

AWARD WINNING

panorama

People share their stories of mental health recovery in work and life

Monthly Issue August #102B

Not Being Put Out to
Pasture: Equine Therapy,
Peer Work, and More!

Everything That School
DIDN'T Teach You

Alyssa's Animation
Aspirations

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AUSTRALIA

Where mental wellbeing thrives

NDIS PROVIDER
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Where mental wellbeing thrives

About us

Flourish Australia is committed to walking beside people with a lived experience of mental health issues as they progress along their recovery journeys. We passionately believe in mental health recovery, and are committed to providing the best possible support and encouragement to people so they can achieve their recovery goals. We offer this help across all 60+ of our services in New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory.

Contact Flourish Australia!

1300 779 270 (option1) or
flourishaustralia.org.au

Chair: Judi Higgin
Chief Executive Officer: Mark Orr AM
Chief Development Officer: Peter Neilson

About Panorama

Founded in 1996 in one of Flourish Australia's predecessor organisations (PRA), Panorama has grown to become a lifestyle magazine dedicated to informing and encouraging the recovery journey of readers. Panorama is written, designed and produced almost entirely by people with a lived experience of mental health issues.

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Alyssa accesses services at Flourish Australia's headspace Bankstown

Sharon has accessed services at Flourish Australia in Queensland

Edwina is Panorama's fashion and travel diva

Angela Jackson is the Social Commissioner at the Australian Productivity Commission

Thanks to Flourish Australia staff Himal Prasad, Emaid Mustapha, Nickson Wang

Contributions are welcome!

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COVER: Edwina in her element at The Westwood/Kawakubo Exhibition fashion show at the National Gallery of Victoria. PHOTO BY EDWINA

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WE PROVIDE PRACTICAL

Care for Carers

Flourish Australia is committed to working closely with families and carers in their important role of supporting people close to them with a lived experience of a mental health issue.

Using a family inclusive approach, we work directly and in partnership with specialist organisations to provide support and education services for families and carers.

A list of helpful resources and Carer organisations for family and carers can be found on our website:
flourishaustralia.org.au/family-and-carers

SCAN QR TO FIND OUT MORE



In Panorama August 2026...

In Lead Up To TheMHS 2026: Flourish Australia's Chosen Delegates, we share the details of the unprecedented number of Flourish Australia representatives presenting at this major conference. Yeshal (pictured above), founder and community worker of the Yes Help Network and part of the headspace Youth Reference Group, will be presenting at TheMHS Conference with Serena Nian, Services &

Community Development Officer from headspace. All the details on page 9!

According to many news reports, the NDIS has quickly grown larger than anyone had anticipated. We face the dilemma of having to rein in the cost to a level that the tax payer will accept while not causing disadvantage to those who most need services. We feature an article by Angela Jackson, social commissioner in the Productivity Commission, on page 12. In Opinion: For the sake of fairness, broken NDIS must be rescued and reset, Angela describes her view of the problems with NDIS and what steps she thinks may help in future. We also look at some of the recent changes introduced by the government in the budget in May in the article Budget reins in NDIS: New Assessment Regime for NDIS on page 14.

Because of a change to the regular meeting of the Community

Advisory Council, we will not have our regular Council Column for this issue only. But it will return full of vigour in September!

With support from headspace, Alyssa has gone from a highschool student to earning distinctions studying animation at University and holding down a job, and has set up her own small business. Alyssa's Animation Aspirations is on page 4 and 5.

Sharon has gone from being stuck at home all the time to getting back to living life. And she's had such great results with equine therapy that she's moved onto a property and bought horses. Can't get a bigger tick of approval than that! Not Being Put Out To Pasture is on page 10 and 11.

In Panorama September 2026...

- Building Confidence Through Small, Consistent Changes
- Redman's recovery journey

Spread

hope.
inspire others.

**Don't worry if
you're not a writer -
that's where
we jump in!**

Did you know that sharing your own mental health recovery story can spread hope and inspiration?

At Panorama, every story is valued.

We're constantly on the lookout for stories from those living with mental health issues, but family members and caregivers, your stories matter too!

Not sure where to begin? Send us a message, we would love to hear from you.

Email: panorama@flourishaustralia.org.au or Call: 1300 779 270



ALYSSA'S ANIMATION ASPIRATIONS

WITH A LITTLE SUPPORT FROM HEADSPACE BANKSTOWN

BY ALYSSA

I've always gotten a lot out of art, my one true passion above all others. I have collected a large portfolio of work that spans many different styles, but I've developed my own personal style, too. You must work hard to hone your skills, as art is something you only get better at if you invest the time and effort.

I'm currently studying a Diploma in 2D Animation at the Academy of Interactive Technology (AIT) at Ultimo. For the last 10 weeks I've been learning the fundamentals of how to create characters and bring them to life. What I'm learning isn't really CGI, it's more similar to how animators did things decades ago.

I've been learning how to use industry standard equipment and software at AIT, so I draw characters with a tablet and a stylus before transferring them over to the computer to animate them with the "Toon Boom" program (which

I'm still learning to navigate). As I've always enjoyed drawing with paper and a pencil, the stylus and tablet really work for me.

After I complete my Diploma at AIT, I would like to get my Bachelor's in 2D Animation before I start seeking work. What I would really love to be able to do is work as a storyboard artist, though I'd be happy to work anywhere in the 2D animation field.

It took me a while to find the course that I wanted to do, as I looked very carefully for a study path that met a high enough standard and would get me to where I wanted to go. As I'm averaging Distinctions for most classes (and High Distinctions for one in particular) and I'm also really enjoying the work, I know I made the right call.

I also enjoy expressing myself through writing. Every now and again I'll pick up a pen and just write. I've been so busy with other things that I just haven't had time for it lately, but it can be fun to just put

down everything that's happening in my head onto the page (to read more about this, check out Panorama's "3 Activities 4 Recovery," which appears in our Winter 2026 print issue, and in our April, May and June 2026 issues – Ed).

headspace

Before connecting with headspace I'd been seeing the school counsellor for a while as I was experiencing some really hard times and major depression. I was halfway through Year 12 when she suggested it might be helpful for me to visit headspace and have a chat with a support worker.

I didn't have a professional support network beyond the school counsellor at that point, and while I did have family support, they didn't understand the mental health side of things. But once I began attending headspace, I started to receive amazing support from Himal, Suzanna and Oisin.

