PWdWA February Newsletter

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# PWDWA Welcomes New Chief Executive Officer

## Championing Lived Experience Leadership

PWdWA is proud to announce the appointment of Kat Johns as the new Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of People With disabilities WA (PWdWA). This appointment follows a rigorous and inclusive recruitment process in partnership with Australian Barnardos Recruitment Services (ABRS) and was guided by the 66R HR framework best-practice recruitment policy designed to embed inclusion, equity, and lived experience in leadership hiring.

At PWdWA, we practice what we preach. As an organisation led by and for people with disabilities, we are committed to ensuring lived experience leadership is at the forefront of decision-making. Kat’s personal experience, deep sector knowledge, and dedication to advocacy make them the ideal person to lead PWDWA into the future.

Shazzy Tharby, Chairperson of PWdWA, said, “Kat’s appointment reflects everything PWDWA stands for: empowering people with disabilities, fostering inclusive leadership, and ensuring that lived experience is valued at every level. We are excited about the future under Kat’s leadership and the continued work towards a truly inclusive society. I sincerely thank ABRS for their commitment to inclusive recruitment and to everyone involved in this process for upholding the values that make PWdWA strong.”

# Message from our CEO – Kat Johns

In this February edition of our newsletter, I am delighted to share some significant developments highlighting our commitment to supporting people with disabilities in Western Australia.

Firstly, we extend heartfelt congratulations to Samantha Connor AM on her appointment as a member of the Order of Australia for her outstanding service to individuals with disabilities. Having previously served on our Board and worked for PWdWA, this is a well-deserved acknowledgement of Sam’s dedication to advocating for the rights of people with disability.

We welcomed the release of the roadmap for implementing the Disability Royal Commission recommendations by the Hon. Don Punch MLA. As an organisation led by and for people with disabilities, we are committed to engaging actively in this process to achieve impactful outcomes in essential areas such as employment, community support, and housing. We believe that these steps are fundamental to fostering independence and enhancing the quality of life for individuals with disabilities.

I am encouraged by the government’s commitment to implementing key recommendations from the Disability Royal Commission and urge them to adopt them fully. Together, we can create a more inclusive and supportive environment for everyone.

In January, I attended the launch of the National Autism Strategy, spearheaded by the Hon. Amanda Rishworth MP. This initiative aims to address the challenges faced by autistic individuals, including the alarming unemployment rate that is six times higher than the national average. PWdWA is dedicated to collaborating with stakeholders to create meaningful employment pathways for those in the autistic community.

# PWdWA in Action

## Board of Directors Training

On Saturday, February 1, 2025, the PWdWA Board of Directors undertook Board Governance training, covering Board Oversight, Risk Management, and Strategic Planning. The training will empower People With Disabilities WA with strong strategic leadership, ensuring PWdWA remains the leading disability advocacy organisation in Western Australia, representing rights, needs, and equity.

## 2025 PWdWA State Conference

PWdWA has received notification that our grant application has succeeded, and our 2025 Conference will proceed. This year’s conference theme is “Participate and Contribute,” focusing on inclusive education and training, jobs and economic participation, leadership, and people with complex needs.

The conference will be held on 19 and 20 June 2025 at the Esplanade Hotel in Fremantle. We are asking [Expressions of Interest (EOI)](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/7KBCFRP) for content from individuals and organisations that would like to contribute to the conference. EOI must be received by the close of business on 14 February 2025.

## Implementation of Disability Royal Commission Recommendations

The Western Australian Government has released a roadmap outlining critical steps towards enhancing the lives of individuals with disabilities. The roadmap focuses on employment, community support, and housing and emphasises creating inclusive employment practices, strengthening community support systems, and developing accessible housing solutions.

The government acknowledged the importance of involving People with Disabilities WA (PWdWA) in implementing the Disability Royal Commission's recommendations. They have committed to working closely with PWdWA and other key stakeholders to ensure the reforms are meaningful and impactful for people with disabilities.

Minister for Disability Services Don Punch has highlighted the government's unwavering dedication to implementing these recommendations in partnership with people with disabilities, their families, carers, and supporters. This commitment gives us hope for a more inclusive future.

