



**ACT**  
Government

Justice and Community Safety



# ACT Corrective Services Disability Framework

A roadmap to the future

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We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the ACT, the Ngunnawal people. We acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region.

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# The ACT Corrective Services Disability Framework on a page

The ACT Corrective Services Disability Framework guides how we work with clients in both community and custodial correctional environments.

ACTCS commits to placing the client with disability at the **centre** of service planning and delivery to provide a service where:

- Differences are valued
- Choice is empowered where possible
- Clients have access to coordinated services that collaborate with key people
- People with disability and relevant data inform service design and delivery
- Clients are connected with appropriate supports and services across correctional environments
- Diverse cultures and experiences are respected, valued, and supported
- There is an inclusive and respectful culture that recognises the rights and needs of people with disability



# Introduction from the ACT Corrective Services Executive Champion for Disability and the ACT Corrective Services Commissioner

The ACT Corrective Services (ACTCS) Disability Framework outlines how ACTCS commits to placing the client with disability at the centre of service planning and delivery.

There is a complex intersection and impact of disability on recidivism, particularly in relation to access to, and capacity to, engage in rehabilitative and reintegrative programs. This Framework is therefore important in supporting better outcomes across many domains for our clients with disability.

The Framework further builds on the important work ACTCS have been implementing under the ACT Government *Disability Justice Strategy 2019–2029* and the ACTCS *Disability Action and Inclusion Plan 2021–2023* to provide a more equitable and inclusive service.

The Framework provides a guide to what best practice looks like in the correctional environment when working with people with disability. Key initiatives such as the Integrated Offender Management Framework and the new Disability Action and Inclusion Plan for 2024–26 will be the vehicles to operationalise the service changes required to move ACTCS towards the best practice environment. Many staff already demonstrate the principles of the Framework in their day-to-day work and implementation of the Framework will enable a more consistent service approach across the agency.

We would like to thank all those involved in the development of the Framework, including clients, people with disability, community and advocacy organisations, First Nations people, staff, oversight bodies, and other government agencies. This collaboration has been critical in helping us understand how we can make sure clients have access to support and adjustments to enable better outcomes.

A more inclusive service for people with disability will mean a better service for all our clients. We look forward to implementing this Framework through our future service improvement activities, with the support of our stakeholders, and continuing to improve how we support clients with disability.



**Ray Johnson** APM  
Commissioner, ACTCS



**Catherine King**  
ACTCS Executive Champion for Disability

# Purpose and context

The ACTCS Disability Framework outlines our common understanding, principles and service approach that guide and inform how we work with clients with disability in both community and custodial correctional environments.

The Disability Framework will be implemented through future service improvement activities.

## Context

The Disability Framework is an action in:

- The ACT Government *Disability Justice Strategy 2019–2029*
- Tranche 1 of the ACTCS *Disability Action and Inclusion Plan 2021–2023*
- The *Healthy Prison Review 2019* conducted by the Inspector of Correctional Services
- The ACT Government *Reducing Recidivism in the ACT by 25% by 2025 Plan*

The Disability Framework complements a number of existing ACTCS strategic documents:

- Strategic Plan 2019–2024
- Integrated Offender Management Framework
- Rehabilitation Framework
- Walking with Women on the Pathway to Change Framework
- Be the Change We Seek: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Offender Framework

## Key definitions

Term	Definition
<b>Disability</b>	Persons living with disabilities include those navigating long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments, and may experience barriers and challenges with safe and equitable participation/access in society (based on the definition from the United Nations ‘Convention on the rights of Persons with Disabilities’).  Or more simply: having a functional impairment or additional needs.
<b>Client</b>	A person who is under the care or supervision of ACT Corrective Services in a custodial environment (primarily at the Alexander Maconochie Centre) or community setting. This includes, but is not limited to, people who are convicted of an offence and subject to detention or a community corrections order, accused people subject to detention or bail, and people on parole.

# Key issues and barriers

What we know and have heard is outlined in the [Disability Framework Consultation Summary](#).

The main issues raised in supporting ACTCS clients with disability include:

- There are many barriers which discourage people from identifying as having a disability, including:
  - Shame and stigma
  - Not wanting to appear weak
  - Worrying about how this disclosure might change perceptions or how the information is used
  - Feeling like they won't be understood
  - Not identifying with the term disability.
- There is limited data available on the actual rates of people with disability in correctional environments. This includes limited data about the types of disabilities (and other health issues) experienced by ACTCS clients and adjustments needed
- People who have both lived experiences of disability and interactions with the justice system face additional challenges and barriers as these experiences often combine to result in further disadvantage, such as difficulty with:
  - Housing
  - Employment
  - Finances
  - Advocacy
  - Stigma of disability and the justice system.
- Misunderstanding of disability-related behaviours by correctional staff
- Correctional clients unable to access external services due to not meeting their access criteria or apprehension and unwillingness of services to engage with clients in a custodial environment
- The complex intersection and impact of disability on recidivism, particularly in relation to access to, and capacity to, engage in rehabilitative and reintegrative programs
- The importance of consulting with people with lived experience of disability.

