



Inclusive Language Guide

Contents

Introduction3

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples4

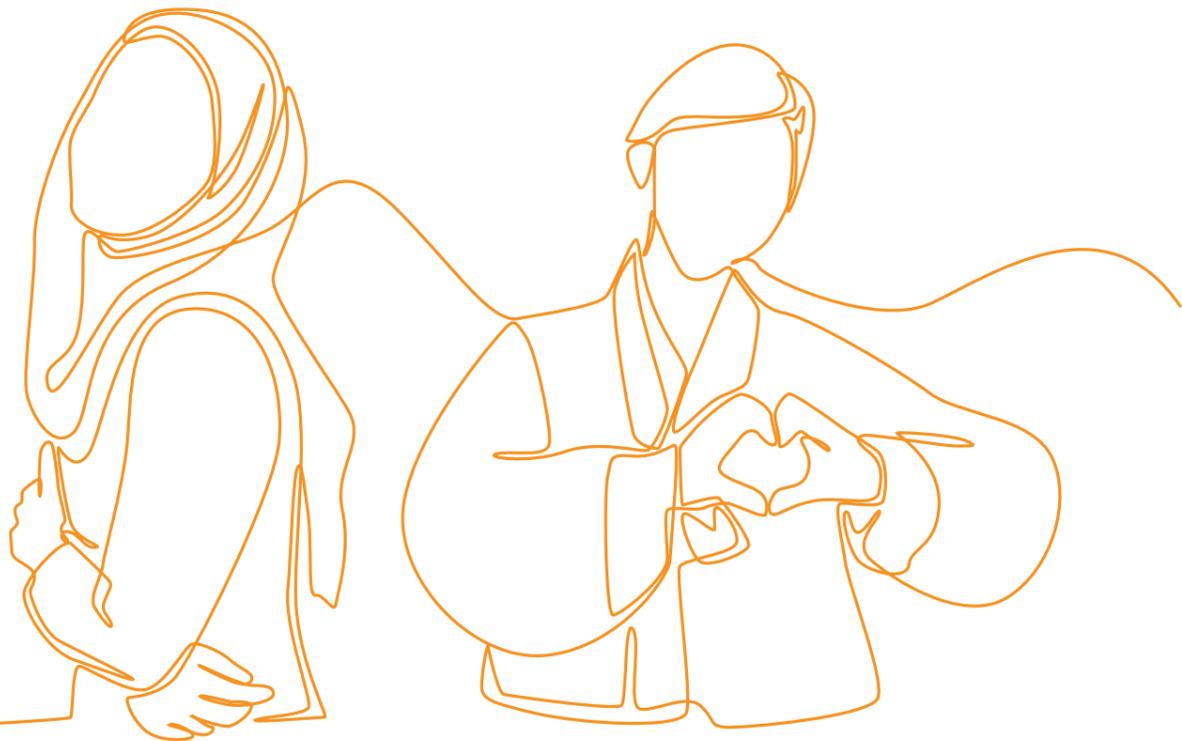
Age6

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse People.....7

People with Diverse Genders, Sexes and Sexualities9

People with Disability and Chronic Conditions 14

References.....17



Introduction

Telethon Kids Institute acknowledges Aboriginal people as the Traditional Custodians of the land and waters of Australia. We also acknowledge the Nyoongar Wadjuk, Yawuru, Kariyarra and Kurna Elders, their people and their land upon which the Institute is located, and seek their wisdom in our work to improve the health and development of all children.

At Telethon Kids, we don't just accept difference — we celebrate it, and we support it for the benefit of our people and our community.

We want all staff and students, no matter your age, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, ability or culture, to feel safe, supported and empowered so together we can make Telethon Kids the best place to work for everyone.

One of the ways we can ensure that people at Telethon Kids feels welcomed and included is by communicating in a way that celebrates everyone. This guide explores principles of communication, and preferred language that applies to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people with diverse genders, sexes and sexualities, culturally and linguistically diverse people, people with disability and chronic conditions, and people of different ages.

Although this guide explores how language applies to different groups independently, in reality, a person's identity is shaped by a range of intersecting factors. It is therefore important to recognise that different people experience different levels of societal and systemic advantage or disadvantage, and that this is often based on the compounding of different aspects of their identity.¹

This guide has been co-designed with the Kulunga Aboriginal Unit, Chronic Conditions and Disability Special Interest Group, LGBTQIA+ Special Interest Group and GEDI Council.

Content Warning

Some examples used throughout this guide contain inappropriate, outdated and offensive language, and may be distressing. Please note that these are only examples of language that should be avoided.



**GENDER, EQUITY,
DIVERSITY, INCLUSION
COUNCIL**

An Initiative of the Gender, Equity, Diversity and Inclusivity Council, co-designed with the Kulunga Team, LGBTQIA+ Special Interest Group and Disability and Chronic Conditions Special Interest Group.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

It is important to note that there is a vast diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Australia. This means that certain phrases and behaviours can take on different meanings in different communities; therefore, you should always seek advice from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people you are communicating with or about and respect the many preferences and protocols that exist.

Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country

Welcome to Country

Protocols for welcoming visitors to Country have always been a part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. Today, while these protocols have been adapted to contemporary circumstances, the essential elements remain: welcoming visitors and respect for Country.

Welcome to Country is delivered by Traditional Owners, usually by an Elder, or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who have been given permission from Traditional Owners to welcome visitors to their Country.

Welcome to Country occurs at the beginning of a formal event and can take many forms including singing, dancing, smoking ceremonies, and/or a speech.²

Acknowledgement of Country

An Acknowledgement of Country is an opportunity for anyone to show respect for Traditional Owners and the continuing connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to Country.

