across government, community, and business are invited to contribute their ideas about how we can each play our part in advancing reforms, driving innovation, and embedding inclusive practices across all sectors to improve the lives of people with disability and shape a more equitable Queensland.

There are two speakers and three panel sessions that highlight key areas for driving innovation and employment in Queensland now and into the future, including the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Panel sessions will be moderated by people with disability.

A dynamic innovation session will see all conference attendees shaping the future together and igniting ideas that create genuine social impact.

Conference Agenda

Friday 29 August 2025	
Time	Activity
9:30am	Acknowledgement of Country: Uncle Willie Prince
9:40am	Conference opening: MCs Paul O’Dea and Elisha Matthews
9:45am	Minister address: The Honourable Amanda Camm MP, Minister for Families, Seniors and Disability Services and Minister for Child Safety and the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence
10:00am	Keynote Speaker: Rosemary Kayess, Disability Discrimination Commissioner, Australian Human Rights Commission (digital presentation)
10:30am	Panel 1: Employment and Social Impact • Dominique Lamb – Queensland Small Business Commissioner • Adele Laughton – Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Queensland Social Enterprise Council • Shahram Jazan – President, AMPARO Advocacy • Katherine Hayes – CEO, Youth Advocacy Centre Facilitator: Nigel Webb, Board Member, Queenslanders with Disability Network (QDN)
11:30am	Morning tea
12:00pm	Innovation hub: Join us for a high-energy innovation session focused on building the future — tackling system reforms, envisioning Brisbane 2032, boosting employment opportunities for people with disability, and sparking solutions with real social value.
1:00pm	Speaker: Dr Dinesh Palipana OAM, Doctor, Lawyer, Disability Advocate, in conversation with Michelle Moss, CEO, QDN
1:30pm	Lunch

Friday 29 August 2025

Time	Activity
2:15pm	Panel 2: Disability Reforms • Helen Missen – Acting Deputy Director-General, Strategy, Policy and Legislation, Department of Families, Seniors, Disability Services and Child Safety • Natalie Lewis – Commissioner, Queensland Family and Child Commission • Aaron Verlin – Acting Deputy CEO, Service Design and Improvement, National Disability Insurance Agency • Hope Peisley – First Assistant Secretary, Disability and Carer Programs Division, Department of Health, Disability and Ageing Facilitator: Dr Sharon Boyce, Chair, Queensland Disability Advisory Council and Chair, QDN
3:15pm	Comfort break
3:25pm	Panel 3: Olympic and Paralympic Games • Jen Williams – CEO, Committee for Brisbane • Anthony Ryan – CEO, Brisbane Economic Development Association • Michael Dobbie-Bridges – Director, Create Advisory, Board Member, Stadiums Queensland and Paralympian Facilitator: Alison Barber, Board Member, QDN
4:15pm	Summary remarks: Michelle Moss, CEO, QDN
4:20pm	Conclusion
4:30pm	Networking event: Plaza Terrace Jazz duo: Dr Jeff Usher and Ella Doneman
5:30pm	Finish

Conference Presenters

Acknowledgement of Country



Image description: A man in a red and black striped polo shirt, with a glimpse of a wheelchair back behind his shoulders. He is wearing square shaped glasses and smiling warmly.

Uncle Willie Prince

Wilfred Prince, known as Uncle Willie, was born on Wakka Wakka country in Cherbourg and has cultural and spiritual connection to the Kalkadoon clan group in Mount Isa. Uncle Willie experienced multiple hospital admissions in his early life and was removed from family and culture at age two and placed in the Royal Children's Hospital. He was later transferred to Xavier Home for Crippled Children and left there when he was 16. Uncle Willie worked for the State Library for 33 years and had a distinguished career in disability sport, representing Queensland 16 times. He carried the Paralympic torch in 2000 and in 2018 carried the Queen's baton for the Commonwealth Games. Uncle Willie is a voice and advocate for people with disability, particularly Aboriginal people with a disability.

Masters of Ceremonies



Image description: A woman with shoulder length hair and a fringe. She is positioned sideways against a blurred background, wearing a white top and with her head turned toward the camera. She has dark brown eyes and is smiling.

