voice

Physical and mental wellbeing

Down Syndrome Australia

December 2025

“Heart” Melissa Kirkman

Editor's note

Hi there,

I'm excited to share this issue of *Voice* with you—it's all about physical and mental wellbeing, and it's been lots of fun to put together.

Across the next 45 pages, you'll find practical tips, inspiring personal stories and thoughtful reflections on what it means to care for your body and mind.

You'll hear from people who are building healthy routines, finding confidence through sport, learning new skills, supporting their peers and speaking up about what wellbeing means in their lives.

We also shine a light on the programs, tools and resources helping people with Down syndrome and intellectual disability to stay healthy and empowered.

A big thank you to everyone who shared a story or piece of advice, and to all the families, supporters and healthcare professionals who have made this issue possible.

I hope these articles encourage you to take small steps toward feeling your best every day.

Happy reading,
Nathan

> I love making arts as it helps me to express my emotions. It makes me happy and helps me to feel good inside.

Melissa Kirkman (opening page artist)

In this issue...

Message from the CEO

Welcome to our latest edition of *Voice*, where we focus on mental and physical health and wellbeing – a topic that is absolutely vital for people with Down syndrome.

Good health underpins independence, confidence and quality of life, yet we know that people with Down syndrome often face barriers to accessing appropriate healthcare and opportunities to maximise their wellbeing.

At Down Syndrome Australia, we are committed to working with our State and Territory members and partners to break down those barriers and promote opportunities for better health. We do this through advocacy, resources and practical initiatives such as our Health Ambassador program, and Health Apps that empower individuals and families.

This issue is packed with inspiring stories and useful tools. You'll find an overview of the CHAP health tool, which helps ensure regular, comprehensive health checks, and learn about the Better Healthcare podcast, amplifying lived experience to drive change.

We celebrate inclusive health activities like Dancing in the ACT and FitSkills21, and share top wellbeing tips from our Health Ambassadors. There are Easy Read guides on physical and mental health, creative approaches like colouring for calm and songwriting, and profiles of incredible individuals, from athletes at the Virtus World Championships to advocates shaping the future.

Health and wellbeing are lifelong priorities. Together, we can create a community where every person with Down syndrome has the support to thrive – physically, mentally and socially.

I encourage you to explore these stories and join us in promoting a healthier, more inclusive future for all.

Warm regards,

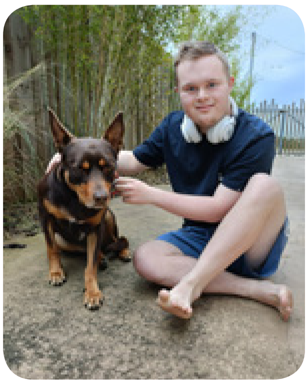
Darryl Steff
CEO, Down Syndrome Australia

Do we have your correct address?

Please email us to ensure all your details are up to date:
voice@downsyndrome.org.au

You can also let us know if you'd prefer to receive a digital copy of the magazine, rather than the printed version.

DSAN update



My name is Sandon Overton. I am 18 years old and I live in Tasmania, on the northwest coast. I joined the Down Syndrome Advisory Network (DSAN) on 5 June this year, which was my 18th birthday. My very first DSAN meeting was on my birthday.

I have really enjoyed being part of DSAN. It has been great meeting people from all around Australia.

One of the fun things we did at DSAN recently was make a video for International Dog Day that was to go on Down Syndrome Australia's social media. My dog's name is Kye and he is a Kelpie. I liked showing Kye doing tricks and looking after our chickens. I felt proud to share him with the group.

We also learned about marketing with Kate Jeremiah from Down Syndrome Australia. She taught us how to write a social media post. For the activity, I chose the topic of "living a healthy lifestyle." We also did a workshop on how to write a magazine article with Nathan.

Another week, we each talked about something we are passionate about. I talked about how I love art. I did a lot of art at high school. I graduated this month, and I still do art at home. Sometimes I paint. Sometimes I use clay. I also like taking things apart and turning the pieces into something new. I like to take things to another level. I have been making Spiderman pictures using the expanding and drawing method.

I am also passionate about music. I play acoustic guitar and electric guitar. I have been learning guitar for a very long time. I go to a music school called Encore. I am going to perform at the end-of-year concert.

Another thing we did at our DSAN meeting this last half of the year was we learned about leadership from Claire Mitchell, David Fuller and Matthew Mason-Cox from the DSA Board. They talked about what makes a great leader. For me, a great leader is respectful, kind and patient. A leader also trusts the people in the group.

In the past few months, we have got three new members at DSAN. Isaiah Caruso from South Australia, Jack Williamson from Victoria and Callum Bateman from the Northern Territory.

I am excited to keep being part of DSAN next year. I want to keep learning, meeting new people. It has given me much more confidence already since joining.

Next year I also want to get a job and learn to drive. I want to do a teacher assistant course at TAFE. My dream jobs for the future are to be a music artist and a YouTuber. I also want to go to Bus Stop Films in Launceston. I am making my own movie called *Power Mansion.* It is a full movie, not a short film. When it is finished, I want it to be shown at the Metro Cinemas.

Sandon Overton
Tasmania DSAN member

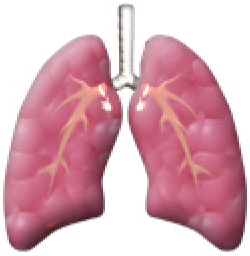
For more information about DSAN, please visit: www.downsyndrome.org.au/advocacy/down-syndrome-advisory-network/

*Or contact Alison on alison.richardson@downsyndrome.org.au or **0438 926 035.***

Looking after your physical wellbeing – Easy Read

Physical wellbeing is about how healthy your body is.

It is about having enough energy to do the things you want to do.



It includes your muscles, your heart, your lungs, your bones and your brain.

Looking after your body can help prevent sickness and pain.

Good physical wellbeing helps your mental health too. It can help you feel more confident and calm.

It's important to eat a mix of healthy foods — including fruits, vegetables and protein — to give your body energy and build strength.

You should also:

- Drink lots of water

- Take any medication your doctor has prescribed

- Keep your body moving by walking, swimming, dancing or stretching

- Listen to your body and tell someone if you are not feeling right

- Get lots of sleep.

Top tips for physical and mental wellbeing

The DSA Health Ambassadors got together and came up with this excellent list of tips for keeping healthy.

Take responsibility for your body

- Be well groomed and look after yourself.
- Down syndrome is just a label. Don't hold back from anything in life just because you have Down syndrome!
- Learn what it means to be healthy—what it feels like in your body.
- Look for role models who can inspire you.
- Be responsible for yourself when it comes to being healthy.
- Do the thing you **want** to do to stay healthy and exercise. Maybe doing the chicken dance is your thing.

Look after your mind

- Prioritise something you **enjoy**.
- Colouring in is calming.
- Keep your brain active with things like word searches.

Get social

- Participate in the community.
- Make new friends.
- Celebrate and share your feelings with friends.
- Be kind to others and yourself.

Move your body

- Get plenty of fresh air and exercise.
- Have a dog? Take it for walks.
- Going to the gym.
- Walking on the beach.

Keep a healthy diet

- Stay hydrated—drink lots of water.
- Eat well—lots of veggies.
- Don't drink much alcohol, mostly drink water.
- It is OK to snack sometimes.

Look after your teeth

- Take steps to prevent problems with your teeth (e.g. get a plate, braces).
- Brush your teeth every night and every morning.

DSA Health Ambassadors enjoying a Sydney Harbour cruise together during the National Centre of Excellence's conference.

Use your support systems

- Living independently: make sure you have good supports, especially if you live independently.
- If you have a problem, talk to people who support you.
- Ask for support for your health management.
- Look after your mental health, and remember that you are **not** alone.
- Seek good healthcare and use reminders for appointments, e.g. by putting them in your phone with a reminder.
- Get help from someone else to get healthy if you are stuck.

Stay motivated and keep a healthy mindset

- Motivation to stay healthy is important—don't give up.
- Get up out of bed, and be motivated.
- Don't listen to thoughts in your mind that are telling you it is too hard to get healthy.
- Choose to focus on what you will get out of exercise — having energy, feeling good in your body.

Support others

- You can encourage someone to be healthy, but don't judge them.
- Give them real information, and be respectful of their choices.
- They are the expert on what works for them.
- Don't tell other people what they should do.

Q&A

Taking on the world together

Hugo Taheny, Ethan Parry and Sam Le Feuvre recently returned from the 2025 Virtus World Athletics Championships, where they each achieved incredible results. Behind every throw, jump and sprint is a friendship that keeps them motivated and proud to represent their country together.

