

2025 Community Conference

Summary Report

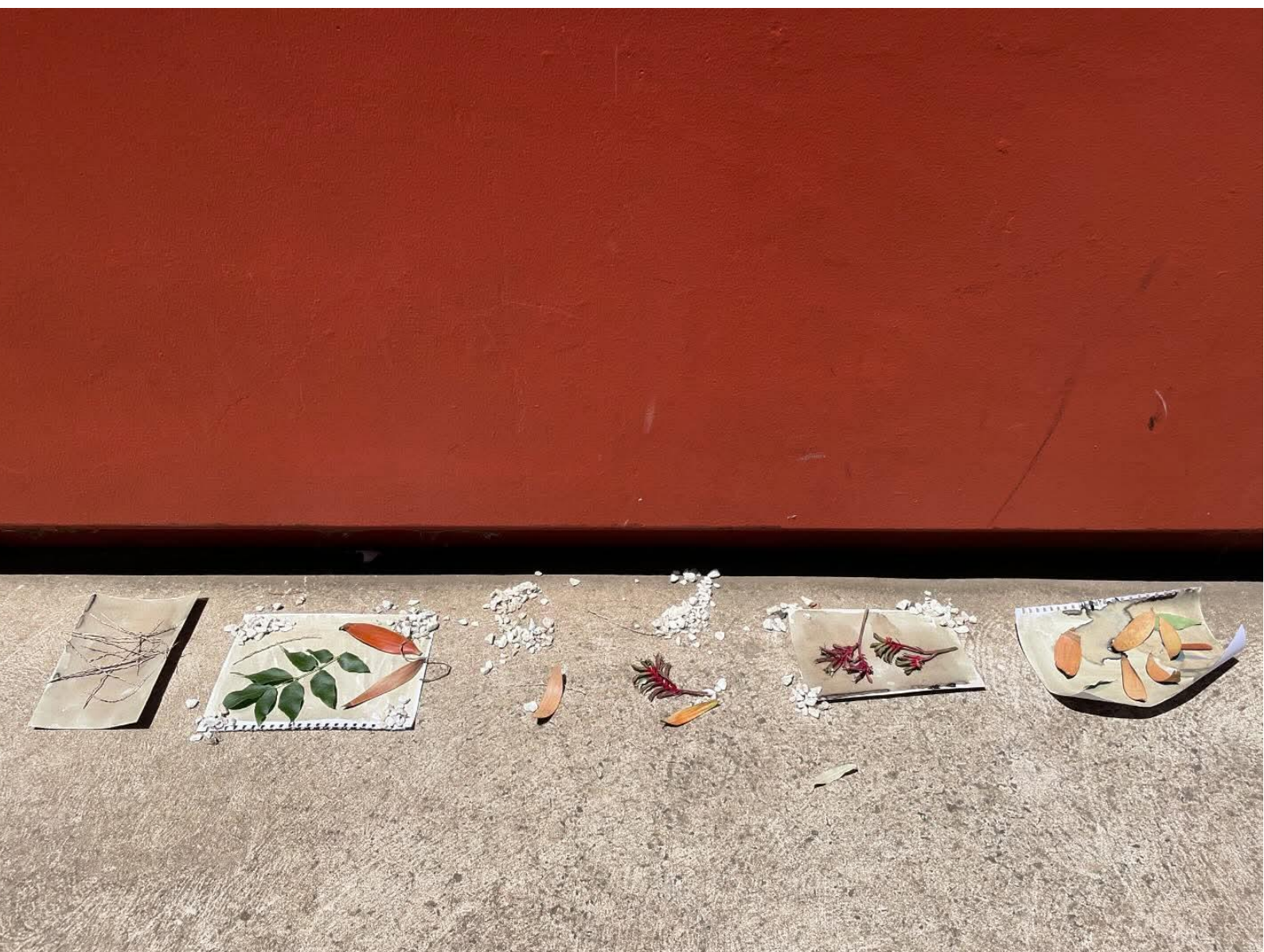


Acknowledgement of Country

Western NSW Local Health District acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands where we work and live. We celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of NSW.

We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging and acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that attended the WNSWLHD Community Conference.