Elisha Matthews

Elisha Matthews is a proud QDN member and Peer Leader. As founder of the No Permit No Park campaign, Elisha raised national awareness and improved policy and legislation around disability accessible parking. She has contributed to major initiatives such as the Disability Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability and the NDIS Review, both through her own submissions and by supporting others to share their experiences. A self-confessed ailuromaniac (lover of cats) and avid crocheter, Elisha raised her family in Brisbane and regularly presents on disability rights, peer leadership, and systemic change to diverse audiences across community and government sectors.



Image description: A man with very short hair, glasses and a beard. He is wearing a maroon collared short sleeved shirt and is standing against a white brick wall. He is looking at the camera with a big smile.

Paul O'Dea

Paul O'Dea is an active member of Community Living Association and serves as the Treasurer for both its committee and the Independent Youth Housing Group, a housing cooperative run by people with disability who manage their own housing and supports. Paul is a QDN member and Peer Leader where he supports others in Disability Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction and person-centered emergency preparedness in times of disaster. Passionate about inclusion and community, Paul is a founding member of the Nundah All Stars, a performance group that has produced an annual musical since 2010.

Speakers



Image description: A woman with short blond hair tucked behind her ears. She is sitting in a light brown chair in an office with brown cupboards behind her. She is wearing a white top under a navy jacket and is looking at the camera.

The Honorable Amanda Camm MP

In her second term in Queensland Parliament, Minister Amanda Camm has taken over the crucial role as Minister for Families, Seniors and Disability Services and Minister for Child Safety and the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence. The North Queenslander plays a critical role in the Crisafulli Government in delivering reform to improve outcomes for some of Queensland's most vulnerable people. Minister Camm recently announced a Commission of Inquiry into Child Safety and is working towards reforming the domestic violence system, all within the first six months of taking her seat in government. Minister Camm is also an advocate for people with disability and is committed to improving accessibility and inclusivity across the state, while listening to the experiences of people living with disability to help improve their daily lives.

Speakers



Image description: A woman with shoulder length blonde hair, looking into the camera and smiling. She is wearing a dark green button-up shirt.

Rosemary Kayess

Rosemary Kayess is the Disability Discrimination Commissioner and a leading international human rights lawyer and academic. She played a pivotal role in drafting the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and she currently serves as a member of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. With a Bachelor of Social Science, Bachelor of Laws and an Honorary Doctorate in Law, Rosemary has held senior academic roles with the Faculty of Law and Social Policy Research Centre at the University of New South Wales and is a Visiting Professor, Centre for Disability, Law and Policy, University of Galway. She was awarded the Human Rights Medal in 2019 in recognition of her outstanding contribution to the promotion and protection of human rights. Rosemary is a current and former member of a number of disability focused councils and committees. Current memberships include the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) Independent Advisory Council and the Australian Discrimination Law Experts Group. Former memberships include the Strategic Engagement Reference Group for the Disability Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability.



Image description: A man in a wheelchair, wearing violet-coloured scrubs, holding books on his lap. He is smiling directly into the camera.

Dr Dinesh Palipana OAM

Dr Dinesh Palipana OAM is a Doctor, Lawyer, Researcher and Disability Advocate. After a car accident during medical school left him with quadriplegia, he became Queensland's first quadriplegic medical intern. Dinesh co-leads spinal cord injury research with the BioSpine team and teaches at Griffith and Bond Universities. He works in the emergency department at Gold Coast University Hospital and is the team doctor for the Gold Coast Titans physical disability rugby team. His leadership spans roles with the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability, Australian Human Rights Commission's Includability program, Housing Hub, and Doctors with Disabilities Australia. Among many accolades, he was named Queensland Australian of the Year in 2021 and received the Medal of the Order of Australia. His autobiography, *Stronger*, was published in 2022.

Panellists



Image description: A woman with long blonde hair tied back in a ponytail. She is smiling directly at the camera and is wearing a purple jacket over a white top. There is a bright wall light behind her and green leaves from an indoor plant.

Dominique Lamb

Dominique Lamb assumed the role of Small Business Commissioner in December 2022. With a robust background in industrial relations and employment law, she brings a unique blend of legal expertise and advocacy skills to her position. Her primary objective is to enhance the operating environment for small businesses in Queensland and to reduce the time and costs associated with resolving disputes involving small business. Dominique has embarked on a proactive engagement strategy, collaborating closely with governmental bodies, industry organisations, and regional stakeholders, and has been successful in expanding the Small Business Friendly Program to include participation from 51 councils.