Tell us where you're from, how old you are and what sports you compete in.

Hugo: I'm 24, I live on a farm in Point Turton, a small town on the coast of South Australia. I do discus, javelin and shot put.

Ethan: I'm 21, from Hervey Bay, Queensland. My sports are long jump, shot put, the 100m sprint and the tri event.

Sam: I'm 19, from Charters Towers, Queensland. I compete in the 100m and 200m sprints, long jump and the tri event.

What are some of your highlights from the recent Virtus World Athletics Championships?

Hugo: I really love representing my country on the Australian Team! I love to feel motivated. I love doing shot put. Athletics is my happy place! I'm number one in the world for shot put and discus, and I hold two world records. We put in the hard work as a team. Ethan and Sam are like my family now and we keep each other on track, and together we make each other

better because we are strong independent dudes and we love our country. I took home gold in discus and silver in shot put at the World Championships.

Ethan: Running against the best in the world was my main highlight. Also, being with my mates and talking to them, and being with the team. Having everyone saying great things, yelling and cheering for me. I took two silver medals home, one for long jump and one for the 4x100m relay which I ran with Sam.

Sam: I got the silver medal in the relay and I got bronze for the 100m sprint. I love to run and I enjoyed meeting up with these guys and my friends.

How did you three meet and become friends?

Hugo: I met Ethan in 2019 when we represented Australia, and then we both met Sam in 2022 when we were on an Australian team together. I liked them and I thought, yep, I'm going to be your mate. We have a very strong relationship and get along well, and now we are adults and have done very incredible things together. Sammy makes us laugh so much, and we just enjoy each other's company. They're my heart – I love them, they are my best friends.

We have represented Australia together in France at the Virtus Global Games in 2023. Ethan and I represented Regional Australia in Fiji in 2024.

Sam: I had seen Hugo on his Insta page before I met him, and they call him the Rockstar. So when I saw him for the first time in Queensland a few years ago, I said, "Hey rockstar!". We are both from farming places and have buggies that we drive around our properties and we also both have Jack Russells and lots of similarities.

Ethan: I met Hugo in 2019 and Sam in 2022. We all met at athletics competitions representing Australia. I love talking with Hugo. He is funny and kind and he loves to tell stories. Sam is funny too and we laugh a lot.

What is it like to train and compete together?

Hugo: We cheer each other on. In 2023, in France, we were all screaming Sam's name because he broke a massive record. It was the 200m sprint. It was an amazing experience to be there with him at the finish line. Lots of hugs. Also, at the end of our relay together, which we all ran in, we did a little happy dance, and that video went viral around the world. In 2022, the three of us broke the 4 x 100m relay world record together. We ran really fast!

Ethan: We enjoy spending time together, having fun and just being good mates.

We all enjoy competing and celebrating each other's success. We talk to each other and laugh together and care for each other.

How often do you train a week?

Ethan: Five or six days a week. I do gym as well as track sessions and technical sessions. I go for a run around the block. I do plank and boxing.

Hugo: I train six times a week. I do a lot of my training in the shearing shed – my dad made it into a gym for me. I also do an exercise physiology session each week with my mate/trainer Ben to work on strength and specific things. I have a throwing circle out in the paddock where I practice my throwing too. I go to Adelaide a few times a week to see my coach – I have got an amazing coach.

Sam: I train four times a week, play a game of soccer on Mondays and do parkrun on Saturdays. I do mostly run training. My coach is always looking at times and she writes down my PB, but we train over different distances. I've got a big sheet in the shed with all my times.

Tell me about the goals you have? What do you want to achieve still?

Sam: I want to make the Australia team again, travel with my mates, keep running and training and be fit and healthy. And get faster!

Ethan: My goals are to keep representing Australia, find a pathway to compete at the Paralympics one day, and just keep training and competing as long as I can. I like feeling strong, healthy and I love to flex my guns.

Hugo: I want to compete in the next Virtus Games in Egypt in 2027. All three of us boys are working towards that. I want to keep enjoying myself and getting better. I want to encourage younger children with a disability so they can aspire for big things and become big athletes, and we can teach them about sports and all that type of stuff. I want to make things different for people with disability. My dream is to be able to compete with my mates at the Paralympics and to light the cauldron at the Brisbane Olympic Games in 2032!

Down Syndrome
Australia

Supporting positive change for our community

As non-profit organisations, Down Syndrome Australia and its members are dedicated to supporting, informing and advocating for the needs of people with Down syndrome and their families across Australia.

Our teams work diligently to support people with Down syndrome through developing resources, advocating for positive change, engaging with the community and implementing innovative programs focused on creating an inclusive future for all.

Your ongoing support enables us to continue with this important work and together, shape the future for people with Down syndrome throughout Australia and beyond.

Your donations help us make a real difference.

All donations, no matter the amount, help us to continue our important work.

To make a donation, scan the QR code or visit:

www.downsyndrome.org.au/get-involved/donate/

All donations over $2 are tax deductible.

Why I love lifting and breathing

We speak with Nixon Christodoulou about his healthy mind and body routine, which includes the gym, Wim Hof breathing and cold showers.

Why do you like to go to the gym?

Because I need to pump some iron. I am very good at push-ups and also some day I will get stronger and stronger and I want to go to the Olympics. I love going to the gym and meeting other strong people. I love pumping iron with my best gym buddy, Mummy Ruth.

What do you do at the gym?

So, me and my mum go to the gym and we get ready, grab the equipment and we warm up and then we do push-ups and machines. I love lifting weights. I can bench press 60kg with the bar and the gym owner has to spot me, because I am so strong [lots of laughter]. Mum is so strong too and I love going to the gym with her.

What are your favourite exercises at the moment?

I love push-ups. My mum and I did the Push-Up Challenge. They are very easy for me. You keep your body at 90 degrees, come down and then push up. I love to do curls for the girls [lots of laughter again]. I love to do my legs with heavy weights. My step-mum Liz always reminds me to stretch and that makes me laugh, but it's very important to stretch even if I find that boring. I only like it sometimes.

Why is it important to look after your physical health?

Because you need to take care of your body. We need to stay healthy and eat healthy and have fruit and water. If you stay strong, it can help you push through anything.

How did you start doing Wim Hof breathing exercises?

I found it on YouTube and I like it because it is good for you. I started doing it because a bodybuilder did it on YouTube and had a cold shower and I like to have cold showers too.

What do you enjoy about Wim Hof breathing?

I like Wim Hof himself, and it helps me to go to sleep. I like to do the exercises when I go to bed. I even do them at school. I like to do them when I feel sad and they make me feel better.

How do the breathing exercises help your mental and physical health?

When I feel red (which is when I feel scared or mad), the Wim Hof breathing helps me to calm back down to green (green is my good mood colour) so I shut my eyes and I breathe and I can feel red moving to green.

Tell us about your experience with Nathan Cleary!

Oh, that was so cool. Liz was outside on the football field and I was in the tunnel with Nathan Cleary and we were both a bit nervous but I said to him it's all good. Then I was about to tell him about Wim Hof and he was already doing it, and I said to him I can't believe it, I cannot believe it right now, and I said let's do Wim Hof and we laughed and so we went for it and stood and did the breathing together, then we ran out on the field and everybody cheered for me. My mum and brother were in the crowd, and I was waving to them—it was so fun.

Can you tell us how to do the Wim Hof breathing?

Ok, alright, easy, easy.

You can sit or lie down and be comfortable.

Close your eyes.

And then after that be ready to go and breathe in through your nose and fill up your belly and then breathe out through your mouth.

Nice and controlled.

Do this 30 times.

Then on the last one hold your breath for as long as you can and when you can't hold anymore then you breathe again.

You can lay there and relax or go to sleep.

Is there anything else you want to share about your exercise and breathing routine?

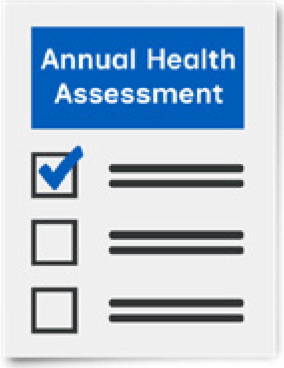
I like having a good routine, so I go to the gym in the afternoon, and then go back home, feed the dogs and make a healthy dinner. Having a cold shower is also good for me—it's fun, it helps me to relax my body.

I also think that the gym helps me—it's hard for me to make friends but everyone at the gym says hi to me and I tell them that Curls Get the Girls.

