

Innovation through Hidden Disability Sunflower Initiative

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Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Initiative



The **Hidden Disabilities Sunflower** is a simple discrete way for people to voluntarily share that they have a disability or condition that may not be immediately visible – they may need a helping hand, understanding or more time to perform tasks.

Key achievements: Metro North Health (MNH) are collaborating with interstate Hospitals to publish a framework for evaluating the Sunflower Initiative in a health care context.



What are hidden disabilities?

Hidden or invisible disabilities include a broad range of disabilities and conditions such as autism, dementia, mental health conditions, intellectual disability, communication disability, vision and hearing impairments, and chronic illnesses.

www.hdsunflower.com/au

Results Post Training 100% of staff report

- ★ I understand why someone might choose to wear a sunflower lanyard.
- ★ I feel confident offering assistance to someone wearing a sunflower lanyard.
- ★ I see benefit in MNH expanding the implementation of the Hidden Disability Sunflower Initiative to other clinical areas.
- ★ I can see the Hidden Disability Sunflower Initiative has potential to improve safety of people with disability in Health Care Setting.

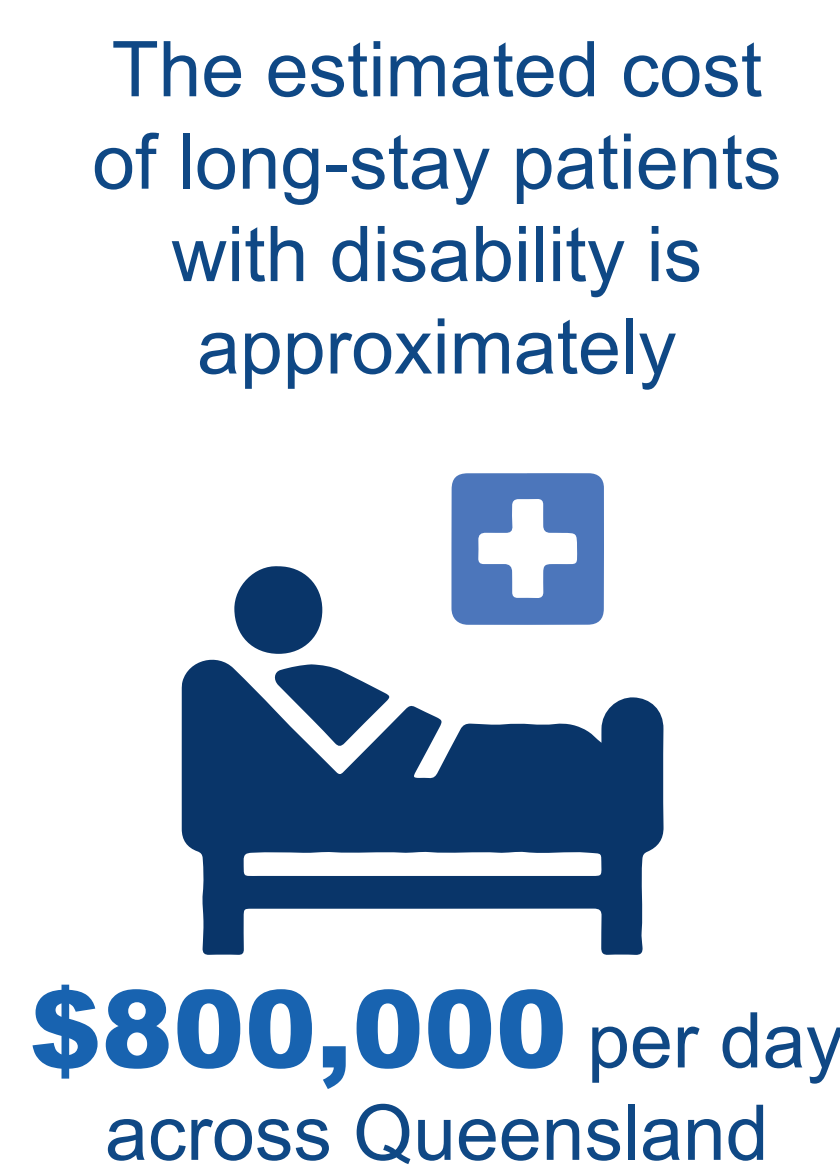
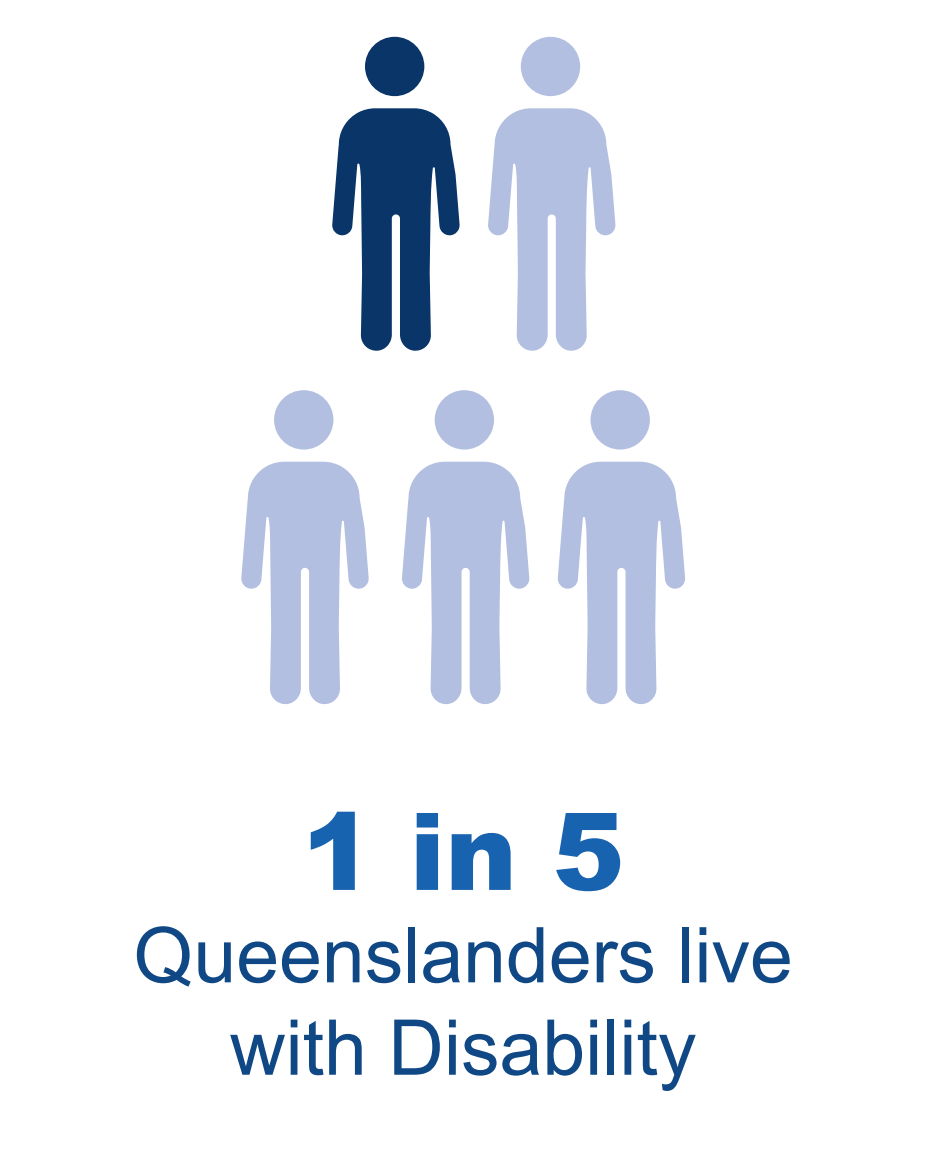