Image description: A woman standing against a brick wall, with long brown hair, sitting on her right shoulder. She is wearing a dark blue blazer with a white top and is smiling directly at the camera.

Adele Laughton

Adele Laughton is an experienced leader with a demonstrated history spanning the social enterprise, not-for-profit and agriculture sectors. As CEO of the Queensland Social Enterprise Council (QSEC), Adele focuses on driving social innovation through strategic leadership and fostering entrepreneurial ecosystems. Adele is also Head of Government Relations at Social Enterprise Australia, where she advocates for policy that benefits both communities and the economy, while building strong connections between the social sector and government. When not at QSEC, Adele is a Non-Executive Director on the Board of Ability Agriculture, a charity that provides opportunities, pathways, and access for people with disability in agriculture.



Image description: A man with a big smile and short dark hair in front of a white wall. He is wearing a blue shirt with a navy tie and is looking to the left.

Shahram Jazan

Shahram Jazan came to Australia over 20 years ago as a refugee with disability, experiencing vision impairment. He recognised the importance of education and completed a Diploma in Mental Health and a Degree in Social Work. Shahram is a dedicated mentor and resource for his peers who experience similar disabilities. He is a founding and active member of AMPARO Advocacy and has worked for Multicultural Australia for the past 15 years.



Image description: A woman standing in front of a tree. She has short blonde hair and is wearing a dark blazer with a purple and white patterned top. She is smiling directly at the camera.

Katherine Hayes

Katherine Hayes is the CEO of the Youth Advocacy Centre (YAC), a community legal centre providing legal and social support for young people in Queensland. Bringing over 20 years of experience in corporate law, Katherine joined YAC in 2022 with a desire to make positive change in the community. As youth justice issues increasingly dominate political debates, Katherine has become a vocal advocate for the rights of children whose voices are often left out of the story.



Image description: A woman standing against a cream wall. She is wearing a black top under a black and white patterned jacket. She is smiling directly at the camera.

Helen Missen

Helen Missen is the Acting Deputy Director-General of Strategy, Policy and Legislation in the Queensland Government Department of Families, Seniors, Disability Services and Child Safety. With over 25 years in the public service, Helen has worked across human services and justice portfolios, bringing deep experience in policy development and system reform. Prior to joining the public service, Helen worked in the non-government sector and is committed to cross-sector collaboration to shape inclusive government policy.



Image description: A woman standing in a room which contains a table, chairs, bookcase, ladder and glass windows and doors. She has long dark hair tied back, a dark blazer over a white top and a large round necklace with tassels on it. She is smiling and looking to the left.

Natalie Lewis

Natalie Lewis is a Gamilaraay woman and the Commissioner of the Queensland Family and Child Commission. Natalie is fiercely committed to transforming systems to uphold the rights and wellbeing of children – particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Her passion for children's rights is inspired by the experiences of children and young people disadvantaged by the systems designed to protect them, especially those in statutory child and youth justice systems. She has led significant national reform across Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child protection and family services sectors, playing an instrumental role in the implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle in Australian child protection legislation. She is a strong advocate for protecting the rights of First Nations Peoples to exercise self-determination and to remain meaningfully connected to kin, culture and Country. Natalie has held senior executive roles in the Queensland Government, the advocacy sector and been appointed to numerous national boards and councils.



Image description: A man standing against a cream wall. He is wearing a blue collared shirt underneath a dark jumper. He has short brown hair and is smiling directly at the camera.

Aaron Verlin

Aaron Verlin is the Acting Deputy CEO of the Service Design and Improvement Division at the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA). Since joining the NDIA in 2018, he has held senior roles including General Manager of the Co-Design and Engagement Division and head of the Partners in the Community Division. In his current role based in the Geelong Head Office, Aaron is accountable for delivering the NDIA's service design initiatives, and the ongoing integrity of business processes, guidance material and business platforms. At the core of Aaron's role, he works to ensure that people with disability are at the centre of the NDIA's work.



Image description: A woman standing against a white background. She has short dark hair and black glasses. She is smiling directly at the camera and is wearing a black top.