Yearly health checks – Easy Read

A yearly health check is a special appointment with your **GP** once a year.

Your GP is your regular doctor.



A yearly health check is sometimes called an **Annual Health Assessment**.

A yearly health check helps to

- Make sure your body is working properly
- Find any health problems before they get too big.

It is important for all people with an intellectual disability to get a yearly health check.

You should go for a yearly health check even if you do not feel sick.

Medicare will help pay for your yearly health check.

For more information about yearly health checks go to

It's Doctor Time! for people with intellectual disability – Inclusion Australia

A health check with proven benefits

The Comprehensive Health Assessment Program (CHAP) helps reduce barriers to healthcare for people with intellectual disability by prompting regular checks and screening. Developed at the University of Queensland by a team led by Professor Nick Lennox, the tool is available to download from the Australian Department of Health, Disability and Aged Care website. In this article, Nick explains what the CHAP is and how you can access it.

What is the CHAP?

The CHAP stands for the **Comprehensive Health Assessment Program**.

The CHAP is a booklet with two parts. The first part of the booklet asks you questions about your health that will help your GP do their job better. This section needs to be completed before you go to see your doctor.

What does the CHAP do?

It's common for some health issues to get missed or not receive adequate treatment. The CHAP helps find these things before they get worse, and helps the GP treat them effectively.

> “In Australia, the CHAP has been the only tool proven to pick up illnesses or health needs that may otherwise be missed.”

Also, the CHAP tells you, your family, your nurse and GP about the common things that are missed or poorly treated, so they can look for them and fix them.

The CHAP helps the GP improve your health and wellbeing. It helps make sure important checks and treatments happen.

How do you get a CHAP?

You go to the health department website, download a copy and print it out. The website addresses are below. There is an adult CHAP for people who are 18 years or older, and a young person CHAP for people aged 12 to 18.

What do you do now?

Fill out the first part of the CHAP. You may fill it out yourself, or get help from somebody you trust. Once you have filled out the first part of the CHAP, call your GP to make a long appointment.

When you see the GP, they will read the first part you have filled out and may ask you a few more questions. Then they will examine you. This means they will test your vision and hearing, check your blood pressure and examine your body.

If your GP has a nurse at their practice, they will do some of these examinations before you see your GP.

When you make an appointment, it is best to talk to the receptionist at the practice to find the best time that suits the GP. There may be times during the week when it is not as busy, which is better for a CHAP appointment.

Here is the CHAP for young people (aged 12-18):
https://bit.ly/3JYxYVw

Here is the CHAP for adults (aged 18 years and older):
https://bit.ly/4qXmwtV

Feeling strong, feeling good

Chantelle Oliver from Down Syndrome Victoria takes us inside FitSkills21, where inclusive fitness builds strength, confidence and lasting friendships.

FitSkills21 is an evidence-based physical activity program delivered by Down Syndrome Victoria. It pairs adults with Down syndrome with volunteer partners to exercise together at a local gym.

Participants attend weekly, one-hour sessions in line with school terms, facilitated by a FitSkills21 staff member. Each person receives a personalised, Easy Read exercise program designed by a physiotherapist, ensuring the workouts are safe, fun, achievable and aligned with individual goals.

Through regular check-ins, we monitor participants' progress—and the results speak for themselves! With the right support, guidance and commitment, our participants prove that positive change in physical and mental health is possible and long lasting, and feels good.

While our participants love celebrating their increased strength and fitness, many share how looking after their physical and mental health makes them feel more confident, capable and content.

One of our long-time participants, Dan Ilsley, enjoys the program so much that he attends two sessions a week—Coburg on Monday evenings and Brunswick on Thursday evenings. When asked what he loves about working out, Dan said: "I love seeing friends at the gym. I love doing a workout with my volunteers because we laugh a lot together. I love getting muscles! After a workout I feel more calm in my mind".

After each workout, the FitSkills21 participants, volunteers and facilitator share a social meal. This encourages friendship and community connection, as well as supporting important life skills such as choosing nutritious and allergy-safe foods and encouraging participants to see food as fuel for their bodies. Our facilitators and volunteers play a key part in role-modelling these behaviours in a supportive and inclusive way.

Research has long shown that regular physical activity supports mental health by improving mood, reducing anxiety and building confidence. While FitSkills21 is a structured, in-person program, we asked participant Dan what he does to stay active and feel good outside of the sessions:

"I ride my bike to and from the gym. I also love walking and get public transport to work and TAFE so I make sure I get plenty of exercise throughout the week," Dan said.

He added that he: "loves to listen to music in his headphones while he is walking" and describes it as "one of his favourite things to do."

Going for a daily walk, stretching, eating mindfully and sharing a nutritious meal with a friend or family member can all support physical and mental wellbeing. Asking ourselves, "What makes my body and brain feel strong and healthy?"—and doing more of that—can be life-changing!

FitSkills21 currently operates in nine locations across Victoria. For more information or to register your interest please complete the enquiry form below.

https://downsyndromevictoria.snapforms.com.au/form/fitskills21-enquiry-form

Dancing in the ACT

A vibrant dance community in the ACT is proving that movement, confidence and connection go hand in hand, writes Shannon Kolak.

Here in the ACT, we love to dance! Around ten years ago, a group of local parents created the Xtreme Stars Dance Troupe—a vibrant, inclusive group for people with intellectual disabilities who wanted a chance to learn choreography and perform.

What began as a small group of dancers has grown into a confident, tight-knit community that performs regularly across Canberra. Every week, the troupe comes together to learn routines, develop skills, and support one another.

Dance coach Cheryle Henry says the focus has always been on ability rather than disability.

“When we step into the studio, labels disappear,” Cheryle explains. “We focus on strengths, not limitations. Everyone has something unique to bring to the floor—whether that’s rhythm, expression, leadership or heart.”

Over the years, Xtreme Stars have proudly performed at major community events including Floriade, the National Folk Festival, Clubs ACT Awards Night, Raiders NRLW halftime shows, Hartley Lifecare High Tea, and countless local fundraisers and celebrations. Each performance sends a strong message—that ability shines brightest when given the chance to be seen.

Haylee from Xtreme Stars says her favourite part is “wearing sparkly costumes and hearing the crowd cheer.”

Miri adds, “I love performing on stage with my friends—we make people smile!”

The joy of movement

Inspired by the success of Xtreme Stars, a new dance fitness program was created. This group meets every Wednesday afternoon at the ACT Down Syndrome & Intellectual Disability workshop space in Canberra.

As Cheryle watched her dancers mature, she realised there was also an important health need emerging.

“A number of my dancers were starting to live more independently and getting older,” she says. “I could see that strength and balance were becoming really important, not just for dancing, but for everyday life. The risk of falls was increasing, and I wanted to make sure they had the fitness and confidence to get themselves up safely if that ever happened.”

That insight became a driving force behind the Dance Fit classes. The two-hour class combines upbeat fitness routines with a 30-minute freestyle disco at the end. The atmosphere is relaxed, supportive, and full of laughter.

The goal is to build strength, balance, and coordination while boosting confidence, independence, and social connection.

> Dance is one of the most enjoyable and accessible forms of exercise. It improves cardiovascular health, coordination, flexibility and memory—and it’s proven to boost mood and mental wellbeing.

Adapting for everyone

Cheryle’s approach to teaching is flexible and inclusive. Steps are demonstrated slowly and visually, with lots of repetition and encouragement. Routines are tailored to the abilities of the group, and everyone is given the freedom to move in their own way.

“No two dancers are the same—and that’s what makes it beautiful,” Cheryle says. “If someone needs to sit down or modify a move, that’s okay. What matters is that they’re involved, having fun and feeling proud of themselves.”

Mary-Ellen agrees. “I love performing like my idols, the Spice Girls,” she says. “I love getting my hair and makeup done and entertaining people. I love when they cheer for me!”

A community that dances together

Whether on stage at Floriade or in the weekly dance class, Xtreme Stars and the Dance Fit crew show that dance is far more than movement: it’s connection, confidence and celebration. It’s where friendships are formed, barriers are broken, and joy fills the room.

“Every time we dance,” Cheryle says, “we remind people that inclusion isn’t about doing things for us—it’s about doing things with us. When we move together, we all shine brighter.”

What is mental health? – Easy Read

Mental health is about how you feel and think.

