

The Achieve Foundation is a new field-building intermediary with a mission to accelerate efforts towards the social inclusion of people with disability in Australia. 1 in 6¹ (18%) people in Australia have a disability (about 4.4 million people). Relative to other Australians, people with disability experience poorer outcomes across a range of domains, including work opportunities, access to housing, accessible health systems, personal safety, and their social, civil and economic rights. This critical expression of disadvantage requires a systemic approach from government with a clear role for philanthropy.


While we are still a new organisation, we have the backing of large service provider with some 70 years standing and we have assembled a team across board and management with leaders from the disability community, academia, policy, advocacy, philanthropy, and systems change.

As an organization that relies on philanthropic giving to achieve our mission, we understand the importance of analysing trends and identifying opportunities for increasing both philanthropic giving and impact. We believe that our experience in the philanthropic sector, coupled with our commitment to supporting outcomes driven by and for people with disability, make us well-positioned to contribute to this important review.

At the Achieve Foundation, we have seen firsthand the impact of inadequate philanthropic giving to support disability. We propose a solution – the creation of a Philanthropy and Non-Profit Cell in government that addresses many of the barriers we have seen to both more and more effective philanthropy.

Thank you for considering our submission, and we look forward to the opportunity to participate in this important conversation.

Sincerely,

 Dr Kirsty Nowlan
Executive Director
The Achieve Foundation

¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2022, People with disability in Australia.

Our recommendation – Government plays an active role as a coordinator of philanthropy through the creation of a Philanthropy & Non-Profit Cell

The rationale for our recommendation

- 1) **Philanthropic giving neglects critical areas requiring support** - We commissioned Queensland University of Technology (QUT) to carry out research to get a clear picture of philanthropic giving to support disability in Australia. The report² found that the disability philanthropy field in Australia is operating at small scale, with no indications of collaborative funding to achieve greater impact. There is no apparent big picture plan or informed vision for the future.
- 2) **Ableist attitudes influence decision-making on philanthropic giving** - Ableism refers to the discrimination faced by people with disability, which stems from negative stereotypes and misconceptions regarding their abilities and contributions to society. The prevalence of ableist attitudes in Australia is well documented, leading to barriers in areas such as education, employment, and social participation for individuals with disabilities. Furthermore, these attitudes can also influence philanthropic giving, where people with disability are rarely represented in leading organisations or programs, leading to insufficient funding for disability and a focus on "charitable" giving that reinforces stereotypes and perpetuates existing power imbalances. By addressing and recognising ableist attitudes, philanthropists can gain a better understanding of the needs of individuals with disabilities, and work towards creating a more inclusive and equitable society.
- 3) **Information asymmetry of social issues** - Philanthropists often approach their giving in a variety of ways, from strategic planning to more ad-hoc approaches based on personal interest or connections. The challenge facing philanthropists is information asymmetry, where they don't have access to a comprehensive evidence base that can inform their giving. This can lead to a lack of impact and potential inefficient use of resources. In the case of disability, for example, there is a broad perception that the government has 'fixed' the issues by creating and funding the NDIS. This view neglects the limits on the NDIS and the need for funding to support the outcomes articulated in Australia's Disability Strategy. To address this challenge, some philanthropists have begun to take a more strategic approach to their giving, conducting research, engaging with experts, and seeking out evidence-based interventions to maximize their impact. Others may rely on intermediaries or trusted advisors to help them identify high-impact opportunities. However, this effort is often piecemeal and needs a centrally coordinated effort that addresses information asymmetry.
- 4) **Ad hoc and isolated impact of programmatic approach** – Philanthropic funding often fosters isolated impact through a competitive approach to grant making. Funders will seek impact by calling for submissions that require respondents to position their organisation as having the best chance to achieve success. Not only does this become a contest between organisations that have the resources to craft the best proposal, but it also perpetuates a system that generates an isolated and singular view of program effectiveness. This runs counter to systems-based thinking which recognises that disadvantage cannot be solved by

² <https://www.theachievefoundation.org.au/resources/philanthropy-for-people-with-disability>

individual initiatives. Rather, addressing complex social issues requires a multisectoral & multi-actor response addressing key levers within intersecting systems. Such a response should be governed by a collaborative and organising logic, shared measurement system and the direct participation of stakeholders with lived experience.

- 5) **Funding of field-building intermediaries** – We welcome the decision of the Australian governments to support the functioning of peak bodies as the representative voice at sector level. There are, however, other enabling actors in sector ecosystems that can accelerate the delivery of outcomes, but which currently receive minimal recognition and funding. While service delivery organisations receive funding from both government and philanthropy, field building intermediaries are an emergent but currently under-recognised system enabler both by government and philanthropy.

A field building intermediary is an organisation that works to strengthen and coordinate the work of various stakeholders in a particular field or sector. Their function is to identify and address gaps in the sector across place, evidence, stakeholder coordination and resource mobilisation. They often serve as a bridge between different stakeholders. The primary goal of a field building intermediary is to facilitate collaboration, among stakeholders to achieve systemic change. Their unique sector or system level perspective enables them to identify challenging issues in their fields and work to accelerate sustained social change alongside implementing organisation dealing directly with people experiencing disadvantage.

- 6) **Missed opportunity to accelerate and scale evidence-based initiatives** – The focus of government engagement with non-profit organisations is currently compliance based. The Government is not proactively involved in conversation between philanthropists, intermediaries and non-profits about how to coordinate or scale efforts for greater impact. Rather, the government currently acts as a passive recipient of innovation and evidence with no system to determine how and where initiatives should be scaled.

We are not suggesting comprising the independent and innovation nature of the non-profit sector, rather this is a question of collaboration in the better use of resources to achieve impact. By building these partnerships, governments can access the knowledge, expertise, and innovation of field actors, while also ensuring that interventions are effective, efficient, sustainable and driven by data over the long term.

Recommendation: Government to establish a central coordination cell for philanthropy and non-profits.

What is required:

Coordinated and genuine partnerships between government, intermediaries, non-profits, and philanthropists are crucial for unlocking scalable change. It is important to establish bi-directional relationships, where government is not just an adopter but actively involved in discussions regarding the building, designing, and funding of interventions. This involvement of government is critical to:

- identifying social needs and correlated funding needs, identify social problems and gaps in solutions
- using national population data to inform and evaluate interventions and to identify where new data is required
- coordinating philanthropic funding to underfunded areas
- ensuring support for field-based intermediaries, particularly in the context of neglected or disproportionately disadvantaged communities
- facilitating collective impact by ensuring that relevant actors are mandated to collaborate to deliver shared outcomes
- evaluating the collective results of philanthropy and non-profit initiatives with a view to scaling effective interventions