Able
AUSTRALIA®

2021-22
Research and Innovation

TOGETHER WE ARE ABLE

About
Able Australia

Able Australia is a diverse not-for-profit organisation providing leading disability, deafblind and aged care services. We offer a broad range of high-quality services to empower our clients to live the life they choose.

As one of Australia's oldest and most trusted services providers, we have grown from providing support to the deafblind community into an innovative and diverse organisation with a varied service offering.

Content

Preface

Lynette McKeown
CEO

2021-22 delivered another challenging year as the COVID-19 pandemic continued providing further uncertainty with numerous lockdowns and changes to the services we deliver. Professor Brené Brown quotes *"Vulnerability is the birthplace of innovation, creativity and change".* As witnessed throughout this report, we have not missed this opportunity to innovate and create change.

Our research and innovation continues to grow as we actively support quality improvement and embrace innovation to enhance the lives of people with disability, our organisation and the future of the sector. Our focus is on:

1. Using research and knowledge to improve evidence-based practice and thus the experience of people with disability

2. Supporting staff to improve their skills and approaches

3. Responding to changes in our regulatory and service environment; and

4. Developing partnerships with experts and industry.

Our strong partnerships enable us to expand our research and innovation to the utmost extent – all with the aim to improve the lives of people living with disability at our core. This together with our focus as outlined we strive to deliver Better days, every day with and for our clients.

Lynette McKeown
CEO

Research and Innovation projects

At Able Australia we are proudly involved in a diverse range of research and innovation projects. These projects provide Able with an invaluable opportunity to enhance our learning in several areas including but not limited to our foundations of deafblindness, training and assistive technology. Our involvement in such projects assists us to improve the way we deliver our services to our clients as well as bring these learnings to strengthen the sector.

The projects identified throughout this report are made possible thanks to our Centre of Excellence for Deafblind team, led by Dr Meredith Prain.

Deafblind Information Australia
(a collaboration with SensesWA and Deafblind Australia) Deafblind Technology Research Project

Partner organisation:	Swinburne University
Funding source:	National Disability Insurance Scheme Information Linkages and Capacity Building Grant
Project aim:	The aim of this project is to increase the application of technology by people with deafblindness to meet their goals. This involves Able allied health staff working directly with clients and researchers to support clients to achieve their stated goals using technology.
Anticipated outcomes:	• Deliver training on mainstream technologies for people who are deafblind. • Create a better understanding of which technologies are potentially the most beneficial for people who are deafblind. • Undertake a whole of house approach to access and communication to support the use of technology within Able houses.

Individualised Supported Living (ISL)

Partner organisation:	Araluen, The University of Melbourne
Funding source:	Nil (Able allocation: $15,000)
Project aim:	Develop a catalogue of training modules that can be delivered online in a COVID environment that are available 24/7 (or used as an adjunct to face-to-face professional development, post-COVID). Training modules are built with the aim to give students the tools to develop comprehensive Individualised Supported Living plans for people with disability.
Anticipated outcomes:	• A training methodology to educate staff on delivering Individualised Supported Living plans. • Project outcomes to be presented at the National Deafblind Conference, June 2022.

Deafblind Communication
Building professional competency in tactile communication

Partner organisation:	Monash University – School of Research and Engagement, NAATI
Funding source:	Australian Research Council
Project aim:	The purpose of this project is to professionally develop deafblind support staff including Communication Guides and Disability Support Workers on how to communicate with deafblind clients using tactile communication. Coordinating and conducting group staff training sessions will work to support this project.
Anticipated outcomes:	• Improve the effectiveness of communication between people with deafblindness and their support staff. • Evidence-based training and resources for conducting training. • Enhanced efficiency and effectiveness of support services provided to people with deafblindness.