An Acknowledgement of Country can be offered by any person and, like a Welcome to Country, is given at the beginning of a meeting, speech or event.

There is no specific wording for an Acknowledgement of Country, just be sincere and do some research on the Country you are acknowledging, or consult with the Kulunga Aboriginal Unit to ensure you are acknowledging the right traditional owner group.²

Acknowledgement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

When we acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples collectively, it is important to recognise that many people have different preferences in terms of how they would like to be addressed. We often hear the term 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples', which is a widely used collective term. We also hear the terms 'First Nations People' and 'Indigenous' being used at a national and international level.

At Telethon Kids, we apply these principles on a daily basis. For example, we have an Executive position that is titled Director of First Nations Strategy and Leadership, reflecting the broad span of that role. Yet we have a number of projects and other position titles that use the word Aboriginal, reflective of the communities with which they work.

The terms 'Aborigine' and 'Native' should not be used, as they have been historically used to discriminate against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.³ Do not use 'ATSI' and 'TSI'. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples should not be described as an acronym, as this homogenises a variety of cultural identities.³

Ultimately, it is best to check in with those who you are addressing and be guided by their preferences. Where possible, it is best to address individuals or groups by using local terms. For instance, 'Rebecca is a Kurna woman' instead of 'Rebecca is an Aboriginal woman'. Indeed, this reference should only be made when relevant to the context and after given consent by the individual(s).

Identity

Describing an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person as 'of Aboriginal background' or asking, 'how Aboriginal are you?' is not appropriate. This is because it can reinforce oppressive classifications used in the past, and fail to recognise the true identity of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People.⁵ Similarly, terms such as 'full-blood' or 'half-caste' should not be used.

General Principles

- ▶ Preferences, protocols and terminology can change in different communities.⁶ It is important to seek advice from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the community you are situated, and to not assume that what is acceptable in one community is viewed this way in all communities.
- ▶ Be mindful of your body language and tone when speaking,⁶ and use plain English to the best of your ability. When working with Aboriginal communities, it is important to consider whether an interpreter will be required; especially when engaging with communities where English is not the first language.
- ▶ Avoid using the phrase 'the Aboriginal language'. With approximately 250 languages and over 600 dialects, it is important to acknowledge the diversity of language that exists amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Using the phrase 'the Aboriginal language' would therefore be similar to saying 'the European language'.⁶
- ▶ We may hear terms such as 'Black' and 'Blackfella' be used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It is important to note that if this language is used by someone who is not Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, it is likely to be considered offensive.⁴
- ▶ 'People' (singular) can be used where reference is being made to a single geo-cultural community, for example, "people of the Nyoongar Nation," or "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at Telethon Kids".⁶
- ▶ 'Peoples' (plural) can be used where reference is being made to the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identities/geo-cultural community groups across Australia, for example, "the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and cultures connected to Lands across Australia".⁶
- ▶ Be mindful that in certain cultures, there is an order in which people can speak or contribute; this established order is not just limited to regional communities, as it is often seen everywhere.
- ▶ Respect protocols and sensitivities around community business. Some customs and practices are performed by men and women separately and/or privately, and this can vary in different communities.⁷

Kulunga Aboriginal Unit

Kulunga's role is to be the primary professional support service that links Aboriginal communities with key research that will work towards closing the gap in the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal children and families. You can seek advice from the team by emailing Kulunga@telethonkids.org.au

Age

What is Ageism?

- Ageism refers to the stereotypes (how we think), prejudice (how we feel) and discrimination (how we act) directed towards people on the basis of their age.⁸
- Ageism is not limited to older people. It can be directed at people of all ages, by people of all ages.⁹

90%
of Australians believe
ageism exists.⁹

83%
believe
ageism is a
problem.⁹

63%
said they had
experienced
ageism in the
last 5 years.⁹

- Language conveys meaning and can fuel misconceptions that can lead to ageism. The adoption of neutral language is therefore important to avoid biases and unintended subtext that classify generational cohorts as disempowered and homogenous groups.⁸

Referring to Age

- Only refer to age when it is relevant. I.e., avoid characterising age references when it is not strictly relevant.¹⁰
- Standalone words in everyday use, like 'old' and 'young', can carry bias or unintended subtext.¹⁰
- Words that carry stereotypes, for example 'elderly' or 'juniors', are not acceptable. 'Youths' is often used to refer to male youths only and may carry other connotations.¹⁰
- Instead, 'older people' or 'younger people' are appropriate and gender-neutral ways of referring to non-specific age brackets as they are less likely to carry bias or unintended subtext.¹⁰
- Alternatively, when an age or age range is relevant to a fact, you can use the term 'people' followed by the age range. For example: 'Survey data showed people aged 15 to 17 years were the highest proportion of internet users'.¹⁰

Referring to Older People

What not to say

Old people, the elderly

What to say

Older people, retired people, retirees, older Australians (or other nationality), people aged between X and Y.

Referring to Younger People

What not to say

Young, juniors, youths

What to say

Younger people, youth, younger Australians (or other nationality), people aged between X and Y.