Visiting headspace after school quickly became an excellent routine that made me feel more like myself again, and my emotions are now far more manageable. I've been attending headspace for about 18 months now, where I meet one-on-one with my Clinical, Peer and Work and Study supports. I've been learning strategies to manage my feelings of anxiety and depression when they pop up here and there, and breathing exercises have been particularly helpful with this. Going through HYP (the Holistic Youth Program, pronounced "hype") played a major role in helping me to decide where I want to go in life.

I'm so glad that I got in touch with headspace for early intervention, as I know how much of a difference it makes for young people to address their mental health as soon as possible. I'm not sure what I would have done if I hadn't started coming here during high school. I don't think that I'd be studying right now, or be as happy as I am day-to-day.

Practical Support

When I commenced with headspace's Work and Study Program, one of my goals was to earn money from my art. In addition to supporting me with my studies at AIT, they've been helping me to start a small business focused on creating commission pieces, logos, and freelance digital artwork. They supported me in gaining my Tax File Number and my photo ID, as well as lots of other documentation. I also engaged with Centrelink, and got all the paperwork with them sorted. I recently spent my final Work and Study sessions on getting my Australian Business Number (ABN), creating invoices, and setting up a framework to get my business up and running.



Other accomplishments I've made recently included earning my driver's license, which took a little while and required lots of practice, and Himel has shown me how to use a calendar app, as I've always been bad with time management. The calendar has been so useful, but I'm still getting used to using it to keep track of every single assignment and appointment and event.

Support To Thrive

When I first started at AIT, Himel and I met with my student support officer there, Rachel. There was an intense orientation and class schedule at the beginning, but I had the absolute best experience with AIT's staff. They checked in with me regularly to make sure everything was good, and it's still going well.

Goals: YRG

One of my latest goals is to join the new intake of the Youth Reference Group at headspace Bankstown. The YRG meet to discuss requests and feedback provided by people who attend headspace, and the decisions of the YRG often change how the entire service operates. YRG members also get to sit in on job interviews for new staff and other official stuff.

"I had a YRG member sit in on my interview when I came to work here," Himel told me, "and their input played a factor in me getting this job."

Going my own way

While I used to visit the Bankstown headspace office throughout the week, lately I've had less spare



time due to assignments and work commitments. I still meet up with Himel, Suzanna and Oisín regularly, either in the community or at the centre. It's nice seeing their friendly, familiar faces! The team will also regularly check in to see if I'm travelling okay.

Oisín has always been a sounding board for the struggles I'm experiencing as I figure out my identity. I still don't really know where I stand at this point, as I'm still developing as a person. When I share my anxieties and issues with Oisín, it helps me to work through my day-to-day challenges.

So now that I've got a great support network, I'm feeling good and I'm doing what I love, things are going awesome. I can't recommend headspace enough!

OPPOSITE RIGHT: Alyssa and her headspace team...in manga form! **OPPOSITE LEFT AND BELOW:** An assortment of drawings and paintings from Alyssa's stacked portfolio. PHOTOS FROM ALYSSA.



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EVERYTHING SCHOOL DIDN'T TEACH YOU

Adulting 101 at headspace Bankstown

By Nickson Wang



Bankstown headspace recently ran an Adulting 101 program to teach a class of young people the many essential life skills that school just doesn't cover. Nickson Wang, Senior Youth Access Clinician, told us all about it.

For the first two weeks of our six-week Adulting 101 program, we focused on budgeting and healthy eating. We then moved onto getting government ID and accessing myGov and Centrelink, and we even invited a speaker from Centrelink to explain what kind of support is on offer for young people. We covered all the details of moving out of home and renting your own place, and how payslips and taxes work. We finished off with healthy relationships in the final week. So all up the class covered a good range of things that all young people need to know, but despite how important these life lessons are, schools still don't teach them.

Every young person attending the class either accesses services at headspace or has done so in the past. And Adulting 101 isn't just for Year 11 and 12 students: with

the content that we're sharing, I'd say our target cohort is anywhere between 16 and 25, but this class would also be relevant for younger participants of 14 or 15 years old.

We ran the class on Wednesdays in the early evening, as this was a convenient time for young people who are balancing school and work and whatever else they may have going on. We also made the sessions interactive, so it's more like having a group conversation than just being talked at. We also had a lot of FAQ sheets on offer if students wanted to learn more about any given subject.

Outreach

When we hold groups and programs at headspace, such as Adulting 101, we usually get a fair amount of interest from the young people. headspace also offers work and study teams, and we have a community engagement officer who visits schools and services to promote our programs and to invite young people to come and hang out and have a chat whenever they'd like.

Always Improving

Other headspace services have run the Adulting 101 group, including Parramatta and Mount Druitt, and we have definite plans to follow up on Adulting 101 here at Bankstown. We'll be running this program continuously, improving it based on how each session goes and by paying close attention to every feedback survey the young people fill out. At this rate, Adulting 101 will be here to stay!

ABOVE: The young people preparing for the Adulting 101 class. PHOTO PROVIDED BY NICKSON

"Being a part of Adulting 101 at headspace is like watching a budding flower bloom."

"I love being able to learn with the group, and if we don't know the answer to a question, we'll figure it out together. We're provided with a bunch of resources and we even get to question experts about this stuff, which is something not usually available to us."

"It would be nice to get the word out there so more young people can be a part of this!"

- Srea

"I just like being here, chilling and learning with community."

- Ade



If you'd like to know more about what's happening at Bankstown headspace, including Adulting 101, check out our facebook page at this QR Code.



The Westwood/ Kawakubo Exhibition

The original trendsetters of fashion on display

By Edwina

I attended the Westwood and Kawakubo International Fashion Show at the National Gallery in Melbourne, pairing the works of two of the most visionary and influential fashion designers in history.

This show appeals to creatives, and being here for this event was the whole reason I flew to Melbourne. This exhibition was a wonderful opportunity to get up close to such high-calibre pieces. Usually, I'd have to go to Europe to see something like this, so I felt privileged to be here. I've also attended Australian Fashion Week for the last three years, and it's always nice to see everyone in their Sunday best checking out the latest designs.

The Westwood/Kawakubo show included over 140 works on loan from international museums, the Westwood Heritage archives, and private collections. These hand-made pieces include asymmetrical tailoring, the use of provocative prints, and they celebrate male/female autonomy.