Good mental health helps you:

- Enjoy life
- Do things you like
- Get along with other people
- Deal with everyday problems

It is normal to sometimes feel:

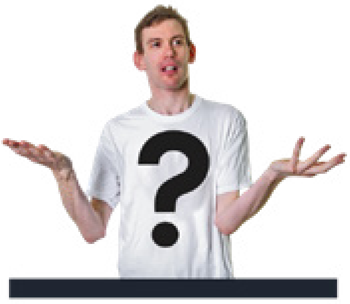
- Sad
- Angry
- Worried

But sometimes you may need some extra help with your mental health.

Many people need help with their mental health for a little while or sometimes their whole life.

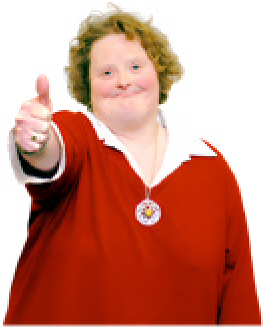
There are a lot of services that can help.

You are not alone.



How can you take care of your mental health?

- Talk to someone
- Rest
- Be active
- Eat healthy food
- Do things you enjoy.



Remember, it is good to take steps to look after your mental health.

Talk to your doctor if you want to check in on your mental health.

Becoming my own advocate

Gillian Gehrke is an advocate for Down Syndrome Australia, Down Syndrome Queensland and International Mosaic Down Syndrome Association (IMDSA). Here, she reflects on how the challenges of living with Mosaic Down syndrome inspired her journey into advocacy and education.

Living with Mosaic Down syndrome, you never know what to expect on a given day.

For me, living with Mosaic Down syndrome is a guessing game of life: every day is a new day, and you never know how you will wake up. Some days I wake with energy, but most days it's difficult to get moving.

Having a goal, and having people you love and want to make the world better for, keeps me going. As a young teenager, I didn't have these things, and it was tough, and I learned the very hard way.

After hitting numerous depression and anxiety episodes, and receiving diagnosis after diagnosis of my health, I realised I alone was the only one who could change—no one was going to do it for me, especially because there is little known about what Mosaic Down syndrome is, and how it affects the individual. It truly is a guessing game and a process of elimination.

So, I started advocating for my health, and that was the beginning of my interest in medical research into keeping healthy.

I will never forget my first experience of health education and advocacy. It was just after signing up for a class at high school called Health Education, which focused on the public health and advocacy for all target markets of society. It was here I did my first major assignment on public health and advocating for health rights. It struck a chord with me—and it has stuck with me since. I must have known it was my purpose in life, even though I didn't know it at the time.

I used my passion for research—for history and textile history and community health advocacy —and applied it to Mosaic Down syndrome. It's exceptionally important to advocate for yourself, as you can't grow as a person unless you alone take responsibility.

> “Having a goal, and having people you love and want to make the world better for, keeps me going.”

But, as someone who lives with intellectual challenges, I know that you also need support. I learned the hard way with this. I thought I could always keep up with my typical peers, and for a long time I didn't even think I had a disability, even though I did. I was in denial, but I also found that supports for people with T21 were too easy for me, and they didn't challenge me.

So, since the advent of advocacy, I have naturally gravitated toward things that made me happy. Instead of fighting it, I let things naturally come to me.

There are some important takeaways I'd like to share.

First of all, if you're having a bad day with mental health conditions, have a good plan. I call it my mental health crisis plan. It helps regulate my nervous system to find calm and balance again.

Surround yourself with people who understand your challenges, who maybe have the same mental health conditions. This is a sounding board to make a breakthrough with your recovery. This is what I call vital—we need people to connect with. There is a reason why they say depression can make you so sick, that it's extremely concerning. There are supports to help anyone who feels they need help.

Carve out the level of energy spoons you have when you first wake up. Make sure you get real rest after a particularly difficult and long day. And try not to take on other people's problems and energies—that will only drain you more.

That sounds easy compared to what the reality is. It takes lots of practise and lots of therapy with accredited medical professionals like psychologists and psychiatrists. I'm here to say it can be done. I'm complex, and I'm managing my conditions much better.

This allows me to re-engage with situations I find more complicated at first. It takes time and persistence. But with the other things I've mentioned, it makes all the difference in the world.

After five years of ongoing supports, and with the continued help from my family who have had their lives turned upside down (change is also big for families), I now have more good days than bad.

It's also been about re-evaluating what real friendship is and learning with the tides of friendships. It's vital to hold on to those who build you up safely and offer genuine care. You can tell the real relationships that get what you have been through.

> “The support of families and friends to walk the distance together—knowing what you have been through. That is the light at the end of the tunnel.”

Supporting My Rights app

The Supporting My Rights app supports people with disability to understand their rights and use the NDIS with confidence.

The app offers:

- Easy Read content for people with disability
- Practical tools and activities to support learning
- Video, podcasts and resources on key topics about human rights
- Guidance for service providers on rights-based support

The app has been co-designed and tested by people with Down syndrome and intellectual disability. It's practical, easy to use and accessible for everyone.

Download the app now: Apple: **https://buff.ly/X6RjP3W** | Google Play: **https://buff.ly/NhPKNyZ**

Helping young people face their fears

Clinical psychologist **Dr Anastasia Hronis** created *Fearless Me!*—a playful, step-by-step therapy program that empowers children with intellectual disabilities to manage anxiety, think more positively and face challenges with courage. She tells us all about it.

A growing number of people around the world are struggling with their mental health.

Young people with intellectual disabilities experience high rates of mental health concerns, particularly anxiety.

For a long time, research on how to help young people with intellectual disabilities has focused mostly on behavioural therapies.

While behavioural therapies have plenty of good evidence behind them, new and emerging work shows that cognitive therapies can also be useful.

Cognitive Behaviour Therapy

Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (or CBT) is one of the most studied types of psychological therapies. Therapists use CBT to help both children and adults who experience a range of mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, stress, trauma and more.

The foundational principles of CBT are that our thoughts, feelings and behaviours all influence and impact one another. Behavioural therapies focus on changing behaviours, whereas CBT also focuses on changing thought patterns.

For example, imagine you see a dog while walking down the street. If you think the dog looks scary and might bite you, that thought can make you feel anxious. As a result, you might cross the road or run away from the dog—those are your actions.

On the other hand, someone else might see the same dog and think it looks friendly. That thought could make them feel excited, and their action might be to walk up to the dog and ask to pat it.

This demonstrates how what we think can have a big impact on how we feel and what we do. CBT can help people understand this process and learn ways to manage their thoughts and feelings.

> “CBT helps us identify patterns in the way we think. Sometimes these patterns can be quite unhelpful for us. Our mind can sometimes tell us things that are not really true, or tell us things that make us feel bad.”

For example, some people always imagine the worst-case scenario happening, even if this scenario is unlikely to happen. CBT helps us identify these unhelpful or untrue thoughts. CBT can teach us to see things in a calmer, more realistic way.

The Fearless Me! Program

Based on this understanding of how CBT works, the Fearless Me! program was created specifically for children and young people with intellectual disabilities.

It is designed for those aged 8–17 years old who experience mild, moderate or severe anxiety. It works best for people who are verbal and have a mild or moderate intellectual disability.

The therapy program involves 10 sessions with a therapist. There is also a website with activities for children to do both with the therapist, and at home with a parent or carer. The Fearless Me! Website was designed to make therapy more fun and engaging for children and young people.

The program is divided into three key parts:

1. **Keep Calm:** Participants learn how to relax when they are feeling anxious.
2. **Stop and Think:** Participants learn how to recognise and change thoughts that do not help them.
3. **Facing Fears:** Participants learn to slowly tackle the things they fear, step by step, and to do the things that made them nervous.

The Fearless Me! Program is completely free to access. If you or your child are already working with a therapist who knows how to deliver CBT, you or your therapist can access the program at no cost.

There is a treatment manual available here:
https://bit.ly/3Jjt5Gx

The website is available here:
https://fearlessme.com.au/

If you have any questions about the program, you are welcome to contact clinical psychologist Dr Anastasia Hronis from the University of Technology Sydney: Anastasia.hronis@uts.edu.au

Keep calm and colour in

Sarah McCrae tells us how colouring in helps her to relax and feel good inside.

Colouring in makes me feel happy, cheerful, joyful and lovely.

I colour in all the time in my spare time. I love doing it. I love to colour flowers, love hearts.

If I do a picture of the clouds, then I do blue. If I have grass, then I do green. I love the rainbow colours: red, pink, yellow, blue, purple.

My favourite activity is the colour by numbers. I like it because it helps to guide you and helps your brain. I also love to colour in shapes.