Exploring assistive technology outcomes with people with deafblindness in Southern Africa

Partner organisation:	Cape Peninsula University of Technology, Monash University
Funding source:	Deafblind International. A partnership between Monash University and University of Cape Town (South Africa) researchers to study the outcomes of a person with deafblindness using the My Rights tool, which was developed for people with disabilities in Australia.
Project aim:	Assistive technology (AT) is a highly effective intervention to address the capability gap for people living with deafblindness. The project aims to determine the applicability of MyATOF dimensions to people with deafblindness and low- and middle-income countries.
Anticipated outcomes:	Validate the My Assistive Technology Outcomes Framework for people with deafblindness in Southern Africa. Peer-reviewed article - Assistive technology for people with deafblindness in Southern Africa: a Delphi study exploring dimensions of impact has been published

Communicating health information to people in Supported Disability Accommodation (SDA)

Partner organisation:	Deakin University, AGOSCI
Funding source:	Medical Research Futures Fund
Project aim:	Investigate how public health information is communicated to people living in Supported Disability Accommodation.
	Conduct three concurrent study arms to investigate how public health information is communicated to people living in Supported Disability Accommodation (SDA) including:
	1. Sensitising interviews with residents and SDA disability support workers to establish current practice concerns
	2. Observational case studies of SDA facilities, examining resident and support worker engagement with COVID-19 public health information, and the communication strategies used to relay this information to residents.
	3. A modified e-Delhi study with a sample of key stakeholders, including representatives from SDA service providers and relevant consumer advocacy organisations, to establish a consensus around key communication priorities and recommended practices.
Anticipated outcomes:	• Guidelines on best practice in communicating public health information to SDA residents.
	• Development of resources to support communication with SDA residents.

Effectiveness of tailored COVID-19 messages for vulnerable Australians

Partner organisation:	Expression Australia, Yooralla, Wallara Australia Ltd and Enliven
Funding source:	Medical Research Futures Fund
Project aim:	Investigate the effectiveness of COVID-19 messaging for vulnerable populations, including people who are deaf and live with disability.
	It has been discovered that effective management of the COVID-19 pandemic and future pandemics in Australia requires significant and sustained population-wide behaviour change. Such behaviour changes can only occur through an effective public health mass media campaign that delivers designed, relevant and accessible key messages to all communities in Australia.
	This project aims to:
	1. Identify COVID-19 information gathering sources and information needs of vulnerable populations and understand the relative impact of current "general" communication strategies used by government.
	2. Create a tailored communication approach to address "common needs" across vulnerable subgroups, and also "subgroup-specific" approaches based upon our understanding of their information needs.
	3. Compare the effectiveness of existing "general" communication approaches used by government to a "common needs" approach across the vulnerable subgroups and also to a "subgroup-specific" approach for improving knowledge of and attitudes towards performing knowledge of and attitudes towards performing specific behaviours that will help limit the impact of the COVID-19 virus in our community.
Anticipated outcomes:	Improved access to tailored COVID-19 messaging by vulnerable groups.

International Communication Rights Alliance

Partner organisation:	ISAAC, Deafblind International, International Council on the Education of the Vision Impaired and International Communication Project.
Funding source:	Nil
Project aim:	In 2020, Deafblind International (DbI) and the International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment (ICEVI), partnered with the ISAAC UNCRPD working group to develop a policy statement and call to action, at which time the International Communication Rights Alliance (ICRA) was formed. The membership of ICRA comprises of: • People with communication support needs • Peak bodies including those representing AAC users and people with communication support needs and those working with these groups. • Service providers • Educators • Academics • ICRA members are represented in six continents. ICRA's key focus points are: • How might the ICRA assist in the interpretation and implementation of the UNCRPD across countries, with respect to communication rights? • What work is currently happening in this area, specific to communication rights? • Are there pre-existing resources or campaigns that could be shared or adapted for this purpose? On the 15th August, 2022 two International Communication Rights Alliance (ICRA) committee members, Beth Moulam and Jacob Matthew, presented to the UNCRPD committee, regarding communication rights and the lack of state reporting obligations and standards. You can watch the presentation, 1:05 hours into the recording by clicking here.