Before the internet, I followed Westwood in magazines. Now I follow podcasts from fascinating fashion people like Alessandro Michele and Yvonne La Fluer. I also do fashion drawings and create new fashion by sewing op-shop finds, which I've studied at a Correspondence level.

Legends

Getting their start in the 1970s, Westwood and Kawakubo both rebelled against the status quo of fashion. With contrasting philosophies and distinctive design quirks, they were both self-taught icons who explored perceptions of beauty and gender, profoundly transforming contemporary fashion through constant experimentation.

Dame Vivienne Isabel Westwood was considered largely responsible for bringing modern punk and new wave fashions into the mainstream. In 2022, Sky Arts ranked Westwood the 4th most influential artist in Britain of the past 50 years. Her passion was

art history, reflected in her choice of fabrics and materials compatible with period fashion. Westwood also used British iconography in her designs, such as images of the Queen and the Union Jack.

Towards the end of her life, Westwood dedicated herself to activism, raising awareness of the environmental impact of fashion. Promoting sustainability, Westwood famously said, "Buy less."

Rei Kawakubo is a Japanese fashion designer based in Tokyo and Paris, and is the founder of Japanese fashion label Comme des Garçons and the international Dover Street Market. Kawakubo's designs range from voluminous with vivid colours to muted, dark pieces. She has designed for Rihanna and many other celebrities.

Source:

National Gallery of Victoria

ABOVE: A variety of Edwina's favourite fashion pieces from the show.

PHOTOS BY EDWINA



NAIDOC DAY CELEBRATIONS 2026

Safe and Strong Families

By Warren Heggarty

Panorama attended the NAIDOC Week Celebrations in Paul Keating Park, Bankstown, on Saturday the 4th of July 2026. There was a stall staffed by the local headspace Bankstown service, of which Flourish Australia is the lead partner.

It was lovely sunny weather for a family event, and there were a couple of dozen stalls, play areas, and a stage for outdoor entertainment. We saw some fun Indigenous dancing/singing with audience participation. And, of course, there was live country music. In addition to various Indigenous social and health groups, there were stalls from the Cancer Council, NSW Police, University of Western Sydney (they own the

strange orange building next to the park!), St Vinnies, and more.

One Indigenous service we stopped and chatted to was Kari Limited, which provides community and family support, among other things.

Kari is an Indigenous run organisation based in Liverpool NSW, with services in Penrith and Roseberry as well.

A while ago, we heard founder and former CEO of Kari, Paul Ralph, on the radio discussing how this organisation was founded in 1999. (Ralph & Ralph, 2025) An Indigenous man, Paul was a public servant at the time he realised that he wasn't seeing the change he wanted to see, so he and his wife Sheryl took a risk and started a private organisation, Kari, to "deal with the sharp end of the stick," namely child protection, centred at the time on Liverpool. Later, the Ralphs came to realise they had to deal with the "other end of the stick," that is, PREVENTION.

Paul told Mark Levy on Radio 2GB that he was able to get things done by having sound business plans at every level of development, which attracted corporate donors. He is

"very proud" of this.

The Safe and Strong Families Program supports families experiencing family and domestic violence, and assist parents caring for children with challenging behaviours or special needs. Kari runs a free playgroup for Aboriginal children in Liverpool, as well as offering speech therapy and occupational therapy services, if necessary. Kari also encourages Aboriginal people to become foster carers, to "change a life by keeping culture strong."

Kari emphasises family, and we can see common purpose with Flourish Australia's Women and Children's Program at Blacktown. Family violence can lead to complex mental health issues and, without support, mental health issues can in turn contribute to family violence.

The Kari Early Intervention Team can be contacted on (02) 8782 0300, support@kari.org.au, or at www.kari.org.au

References

Ralph, P., & Ralph, C. (2025, September 9). 'Kari Limited' 2GB Morning Radio Show. (M. Levy, Interviewer)

ABOVE: The 2026 NAIDOC Week celebrations in Bankstown NSW kicked off with a Family Day at Paul Keating Park. **LEFT:** An overview of the festivities. **RIGHT:** The Kari stall.

PHOTOS BY WARREN HEGGARTY



LEAD UP TO THEMHS 2026

FLORISH AUSTRALIA'S CHOSEN DELEGATES

Of the 17 abstracts Flourish Australia presented to TheMHS earlier in the year, six were accepted by TheMHS Network.

Delegates include staff, people who access services, headspace Youth Reference Group members, members of the Community Advisory Council, supported employees, and carers. Panorama magazine's very own Grant will also be there, presenting a paper, as well as having a Q&A session on the stage about the forensic health system.

All abstracts had to relate to this year's theme: Illuminating Hope, Inclusion & Connection, and due to Flourish Australia's commitment to developing lived experience leadership, all abstracts had to involve somebody who has accessed our services

Now these presenters-to-be have had their abstracts accepted, the next stage is to write a paper that will take 15 minutes to present, as well as a question time for the audience. As with the abstract creation process, our delegates will be able to bounce ideas off their friends and colleagues to fine-tune their work.

If you want to know more about TheMHS Conference, read "Flourish Australia is sending speakers to some of the BIGGEST mental health conferences!" in our July 2026 issue. And definitely keep an eye out for our full coverage of how everything went at this huge event in a future Panorama!

Delegates and Topics

Paper: *The Power of a Meal: The Value of Food-Focused Groups for Improved Mental Health.* **Authors:** Tam Nguyen, Chevonne Siva, Manuel Costa, and Wiwi Siswayati (Flowerdale service, Liverpool)

Paper: *Illuminating Hope Through Movement: Embedding Exercise Physiology in Community Mental Health to Strengthen Inclusion, Connection, and Crisis Prevention* **Authors:** Laurence Gagnon, Oscar Lederman (Marrickville service)

Paper: *Yes Help Network: Gen Z-Led, Culturally Inclusive Peer Support for Youth Mental Health* **Authors:** Serena Nian, Yeshal Mansoor (headspace Parramatta/Castle Hill)

Paper: *From Peer Supervision to Peer Co-Reflection: Exploring*

Language, Power and Practice at Flourish Australia. **Authors:** Lisa Gott, Matt Tipping (Caboolture service)

Paper: *Human Connection as a Mental Health Superpower* **Authors:** Serena Nian, Ioann Kopellou (headspace Parramatta/Castle Hill)

Paper: *Being Included By Our Peers Brings Hope To Forensic Patients.* **Author:** Grant Everett (SOP)

Quotes from presenters

Yeshal, founder and community worker of the Yes Help Network, empowers young people through wellbeing programs and peer-led support, addressing mental health, cultural barriers, intergenerational challenges, and family violence. She will be presenting at TheMHS Conference with Serena Nian, Services & Community Development Officer at headspace.