Culturally and Linguistically Diverse People

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse

The term 'Culturally and Linguistically Diverse' describes the diversity of the Australian population in terms of language, ethnicity, nationality, tradition, dress, food, societal structure, art and religion. It is generally used to refer to people for whom English is not their principal language or who have a background that is not Anglo-Saxon. However, we need to acknowledge that everyone has a culture and recognise the dominant and privileged position of western culture in our society.¹¹



Racism

In Australia, **1 in 3** people experience racism in the workplace.¹³

- **Overt racism** refers to intentional and/or obvious harmful attitudes or behaviours towards a marginalised group because of their race, ethnicity or culture. This is what people usually think of when they talk about racism, however racism is much more complex than this type alone.⁴
- **Casual racism** refers to any remarks that use negative stereotypes or prejudice to say something about a person's race or ethnicity. Even when the intent is not to harm someone, it can still have a psychological and emotional impact. People may experience adverse effects on their physical and mental health when targeted by casual racism.⁴
- **Covert racism** is harder to address, as these may not always be evident in language used but can include deliberately mispronouncing names or referring to a group by using cultural stereotypes.⁴
- **Systemic racism** refers to the situation when the society or institution has practices that discriminate against particular groups of people, and is more to do with the system, than an individual's own standing. It can be Institutional, where racism is normalised and accepted, or Structural, where inequalities lead to exclusion of people.⁴

Communication – General Principles

- **Person-centric language:** Only refer to race, culture and ethnicity when it is appropriate and relevant to do so. Avoid highlighting someone's ethnicity as a way of singling them out from a group, or marking them as different. For example, when introducing someone, avoid stating that they are from another country when you have not done the same for others, or if it is not relevant to the context. Avoid generalisations or making the person's identity invisible (for example, referring to someone simply as 'African' rather than saying what country they are from).⁴
- **Where are you from?** The question 'Where are you from?' is often innocently asked to show interest in someone. However, if you ask it when first meeting someone based on your assumptions about their physical appearance, accent, or name, it can lead to that person feeling set apart from other Australians. There are Australian people who do not have a Caucasian appearance. They may be second or third generation Australian and should not be made to feel they need to justify their background.¹¹ Ultimately, assumptions about a person's cultural background can be isolating and hurtful. It is therefore important to base your understanding of someone's cultural background on what they choose to tell you.
- **Avoid stereotypes:** We are all prone at times to using stereotypes that oversimplify us as people. Cultural stereotyping is extremely common and can lead to inaccurate ideas. People from a particular culture or ethnicity can be stereotyped as having certain capabilities or skills which can, in turn, streamline them into certain positions or create expectations about their skills. Even stereotypes that are positive or in good spirit still have the effect of classifying a person as an 'other' (for instance, 'your English is so good'). This can be limiting as well as inaccurate. While someone may refer to their own culture in a stereotyped way, it is not okay for someone else to do this. It is therefore important to respect each person as a human being and avoid creating stereotypes for individuals or groups of individuals.¹¹
- **Plain English:** Using plain, clear language and shorter sentences can make your message clearer not only for an audience for whom English is not a first language, but for everyone. Unless you can explain the context or meaning, do not use idiomatic language, slang, colloquial terms and local references. Use more inclusive language and be conscious of the terminologies you use, even in a jovial manner, and how they may hurt another individual.¹¹
- **Name Pronunciation:** Our names are a central part of our identity; therefore, using an individual's preferred name and pronouncing it correctly reinforces their sense of belonging. If you are unsure of how to pronounce someone's name, it is best to ask as soon as possible rather than making assumptions (and potentially mispronouncing their name for an extended period of time).

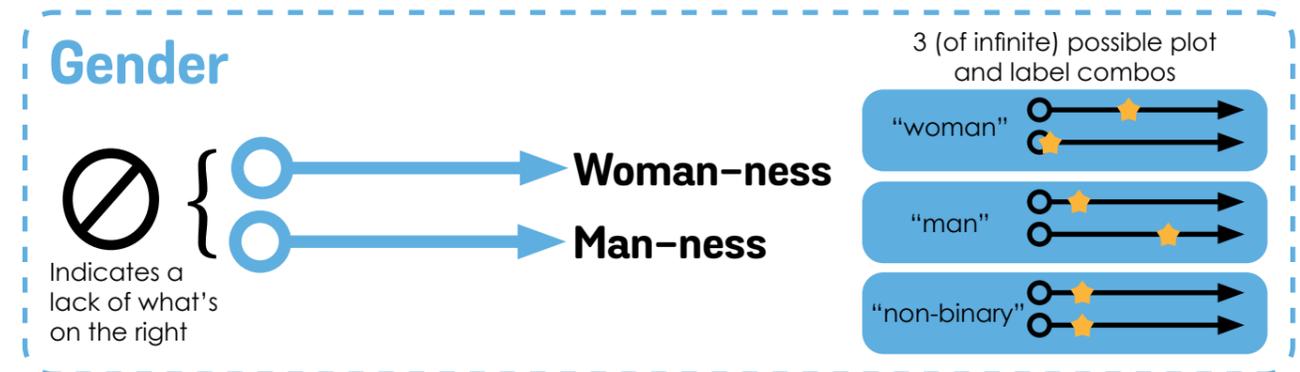


People with Diverse Genders, Sexes and Sexualities

Gender, Sex and Sexuality

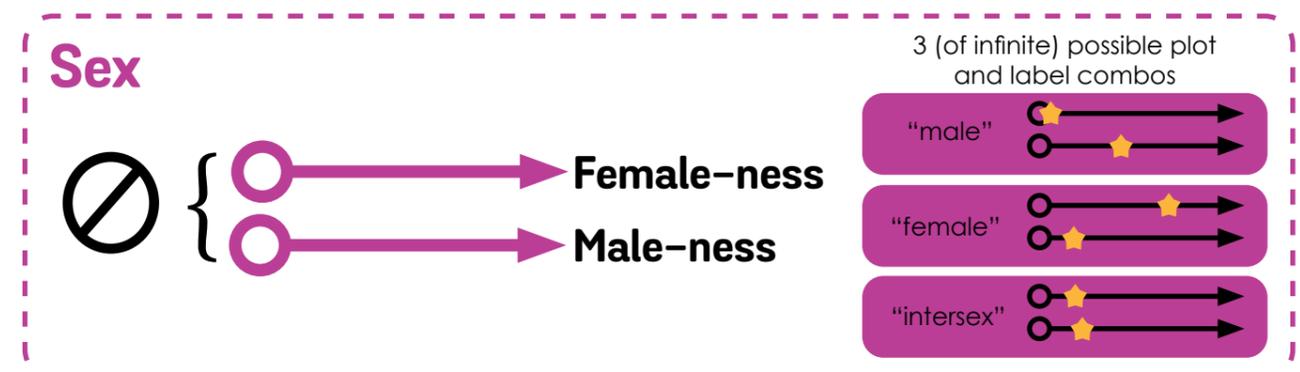
Gender, sex and sexuality are different aspects of a person's identity, and should not be conflated. When reading this section, keep in mind that we should not make assumptions or define people by these aspects of their identity.