Preliminary results identify increased confidence to disclose non-visible disabilities, improved hidden disability awareness within healthcare environments, high consumer and staff satisfaction, and increased knowledge, and recognition of how to support PWHD.



Key challenges include:

- funding to sustain engagement,
- ensuring confidentiality and psychological safety, and
- embedding consistent responses to support health staff and consumers with hidden disabilities.



Background

People with non-visible disabilities experience poorer health outcomes, more frequent emergency department use, and a higher risk of avoidable early death.

Healthcare environments can be complex and challenging for people living with disability, particularly for those whose disability is not immediately visible.

Time pressures, sensory environments and ineffective communication by health care providers can heighten vulnerability and challenges experienced by people with hidden disabilities (PWHD) and/or their carers and regrettably lead to adverse health outcomes, poor experiences and increased length of stay.

Methods

Using collaborative approaches to address the health inequities of PWHD, MNH sought to raise awareness, drive attitudinal change and improve accessibility of health care through adoption of the sunflower symbol.

Multidisciplinary groups, health staff and consumers with lived experience of disability and caring roles, are guiding the co-design of sunflower initiative implementation across clinical and non-clinical areas.

Awareness campaigns, targeted training, and lived-experience narratives are central to implementation and evaluation processes.

Disability Services Action Plan (DSAP)
 In March 2024, Metro North Health launched our inaugural Disability Services Action Plan 2024 – 2029.