"There is real power in feeling understood without having to explain yourself," said Yeshal. "Through my work with Yes Help Network, we've created relatable, inclusive spaces for young people to spark hope and belonging. I'm excited to present at TheMHS Conference 2026 to share how peer connection and storytelling can help young people feel less alone and more confident in their personal growth and in seeking help earlier."

Lisa Gott, Executive Director, Lived Experience Leadership at Flourish Australia, is also presenting a paper alongside Mat Tipping, Lived Experience Practice Lead at Flourish Australia Caboolture, about best practise in peer work.

"At Flourish Australia, we have intentionally adopted the term Peer Co-Reflection to reflect the values that underpin peer work — particularly mutuality, reciprocity and shared learning," Lisa explained.

ABOVE, L-R: Yeshal, founder of the Yes Help Network, and Erick, a Senior Youth Worker from Cumberland Multicultural Community Services. PHOTO BY SERENA



NOT BEING PUT OUT TO PASTURE:

Equine Therapy,
Peer Work, and More!

By Sharon

If you'd told me 18 months ago that I'd be where I am now, I wouldn't have believed you. And it's all thanks to Flourish Australia. The services, peer workers and support was awesome!

A social worker at my local Community Centre referred me to Flourish Australia in Queensland, and I had a phone consultation to work out my needs and goals and to figure out what peer worker would be the right fit.

The core issue that I needed the most help with was being able to leave my house, as I experienced severe anxiety and fear whenever I went outside, so we worked on that. Before Flourish Australia, I might be able to walk out the front door every couple of days, or I could be stuck inside for a week. This is why I've learned to do everything over the phone.

My troubles in leaving the house were because of a combination of both mental health issues and physical health issues. Combined, they can really put you on a little merry-go-round. I'd really isolated myself by this point, and I also experienced some hoarding issues. I'd struggled with this on my own for a long time before reaching out for help.

I met my Flourish Australia support workers in person locally, as the centre was a long way away. Phil and Debbie addressed all my goals and needs, and were the kind of people that are easy to talk to and made you feel heard. They gently helped me to step out of my comfort zone, such as by visiting a local café where we can sit and talk about things over coffee and cake. On the days we didn't go out, we talked on the phone.

My biggest achievement was feeling safe to leave the house. Every step of progress gave me hope, which is something I didn't have before. I've since been able to figure out how much I can push myself without overdoing it.

Flourish Australia helped me to quit beating myself up, to stop feeling guilty all the time, and to focus on what I CAN do. There's no cure for the bad things that have happened in our lives: it's about finding ways to live my best life. I learned it's okay

to ask for help, something I just never did, and not feel guilty asking for help.

It never felt like my peer workers were “ticking boxes,” but that they really cared. It’s wonderful to be able to talk with somebody who has their own lived experience, and being employed is good for the mental health of the peer workers, also!

I found Flourish Australia’s support non-confrontational, but to get the most out of your time with them, you have to be completely honest.

Hard Times

Everything can change at a moment’s notice. That’s been the story of my life for the last 20 years. There’s never a dull moment!

The hard times began when the doctors found a large tumour, a malignant melanoma, in my back. The surgeons successfully took out a piece of me the size of a golf ball, right near my spine. I was getting better in the beginning, but then there were post-op complications, including an infection, extreme tiredness, and a constant mental fog. It took years of meeting with different specialists before they eventually discovered I had rheumatoid arthritis and fibromyalgia.

Following complications post op, I never got back to full time work, which at the time was as a Workplace Trainer. I was too ill to work and was on unpaid sick leave, and this is where the long years of seeing various specialists loads of tests to find the problem started. I was in a lot of pain and plagued with fatigue, hence why my mental health deteriorated. My brain could not compute the new normal of going from the ability to do everything to doing very little.

As the main breadwinner, this really knocked me for six, and I was mourning the loss of my son, Matthew, to suicide. It was a very tough time.

Mum

When I went downhill, my Mum sold her flat and moved in to care for me, and did everything she could to prevent me getting isolated. We had a tumultuous relationship over the years, but she really stepped up for the last 3 or 4 years of her life.

We were the closest we’d ever been when she passed away.

I was then provided with a part-time carer. It turned out that they had been friends with my son, Matthew. It was nice to have that connection.

Next Steps

I ended up accessing services with Flourish Australia for just a year, but they had a major impact on me. With their support, I’ve had an opportunity to grieve my many losses properly.

I committed to the program, and I’m proud to say that I saw it all the way through. I am incredibly thankful for the many tools I’ve learned that help me to get through the difficult times.

Afterwards, I received a few follow-up calls just to make sure I was travelling okay. They didn’t just forget about me! If I need to one day, I may get back in touch with them again.

I’d love to see more people take advantage of this program. I recommend Flourish Australia to everyone!

Now that I’ve moved on from Flourish Australia, I see a social worker every couple of weeks to keep me on track.

NDIS

I first made contact with the NDIS five years ago. It’s a difficult application process, and although I had various people supposedly helping, it wasn’t until Kate from Flourish Australia came along that we got the ball rolling and made things happen.

I didn’t tell anyone about how bad it had gotten, how low I was feeling, hiding away in my home. But when I connected with Flourish Australia, I finally felt safe to share this with my support workers. We identified that I needed the funding for my arthritis and for psychosocial services.

My NDIS just got approved a few weeks ago, and I can thank my peer worker Kate for that. She was an absolute dynamo, so passionate about supporting people to get the funding they need. She did amazing work gathering all the reports and proof to make it happen, and it only took a handful of days for everything to be approved.

As I’ve moved on from Flourish Australia now, the exact details of where I’ll be accessing my NDIS services comes next. I’m rural, regional, so providers aren’t plentiful around here. My new social worker will help me with this, and I have high hopes.

Equine

I have had horses at different phases in my life, and when I finally realised I needed mental health support, I decided to go for equine therapy as opposed to CBT, as equine therapy is less confrontational. After working with therapy horses, I decided to get some of my own.