Hope Peisley

Hope Peisley is a senior executive officer in the Australian Government with a passion for social policy leadership. She currently leads the implementation of the National Carer Strategy 2024-2034, engagement with Disability Representative Organisations and programs to provide people with disability access to effective advocacy support. Hope has held senior roles across multiple agencies including heading up the National Disability Insurance Scheme Reform Taskforce at the Department of Social Services, Acting General Manager of the Disability and Carer Programs Group, responsible for the National Immunisation Program and had a lead role in the COVID-19 Vaccination Taskforce. Hope also worked at the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet Office for Women and led the Commonwealth State Relations Branch. She holds a Bachelor of Science (Psychology) and a Masters in Public Health.



Image description: A woman with long blonde hair and glasses who is standing and smiling at the camera. She is wearing a navy blazer with a white shirt.

Jen Williams

Jen Williams is CEO of the Committee for Brisbane, leading its advocacy, thought leadership and commercial operations. Prior to this, Jen led the Queensland Division of the Property Council of Australia. Over her 12-year tenure at the Property Council, she progressed from Senior Policy Advisor to Deputy Executive Director and was appointed as Executive Director in 2021. Jen is widely recognised in Brisbane business, not-for-profit and political circles, having formed many partnerships in the pursuit of policy reform, including through public campaigns to address the housing crisis and to increase post-pandemic visitation of the city centre. Jen also has a background in secondary school education, development and political advice. She holds a Master of Management (International Business), Bachelor of Social Science and Bachelor of Education.



Image description: A man with grey hair who is smiling at the camera. He is wearing a light blue collared button-up shirt and a dark blue tie with white dots on it.

Anthony Ryan

Anthony Ryan is the CEO of the Brisbane Economic Development Agency, where he leads the city's growth strategy globally, drives visitation and attracts investment and talent, whilst looking ahead at emerging opportunities for the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Recognised as a 'Queensland Great' in 2013, Anthony is a well-respected and self-confessed sport loving local who is known for his passion and entrepreneurial spirit. Previously CEO of Youngcare, Anthony transformed the national not-for-profit organisation into an innovative and entrepreneurial company that provides meaningful solutions and choices for young people with high physical care needs.



Image description: A man with dark hair and a smiling face. He is wearing a white shirt and a navy jacket. Behind him is a white background.

Michael Dobbie-Bridges

Michael Dobbie-Bridges is a Paralympian who represented Australia at the 2008 Beijing Paralympic Games and six World Team Cups. He has played an integral role in the establishment of the Queensland Wheelchair Football League (AFL) and currently sits on the Board of Directors at Stadiums Queensland and Vertaview Group. Michael has held leading positions across many government portfolios including as Chief of Staff for the Assistant Minister for Social Services and Disability Services in the Turnbull Government. He is a Director at Create Advisory, a startup Government and Infrastructure advisory firm.



Image description: A woman with short straight blonde hair and blue eyes. She is standing and has her arms crossed. Her dress is bright blue and has long sleeves, pin tucking and a button at the collar. Behind her is a white brick wall. She has an open bright smile.

Michelle Moss

Michelle Moss is CEO of QDN and has worked in the human services sectors for over 30 years, across disability, health, and women's services including sexual assault and domestic violence services. Michelle has worked in direct support work, counselling, behaviour support, consumer and community engagement, and social policy. She is a strong advocate with a commitment to the voice of people with disability who use services driving and influencing public policy and being active players in the planning, design, delivery and evaluation of services. Michelle has experience working across the key advocacy areas of transport, housing and health that impact people with disability in Queensland.



Image description: a woman sitting in a wheelchair. She has short light brown hair and is wearing a black and white checked top. She is smiling directly at the camera.

Dr Sharon Boyce

Dr Sharon Boyce is an educator, author, speaker and leading disability advocate, committed to social justice and empowering people with disability and supporting real living independence. She is Chair of QDN and the Queensland Disability Advisory Council. Sharon is also an appointed member of the NDIS Independent Advisory Council, and the President of Physical Disability Australia. She is an advisor to the Toowoomba Regional Council's Access Committee, a researcher and Director of the Australian Institute of Inclusive Education and Research, Director of the Disability Training Institute, and CEO and Director of Aus Inclusion Pty Ltd. In 2020 Sharon was awarded a Doctor of Letters for her research in education inclusion and dyslexia, and she is currently completing a Doctor of Philosophy exploring Australia's disability landscape over the past 25 years. Some of her recognitions include the Queensland Regional Achiever Award, a Human Rights Award and a Disability Action Week Award.



Image description: A man in a black and white check shirt, with the top of a wheelchair visible behind his head. He has a QDN name badge on his shirt and is smiling directly at the camera.