I like to colour in because I can do it by myself, or with friends. Sometimes when you are on your own, you can do colouring and listen to music, and it can help you to relax. It helps me to relax and makes me feel brave and think about all the good things about the colours I like.

When I feel a bit down or upset or uneasy, colouring makes me feel better.

Health and wellbeing apps for people with Down syndrome

Down Syndrome Australia has created two free health apps to support people with Down syndrome and their families. Here is some information about what each app does and how you can use them.

Down Syndrome Good Health App

This health app is for adults with Down syndrome to keep a diary of daily meals, water, exercise and activities.

Down Syndrome Good Health supports adults with Down syndrome to keep a diary of their meals, water intake, exercise and daily activities to share with family, support people and healthcare providers.

The app encourages regular use and includes mini-games that are unlocked by daily diary entries.

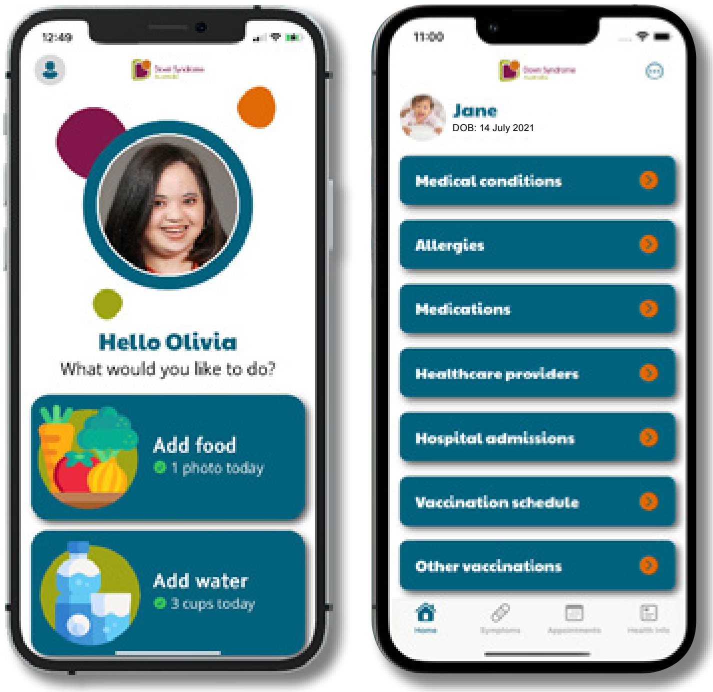
The Down Syndrome Good Health App helps you to:

- Keep a record of your diet by taking photos of meals.
- Keep a record of your water intake.
- Keep a record of your exercise and physical activities.
- Keep a record of the things you do and how these make you feel.

Down Syndrome Health Record App

This health record app is for parents and support people of children with Down syndrome.

The Down Syndrome Health Record App assists parents and support people of children with Down syndrome to record and monitor their child's health, growth and development.



Down Syndrome Health Record helps parents to:

- Record information relating to medical diagnoses, allergies, medications, vaccinations, hospital admissions and healthcare providers.
- Monitor weight, length/height and head circumference, as well as developmental milestones.
- Track active symptoms and share information with healthcare providers.
- Record and prepare for healthcare appointments.

Where to download the apps

The two apps are available on:

- the App Store for Apple devices
- the Google Play Store for Android devices

Download on the App Store

GET IT ON Google Play

Expressing myself through music

Stephanie Papaleo shares how singing and songwriting—and her country music alter-ego, Shana Milan—help her express herself and have fun.

I have been going to a one-on-one singing lesson with a teacher at Armstrong's School of Singing for 8 years.

I love going to my lessons because they give me a chance to get out of the house, keep active and not stay home all the time.

I first started writing songs with my sister-in-law in 1998. She has inspired me so much, and has been the life of the party.

When I'm writing songs, I'm not writing them as me, I'm pretending to be another person.

I can write about anything and it's a good way to share my personal experiences.

Singing and songwriting are good for my mental health because they help me to be creative, imaginative, excited and have heaps of fun.

Below is a song I wrote as Shana Milan. The song is called "Red Lips, Pink Nails".

I wrote it to help people with disabilities understand about how to look after themselves. The song is about loving the way that you are and having lots of fun, and forgetting about the past.

Red Lips, Pink Nails

Red lips send me love
Pink nails, that's enough
Positively wanna be carefree
I will live when I wanna go
and be me
Lot more fun in the sun
Just be careful with everyone

BRIDGE:

I'd rather go shoppin'
Than stay home alone
Bein' seen — let's go

CHORUS:

Red lips — send me love
Pink nails — that's enough
Red lips — shape a smile
Pink nails — will always find
me now
Finally — I'll wish for a holiday
Reality — I'll always be okay
No more cryin' on her shoulder
Lot more lovin' and laughin'

REPEAT BRIDGE
REPEAT CHORUS
REPEAT BRIDGE
REPEAT CHORUS

Oh, always find me now
It's in the past, they won't
find me now
Wish for a holiday and will
always sleep to dream

Please note: Stephanie Papaleo did not write this song. When Steph is songwriting, she is a new-coming country artist. Her name is Shana Milan.

Living a full life

Margaret Curtain is a 76-year-old woman with Down syndrome living in Tasmania. Her sister Shelagh shares a little about her life, before we ask Margaret some questions about how she's taken care of herself over the years.

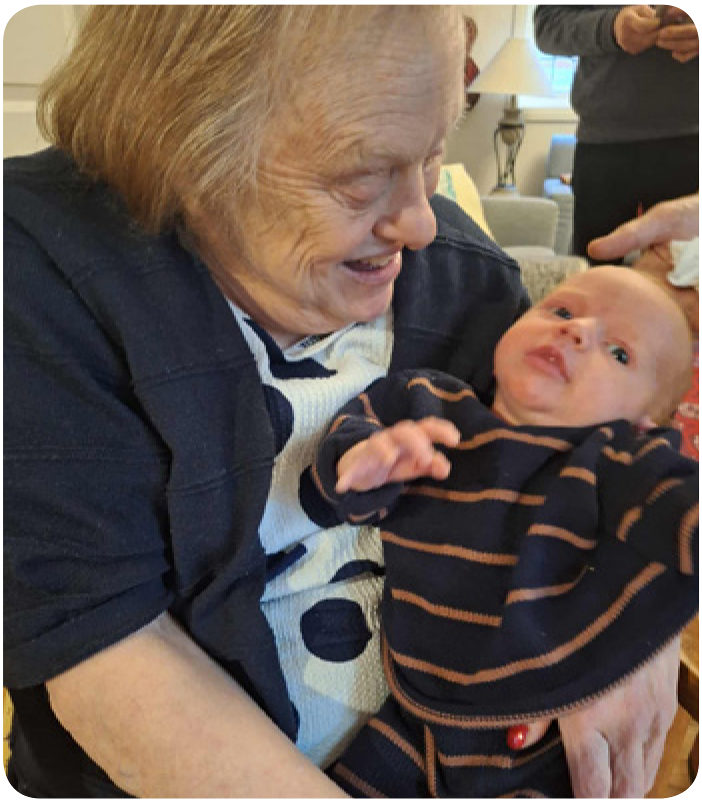
Margaret is the eldest of seven children. She spent much of her childhood in Maydena, Tasmania, with five siblings who all attended Maydena Primary School. After her father passed away, her mother Connie moved to Hobart with Margaret and her now six siblings. There, Margaret attended Talire School in New Town.

With Margaret by her side for a lot of this time, Connie was very active in the disability space, including being a founding member of COSMOS Inc in the early 1980s. This was the first recreational service for people with disabilities in Tasmania.

Margaret enjoyed her time participating in a range of recreational activities and events at COSMOS. She was involved in Riding for the Disabled, and went tenpin bowling every Sunday. During the 1980s she participated in multiple Special Olympics, in Australia and overseas. Margaret was employed for many years at Oakdale Lodge as part of their sewing team.

Since her mum passed away in 1989, Margaret has lived in a group home, and has since retired from work.

She continues to have close contact with her siblings, her nieces and nephews, and great nieces and nephews, all of whom are quite astounded by what Margaret has achieved over her 76 years.



She recently reached out to her local council about the state of the footpaths around her home impacting her ability to get around with her walker, and the council rectified the situation not long after!

Margaret remains socially active. Although she has had a couple of health scares this year, she has bounced back remarkably and hasn't let these episodes stop her living life.

What things have you done to look after your mental and physical health over the years?

I eat healthy food. I walk with my walker.

I like to read the paper every day so I know what's happening with sport and politics.