Angel is pure Brumby, my heart horse, and the fact she was already called that felt like a sign. Angel is gentle and sweet and can read me like a book. Then came Slippery Pete (his racing name), a blue blooded thoroughbred with zero interest in running. He’s a very funny horse, and it makes me laugh at how goofy he is. They are both fantastic for my mental health.

Once Mum and I got the horses, we moved to Pomona on acreage so I could be with my Horseys whenever, not once a week. As things tick along, I’m considering some ideas around the equine industry and giving back, paying forward so to speak. I actually have an idea for a small business connected to equine therapy, but I don’t want to give away the secret before I do it!

OPPOSITE: Equine therapy can have a profound impact on people’s mental health issues. Sharon loved it so much, she bought horses! **BELOW:** Sharon, enjoying some time out of the house at her favourite salon. **PHOTOS FROM SHARON**





OPINION:

“For the sake of fairness, broken NDIS must be rescued and reset”

By Angela Jackson, Productivity Commission

When the Productivity Commission first recommended the creation of the National Disability Insurance Scheme 15 years ago, it did so in response to a system that was underfunded, unfair, fragmented and inefficient.

The need for reform was undeniable. Since then, the NDIS has transformed the lives of hundreds of thousands of Australians with disability, replacing uncertainty with support, and bringing choice and dignity to many who were long denied both.

But progress does not mean perfection. Elements of the scheme’s

design and implementation have drifted from that original vision, undermining service quality and placing the scheme on an unsustainable financial trajectory. Reform is once again necessary to preserve the program’s core purpose. The NDIS was built on a powerful idea that people with disability should have the same choice and control over their lives that most Australians take for granted. Individualised funding, combined with competition among providers, was meant to lift quality and drive innovation. In practice, however, largely unregulated markets have too often failed to do either.

An explosion in the number of

unregistered providers, plan managers and support coordinators has diluted accountability - and made it harder for participants to navigate the system safely. Quality and safety concerns have become a recurring feature of the scheme.

In this context, proposals to require registration for all providers and introduce pre-approved panels for plan managers and support coordinators must be considered.

Alongside a national system of worker registration recommended by the Productivity Commission last year, they could ensure those core principles, choice and control, do not come at the expense of quality and safety.

At the same time, difficult conversations are emerging about who the NDIS is for. Nervousness about proposals to transition some people off the scheme is understandable. For many participants, the NDIS has become the only reliable source of support. But that reality reflects broader gaps in the system - it is not a reason for the NDIS to go unexamined.

The NDIS provides highly individualised and intensive assistance, which for people with significant and permanent disability is appropriate. It was never designed to be the default provider of services that could be delivered more efficiently through mainstream or community-based systems. As those systems have withered, pressure has flowed onto the NDIS, raising costs while often delivering poorer outcomes.

This helps explain why almost twice as many people are now receiving services through the NDIS than the Productivity Commission envisaged in 2011. A particularly stark increase has occurred among children with autism and developmental delay. In many cases, the absence of accessible early intervention services outside the NDIS has driven both diagnosis rates and scheme entry. The proposed Thriving Kids program represents an opportunity to reset this trajectory. (See next story)

By making early intervention services evidence-based, widely available and delivered in convenient community settings, support can be provided earlier

and more consistently, without requiring families to navigate an increasingly complex scheme. Crucially, such services would be available to children regardless of NDIS eligibility, filling a gap in the disability support system.

The consequences of neglecting community-based supports are perhaps most stark for people with psychosocial disability. Only a small proportion qualify for the NDIS, yet the need for ongoing psychosocial support extends far beyond that group.

As the Productivity Commission's review of the National Mental Health Agreement reported last year, around 500,000 people with moderate to severe mental illness are not eligible for the NDIS, and have no access to psychosocial supports. The failure to rebuild these services has left too many people without support and placed further strain on the NDIS to fill the gap.

Reform will not be easy. Participants face uncertainty, and providers will need to adapt to a system with stronger regulation and clearer expectations. But the alternative is worse: without reform, the NDIS risks becoming financially unsustainable and functionally ineffective, letting down both participants and the broader public who support it.

Australia embraced the NDIS because it promised fairness, dignity and security. Thoughtful reform- focused on quality, sustainability and the rebuilding of supports beyond the scheme is the surest way to keep that promise.

This article originally appeared in The Australian Newspaper. Authors' views are their own, and do not necessarily reflect the views of Flourish Australia.

OPPOSITE: Angela Jackson, Social Commissioner at the Australian Productivity Commission. **PHOTO:** PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION

How do you feel about your NDIS support?
We'd love to hear about it!

panorama@
flourishaustralia.org.au

Thriving Kids Program: Early Intervention Outside the NDIS



We read in Angela Jackson's article that a lack of early intervention services for children with Autism and Developmental Delay has contributed to a rise in diagnoses as people try to access support from NDIS.

"Thriving Kids" is a national program which aims to provide early intervention to take some pressure off the NDIS. It is aimed at children under eight years old with low to moderate support needs. Early intervention allows appropriate support to be given before a problem leaves the child with more seriously impaired function.

However at the time of the Federal Budget, 13 May 2026, Queensland was still refusing to sign on.

The 'Thriving Kids' website says: "Children with permanent and significant disability and children aged 8 and under with developmental delay and/or autism who have substantially reduced functional capacity (high support needs) will remain eligible for the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), subject to usual arrangements."

The implication, though, is that there will be a lot of children who will not need to participate in the NDIS in the long run.

Also in the budget: a "positive partnership" program in primary schools to cover children no longer eligible for NDIS.

PHOTO: Selia800 from PIXABAY.

Victorian Govt Urged to Restore MH Housing Funds



The Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System recommended the government deliver 2,000 mental health supported homes.

In its 2021-22 Budget, the government allocated \$40.4 million over four years to provide mental health support services in homes built under the Big Housing Build. This funding has now been cut. (Knight & Thompson, 2026)

In March 2026 Ms Sarah Toohey, the CEO of Community Housing Industry Association Victoria (CHIA Vic, pictured) urged the Victorian Government to restore that funding in its upcoming budget. (Mirage News, 2026) Ms Toohey was previously Senior Advisor to the Housing Minister, and had worked on Victoria's Big Housing Build.