# PWdWA in Focus

## Advisory Services and Training

In December, PWDWA launched our new Advisory Services and Training programs, designed to foster inclusive and accessible environments for all.

Offering comprehensive training sessions to help organisations understand and implement best practices in disability inclusion, our team has already begun working with organisations to assist with Social Stories, Disability Access and Inclusion Plans, and Access and Inclusion Disability Awareness training.

In recent weeks, PWdWA has provided Disability Access and Inclusion Awareness training to the Australian Islamic College in Kewdale, House of Honey, and the Water Corporation.

# Current Issues

## State Election

The State Election is due to be held on 8 March 2025. If you need to enrol, verify your current information, or update your details, please visit the [website](https://www.elections.wa.gov.au/) The electoral roll will close at 6 PM on 13 February.

If you wish to apply for [postal voting](https://www.elections.wa.gov.au/postal-voting), you have until 6 pm on 5 March

At the recent **Shelter WA – WA Decides:2025 Election Forum** on housing and homelessness, attended by CEO Kat Johns and Engagement Manager Vanessa Jessett, when asked about their party’s commitment to signing on to changes to the National Construction Code Accessibility standards, Hon. John Carey MLA, Minister for Planning; Lands; Housing; Homelessness (Australian Labor Party), Hon. Steve Martin MLC (Liberal Party), Shane Love MLA (The Nationals WA) all stated they were not in favour of signing the agreement. Hon. Dr Brad Pettitt MLC (Greens, WA)

Below is an outline of the various commitments and strategies the parties have commented on in supporting individuals with disability.

## Greens

**Rights and Inclusion:**

* **Upholding the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD):** Ensuring that the rights enshrined within the CRPD are respected and implemented across all sectors
* **Accessible Public Spaces**: Mandating universal design standards in all new public infrastructure to ensure accessibility for everyone
* Support Services:
* **Improving NDIS:** Advocating for better funding and management of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) to reduce wait times and improve service delivery
* **Community Support Programs:** Expanding community-based support programs to provide more localised and personalised assistance

**Employment and Education:**

* **Inclusive Employment:** Promoting employment initiatives that support individuals with disabilities in finding and retaining meaningful work
* **Accessible Education**: Ensuring that educational institutions are fully accessible and provide the necessary support for students with disabilities

## Labor Party:

* **Boosting NDIS Funding**: Increasing funding to address wait times and improve service delivery.
* **Employment Initiatives**: Introducing a $1 billion Disability Employment Fund to subsidise workplace accommodations and training programs.
* **Universal Design Standards**: Mandating accessible design in all new public infrastructure projects

## Liberal Party:

* **Carer Support**: Proposing $400,000 annual grants for carer hardship and short breaks (respite).
* **Carer Card**: Establishing a WA Carer Card to provide cost-of-living benefits to carers.
* **New Carer Strategy**: Developing a new strategy to support and recognise the diverse roles of carers

# Upcoming

| Town | Hosted at | Dates |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Merredin | Merredin Community Resource Centre | 18 February |
| Moora | Amity Health Moora | 10 February |
| Narrogin | Amity Health Narrogin | 4 February |
| Northam | Jobs and Skills, 1 Hutt Street, Northam | 27 February |
| Pinjarra | Murray House Community Centre | 13 February |
| Fremantle | St Pats Community Centre | 29 January |
| Toodyay | Community Resource Centre | 26 February |
| Waroona | Waroona Community Resource Centre. | 6 & 20 February |
| York | York Community Resource Centre | 25 February |

**PWdWA**

**Would you like your newsletters emailed rather than posted? Just let Vanessa know at vanessa@pwdwa.org.**

* **Metro:** (08)6243 6948
* **Mandurah Office**: 22 Ormsby Terrace Mandurah – 08 6243 6948. By appointment only.
* **Pilbara**: 1800 193 331. Online appointments by arrangement at Pilbara Community Legal Services Karratha, Port Hedland, Roebourne, and Newman.
* **Waroona and Pinjarra:** 1800 193 331. By appointment only.
* **Wheatbelt:** 1800 193 331. By appointment only.

PWdWA is funded by the Western Australian Department of Communities and the Australian Department of Social Services.