I like chatting with people, especially about sport and politics.

What are your favourite activities to do now?

I like doing word finder, and reading the paper, and going out for a drive and having coffee, either with carers from the house or my brothers and sisters.

How often do you have medical and health appointments? Why are they important?

I go quite often for checkups as I have asthma. It's important to know if anything is wrong with your health.

Who are your support people?

The carers in my group home and my family.

What are you most proud of in your life?

In 1986 I received communion from the Pope when he visited Hobart.

I went to a few Special Olympics where I did athletics, and later on I did tenpin bowling and carpet bowls.

I was part of the Speak Out Association of Tasmania, a group of people who promote the rights of disabled people.

What is your advice for other people with Down syndrome who want to look after their health?

To go out to things. Join sport groups.

DSAN

How we stay healthy and well

The Down Syndrome Advisory Network (DSAN) helps Down Syndrome Australia to be the leading voice for people with Down syndrome in Australia.

Here, DSAN members from across the country share how they look after their physical and mental wellbeing.

Chris Bunton (NSW) (pictured above)

My parents enrolled me in gymnastics from an early age to improve my fine and gross motor skills. I enjoyed playing on trampolines and foam pits, which helped me build friendships and confidence through fun activities. As I got older, I developed a passion for gymnastics, which kept me active and improved my mental health. Gymnastics has helped me grow both physically and mentally, and through sport, I became the person I am today.

Sandon Overton (TAS) (pictured right)

Physical and mental wellbeing is important to me. I have a personal trainer named Jess and we meet up each week either at her house or at my house. She helps me work on my fitness. We go for walks, ride our bikes and do weights. We even made up a game called Uno Boxing using Uno cards. For my mental wellbeing I cook, play my guitar and sing. I also do yoga and meditation.

Isaiah Caruso (SA)

I like to regularly go to the gym. I go twice a week. I also am very social and have salsa dance practice once a week with Latino Grooves. I will have my first performance soon which I am so excited for. I am also part of a football team, the Goodwood Saints. I love playing football and it's so much fun to be part of a team. This makes me happy.

Anna Gray (WA) (pictured below)

My name is Anna and to look after my physical and mental wellbeing I love to stick to my morning routine. This includes doing yoga and doing my skincare routine. I also like doing Pilates, gym, swimming and catching up with my friends and family.

Jack Williamson (VIC)

I work to control my eating and focus on a healthy diet. I do this every day. My tips would be: Try to avoid temptations. Don't go to buffet restaurants. Avoid the tearoom at work if there is cake. When you are feeling hungry or know there is yummy food in the fridge – distract yourself with other activities. Also, plan some meals for the week that are healthy and have a clear understanding of what the portion should be.

Michael Cox (QLD)

I go to the gym three times a week and go for a run twice a week. This helps me keep fit and healthy both physically and mentally. I started doing it at a young age, when I had to keep in peak shape to be an international swimmer. Because I've been doing it for so long, it's just become part of my life. It helps to clear my mind, keeps me grounded and helps me to fight towards having a better life.

Annie Lee (ACT)

My tips are, don't have too much sugar, but some sugar is OK. Stay fit. I go to the gym once a week, and do Zumba 3 times a week. I really like Zumba so it's easy to keep going. Make sure you are eating your vegetables! I like eating my vegetables and I like fruit as well, I even have smoothies. Make sure you get enough sleep. I like being fit and healthy because it means that I have lots of energy to do the things I love.

Paws for wellbeing

Pets can make a huge difference to our mental health. They give comfort, help us feel calm, make us laugh and keep us active. Here, members of the Down Syndrome Advisory Network share why their pets mean so much to them.

"I love Miley because she comes on walks with me, and she gives the best hugs ever!"

Anna Gray

"I love Ollie because he's always there for me."

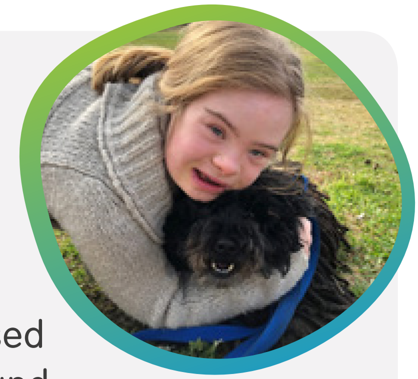
Michael Cox

"I love my sister's dog, Rufus, because he always makes me feel energised, especially when we go for a walk together. Every morning, he waits at my bedroom door and brings a smile to my face. He loves to play tricks with me, and I love to teach him, and I praise him with a reward called "Apple"."

Chris Bunton

"I love cuddling my cats. They make me laugh and smile and they are very funny. They bring me lots of love."

Jack Williamson



"I love Ted because he is awesome and he makes me happy. Ted passed away this year and it was very sad, but I will always love Ted."

Annie Lee

Find a word

Can you find the ten words listed below? They could run in a straight line down, across or diagonally.

M	C	S	L	E	E	P	I	P	W
J	E	S	X	I	I	N	D	T	L
S	H	D	O	Z	B	U	E	A	T
T	W	O	I	U	R	T	X	L	H
R	A	C	I	T	E	R	E	K	E
E	L	T	B	T	A	I	R	I	R
N	K	O	G	E	T	T	C	N	A
G	I	R	D	U	H	I	I	G	P
T	N	U	P	U	E	O	S	O	Y
H	G	Z	K	F	J	N	E	A	N

Meditation

Doctor

Therapy

Nutrition

Sleep

Talking

Walking

Strength

Exercise

Breathe

Our first year in the Learn and Lead Group

As members of the Learn and Lead Group, Tessa Douglas and Audrey O'Connor help advise the National Centre of Excellence in Intellectual Disability Health. Here, they tell us all about the group's first year and what they've been working on.

We are happy to be members of the Learn and Lead Group for the National Centre of Excellence in Intellectual Disability Health (the Centre).

The Centre works to make sure people with intellectual disability get better health care.

The Learn and Lead Group gives advice to the Centre about the changes we believe are needed in the health system. We also learn advocacy and leadership skills. Many of us feel grateful to be part of the group and to help people with intellectual disability.

We had our one-year anniversary this year. We started on 16 October 2024. As a group, we're only now getting to the bigger picture of what we can do.

There are about ten people in the group, and we meet every second Wednesday. Alison from Down Syndrome Australia coordinates the meeting with a different person from the group leading each time.

At the meetings, we follow an agenda that always includes an Acknowledgement of Country and reading the values and goals of Learn and Lead.

The group's values are kindness, respect and inclusion. Our goals include working as a team, building confidence, and ensuring people with intellectual disability have positive healthcare experiences.

Speakers often attend our group meetings to ask about our experiences. I (Tessa) have mostly had good experiences in the healthcare system myself, but I think other people out there need more help and support.

Every person with a disability has different needs. We are individuals.

Being in the group means we get leadership training and opportunities to develop our public speaking and presentation skills.

This year, I (Audrey) co-presented at the World Down Syndrome Day event in Sydney with Julian, the director of the Centre. It felt amazing. I enjoyed it but felt a little nervous. I've shared talks about my lived experience before, but never co-presented with someone. Talking about health was new for me.

I (Tessa) have been learning lots of new skills, like using Zoom and email. At the Centre's conference in Sydney, I designed and painted the T-shirts. I'm an artist, so I created the design and logo for our group.

We ran a workshop at the conference called 'Let's Get Loud', with the theme 'Working Together Every Step of the Way.' It was about helping others when unexpected things happen. The conference had different rooms, each with workshops focusing on different health topics. It was amazing.

One example of advice shared was the need to use more Easy Read materials so people can better understand information.

We wrote advice on light up speech bubbles at the conference. The advice I (Audrey) gave was about helping people with disability understand what is happening to them. Professionals need to explain things clearly. They should also help us describe pain, because people sometimes make assumptions and get it wrong.

I (Tessa) am grateful to be helping people get better healthcare.

I (Audrey) love being part of the group. It helps us understand what is going on in healthcare. If you're in hospital, you want to know what's happening, and often things aren't explained. Being part of this group helps me understand more. I feel more empowered.

For more information about the Learn and Lead Group please visit: nceidh.org.au/who-we-are

Or contact Alison at alison.richardson@downsyndrome.org.au or 0438 926 035.

Better healthcare podcast

A new podcast looks at why we need urgent improvements in healthcare for Australians with intellectual disability. The team behind the podcast tell us about it.

A new podcast is placing the experiences of people with intellectual disability at the centre of the conversation about better healthcare.

