

Inclusive Communities Fund

Submission jointly authored by:

Australian Multicultural Women's Alliance

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Alliance

The National Rural Women's Coalition

The Working with Women Alliance

Women With Disabilities Australia



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Acknowledgements

The National Rural Women's Coalition (NRWC), The Working with Women Alliance (WwWA), the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Alliance (NATSIWA), Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA) and the Australian Multicultural Women's Alliance (AMWA) acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which we work and live. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders past, present and future. We value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, and knowledge. We extend our respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who for thousands of years have preserved the culture and practices of their communities on Country. This land was never surrendered, and we acknowledge that it always was and always will be Aboriginal land. We acknowledge that Australian governments have been complicit in the entrenched disadvantage, intergenerational trauma and ongoing institutional racism faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people must lead the design and delivery of services that affect them for better life outcomes to be achieved.

About NRWC

The National Rural Women's Coalition (NRWC) is a grass roots organisation, established in 2002, that provides a collaborative, powerful national voice for women living in rural, regional, and remote Australia. We are a coalition of five peak rural alliances comprising the Australian Local Government Women's Association, Australian Women in Agriculture, National Rural Health Alliance, Women in Seafood Australasia and Transport Women Australia Limited. For over 24 years, we have advocated on issues ranging from health, education, communication, transport, economic participation and security, safety and women's leadership. Providing the lived experience and expertise of issues faced by rural regional and remote women to policy makers.

About WwWA

The Working with Women Alliance (WwWA) represents two key portfolios: National Women's Safety (NWS) and National Women's Equality (NWE). The WwWA connects the critical areas of gender-based violence prevention and the advancement of women's economic equality and



leadership, bridging these important policy fields for greater impact. We work with members and stakeholders, including the Australian Government, to provide expertise and advice on gender equality and women's safety.

About AMWA

The Australian Multicultural Women's Alliance (AMWA) is led by the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA), the national peak body representing Australians from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds in partnership with Settlement Services International (SSI) and Media Diversity Australia (MDA). The Australian Multicultural Women's Alliance is the national voice for multicultural women. AMWA advocates for gender equity, representation, and inclusion across all facets of Australian society. Our work is informed by lived experiences, community insights, and evidence-based research to ensure that systemic barriers are addressed, and opportunities for women are unlocked. As an intersectional alliance, we aim to empower women from all multicultural backgrounds to thrive and contribute fully to Australia's prosperity.

About NATSIWA

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Alliance (NATSIWA) is the national peak body representing the voices, leadership and lived experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women across Australia. As one of the Australian Government-funded National Women's Alliances, NATSIWA advocates for policies and reforms that advance gender equality, cultural safety and self-determination, ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's perspectives are reflected in national decision-making through community-led engagement, evidence-based advocacy and strategic partnerships.

About WWDA

Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA) is the national representative organisation run by and for women, girls and gender-diverse people with disabilities. WWDA works to promote and advance the human rights, safety and wellbeing of women, girls, and gender-diverse people with disabilities in all of their diversity. As a National Women's Alliance, WWDA represents and advocates for the interests of women, girls and gender-diverse people with disabilities to inform government policies and programs in advancing gender equality in Australia. WWDA has a particular focus on decision-making and agency, participation and leadership, prevention of all forms of violence, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and economic security and social protection.

Executive Summary

This submission draws directly on a recommendation jointly made by the National Women's Alliances in our [2026–27 Pre-Budget Submission](#), which called for national investment in the Disability and Gender Leadership program. The program provides a proven, disability-led and peer-led approach to building leadership, rights knowledge, civic participation and sustained community connection through trusted local networks. The Inclusive Communities Fund provides an opportunity to scale this existing approach through its proposed investment in community capability and partnerships with disability-led organisations. We also hold grave concerns about the relationship between the Fund and proposed changes to NDIS Social, Civic and Community Participation and Capacity Building Daily Activity supports. The proposed \$200 million over three years cannot substitute for the individualised supports people with disability need to participate in community life. We urge the Australian Government to reconsider broad ministerial determinations and blunt funding cuts in these areas and ensure the Fund remains additional to individualised NDIS supports.

