



Dietitians
Australia

Capacity Building in Disability for Dietitians Project

Project partners and collaborators



Australian Federation of
Disability Organisations



First Peoples
Disability Network



Down Syndrome
Australia

Project background

Our goal

To address the need for disability-specific Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for dietitians, Dietitians Australia partnered with the Australian Federation of Disability Organisations (AFDO) to design and deliver the Capacity Building in Disability for Dietitians (CBDD) program in 2019.

The initiative sought to enhance dietitians' knowledge, skills, awareness, confidence, intentions to change practice and perceived benefits to people with disability, with the ultimate goal to improve access to high-quality dietetic services in mainstream healthcare settings.

Design

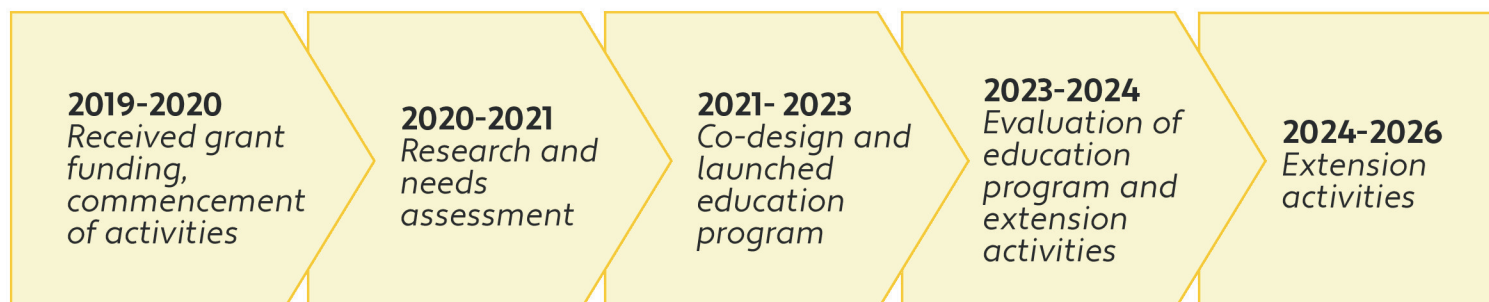
The program was guided by an advisory group and informed by the social and biopsychosocial models of disability, adult and social learning theories. The advisory group; established by AFDO and Dietitians Australia, included 2 people with disability, 2 dietitians and organisation representatives.

The needs assessment phase involved a desktop review, surveys and focus group interviews of people with disability, families and carers as well as surveys and focus group interviews of dietitians (members and non-members of Dietitians Australia who worked in client-facing roles). This needs assessment and the advisory group assisted in identifying gaps in training and service access, thus informing the programs development, implementation and outputs.

Funding

This project is funded by the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing through the Information Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) grant, under the Mainstream Capacity Building Program.

Phases of the CBDD Project





Education program activities

Below lists an overview of all the activities this project developed across 2022 to 2026. To access the education materials that remain accessible on demand, scan the QR code on the flip side of this page.

Initial activities

Development of online course, Introduction to Disability and Inclusion for Dietitians

Online, self-paced 5 module course covering:

- disability foundations
- health and function
- communication
- supporting people with disability where they live, work and play
- navigating funding.

In-practice workshops

Online, small group live sessions. 5 workshops covering:

- NDIS basics
- supporting clients with communication disabilities
- meal-time management
- a focus on function
- NDIS reporting.

Supervision groups

- Online
- 12 supervisors, with groups of 4 supervisees
- Monthly for 6 months.

Extension activities

Introductory course review

- Updated module content
- Reviewed case studies, added videos, added quizzes
- Development of accompanying written resources.

Intermediate course development

- Intermediate course development accessible via the Dietitians Australia Shop from July 2026.

In-practice workshops: Clinical focus

- Online, small group live sessions (completed)
- 3 workshops covering:
 1. Neurological disabilities
 2. Paediatric disabilities
 3. Psychosocial disabilities.
- Accompanying LMS courses, self-paced.

Supervision groups

- Online
- 8 supervisors, with groups of 4 supervisees
- Monthly for 6 months.