Gender. Gender is a social construct experienced by people internally, regardless of how they present externally or their sex/bodily characteristics.¹⁴ We may have been taught that male and female are the only gender identities. This is the binary view of gender.¹⁵ Gender actually exists on a spectrum, and refers to someone's sense of woman-ness or man-ness. People who do not identify exclusively with being a man or a woman, and instead feel like they fit somewhere between the two, might identify as being non-binary.¹⁵ Many also feel like they do not identify as a man, a woman or non-binary, and may identify as agender, meaning that they do not feel any of these gender identities fit them.¹⁵



Source: [The Genderbread Person](#)

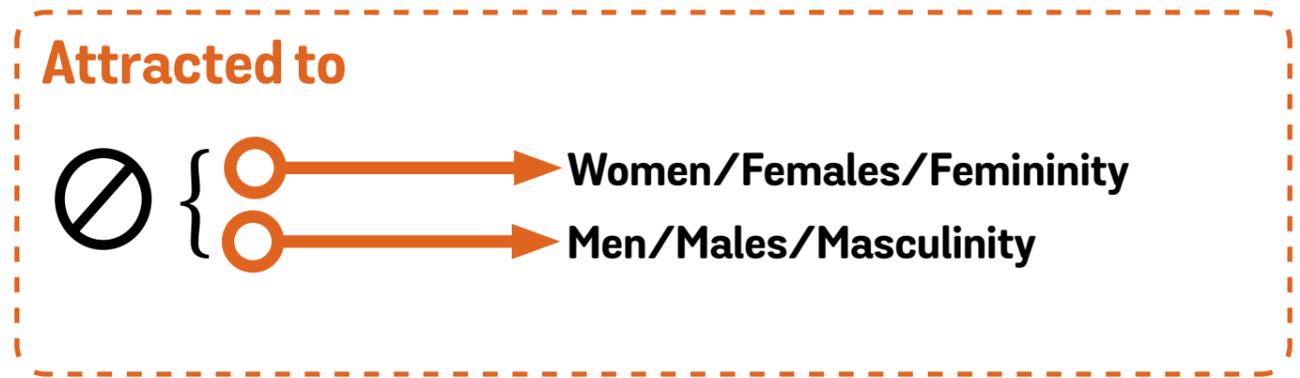
Sex. Sex refers to a person's physical sex characteristics including hormones, chromosomes, internal reproductive systems and genitals.⁴ A sex is assumed for us at birth, which is often limited to male or female and is based on external genitalia; however, we know that sex is more complex than this. Approximately 1.7% of people are born with intersex variations, meaning their innate sex characteristics differ from medical and social norms for female or male bodies.¹⁶ Bodily differences among people with intersex variations may include differences in genitalia, chromosomes, internal sex organs, hormone production, hormone response, and/or secondary sex traits.¹⁴ These can become apparent at many different life stages, including prenatally, at birth and in early childhood, at puberty, and later in life.¹⁷



Source: [The Genderbread Person](#)



Sexuality. Sexuality refers to someone's emotional, behavioural and/or romantic attractions to others. Sexuality takes into consideration a person's feelings and behaviour, and these may be towards someone of the same gender, another gender, all genders, no genders or a combination.⁴ Some people may choose a term to describe their identity such as heterosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, pansexual or asexual.⁴ Some people may choose to describe their sexuality in terms of feelings, behaviours or experiences such as 'same sex' or 'gender attracted', or they may choose to use no term at all.⁴ Sexuality is widely considered to be fluid and while, for some people, this is a clear constant throughout their life, for others, their sexuality can change over time.⁴



Source: [The Genderbread Person](#)

Pronouns

Pronouns are the words we use to describe people when we are not using their name.⁴ The pronouns used for someone can play an important role in that person affirming their gender in the world.⁴ We often assume a person's pronouns based on their presentation, but it is important not to make assumptions - the best way to find out someone's pronouns is to ask.⁴ We also encourage you to wear a pronoun badge on your lanyard, and add your pronouns to your email signature.

- Add your pronouns to your email signature by updating your details on the [Password Self Service Site](#).
- Request a pronoun badge for your lanyard by emailing [the GEDI Council](#).