"Not-for-profit community housing organisations have built 500 bespoke homes for people living with a mental illness," Ms Toohey said. "The homes are designed to support recovery and have been tenanted in good faith, but without the promised government funding these homes are at serious risk of not being properly staffed, leaving renters without the support they need to recover and stay housed."

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PHOTO: Sarah Toohey CHIA



BUDGET REINS IN NDIS

New assessment regime for NDIS

Over time, we have seen that the cost of the NDIS has expanded beyond expectation. In the 2026 Federal Budget on May 13, the Treasurer Dr Jim Chalmers presented the government's plan to save \$185 billion over ten years. Already, in April, Health minister Mark Butler had announced changes that will see 160,000 people removed from the NDIS by 2028. (Ison, Autism; NDIS 2026)

According to a budget report by Sarah Ison, the current NDIS annual growth rate is about 9 per cent. The new budget's aim is to reduce that to a steady 5 per cent in the 2030s. Between now and then, though, things will be even tighter. The increase planned for 2026/27 is a mere 0.2 per cent. (Ison NDIS 2026)

When the NDIS began, "diagnosis

lists" were used so that some people with certain diagnoses could be granted automatic access to the scheme. Those who have received access to NDIS through A DIAGNOSIS ALONE may be subject to a "more objective assessment system looking at functional capacity." The person would only have access to the scheme if their functional capacity was assessed as "substantially reduced" in that it impacts day-to-day living.

According to Dr Sam Bennett, Grattan Institute Disability Program Director, it was easier to demonstrate functional impairment if you had a physical disability, meaning that those with psychosocial or neurological conditions were more likely to be affected.

Sarah Ison wrote that, "Funding allocated to participants for 'social, civic and community participation,' which includes activities such as

dance lessons and social outings, will start being adjusted [in October] while tighter assessments of whether participants' supports are 'reasonable and necessary' will begin in February 2027."

Of the 66,000 people accessing the NDIS due to psychosocial disability, 4,000 were described as having high function, and The Australian's report speculated that these people may constitute the "small number of people" (with psychosocial disability) who may be moved out of the NDIS. (Ison, Psychosocial, 2026)

There are about 500,000 Australians with moderate to severe mental illness who are NOT on the NDIS. Carolyn Nikoloski, CEO of Mental Health Australia, said that given the huge cohort of people with unmet need, she was worried that they would now be pushed aside.

Minister Butler has indicated that the government intended to "build (a) system of foundational supports" to cater for this very large number of people. These "foundational supports" include the sort of psychosocial programs that were rolled into the NDIS in the first place. These people, it seems, might now be "left in a bit of a gap."

Outside of the NDIS, the Budget includes a "national autism information and advice helpline" to divert children with mild to moderate autism away from the NDIS. There will be a public awareness campaign and workforce training for the Thriving Kids program (see separate story on page 13).

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ABOVE: Australia's federal Minister for Health and Ageing The Hon Mark Butler MP made some long expected announcements about NDIS reform in the third week of April 2026.

PHOTO PARLIAMENT HOUSE CANBERRA



When Salvias Droop

Marking Neighbours Day

By Kent Austin*

Did you know that the 29th March was Neighbours Day? Or "Neighbours Every Day" day, to be precise. This is an attempt to foster good neighbourliness, something that older people vaguely remember that we need to bring back. You can read about this day on the Relationships Australia website (QR Code at the end).

Here's a story about what Kent did: it started out as an annoying problem, then blossomed...

I am not a gardener. I avoid it. But I knew I had to take action because the salvia bush was drooping under the weight of a myriad purple flowers. The last time this had happened, I had just chopped it all down and thrown it in the green garbage bin.

That is when Philomena, the elderly lady next door, went crook at me. "Why did you throw out all the lovely flowers?" She complained. "I LOVE salvia."

"Because all the lovely flowers were blocking the back door," I explained. At least I now knew what they were called!

I came up with good idea for a peace offering for my neighbour, even though I barely knew her. "But what if I get it wrong and look like a complete idiot?" A little voice asked. Another voice answered, "Yes, and what if she doesn't really like flowers? I'll just make a fool of myself."

After another couple of weeks of fighting these do-nothing demons who live rent-free in my head, I acted. I got some sheets of butcher's paper left over from moving house, a sheet of pink wrapping paper and some sticky tape, and I made the salvia bush into a bouquet of beautiful flowers. It took me ages to lay all the stalks parallel and pull off the excess leaves, but I had become a florist!

I proudly went round to Philomena and presented the bouquet to her with a cheery "Happy Easter." Of course, Philomena is Greek, and HER Easter was not till the next week. But

when she saw my untidy bundle of scraggly salvias, she forgot all about the Liturgical Calendar.

Let me just say that it made her day. It was some time before I returned home, carrying an assortment of Greek delicacies with me. I wasn't particularly worried that I'd left hundreds of leaves and little purple flowers all over the place that I now had to sweep up, as I had made a new connection with a neighbour.

Isn't it strange that my "demons" and I had been so opposed to the whole idea only an hour or two before? Perhaps this is what people really mean when they say they want to "change the world."

ABOVE: LEFT Kent cleared a place in his kitchen and laid the salvia stalks out across it. **RIGHT** He set to work making a bouquet. It was not an expert job, but it solved the salvia problem and resulted in a neighbourly exchange. **PHOTOS BY WARREN HEGGARTY**



**Relationships Australia:
Neighbours Every Day**

IS AI RECRUITMENT MISSING OUR TALENTS?

Is a National Skills Taxonomy the Answer?



Have you ever gone looking for a job and then, after seeming to make no progress, wondered whether the whole process was just random? You are not alone. But no, it is not random. Like anything large scale, there are problems in the job market and we need to work around them. Fortunately, people out there such as Jobs and Skills Australia (an Australian government organisation) are working on the problems as we speak.

Sometimes, the real skills that a person might bring to a job are revealed in the stories they tell, not in the words they use. That is why we have job interviews. But if the recruitment process obsesses over jargon, especially if the recruiter is a robot, it will MISS these skills completely.

For example, emotional intelligence, de-escalation, ethical judgement and cultural competence are just words. If you possess these skills, you may not use the terminology that will flag you to the AI recruiter!

What about critical thinking, creativity, collaboration and problem solving? The robot recruiter might have a better chance here. But what I call "critical thinking" another might call

"common sense." And what looks like "problem solving" to one person looks like "creativity" to another.