Recommendation

- Scale **nationally** the *Disability and Gender Leadership* program and *Local Leadership Hubs* model (proven effective in Victoria) at an estimated cost of \$3.57 million¹.

¹ This amount has been indexed by 5% to account for the increased costs of program delivery since the [2026–27 Pre-Budget Submission](#), including the 4.75% increase to SCHADS Award.

Disability and Gender Leadership Program

Women with Disabilities Victoria (WDV) runs the Disability and Gender Leadership program, incorporating the *Enabling Women Leadership* program and the *Youth Experts* program.

The program's impact extends beyond the individuals who engage in it and has systemic societal impacts, as graduates apply their expertise to advocate for disability inclusion, access, and rights in the communities they live in. In addition, this program provides government with a diverse range of skilled and supported lived experience disability and gender advocates.

The *Enabling Women's Leadership* program is a free, highly sought after peer-led leadership and advocacy program that empowers women and gender diverse people with disabilities to build and utilise their leadership skills. Developed by and for women and gender diverse people with disabilities, the *Enabling Women's Leadership* program delivers curated modules and mentoring in an inclusive disability environment that builds essential leadership skills, knowledge, and confidence. The program supports 30 participants annually through two rounds of eight four-hour workshops. Participants are also matched with mentors who can guide and support them to reach their individual learning and leadership goals.

In addition, Women with Disabilities Victoria runs Local Leadership Hubs as vital networks for women and gender diverse people with disabilities across Victoria. These hubs operate in Geelong, Bendigo, and Outer Eastern Melbourne, with an additional hub available online. By offering hubs online and in person, WDV enables increased involvement in the hubs by providing more ways to access the program.

Each hub hosts monthly, disability-led events facilitated by Hub Liaison Officers. These events are free and open to all, providing safe and inclusive spaces for participants to share experiences, learn about their rights, practice advocacy, and explore leadership opportunities. Beyond hosting events, Hub staff actively engage with their local community to promote disability inclusion and rights. This may involve participating in local government disability advisory bodies or representing the needs of women and gender diverse people with disabilities at family violence service coordination meetings.

By offering both a safe space for connection and empowerment and working externally to make communities more inclusive and accessible, the Hubs play a dual role. They not only reduce isolation and build individual confidence but also drive systemic change—making women and gender diverse people with disabilities more visible and valued within their communities.

Proposal

Based on current costs for Victoria, it is estimated to cost of \$3.57 million² to scale nationally, and would include:

- \$486,150 for WDV's Disability and Gender Leadership program, incorporating Enabling Women and Youth Experts.
- \$487,200 for the Local Leadership Hubs, including 3 physical hubs and one online and community engagement work.
- If both programs are funded, the cost would be reduced as there would be less management oversight cost. Total cost: \$922,520.55

Funding and expanding WDV's *Disability and Gender Leadership* program as a national, peer-led model is a cross-cutting investment. Its impact rests on the long-standing, place-based relationships that state and territory organisations (like WDV) have built with women and gender-diverse people with disability, local services and government. Resourcing these trusted networks builds leadership (skills, confidence, visibility and civic participation) and prevents violence (reducing isolation, strengthening rights literacy, and creating disability-led pathways for early help-seeking and disclosure).

Graduates develop the skills and confidence to enter paid employment and/ or step into community and advisory roles. Likewise, the hubs offer sustainable mechanisms for ongoing community engagement, embedding change locally and making services and decision-making more inclusive. The success of this program requires scaling proven, community-rooted practice, rather than the development of separate stand-alone pilots.

² This amount has been indexed by 5% to account for the increased costs of program delivery since the [2026–27 Pre-Budget Submission](#), including the 4.75% increase to SCHADS Award pay rates.