The most common pronouns used in Australia are:

- She/Her/Hers which are typically used for feminine people,
- He/Him/His which are typically used for masculine people, and;
- They/Them/Theirs which can be used for people of all genders and/or people who do not identify with using 'she' or 'he'.⁴

People may also use neopronouns such as:

- ze/hir/hirs
- ze/zir/zirs
- xe/xem/xyrs
- ey/em/eirs.⁴

People can also identify with more than one pronoun (i.e., he/they, she/they, he/she/they), a combination of pronouns, or no pronouns at all (i.e., using just their name instead).⁴

Gender Neutral Language

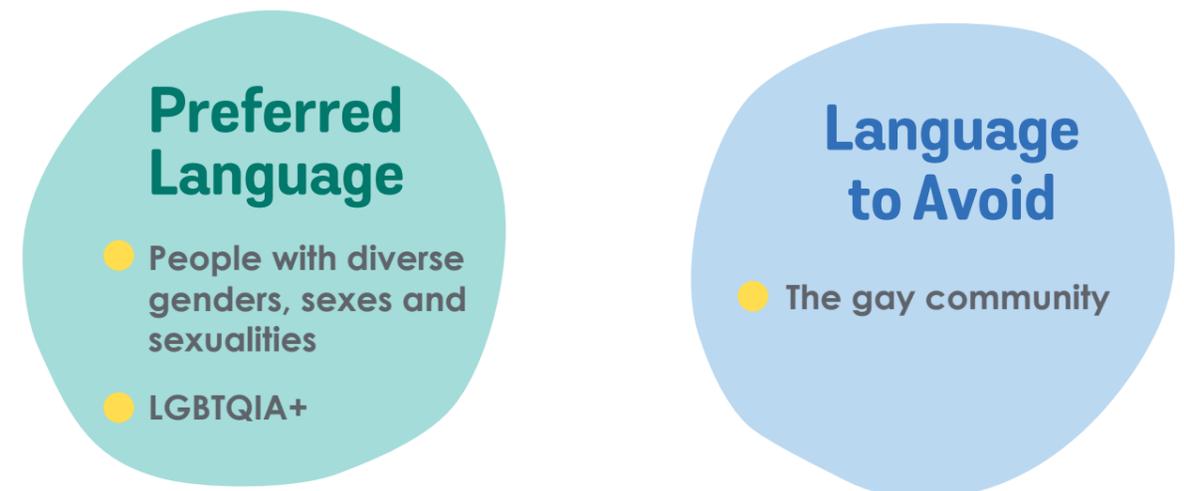
Gender neutral language removes the assumption of gender. It allows us to include more people and reduces the risk of misgendering someone⁴ (referring to someone using a word, name or pronoun that does not correctly reflect their gender identity). This does not mean that we cannot use gendered language to describe ourselves or someone else, these are simply alternatives for when we do not know the gender for somebody, or we are talking to a large group.⁴

When referring to, or addressing, specific individuals, address them in a way that doesn't assume gender.⁴ Unless the individual has expressly told you their pronouns (i.e., verbally, in their email signature, or by wearing a pronoun badge) you should continue to use gender neutral language when communicating with the person and referring to them, and not make assumptions based on their name or physical characteristics. Additionally, avoid using job titles that end in '-man' or '-woman' (for example, instead of saying policeman – use 'police officer' instead).⁴

Referring to People with Diverse Genders, Sexes and Sexualities

A great deal of umbrella terms have been used to collectively refer to people with diverse genders, sexes and sexualities.

When referring to the community in a formal setting, use the term 'people with diverse genders, sexes and sexualities'. In a more casual setting, use the term 'LGBTQIA+'.



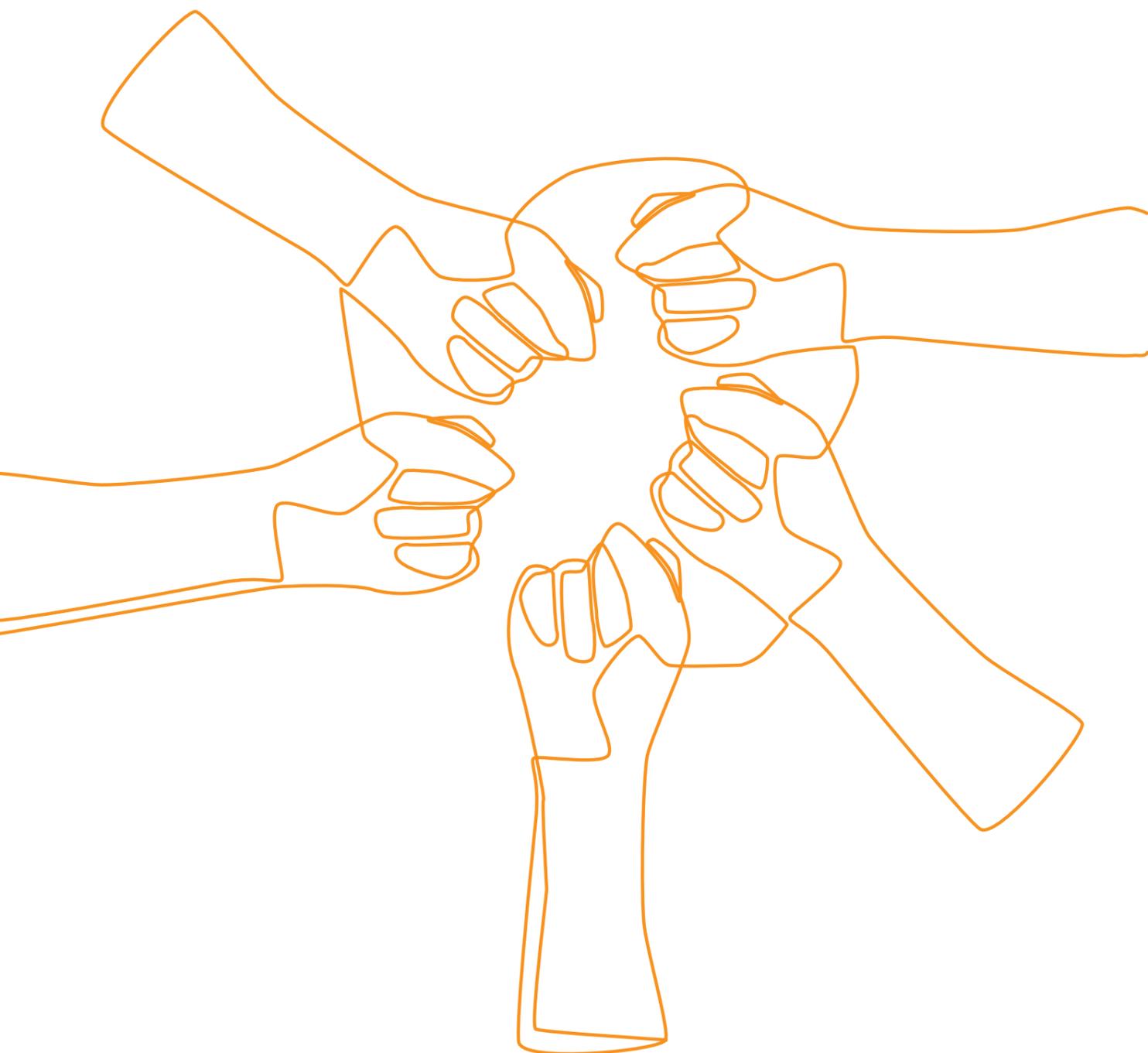
With that said, it is important to recognise that the experiences of people within this community differ widely, and that you should use specific terms when referring to specific people.