By many accounts, there appears to be a lot of skills that are missing from the Australian workforce. Employers are crying out for certain qualities, but recruitment processes do not identify suitably qualified people.

Maybe it is a mismatch of language? Maybe recruiters use different words than applicants to describe the same thing? Add AI into the mix, and you have a situation where the recruitment process filters people out not because they are not qualified, but because they don't use the same jargon.

This is no minor point. Jobs and Skills Australia has a Proposal for National Skills Taxonomy. That means they want everyone to adopt a common set of specifically defined or classified words to use in recruitment, so that everyone is on the same page.

Jobs and Skills Deputy Commissioner Megan Lilly says in her article on the proposal, "Let's make sure algorithms judge us by what we can do, not by what they can't see, by adopting a skills-first mindset." (Lilly, 2026)

If only algorithms had minds!

Maybe a simpler answer would be for recruiters to be more hands-on in their processes. Over forty years ago, before the advent of computerisation, actual humans would scan job applications. In the 80's one large employer, the NSW Department of Education, had about 30 full time staff just processing teacher job application forms BEFORE the interview stage.

We don't have to go back to the same level of paperwork as existed then, but at least in those days applicants knew that an actual human had reviewed their application even if they were unsuccessful.

Be sure to check out our Transferable Skills article on the very next page!

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ABOVE: After generations of workers trying to figure out how to catch the attention of human bosses, we now have to recalibrate to accommodate AI in our applications. Maybe networking and getting headhunted for jobs aren't as difficult as we first thought. **PHOTO BY RALPH/ALTRIP/GERMANY FROM PIXABAY**



TRANSFERABLE SKILLS

Learn Once, Use Forever

Transferable skills are those skills that have widespread applications across many fields, and they can really beef up your resume. For instance, being organised is essential in every industry (as well as in our social lives), as is being able to communicate effectively, or being able to Win Friends And Influence People, as the classic book title goes.

There's plenty we can do to learn and develop our skills. If you have trouble with punctuality, for instance, you could set multiple alarms on your phone and keep track of every meeting and appointment with an electronic calendar.

Hard and Soft Skills

"Hard" skills are industry-specific abilities, as it goes without saying that a computer programmer will require very different qualifications than a chef. "Soft" skills focus more on behavioural and social aptitude, such as your ability to work well with others, problem-solving, critical thinking, and creativity

Employers look for a hybrid of hard and soft skills. And while we are usually encouraged to be modest, when hunting for a job you need to list all your relevant skills and strengths. You may need to demonstrate your aptitude as a part of the interview process, so be honest!

AI often plays a major role in the recruitment process now (refer to Is AI Recruitment Missing Our Talents? on the previous page), so it's more vital than ever to confirm you have what the employer is seeking by including the right keywords in your resume. Otherwise, there's little doubt a machine will reject you.

Get A Job That's Right for You

"Inclusive Employment Australia uses a person-centred and strengths-based approach to identify the transferable skills participants have gained through work, study, volunteering, caring roles, and community activities," said Emaid Mustapha, Flourish Australia's Team Leader-Employment.

"We encourage people to build on these skills to support their employment goals, and if they're interested in a role that requires additional qualifications, we can connect them up with suitable training/certificates to improve their chances in matching with the work environment that suits them.

"Based on their interests, strengths and capacity, we also encourage participants to look at roles they haven't considered, while always respecting their preferences and goals."

SOURCE: Centre for Inclusive Employment Australia website

PHOTO PROVIDED BY GERALT-SCHOOL FROM PIXABAY

Always Time To Learn

How many of the following skills do you have that could be transferred between different jobs? Most of this list is very basic, but can serve as a foundation that you can build on with time and effort.

LITERACY: Can you read and explain yourself through the written word? Do you have an adequate grasp of spelling and punctuation?

BASIC MATHS: Can you add, subtract, divide and multiply? What about basic financial skills, like how discounts and interest rates work?

TECHNOLOGY: How are you with computers and smart phones? Using the internet, e-mailing, ZOOM meetings?

TIME MANAGEMENT: Can you be where you're meant to be, when you're meant to be?

INDEPENDENCE: Can you work on your own without supervision?

FINE MOTOR SKILLS: How are you with tasks that require coordination with small objects?

FITNESS: Are you strong, can you perform physical labour?

ATTENTION: Can you maintain focus for a protracted period?

PROBLEM SOLVING: Can you figure out how to navigate obstacles to getting your work done?

CO-OPERATION: Are you a team player?

COMMUNICATING: Can you listen and understand instructions, and be understood in return?

FLEXIBILITY: Can you adapt to new conditions and situations?

PRESENTATION: Do you take care of your hygiene and appearance?

PERFORMANCE: Can you get the job done efficiently and consistently?

Looking for open employment? Have a history of mental health issues? Call Inclusive Employment Australia!

1300 779 270 (option1)

Kate Traces Mental Health Roots to Early Childhood



Through her royal work, The Princess of Wales has met “adults struggling with addiction and mental health issues.”

According to a report by Hilary Rose in The Times, “she has been struck by how often they could trace the roots of those problems to early childhood. Early childhood development is said to be the cause closest to Kate’s heart.” (Rose, 2026)

In mid-May 2026, the princess made a brief work trip to Reggio Emilia in Italy. This place is famous

for its unique approach to child learning, emphasising art, drama and the natural world. A Kensington Palace spokesman said “the princess will see first-hand how the Reggio Emilia approach creates environments where nature and loving human relationships come together to support children’s development.”

Since 2021, the princess has spearheaded The Royal Foundation Centre for Early Childhood. It fosters collaboration, research and practical action in the field. In 2025 it launched its Shaping Us Framework

to look at social and emotional development, and this framework is behind Kate’s Italian trip. (Nanan-Sen, 2026)

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Rose, H. (2026, May 9). Children ignite Kate’s new lease on work life. The Australian newspaper.

ABOVE: Catherine, Princess of Wales.