Excellence in Practice: Voices for Better Care, launched by the National Centre of Excellence in Intellectual Disability Health (the Centre), brings a fresh and much-needed focus to a long-standing problem—the persistent health inequities faced by people with intellectual disability in Australia.

Hosted by disability advocates Ricky Kremer and Raylene Griffiths, who both bring powerful lived experience, the podcast creates a platform for practical insights and real stories—shared by people with disability, healthcare professionals, and other experts.

> At the heart of the series is a simple but urgent message: people with intellectual disability need access to better care.

"Right now, people with intellectual disability die an average of 27 years earlier than other Australians—not because of their disability, but because of preventable conditions," says Scientia Professor Julian Trollor AM, Director of the Centre.

"That's unacceptable, and it tells us something is deeply wrong with how our health system responds."

Episodes of *Excellence in Practice* delve into key issues such as communication, negative attitudes, diagnosis delays, and inclusive healthcare planning. With each topic, the podcast asks: What does good care look like, and what needs to change to get there?

While aimed at healthcare professionals looking to improve their practice, the podcast also speaks more broadly to anyone interested in disability rights, inclusion and health equity.

"We know that better care starts with better understanding," says Professor Trollor.

"By sharing insight through lived experience, we hope this podcast drives real improvement—not just in policy, but in everyday clinical practice."

With its blend of human stories and evidence-informed discussion, Excellence in Practice offers a timely and accessible resource for health professionals, service providers and advocates alike.

You can listen to the podcast at:
nceidh.org.au/resources

Do you want to learn how to deliver more inclusive and effective care for people with intellectual disability?

Check out the podcast:

Excellence in Practice

Voices for Better Care

Scan the QR code to listen on your favourite podcast app

Artwork by Emily Crockford at
studio A

National Centre
of Excellence in
Intellectual
Disability Health

Out and about

Workshops, national meetings, international travel and plenty of community moments have filled the past six months. And the smiles say it all!

Left: Team DSA together in Melbourne for a special planning catch-up in August. **Right:** DSA CEO, Darryl Steff, at ACOSS' Meet the Parliamentarians event with other Disability Representative Organisation representatives in September.

Left and centre: Community members taking part in our special photoshoot in June. **Right:** nib Thrive representatives with DSA's Rohan Fullwood, Darryl Steff and Beth Sywulsky at the launch of Ageing Well with Down Syndrome in July.

Health Ambassador Alishia and Darryl Steff, in Dubai for Inclusion International's 18th World Congress in September.

DSA's Digital Champions, Learn and Lead group members and Health Ambassadors together in Sydney to share their knowledge at the National Centre of Excellence in Intellectual Disability Health Conference in July.

Participants sharing their powerful healthcare messages during the Learn and Lead Group's 'Let's Get Loud!' session at the Centre's conference.

Our Supporting My Rights Project Reference Group in Melbourne in September, recording podcasts for the Supporting My Rights app.

Our voice

Australian Capital Territory

As usual the ACT members, staff and volunteers have been busy! We hosted a cocktail event, supported by Eastlake Gungahlin, called 'Cocktails & Inclusion'. Our guest speakers were Aussie screen legends John Jarratt and Gerard O'Dwyer. They spoke about inclusion in the entertainment industry and the making of their film, *What About Sal*. The Xtreme Stars provided the entertainment and Underground Spirits created a delicious "Inclusion Cocktail".

Our Advocacy Reference Group continues to meet each fortnight, creating workshops on Supported Decision Making and Self Advocacy, testing Easy Read resources and participating in community meetings and public speaking opportunities. Our community came together for our annual StepUP! for Down Syndrome family picnic. It was a lovely afternoon where families of all ages gathered to reconnect and enjoy the sunshine.

During Term 4, we hosted 'Safety Month' where our members learned basic first aid from St John Ambulance and other community safety skills from ACT Fire and Rescue and the Australian Federal Police. Thank you to everyone who volunteered their time. We wish our member Charlotte Bailey the best of luck at the Australian Human Rights Awards in December. Charlotte is one of four finalists for the Young People's Award.

Shannon Kolak
CEO, ACT Down Syndrome & Intellectual Disability

Queensland

In July, we proudly launched our new name, Down Syndrome & Intellectual Disability Queensland (DSIDQ). Our leadership team travelled across Queensland to host community engagement events, connecting directly with families, gathering feedback to shape our strategic direction, and sharing updates on our services.

In August, the Education Team hosted the Endless Possibilities Conference at Victoria Park, bringing together educators and experts to explore inclusive approaches to teaching literacy and numeracy. Leading researchers Associate Professor Kathy Cologon and Professor Rhonda Faragher shared insights under the theme *Foundations for Success: Inclusive Literacy and Numeracy for Students with an Intellectual Disability.*

October marked Down Syndrome Awareness Month, celebrated through the Gala Dinner, Casali's 10th Awareness Drive, the Townsville Step Up event, and the DSIDQ Family Picnic. These events strengthened community connections and amplified the voices of people with Down syndrome and intellectual disability.

Responding to community feedback, we are introducing Carer Coaching and Carer Peer Support Groups, offering one-on-one support and facilitated programs to help carers achieve goals and build strong networks. Looking ahead, we're excited to bring our new debating program, Hear Me Out, to the Gold Coast in 2026, supporting participants to build confidence, communication and teamwork skills in an inclusive setting.

Sarah Bone
CEO, Down Syndrome & Intellectual Disability Queensland

South Australia

In South Australia, the past few months have been full of community connection and exciting progress. We had a wonderful response to Down Syndrome Awareness Month, with families, schools and local organisations joining in the celebrations. The SA team shared an awesome series of posts on social media, highlighting personal stories, achievements and moments of pride from across the state.

Work also continued on the development of a new Association for the South Australian Down Syndrome community. The draft constitution for Down Syndrome SA was completed and shared with the working group for review. We met to discuss the draft and are now preparing it for the next stage of approval. This is an important milestone and reflects the dedication and collaboration of everyone involved.

Our SA team, Louise and Jennifer, continued to deliver wonderful work across the state. We are preparing for regional visits in the new year to connect with families, listen to local experiences and provide support on the ground. Planning is also underway for a toilet training workshop and a Key Word Sign session to support communication and daily living skills.

On the days when Louise and Jennifer were not working, DSWA continues to answer the South Australia Information Service phone and emails, ensuring families received timely information, support and referral where needed.

Cassandra Hughes
CEO, Down Syndrome WA

Tasmania

October was a wonderful month filled with connection, creativity and community spirit. We kicked things off with a fantastic statewide get together at the Hobart Zoo and Aquarium, where members from all corners of Tasmania came together to explore, interact, and enjoy a fun-filled day. Between sharing ice creams, meeting fascinating animals and catching up with friends old and new, the day was full of laughter and adventure.

As the sun set, the excitement continued with our very first Spring Fling in Hobart. The evening was a true celebration of talent and teamwork, featuring vibrant dance performances from our southern Bright Stars, stunning artwork contributed by members from across the state, and plenty of opportunities to connect and support one another through fundraising. The energy and creativity on display made it an unforgettable night.

We're so grateful to everyone who joined us and helped make October such a success. As we look ahead, we're already excited for our summer catch ups around the state and of course our much-anticipated family camp coming up in early 2026!

Stacey Jackson
Executive Officer, Down Syndrome Tasmania

Victoria

Across our programs, services, partnerships, and advocacy, people with Down syndrome and families continue to lead the way in shaping an inclusive Victoria these past six months.

We finished 2025 with two major events: our annual trek where seven dedicated hikers walked part of the bucket list Larapinta trail, raising $45,000, and StepUP! for Down syndrome, celebrating Down Syndrome Awareness Month and raising over $50,000 to support DSV's provision of information, services and supports.

Growth continues across our Club21, FitSkills21 and Education programs, and across regional Victoria we've continued to strengthen our presence with events and activities designed with and for local communities. This is ensuring more people have access to support, resources and inclusive opportunities close to home. We said goodbye and thank you to Regional Coordinator Linda Jungwirth, and welcomed Debby Fraumano to this role.

We also recently launched our Annual Report, celebrating highlights from the last financial year, including a 14.75% increase in membership, 9,081 attendees accessing 1,155 MyTime peer support sessions, 85 students with Down syndrome supported in local schools, and 19,504 engagements within our closed Facebook support groups. Looking ahead to 2026 our biennial Education Conference is on 2 March, Family Fun Day on 22 March, and we will be launching our 2026 adventure on the iconic Great Ocean Walk.