It is important to note that people within the LGBTQIA+ community may conflate aspects of their identity or use outdated or inappropriate language, but it is not appropriate for everyone to use these terms. Additionally, this language should not be policed by non-LGBTQIA+ people. You may also hear many people within and outside of the LGBTQIA+ community refer to themselves or others as 'Queer'.

Isn't "Queer" a bad word?

This word was previously a slur, but has emerged as an umbrella term of empowerment for LGBTQIA+ people. 'Queer' encompasses a wide range of identities, and doesn't risk excluding groups that the acronym may leave out.¹⁸ Some people find queer's ambiguity appealing since it gives a sense of community without the need for a more specific label.¹⁸

With that said, there are many people who dislike the term, mostly due to its history as a slur. In the 1960s onwards, people used the word queer as a weapon, usually saying it when attacking or trying to humiliate LGBTQIA+ people.¹⁸ So, while it is a word that many use, keep in mind that not everybody is comfortable using (or hearing) it and that many LGBTQIA+ people find it offensive. For this reason, use other terms ('LGBTQIA+' or 'people with diverse genders, sexes and sexualities') unless someone tells you that they identify and are happy to be referred to as 'queer'.



Terminology

Heterosexual	Heterosexual (straight) is an individual who is sexually and/or romantically attracted to the opposite gender. ¹⁹
Aromantic/ aro	A term to describe people who do not experience romantic attraction to others. An aromantic person may or may not experience sexual attraction to others, and therefore may or may not also identify as asexual (see below). ¹⁴
Asexual/ace	A term to describe people who experience little to no sexual attraction to others. Asexuality is distinct from a lack of libido or sex drive, such as due to medical or mental health reasons. An asexual person may or may not experience romantic attraction to others, and therefore may or may not also identify as aromantic (see above). ¹⁴
Lesbian	A term to describe a woman who is romantically or sexually attracted to other women. Women and non-binary people may use this term to describe themselves. ¹⁴
Gay	A term to describe a person who is romantically or sexually attracted to members of the same gender. People of any gender may use this term to describe themselves, but it is commonly used by men who are attracted to men. ¹⁴
Bisexual	A term to describe people who are romantically or sexually attracted to more than one sex, gender, or gender identity, though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way, or to the same degree. The term is sometimes used distinctly from the term pansexual (see below), in that people who are bisexual experience attraction to more than one gender, while pansexual individuals are attracted to people regardless of gender. ¹⁴
Pansexual	A term to describe people who have the potential for romantic or sexual attraction to people of any gender though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way, or to the same degree. The term may be used distinctly from the term bisexual (see above), in that people who identify as pansexual experience attraction to a person that is unrelated to that person's gender or sex. ¹⁴
Transgender/ trans	A term to describe people whose gender identity is different from the gender that was presumed for them at birth based on their visible sex characteristics. ¹⁴
Cisgender	A term to describe people whose gender identity aligns with the gender presumed for them at birth, generally based on their visible sex characteristics. ¹⁴
Sex presumed at birth	The sex presumed for an individual when they are born, which is often based on external genitalia alone. ¹⁴
Intersex	A term to describe people whose innate sex characteristics differ from medical and social norms for female or male bodies. Bodily differences among people with intersex variations may include differences in genitalia, chromosomes, internal sex organs, hormone production, hormone response, and/or secondary sex traits. When referring to people with intersex variations, it is important to avoid medical terms that carry negative connotations such as 'disorders of sex development'. ¹⁴
Deadnaming	A term used to describe the act of intentionally or unintentionally referring to a trans person by the name that they used before affirming their gender. This may also be referred to as "misnaming" and is often experienced as invalidating and distressing. ¹⁴
Title	Mr, Miss, Mrs, Ms are examples of common titles used throughout Australia. These usually imply a person's gender and, in some cases, can imply a person's marital status too (historically Miss has been used for unmarried women, while Mrs was used for married women). You may start to see Mx (pronounced as M-X or Mix) included as a gender-neutral title option. ⁴
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual
Brotherboy and Sistergirl	Brotherboy and Sistergirl are considered culturally, as well as socially, accepted terms to describe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander transgender people, where Brotherboy refers to a transgender man, and Sistergirl refers to a transgender woman. These terms are also used to describe people who are not transgender, as they are used in a broader context through the kinship system. This includes relationships with family, extended family and between Aboriginal people as a term of endearment.

People with Disability and Chronic Conditions

What is Disability?