Other activities that are being implemented to help address some of these issues include:

- Improving identification and data collection through new and revised processes, procedures, and systems
- Implementing disability awareness, confidence, and response training for staff
- Establishing a Disability Expert Reference Group, with a membership that includes people with lived experience of disability, and other key experts in disability services.

# Principles

Key principles will underpin how ACTCS supports clients in custodial and community environments:

- Individual differences are valued, and individual choice is empowered where possible.
- Clients will have access to coordinated services that appropriately engage and collaborate with key people relevant to their need.
- The experiences of people with disability, and relevant data, inform service design and delivery.
- Clients with disability are connected with appropriate supports and services across correctional environments to promote continuity of care.
- Diverse cultures and experiences are respected, valued, and supported, with recognition that disability is conceptualised differently across cultures.
- An inclusive and respectful culture that recognises the rights and needs of people with disability will be fostered across all areas of ACT Corrective Services.

# Service approach

Respect and dignity for people with disability is essential in delivering a client centred service. Ways to maintain the respect and dignity of individuals with disability to the fullest extent possible within the justice system include adopting:

- A person-centred approach
- A diversity informed approach
- Enabling empowerment and self-determination.

ACTCS commits to placing the client with disability at the centre of service planning and delivery. Key strategies to be incorporated across all ACTCS services where possible include:

## Individualised care

Individualised care underpins the best outcomes for clients with disability. This means that work is based on a person-centred and diversity-informed approach.

A **person-centred approach** focuses on the individual by providing trauma-informed, holistic care which incorporates individual responsivity (what works and doesn't work for the person).

A **person-centred approach** also looks at the individual as a member of the community.

An important part of this is building and maintaining positive connections.

In our day-to-day work this looks like:

- Focussing on the individual's abilities, needs and strengths, rather than labels
- The level of service that each individual receives should be proportionate to their needs
- Supporting individuals in custody to re-establish and maintain positive support networks with family, kinship connections, carers and community supports from entry
- Considering opportunities to tailor activities to promote equitable access to upskilling while in custody that are relevant and accessible to the individual, not based on ideas of what a person with a particular disability might be able to achieve
- Working with relevant community partners to support parents with disability to rebuild parent skills and reengage with family and community.

A **diversity-informed approach** considers all the different factors that make up a person's identity, such as their culture, gender, sexuality, disability, etc.

In our day-to-day work this looks like:

- Considering relationships outside of a binary or mainstream context that the individual feels are sources of support (individuals may have same sex partners, non-traditional support systems, kinship connections that extend beyond the Western nuclear family unit)
- Considering how culture may influence perceptions of disability and support needs.

## Cultural awareness

ACTCS has a diverse client population across custodial and community environments. It is critical that different cultures and experiences are respected, valued, and supported, with consideration that disability is perceived differently across cultures.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are overrepresented in custody and disability is conceptualised differently by First Nations peoples (i.e. there is no word for disability in many First Nations languages). Culturally safe and appropriate holistic care for First Nations clients is the best way to support them through this Framework.

Ways that we can demonstrate cultural awareness in our work include:

- Being mindful of communications with people for whom English is not their first language
- Recognising the impact of minority stress on reintegration
- Enabling access to culturally appropriate supports
- Improving cultural awareness and cultural competency of staff through training and other learning and engagement experiences
- Consider how induction processes can support First Nations peoples and avoid re-traumatisation
- Supporting First Nations clients coming together to support one another and share their stories
- Improving the sensory environment in work activities to support healing
- Having Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific programs and supports in the community.

## Empowerment and self-determination (within the limitations of the environment)

**Empowerment** and **self-determination** mean the client is involved in decision making, has realistic goals and expectations set, and ACTCS identifies opportunities where the individual can choose what is best for them.

We acknowledge that in a correctional environment, where many choices are limited, providing empowerment and self-determination at the individual level can be challenging.

Enabling empowerment and self-determination in the workplace looks like:

- Encouraging as much contribution from the individual as possible
- Giving individuals choice in decision making where possible
- Discussing reasonable adjustments to meaningfully access training options that could lead to industry employment, not based on ideas of what a person with a particular disability might be able to achieve.
- Staff having greater understanding of individuals and how to support capacity building
- Acknowledging that disability is a continuum, and that disability and client need(s) may change over time
- Considering a person's needs during planning at transition points/times of change and proactively considering other times they may require support
- Identifying issues that need to be addressed when supporting transition back into the community.

## Collaboration

Critical to ensuring the best outcomes for individuals is the establishment of genuine relationships, partnerships, and collaboration across the broader community services system available for clients with disability and their carers/families.