RECOVERY GAMES Solutions

Scramble

- Defence
- Consumer
- Conference
- Flowerdale
- Register
- Growing
- Discriminated
- Platinum
- Glass

Panorama Crossword:

Down

- Fluidity
- Little
- Traumatic
- Prevention
- Mentoring
- Coffee
- Breakers

8 Conscious

9 Leader

Across

8 Connection

10 Stigma

11 Intervention

12 Beneficial

Panorama Find-A-Word

TWNONEYRIGELUHYBFCOMWIBSSYEKDM
IKHMAZLHURQBOCROFEZLXSSXOWITCT
WJQUGLGEMWUDDDEQDIOJYPETXDIZJH
XXRBRWLAENAOWCACKFVGEFOWCJHZEX
JRAMCEVXODNOFZEPQATXDKCDGZRN
PORFFMNOYNUBDZLUWBTAPJMFFFDZV
NCMLTHCIFDCBYCNYMLOZBBWVYVHIQ
ZONGEXJAEHXTFGHMEEAVALACLNZYJ
CLNBCBEFMSAWBRWSZGDNXFHJFCPFN
QGI R PZCLLF AKLT ONVZZWP KZPX TQHHP
QXSPNXACDNMVEZLNPMNLTPQDYZRGEZ
JWEPREPARATIONZSYNCHRONISETSNF
YWZQAZLVWSICICXCTYDTPBXCQYRDZ
AYWBEHAVIOURCFWTVROJTYVPLNWF
KXZRYAYQIROQYRTIMTWDJQQUWUWQO
UOJMSMRXFCZYIOQOSTZRFNOMKAVMJ
MEDOYSDMLXUHZSTIHQTPDNBQMPPLTH
ZARBFKNOWLEDGERMYHOLHVFJDBPFL
MABREAKERSAOWPOQCXWKCCEWNHGUSX
AMTVNKDUJSUHOULBRITDAAPFTXMKT
ZAATEHUVLDUDOKHVDBITNAUSLIEVDQ
RAONDRGEQJOOVRYALHUCNMOMKGD
MCEIKZQZJIGOMAFUMUWRCMEMRMAF
GGFWWAGKMURYMUBNOAPTIFAJGUKJ
TRDKPVJHFWKKDOSSOBGHANYPGADQL
SNKCXHWXZJPPPOHGBHJUMRYVF
EPVLCGGBSMZFYDCIBBHLRQFBJRXKZA
FOEGBMIAKUQEDHJRCCCFMKDWKIPZISK
POIXXANMAMUYWJRHASNRSDRECOAIPLOA

WHEN EVERYTHING FEELS LIKE TOO MUCH

And how tiny things can help

By Penelope



Some days, life feels loud

Your 'TO DO' list grows legs. Your thoughts race ahead of you. Your body feels tired even when you've "done nothing". Stress, worry, overwhelm, they can sneak up quietly or crash in all at once.

If this sounds familiar, you're not broken. You're human in the year 2026.

Modern life asks a lot of us. We're expected to keep up, stay calm, be productive, be available, show up, smile, often without enough rest, safety or support. Over time, that pressure can turn into burnout: a deep, whole body tiredness where even small things feel hard. And while that experience is painful, it's also understandable.

First things first: this is not your fault

Burnout and overwhelm are not signs of weakness or failure. They're signs that something has been too much for too long.

And here's the hopeful part: even when life doesn't change overnight, how supported you feel can.

Small, gentle steps especially ones

that cost nothing, really can help ease the load.

Tiny things that can help (no perfection required)

Think of these as options, not rules. You don't need to do all of them. One is enough. Even half of one counts.

- Try breathing like you're not being chased by a tiger
- Stress tells your body it's in danger. Slow breathing tells it, "False alarm."
- Try it now as you are reading this: Inhale through your nose. Exhale through your mouth a bit longer. Repeat a few times. Feel your body change? Congratulations, you've just helped your nervous system.

Be here — just for a moment

Mindfulness doesn't mean clearing your mind or being calm all the time. It just means noticing this moment. The feel of your feet on the floor. The warmth of a mug in your hands. The sound of the leaves in the tree. One moment of noticing is enough. Listen. What can you hear right now?

Move in ways that are kind

You don't need a gym. A slow walk. Stretching while the kettle boils. Standing in the sun like a cat charging its batteries. Gentle movement reminds the body that it's still alive, still here, still capable of change. Your body appreciates any movement that doesn't feel like punishment.

Let someone in

You don't have to explain everything perfectly. A simple "I'm having a rough time" is enough. Being heard, even for a few minutes, can make stress feel lighter. Connection doesn't fix everything, but it does make things feel less lonely.

A gentle reminder

You are not behind. You are not too much. And you are not alone in this.

Healing doesn't mean never feeling stressed again. It means learning, slowly, kindly, how to come back to yourself. One breath. One step. One moment of support at a time.

And that's more than enough to begin.

You don't have to do this alone

If overwhelm or burnout starts to feel heavy or scary, help is available — free, confidential and without judgement:

- **Beyond Blue**
24/7 phone and online support: 1300 22 4636
- **Lifeline**
24/7 crisis support: 13 11 14
- **NSW Mental Health Line**
1800 011 511
- **Flourish Australia**
Recovery focused mental health support across NSW

If today's win is "I kept going" — that's enough. If it's "I rested" — also enough. If it's "I read this article" — absolutely enough!

Until next time, wherever you are today, it's a place you can move forward from.

PHOTO PROVIDED BY STOCK SNAP FROM PIXABAY

Penelope

NDIS

Support for you, your family,
and your carers.

We will walk alongside you
on your recovery journey, as
well as help you live in the
community, learn new skills,
and do the things that are
important to you

AT FLOURISH AUSTRALIA we can assist you to:

Our NDIS services

Flourish Australia is a registered NDIS provider. We support people who have a complex mental health issue to live the life they want to live. We have been in business since 1955 and have assisted many people to:

- Find a job
- Undertake training or study
- Make friends
- Connect with their communities
- Sort out day-to-day issues
- Find a place to live
- Stay healthy
- And much more

The most important things to us at Flourish Australia are your health, wellbeing, and recovery journey.

We are here to help

We know that applying for the NDIS or seeking support can be a confusing and intimidating process. Contact us and we will help you during all stages of the process.

📞 1300 779 270 ✉️ hello@flourishaustralia.org.au

🌐 www.flourishaustralia.org.au

📱 Follow us @FlourishAus



Find out if you can
access the NDIS



Think about your current
needs, goals, and supports



Meet with your NDIS
planner and get a plan



Decide which service providers
you want support from



Put your plan into action



flourish
AUSTRALIA

Where mental wellbeing thrives

NDIS