In this guide, we use the term 'disability' in the context of the internationally recognised social model of disability, which describes disability as a social construct.²¹ This means that disability is the result of the interaction between people living with impairments and an environment filled with physical, attitudinal, communication and social barriers.²¹

This can be contrasted with the medical model of disability, which sees disability as an individual deficit, and a deviation from the 'norm'. The medical model of disability focusses on what an individual cannot do or cannot be, which often reinforces tragedy or pity.²²

Additionally, we define 'disability' in the context of the social model because this endeavours to change society to accommodate for people living with impairment, and supports the view that people with disability have a right to participate as fully and equally as everyone else.²¹

➤ Example: inability to walk

According to the **Medical Model**, an inability to walk inhibits a person from entering a building that only has stair entry by themselves (*i.e., the person is the problem*).

According to the **Social Model**, by having only stairs, the building is inaccessible to the individual (*i.e., the stairs are the problem*).²¹

In Australia, there are approximately **4.4 million people living with disability**, which is around **1 in 6 people**.²²

For **1 in 4 people with disability**, their **main form of disability is mental or behavioural**.²²

1 in 10 Australians aged 15 years and over had **experienced discrimination** in the previous 12 months **because of their disability**.²²

What are Chronic Conditions?

'Chronic Conditions' encompasses a broad range of long-lasting and/or complex health conditions across the spectrum of illness, including mental illness, trauma, disability and genetic disorders.²³ They are generally characterised by their long-lasting and persistent effects.²⁴ Additionally, the social and economic consequences of chronic conditions pose an impact on peoples' quality of life.²⁵

It is important to note that chronic conditions and disability are two separate things, but they can co-exist. For instance, some people who experience chronic conditions face physical, attitudinal, communication and social barriers when interacting with their environment, and therefore experience disability. Others do not face these barriers, and therefore do not experience disability.

50%
of Australians are estimated to have **one or more of 10 selected chronic conditions**.²⁴

1 in 5
Australians had **two or more of 10 selected chronic conditions**.²⁴

When do we talk about Disability or Chronic Conditions at Work?

It is a personal decision for someone to talk to others about their lived experience with disability or chronic condition, and one that will be made according to individual circumstances.²⁶ For instance, people may wish to have discussions with their colleagues or employer if their disability or chronic condition is likely to affect how they can perform their job.²⁶

In the context of work, conversations should be limited to how someone's ability to do their job is affected. It is important to not inquire too closely into a colleague's personal life or medical history. Instead, these conversations should be an opportunity for you to understand how your colleague will perform tasks, and what adjustments may be required to allow them to fully participate as a member of your team. The focus should be on building trust and understanding the unique needs of the person.²⁶

Ultimately, conversations about a person's lived experience with disability or chronic conditions should be initiated by the individual, and all information shared should be relevant.

Person-First vs Identity-First Language

The language we use to describe people living with disability or chronic conditions can be 'person-first' or 'identity-first'. It is always important to follow the lead of the person you are talking to, or simply ask, to avoid using language that someone does not prefer.²⁰ It is also important to note that a vast majority of people living with disability or chronic conditions use person-first language, and this is often best to use as a default when unsure of a person's preferences.



Person-First Language	Identity-First Language
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ This language avoids unnecessary focus on a person's impairment or condition. Examples include 'person with disability' or 'person with a chronic condition'.²⁰ ➤ Other phrases include 'person with lived experience of disability' or 'person with lived experience with a chronic condition'.²⁰ For many people, this language captures the individual and the people who support them (including their family members and/or carers); however, it is important to note that 'lived experience' is defined differently by different people. ➤ Additionally, many people with disability or chronic conditions prefer the phrase 'person with lived experience of disability' as it captures those who have experienced disability or chronic conditions in the past, as well as those who will not be experiencing disability or chronic conditions for their entire life. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Disability is an aspect of life that we cannot control, but which we embrace as part of who we are. Examples of identity-first language include 'Deaf' or 'Autistic'.²⁰ ➤ People may wish to be referred to using identity-first language because it signifies membership of a wider cultural group.²⁰ ➤ For example, some specific communities, such as Autistic and Deaf communities, may not define themselves as disabled at all. Deaf people identify as being part a cultural group with a different first language. Capital letters are used to signify an alternative cultural identity.²⁰ ➤ It should be noted that, generally, very few people use identity-first language. It is best to only use identity-first language if an individual shares that they would prefer to be referred to that way.

How to describe People with Disability or Chronic Conditions

- 1. Focus on the person, not the disability and/or chronic condition.** Do not describe a person as 'being' their condition – for example, 'Vanessa is paraplegic.' Instead, you can say 'Vanessa has paraplegia'. The exception is people and groups that use identity-first language to describe themselves, in which case you should do the same: 'Vanessa is Deaf'.²⁰
- 2. Avoid descriptions that suggest pity.** Terms such as 'afflicted by', 'stricken with', and 'victim' imply a person with lived experience of disability or chronic conditions is suffering or has a reduced quality of life. Use neutral language, instead. For example: 'He has muscular dystrophy'.²⁰
- 3. Use the word disability as an uncountable noun.** For example, 'person with disability' or 'people with disability', not 'person with a disability' or 'people with disabilities'. When disability is used as a countable noun, as in the sentence 'there are many sensory disabilities', it refers to a specific condition. 'A disability' is not a specific condition.²⁰
- 4. Avoid qualifiers such as 'multiple', 'severe', or 'high-functioning'.** This language is based on the medical model of disability and suggests some kind of hierarchy. A person either identifies as disabled or they do not. However, some people with disability self-identify under these categories. In those instances, you should follow their lead.²⁰