Dan Payne
CEO, Down Syndrome Victoria

Western Australia

In Western Australia, the past few months have been filled with connection, celebration and growth across our community. In October, we proudly hosted our annual StepUP and Dance with Down Syndrome event, bringing families and supporters together in a joyful celebration of inclusion. We also continued to expand our Life Skills Lab, delivering a series of adult workshops that are now being shared across both WA and SA to support independence, confidence and community participation.

We were delighted to celebrate Nikki Schwagermann, our Family Support Coordinator, who received the NDS Emerging Leader Award, recognising her outstanding commitment to families and children across the state. Our Playgroup and Kids Club social groups continue to provide connection and peer support for younger children and their families.

We were deeply grateful to Telethon7 for their continued support and the opportunity to be featured in this year's broadcast. Our outreach also continued with regional visits to Broome and Kununurra, strengthening relationships in some of WA's most remote communities.

The DSWA team has continued to support two staff in South Australia delivering family support and support to the employment projects..

We now look forward to the Christmas season and to commencing 2026, our 40th Anniversary year.

Cassandra Hughes
CEO, Down Syndrome WA

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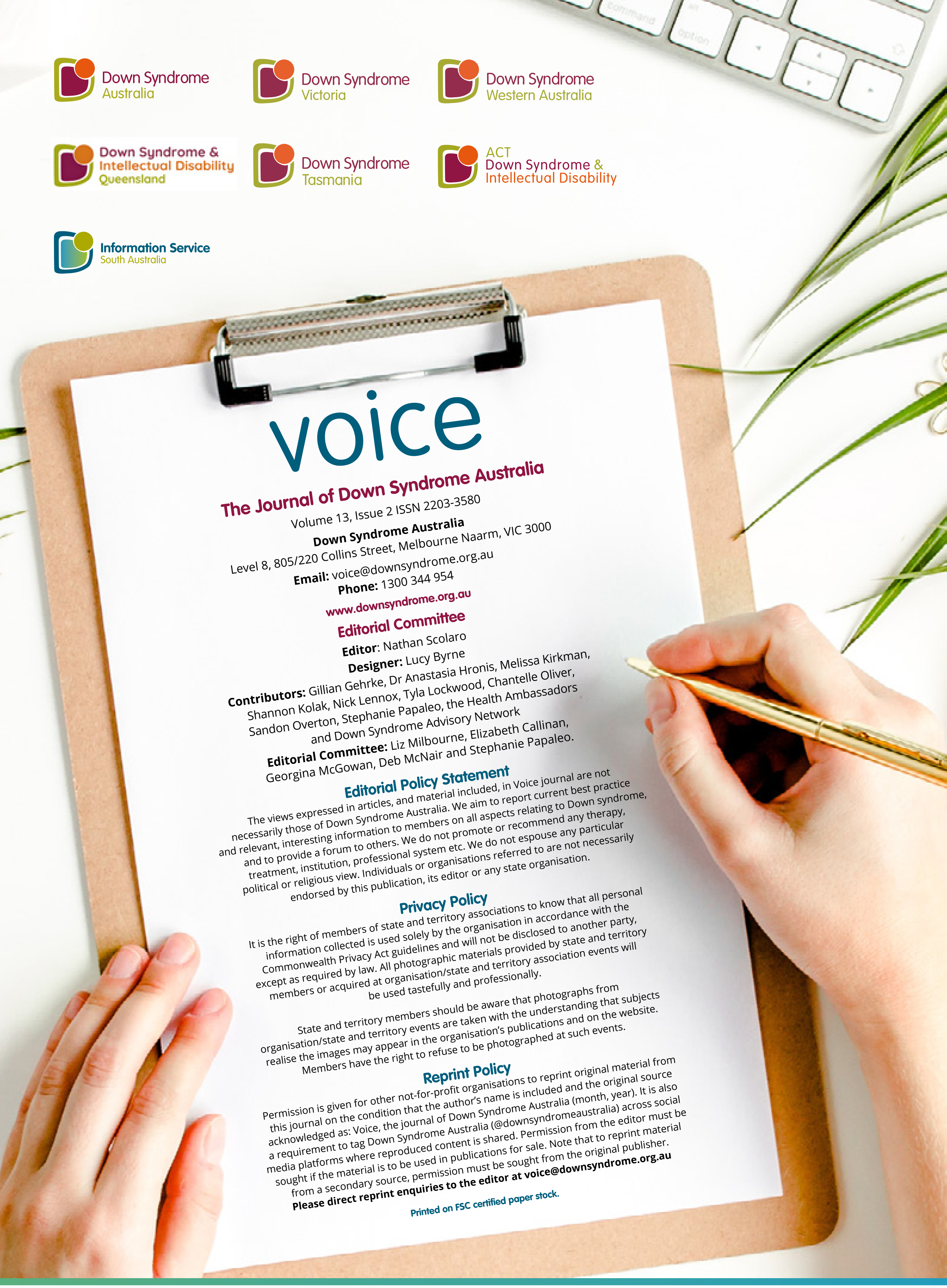

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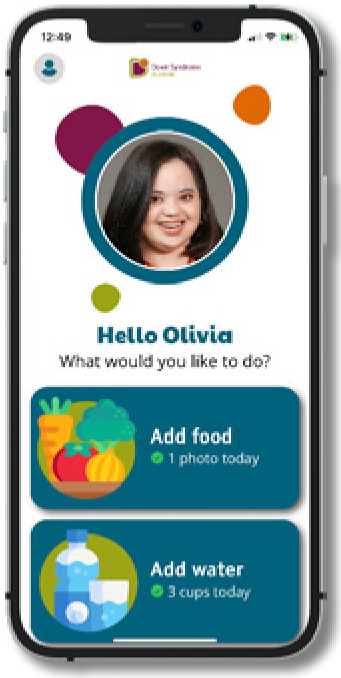

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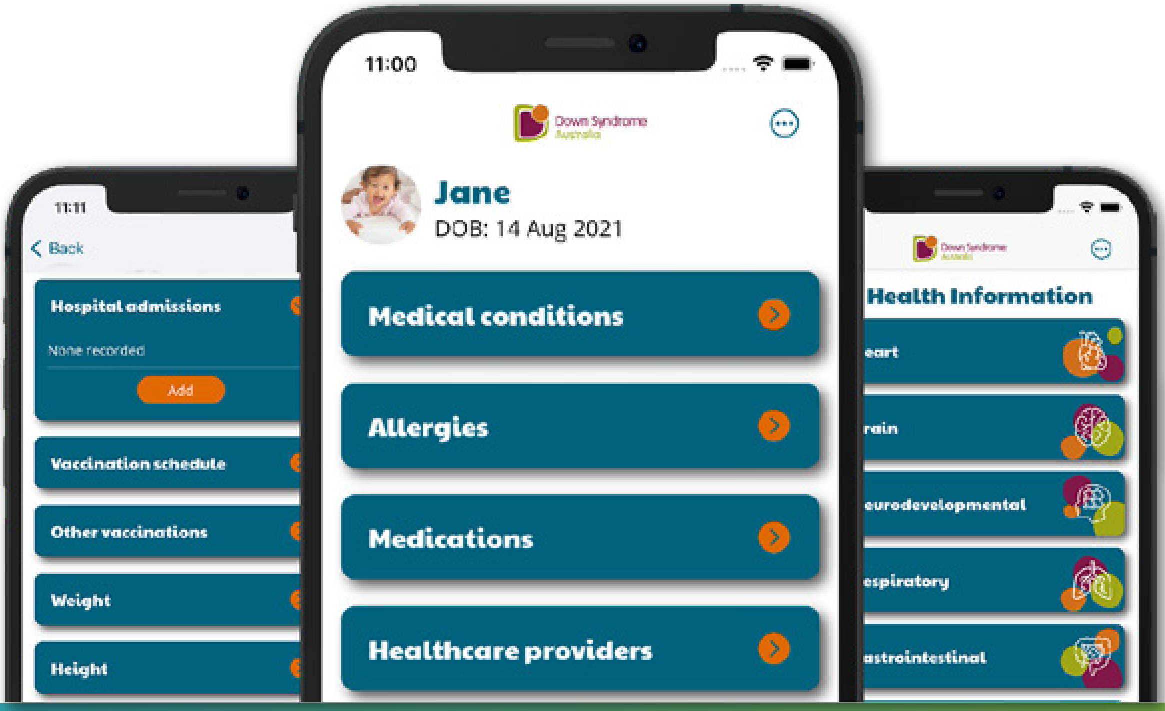

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