The Disability Services Action Plan has 5 Priority Areas

Inclusion

Accessibility

Safety, Rights and Respects

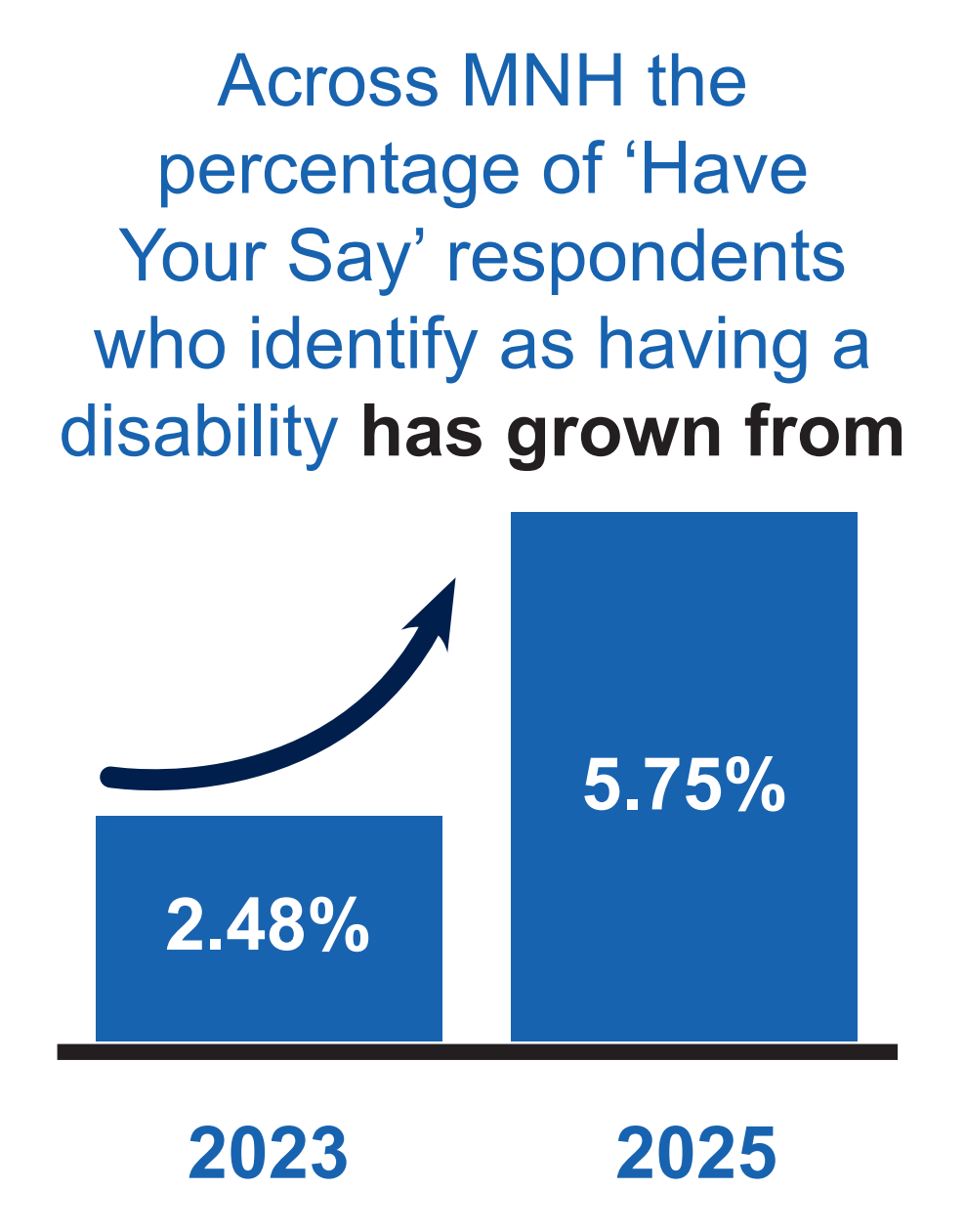
Evidence, Research & Data

Improved Service Delivery

MN ENABLE – Employees Navigating Access, Barriers, Leadership & Equity

MN ENABLE has been established to provide a safe and inclusive environment for all employees and consumers, and values their lived experience of disability, chronic health conditions, neurodivergence, mental health.

To learn more or express interest email MN-ENABLE@health.qld.gov.au



Workforce Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

Key achievements:
 MNH is the largest employer in Australia to have completed the NDRC (National Disability Recruitment Co-ordinator) Audit, in June 2025.

Workforce Training and Capacity Building

Training Courses are available to build capacity of our workforce to improve outcomes for people with disability in our community. Learn more about:

- Disability Awareness and Capability Training series (Monthly Webinars)
- Neurodiversity
- Inclusion in the Workforce

You can access this training via the Staff Extranet Page