What not to say	What to say
People living with disability, the disabled	People with disability
Suffers from, victim of, afflicted by, crippled by, incapacitated by	Zhang has a chronic health condition
Paraplegic (which describes the person as their impairment)	Vanessa has paraplegia/quadruplegia
Confined to a wheelchair, wheelchair-bound, wheelchair person	Aya uses a wheelchair or mobility device
Intellectually challenged, mentally disabled, mentally defective, handicapped, simple, special needs	Suresh has a cognitive disability/intellectual disability
Demented	Maria has dementia
Brain-damaged, brain impaired	Will has acquired brain injury
Aspy/aspie, profoundly autistic, mild autism	Karim has autism, or Karim is on the autism spectrum
High functioning/low functioning	Sue is autistic/Autistic (if she identifies that way)
Mental	Li is neurodiverse/neurodivergent
Hyper/hyperactive	Marcia has ADHD
Slow learner, stupid	Florence has a learning disability
Crazy, insane, mad, manic, mentally ill, mentally unstable, psycho(tic), psychopath(ic)	Lowana has psychosocial disability/a mental health condition
Benjamin is schizophrenic (which describes the person as their illness), schizo	Benjamin has schizophrenia
Jolene is borderline	Jolene has borderline personality disorder
Depressive	Van has depression
Martin is deaf	Martin is Deaf, hard of hearing
The blind, person without sight	Mina is blind, has a vision impairment, Mina is a person with low vision
Mute	Frances is non-verbal
Able-bodied*, abled*, healthy, hearing, normal, sighted, of sound body, well ²⁰	Person without disability, non-disabled person

References

1. Science in Gender Equity Australia. *Guidance on Intersectionality*. <https://sciencegenderequity.org.au/resources/blog/intersectionality-in-sage-athena-swan/>.
2. Reconciliation Australia, *Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country*. <https://www.reconciliation.org.au/acknowledgement-of-country-and-welcome-to-country/>.
3. Reconciliation Australia, *Demonstrating inclusive and respectful language*, 2021. <https://www.reconciliation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/inclusive-and-respectful-language.pdf>.
4. Edith Cowan University, *Inclusive Language Guide*, 2021. https://www.ecu.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/938390/ECU-Inclusive-Language-Guide-Final-Approved-1.pdf.
5. Creative Spirits, *Aboriginal Identity: Who is 'Aboriginal'?* <https://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/people/aboriginal-identity-who-is-aboriginal>.
6. Amnesty International Australia, *Inclusive Language and Events Guide*, 2021. <https://www.amnesty.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/AIA-Inclusive-Language-and-Events-Guide-3.pdf>.
7. Australian Government Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Communicating with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Audiences*, 2016. <https://www.pmc.gov.au/resource-centre/indigenous-affairs/communicating-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-audiences>.
8. World Health Organization, *Global report on ageism*, 2021. <https://www.who.int/teams/social-determinants-of-health/demographic-change-and-healthy-ageing/combating-ageism/global-report-on-ageism>.
9. Australian Human Rights Commission, *What's age got to do with it?* 2021. <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/age-discrimination/publications/whats-age-got-do-it-2021>.
10. Australian Government Style Manual, *Age Diversity*, 2021. <https://www.stylemanual.gov.au/accessible-and-inclusive-content/inclusive-language/age-diversity>.
11. Deakin University Inclusive Education, *Culturally and linguistically diverse students*. <https://blogs.deakin.edu.au/iccb/toolkit/who/teaching-international-cald-students/>.
12. Australian Bureau of Statistics, *2016 Census: Multicultural*, 2017. <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/lookup/media%20release3>.
13. Western Sydney University, *Challenging Racism Project 2015-16 National Survey*, 2017. https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0015/1202226/Challenging_Racism_Report_3.pdf.
14. Strauss, P., Hill, N.T.M., Marion, L., Gilbey, D., Waters, Z., Moore, J.K., Costanza, M., Lamblin, M., Robinson, J., Lin, A., Perry, Y. *Suicide prevention in LGBTQA+ young people: Best practice guidelines for clinical and community service providers*. <https://www.telethonkids.org.au/projects/suicide-prevention-guidelines-lgbtqa-young-people/>.
15. REACHOUT.COM. *The difference between gender, sex and sexuality*. <https://au.reachout.com/articles/the-difference-between-gender-sex-and-sexuality>.
16. Intersex Human Rights Australia. *Intersex population figures*. <https://ihra.org.au/16601/intersex-numbers/>.
17. Intersex Human Rights Australia. *Intersex for allies*. <https://ihra.org.au/allies/>.
18. Minus18. *What Does "Queer" Mean Anyway?* <https://www.minus18.org.au/articles/what-does-%22queer%22-mean-anyway>.
19. Pride in Sport. *Terminology*. <https://www.prideinsport.com.au/terminology/>.
20. People with Disability Australia. *Language Guide*. <https://pwd.org.au/resources/language-guide/>.
21. People with Disability Australia. *Social model of disability*. <https://pwd.org.au/resources/models-of-disability/>.
22. Australian Bureau of Statistics. *Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings*. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/disability/disability-ageing-and-carers-australia-summary-findings/2018>.
23. Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council, 2017. *National Strategic Framework for Chronic Conditions*. <https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2019/09/national-strategic-framework-for-chronic-conditions.pdf>.
24. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. *Chronic conditions and multimorbidity*. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-health/chronic-conditions-and-multimorbidity>.
25. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. *Chronic disease*. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports-data/health-conditions-disability-deaths/chronic-disease/overview#:~:text=Reports-,Overview,action%20in%20the%20health%20sector>.
26. Job Access. *Talking to others about your disability*. <https://www.jobaccess.gov.au/people-with-disability/talking-others-about-your-disability-0>.



Northern Entrance, Perth Children's Hospital,
15 Hospital Avenue, Nedlands WA 6009
PO Box 855, West Perth Western Australia 6872
T | 08 6319 1000
E | contact@telethonkids.org.au
W | telethonkids.org.au

PRINCIPAL PARTNER