Individuals with disability and their carers/families should be supported in a way that achieves the best outcomes for the individual, carer/family, and the community. Fostering connections with an individual's community and networks ensures they are supported beyond their involvement with ACTCS and the boundaries of our services.

Collaboration means:

- Appropriately sharing information (internally and externally) – with consideration to confidentiality
- Having partnerships in custody and the community with key services and supports
- Having ACTCS services informed by clients with lived experience of disability
- Working more closely together to support clients with disability.

Strategies and activities could include:

- More involvement from families, carers and community supports in sharing information
- Involving clients and service providers in the design of services and/or accessibility options where appropriate and possible
- Consulting with people with lived experience of disability and other disability experts about service design and delivery
- Improving the reliability of, and access to, information regarding the additional needs of a client to support a more appropriate service across ACTCS teams
- More integrated care partnerships with community agencies where those agencies work directly with the client while in custody, as well as continuing support when the individual moves from custody to the community
- Encouraging peer-to-peer learning for staff to improve the support of clients with complex needs
- A central source of information about what internal teams do and what external agencies do
- Engaging with supports early in the process of working with an individual and building rapport to support information sharing and improved outcomes for the client
- Formalised handover processes.

## Enable equitable access to services and support

All ACTCS staff have an important role to play in enabling equitable access to services and support for clients with disability. The design and delivery of services should consider:

- Universal design: designing services so that everyone can access them
- Opportunities for reasonable adjustments
- Alternative ways of communicating and providing information
- Facilitating access to appropriate services and support.

In our day-to-day work this could look like:

- Ensuring disability and other diverse needs are considered during planning, procurement, and delivery – by engaging with clients, experts, and community and advocacy organisations
- Systematically recording reasonable adjustments in the electronic records system
- Greater accessibility and flexibility in how clients subject to community supervision attend to their reporting requirements
- Supporting clients with different learning and communication styles/needs in programs and education
- Explaining conditions of community and sentence-based orders in Plain or Easy English and engaging advocacy support (where required) to ensure the conditions are understood, such as through scenario examples
- Enabling greater access to advocacy and support services, particularly for parole
- Enabling more timely access to services where possible
- Connections to support services and networks for carers and support persons
- Linking clients with health and other support services.

## Continuity of care

**Continuity of care** means the individual and their needs are supported over time, particularly when transitioning into the community. Continuity of care is critical in supporting individuals with disability and happens through:

- Improved collaboration and consistency of information and communication
- Proactively planning for release from custody.

Strategies and activities to support greater continuity could include:

- Contribute to a smooth transition between custody and community supervision, such as through case conferencing
- Having prosocial opportunities designed around client interest and engagement, and activities that support building practical life skills
- Clearer communication with clients about different ACTCS and external staff roles and what each role does
- Clearer communication about what happens upon release, including support and services that are available (and what each involve), to support clients to make informed choices
- Proactive planning for release through timely case planning, considering what needs to be done while an individual is in custody and post-release needs for continuity of care.

## Capable staff

Building capability in staff is critical to effectively supporting individuals with disability. Staff need to be both aware of disability and supported to confidently respond to individual needs. To do this, staff can:

- Participate in training in disability
- Engage in more integrated connections with community support organisations
- Explore more ways to work together to best support the individual needs and rights of the person
- Identify where to go for more information, including connections with specialised staff.

Establishing Staff Disability Champions in each work area would be a key strategy to support and empower staff. These champions are not experts in disability but would:

- Have disability awareness
- Know where to go for more information and support with disability
- Advocate for best practice in their team in working with people with disability
- Participate in a collective group across ACTCS to promote consistency in service and grow knowledge.

## Flexible systems and processes

It is important to reduce system barriers so that staff, systems, and processes are able to flexibly work with people with disability. This response should focus on the individual's abilities and strengths.

Systems and processes should be:

- Based on universal design principles
- Able to provide reasonable adjustments when needed
- Responsive to the changing needs of our clients.

## Continuous improvement

ACTCS is committed to continuous improvement in how clients with disability are supported. Change can take time and learning is an ongoing process through service evaluation and seeking to understand client experiences and outcomes.

Ways to continue service improvement include:

- Improved data on individual needs so that service design is evidence based and specialised to the correctional environment
- Consulting with people with lived experience of disability in service planning, design, and delivery
- Consistently implementing good practice across ACTCS to support people with disability.

# Implementation and review

This Framework commits ACTCS to the key principles that will underpin all service delivery into the future and provides a guide to what best practice looks like in the correctional environment. This will be realised through the future design of services, including current program reform activities underway in both the community and custodial environments. The Framework will also provide a structure to prioritise service improvement in the next Disability Action and Inclusion Plan of 2024.

This Framework will be reviewed in 2026 to coincide with the development of the third ACTCS Disability Action and Inclusion Plan.



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