Staff Supervision

Partner organisation:	Monash University
Funding source:	Nil
Project aim:	A key component to implementing the suite of Better days, every day projects is creating a foundational base which aims to support this change. Working with Monash University on a study which aims to explore supervision from the perspective of three key staffing groups in the disability workforce including; Disability Support Workers, Team Leaders and Area Manager. This project will sing qualitative research with focus groups.
Anticipated outcomes:	Findings from this project aim to influence the shape of Able's supervision framework under the Better days, ever day framework.

Deafblind Technology Project

Partner organisation:	SensesWA, Deafblind Australia, Swinburne University
Funding source:	National Disability Insurance Scheme Information Linkages and Capacity Building Grant
Project aim:	The Deafblind Technology project is exploring ways that a range of technologies can enhance the quality of life of people with deafblindness. Access, technology and communication audits are being undertaken in houses of people with congenital deafblindness and project officers are working with Able clients to optimise take up and use of technologies recommended by researchers. One 'come and try technology' day was held in March 2022 and more are planned for 2023 to showcase technologies for enhancing distance vision, being more independent around the home, and increasing communication access through mobile devices.

How we innovate

The pandemic encouraged us to support clients differently, train and support our staff with new skills, knowledge sets and manage the spaces of our sites with a strong focus on risk reduction.

We experienced multiple and simultaneous COVID-19 outbreaks providing us with the opportunity to further adjust our approach to how we manage such situations to help keep clients, staff and the wider community safe where possible.

Managing COVID-19

COVID-19 continues to be a key driver in the way we innovate and adapt at Able Australia. To this end, we have established a 'business as usual' approach that involves:

- Staff trained in COVID safe practices to ensure we can work in a COVID positive environment.
- Incident Command Centre roles translated into key task lists.
- Streamlined communication with State Government public health units.
- PPE stock regularly delivered to houses according to expected usage.
- QR codes tracking RAT usage to reduce administrative loads.
- Using various MS forms to automate data collation.

Implementing assistive technology in Heidelberg house

The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) announced plans to build a new home for clients in our Heidelberg house. DFFH have met with the Deafblind Services Teams and Able's Deafblind advisor to ensure that all aspects of the design of the new home are made with Deafblind client needs in mind. As part of this we are working to maximise the use of assistive technology into the new build.

Able North Technology Hub/ 'Come and try' deafblind tech day

Able North's Technology Hub was established in partnership with Google and other providers, and expertise from occupational therapists. In March 2022, a popular 'Come and Try' event day gave our deafblind clients the chance to try mainstream and assistive technologies including smart glasses, kitchen-aids, smart home, community access and adapted video gaming.

In March, we hosted a 'Come and Try' Day at our Northcote Tech Hub. This provided our deafblind clients and the wider community to try mainstream and assistive technologies including:

- Smart glasses
- Technology to assist in kitchen
- Smart home technologies
- Community access technology
- Video gaming (adapted)

Accessible Information Team Project

Improving access to translating and interpreting services for senior Australians who are vulnerable, including culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, First Nations Peoples and people who are deaf, blind and deafblind.

The project's three objectives are informed by the Royal Commission into Aged Care:

- Encourage aged care providers to use TIS National and Auslan Connection – two providers who provide one-on-one translation services respectively to the CALD and deaf communities.
- Create and manage a translation and content creation service for aged care providers, Peaks, and Partners in Culturally Appropriate Care.
- Co-create communication products to promote understanding and uptake of aged care reforms.

Better days, every day

Able's Quality and Innovation team is working with Monash University and people with disability in supported accommodation services to explore supervision from the perspective of disability support workers, team leaders and area managers. Report findings from this qualitative study will influence how Able Australia's supervision is delivered under the Better days, every day framework, which is our model of support that ensures our clients get the best quality of service we are able to provide.

Student Placement Program

Able provides various student placements to promote the career merits of the disability sector. Opening students to new learning opportunities is highly beneficial for the students as well as our staff and clients.

A measure of the success of this ongoing program is Able's recruitment of graduates from these programs.

We work with Monash University, Swinburne University and Latrobe University to place allied health students. We continue to provide placements for Certificate III and IV in several disability courses throughout Victoria and Tasmania.

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