Nigel Webb

Nigel has more than 20 years' experience as a social justice advocate and professional. He is a trusted voice, advisor and leader across the community services industry, business and government. His extensive knowledge and experience guides state and national advisory and representatives' groups, boards and community organisations. He provides strategic advice and direction on social and economic inclusion of people with disabilities, and a range of issues of strategic importance to the disability and carer sectors around the NDIS and reforms to employment. Nigel is currently a member of the QDN Board of Directors, Queensland Government Expert Disability Housing Advisory Panel, Queensland Disability Reform Implementation Stakeholder Committee and a representative on the NDIS Reform Advisory Committee Queensland. He is a convenor of the Human Research and Ethics Committee at Logic Institute Ltd and a client liaison officer with Choice, Passion, Life.



Image description: A woman with long blonde hair and glasses sitting in a black wheelchair against a white brick wall, turned sideways towards the camera. She is smiling and wearing a white top.

Alison Barber

Alison has more than 26 years' experience as a disability advocate and professional, graduating from university with a double degree in both primary and early childhood education. She retired from teaching to establish a veterinary hospital in Queensland with her husband and went on to own a 100 acre property which was used for camping, school camps and weddings. Alison's sons' medical complexities and disabilities required her to spend more time at home with them including homeschooling. Her own spinal cord injury in late 2019 necessitated full time use of a wheelchair, adding to her unique life experience for caring for people with disability and living with a disability. Alison is a convenor for the QDN Caboolture Peer Support Group, a Carer Ambassador for Carer's Queensland and a disability representative for the National Carer Strategy Action Plan Focus Group. She is a founding member of the University of Sunshine Coast's research project into Technology Enabled Homes for People with Disability, a member of the Queensland Disability Reform Implementation Stakeholder Committee Co-Design group, a Board Member for QDN and is actively involved in numerous other disability and Participant First NDIS related projects and groups. Alison has also been involved in the Statewide Spinal Cord Injury Delivery Service - Codesign Project and the Value based Health Care Symposium.

Performers and Artists



Image description: A man sitting at a grand piano with the key lid open. He is wearing a dark suit, a white shirt and a dark fedora hat and dark glasses. He is oriented towards the left of the image and his head is slightly angled towards the camera. His hands are slightly raised away from the keys and he is smiling slightly.

Jeff Usher

Jeff Usher, composer, pianist, singer/songwriter, arranger and music educator, is in many ways Australian music's best kept secret. He was once described by Australian jazz legend, Paul Grabovsky, as "one of Brisbane's living treasures". Blind since birth, Jeff stands in a long line of blind pianists. A jazz specialist, Jeff also excels in a wide variety of other genres. He has performed across Australia and the world during a career spanning over 40 years. Jeff has performed with notable American jazz musicians, released seven albums, has been a tutor at Queensland Conservatorium Griffith University since 1998, and received his PhD in music composition from the University of Queensland in 2019.



Image description: A woman with short dark asymmetrical hair. She is standing and singing into a microphone on a stand. She is wearing a black T shirt with pink, yellow and green flowers, and is holding a yellow sunflower. Behind her is a woman wearing an orange t-shirt playing a double bass and a music stand with sheet music on it.

Ella Doneman

Ella Doneman is a musician and educator who has had a love for singing from her youngest years. The love of music enabled her to connect with her family in Europe through traditional Czechoslovakian folk songs. She and her Czech family may not have spoken the same language but they all shared their love of music, song and story. In school, Ella sang in choirs and played the euphonium and later was part of a cappella singing group, the “Deep C Divas” for over 10 years. In 2015 Ella began her own education and teaching business working with people with disability, called Practical Life Skills. Right now Ella is at the beginning of a new project entitled “Blossoming Ella – Blossom Dearie, Ella Fitzgerald and Me!”.

Monte Lupo

Speakers’ gifts are made by talented ceramicists with disability at Monte Lupo Arts. Monte Lupo offers beautiful handmade ceramic and textile artworks and homewares and provides employment opportunities for people living with disability. Monte Lupo’s employee artists manage each step of the production process, preparing the clay, glazing and painting. Each detail is unique to the finished product and a testament to the hard work of their team members. Many of the artists have received national and international recognition for their work, and Monte Lupo is regularly featured in exhibitions across Australia, in addition to holding their own exhibitions. Monte Lupo is operated by disability support provider Multicap.