Webinar Series

19 webinars developed, live and recorded.

Topics included:

- NDIS and core dietetic practice skills
- Physical disabilities
- Paediatrics
- Neurological disabilities
- Cultural considerations

A snapshot of our resources

Paediatric Disability Nutrition Assessment Tool

Purpose: This tool helps dietitians explore and nutrition factors for children with medical needs. It guides when to collaborate with, assess across the multidisciplinary and referral needs, it supports evidence-informed nutrition.

Scope: This resource is applicable to clinical practice (private practice) in Australia, approximately 4-6 million people with disability. Therefore it is likely that this resource.

Acknowledgements: This resource is developed as part of Capacity Building in Disability for the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care. This resource is (APD) The first part. You will experience of current and past content of this resource.

Dietetic Referral reasons cover:

- Oral motor differences
- Eating and feeding differences
- Positive relationships with food
- Reduce negative GI symptoms including toileting
- Supplementation

Paediatric Disability Nutrition Assessment Tool
This guide explores a range of common referral reasons and helps dietitians capture key information in their assessment and work within the multidisciplinary team. Found within the Paediatric Disability In-Practice Workshop LMS.

Community Disability Dietitian Toolbox
This toolbox prompts and inspires dietitians to think broadly, act effectively and overcome challenges when supporting their clients with disability. Found within the Introductory Course.

Community Disability Dietitian Toolbox

Purpose: This toolbox is designed to prompt broadly and act effectively when supporting clients with disability. Due to the diversity of environments they live, work and learn, and the way we communicate the toolbox. We encourage you to do what works for you and your client.

Scope: This resource is applicable to clinical practice (private practice) in Australia, approximately 4-6 million people with disability. Therefore it is likely that this resource.

Acknowledgements: This resource is developed as part of Capacity Building in Disability for the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care. This resource is co-authored by Nutrition Australia. We would also like to acknowledge the past clients who have informed this resource.

Our Dietetic toolbox for working with people with disability: an overview to inspire & guide your practice.

2 Food literacy strategies and a tick box guide for inspiration

CLARIFY COLLABORATION CLARIFY

Community Disability Dietitian Toolbox



Food and Health

Understanding Diet-Related Conditions

Health Condition 1: Diabetes

What is Diabetes?
Diabetes is a condition where there is too much glucose (sugar) in the blood. This causes health problems.

You can find out more about Diabetes here: <https://www.diabetesaustralia.org.au/health-advocacy/diabetes>

Food and Diabetes: For people with Diabetes, the body cannot turn sugar (from carbohydrates foods) into energy properly. This leads to high blood glucose (sugar) levels. They need to pay attention to the type and amount of carbohydrates they eat every day, to keep blood glucose (sugar) levels normal. A healthy diet can help control Diabetes and prevent health problems getting worse.

Health problems in diabetes:

- Fasting weight
- Weight gain
- Blurred vision
- Weight loss
- Feeling thirsty
- Feeling tired
- Trying to burn and lose weight
- Getting to feel more often
- Wounds that are slow to heal

✓ Eat more healthy carbs:

- Fruit and vegetables
- Vegetables and legumes
- Whole grains

⚠️ Eat less high sugar and processed carbs:

- Sauces, dressings, and spreads
- Soft drinks and sugary drinks
- Alcohol
- Highly processed grains
- Highly processed meats
- Highly processed oils
- Highly processed fats

Small Changes For Big Health Benefits

Use common sense changes to your diet can help keep your blood sugar steady and your body strong.

- Swap refined carbohydrates for whole grain high fibre
- Drink plenty of water and limit sugary drinks
- Get regular physical activity
- Balance meals for all nutrients

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Healthy Eating

For Strong Bodies and Minds

Eating good food helps our bodies stay strong and our minds stay healthy. It gives us energy, helps us fight sickness, and makes it easier to learn and feel good. In First Nations communities, eating traditional foods also keeps culture strong and connects us to Country and Family.

Good Food for Deadly Living!
Eating good food helps keep your body and mind strong, so your work stays strong too.

Eating Deadly Foods

Traditional Foods like kangaroo, bush tomatoes, and native flours are rich in nutrients and have been part of First Nations diets for thousands of years.

These foods are:

- A healthy choice
- High in protein
- High in vitamins and minerals
- Low in fat

These foods also strengthen cultural connections and identity.

Many traditional foods have a low environmental impact and are sustainably sourced, supporting both personal health and the health of the land.

Supporting local food programs and community gardens makes healthy food more accessible.

By working together we can keep these programs strong and ensure access to delicious, nourishing foods.

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Building Relationships

Culturally Safe Dietetic Care for First Nations Peoples with Disability

Family and Community Dynamics:

In many First Nations communities, care and support are seen as a shared responsibility, where medical help is often not viewed as a deficit, but rather as part of the person's identity and role within the community. This strength-based perspective values connection, responsibility, and collective care over individual diagnosis or labels.

In many Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities, disability is not viewed as a deficit but as a natural part of human diversity.

It's important to involve Elders, who hold deep cultural knowledge and are respected decision-makers in health care for First Nations People. Their guidance supports culturally safe care, helps build trust, and ensures that services align with community values and traditions.

Communication Tips

Here are some key tips for communicating effectively with First Nations People with disability in a healthcare setting.

- Build trust through relationship building and personalisation.
- Acknowledge identity and the importance of Country, culture, and community.
- Use culturally respectful language and avoid medical jargon and stigmatising terms.
- Use plain, non-technical communication and avoid slang. Ask if you're unsure if you've understood or if something needs to be explained.

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Inclusive Care

Supporting First Nations Peoples with Disability

Cultural Context

Many Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander People with disability may be hesitant to identify with the term 'disability' due to the harm caused by the medical model and the layered experiences of discrimination. Fear of judgement or child removal can also prevent families from seeking support, highlighting the need for culturally safe, strength-based approaches in health care.

"Disability" has no direct translation in most First Nations languages - focus instead on strengths, ability, and true inclusion.

In many First Nations communities, disability is seen through a community lens, with care and responsibility shared across family and community.

Common Disabilities in Communities

Common disabilities in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities are often linked to social and health inequities, such as poor access to healthcare, education, and safe housing. These issues, combined with the impacts of colonisation, racism, and intergenerational trauma, contribute to higher rates of physical, cognitive, and psychosocial disabilities.

- Physical:** Mobility impairments, visual/hearing loss (often due to untreated ear infections).
- Psychosocial:** PTSD, depression, and anxiety, often linked to intergenerational trauma.
- Neurodevelopmental/Psychosocial:** ADHD, Autism Spectrum Disorder, and ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder).
- Sensory:** Hearing and vision impairments, including aids needs in children.
- Cognitive:** Intellectual disabilities and developmental delays.

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First Peoples Disability Network x Dietitians Australia

We collaborated with First Peoples Disability Network to create 4 written resources to support dietitians to deliver culturally considerate care and educate First Nations communities to build healthier eating habits. These resources accompany FPDN's webinar.

Sean and Marley Cooking Series

We partnered with the team at Get Down with Sean and Marley to raise awareness of the value of nutrition and support of a dietitian in promoting health, function and wellbeing. This video explores a 'nourish bowl' recipe. Thanks to the team at AFDO, this recipe was also developed into easy read recipes.

Nourish Bowl Recipe

Cooking Nourish Bowls with Dietitians Australia! Feat. Chef Cammie and Dietitian Michelle

Dietitians Australia

A nourish bowl is a plate with different foods on one plate.

You can choose foods that are good for you and that you like to eat.

Publication papers

- **Evaluation of the Capacity Building in Disability for Dietitians education program.** *This report on interview findings was completed by Centre for Health Service Development, University of Wollongong and is available via the DA website.*
- **Evaluating Disability Education Program for Dietitians: A Cross-Sectional Study of Self-Reported Outcomes** *This comprehensive evaluation paper has been finalised and submitted for publication.*

Visit the Capacity Building in Disability for Dietitians website

To access all the resources, please scan the QR code. The website is your one stop shop for everything mentioned here, including videos, written resources, recipes, webinars, course and publication papers.