We advise this resource may contain images, or names of deceased persons in photographs or historical content.



Western NSW Local Health District's 3rd annual Community Conference was held on the 6 November, 2025 at Dubbo Regional Theatre and Convention Centre.

With a theme of *Let's talk about it – intellectual disability and health care in Regional NSW*, the conference focussed on unconscious bias, collaborative and co-designed projects and initiatives and supporting accessibility in health care.

The conference provided an opportunity to bring consumers, carers, community members and staff together and encouraged delegates, services and organisations to talk about intellectual disability and health care in regional NSW. Speakers shared personal stories of challenges in accessing health treatment and care for themselves or their families and discussed opportunities to identify and address unconscious bias in health systems and services.

Community representatives and staff from Western NSW Local Health District, Ministry of Health, Council of Intellectual Disability and National Centre for Intellectual Disability Health formed a working group to co-design and co-deliver the conference program and masterclass.



Overview

The conference featured speakers who shared their insights with more than 115 people who attended the conference.

The conference was supported by Council for Intellectual Disability and the National Centre for Excellence in Intellectual Disability Health.

Sessions were organised around key areas identified by the working group:

- Addressing unconscious bias;
- Staying healthy living well
- Working together makes us stronger
- Yarning for better health.

Community representative Kathryn Granger shared the MC role with Maryanne Hawthorn. Kathryn was a member of the working group and shared her insights and thoughts to help plan the conference program. Kathryn set the scene for the day telling the audience that everyone has equal rights to health care and “it doesn’t matter if you have a disability or not, everyone should have the same amount of health care”. Kathryn also told us how she stays healthy and well as a volunteer community exercise leader.

The conference started with a Welcome to Country, provided by Auntie Marg Walker.

Two AUSLAN interpreters provided an interpreter service at the Conference.

Conference Preparations

In early 2025, the Community Engagement Team and Specialist Intellectual Disability Health Team convened a working group of staff, partner organisations and community representatives to co-design the conference program. The working group worked collaboratively to co-design all aspects of the program including identifying and selecting suitable topics for presentations.

Delegates were welcomed to the conference by Emily, Craig and Anna and given a name tag and conference booklet.



What we heard

The following section provides an overview of the presentations delivered at the conference, highlighting key themes, insights, and innovations shared by our speakers.

Opening session

The opening session speakers shared their personal experiences and invited the audience to think about ways to make health care more accessible to everyone.

We heard about the experiences of caring for a child with a disability and how finding the right service and the right support can be challenging, especially for families from rural NSW.

Building trust and connection with clinicians and being able to see the same healthcare team are some of the ways that make it easier for people to access healthcare.

People with intellectual disability experience significant health inequities. All information about healthcare should be in Easy Read or Plain English so that people with intellectual disability have the right information to make good decisions about their health.

Addressing unconscious bias

Unconscious bias is when we have thoughts about people without knowing it. These thoughts can mean we act or treat someone differently.

The four panel members explored the concept of unconscious bias from their perspectives as a community member, family member, clinician and health service executive.

The panel spent time talking about the importance of listening to community members, carers, and people with lived experience to build understanding and trust. Building strong partnerships with patients and families helps to understand how they can be supported to achieve better health outcomes and improve experiences of the health system.

Opportunities for clinicians to 'do things differently' should be supported and a flexible approach to providing care will further support patient centred delivery of care.

Talking more about inclusion and health equity will help to make changes at a system level. This includes more opportunities for clinicians to undertake reflective practice, talk about bias, acknowledge bias and then understand how bias impacts decision making.

Breakout Sessions

Comprehensive health assessment program

Comprehensive Health Assessment Checks are done by a GP. These are a once-a-year checks and are a good opportunity to have a full health check. There is a form that you can fill out at home and then the Doctor fills out the second part of the form. It is a good idea to book a longer appointment with your Doctor so there is plenty of time to go through the form. There is a form for adults and a form for children.

Accessible pathology services

Children with intellectual disability often find it harder to have blood taken for routine blood tests. An equitable community-based service was developed to be able to take blood for routine tests without hospital admission or sedation.

Social stories, sensory tools and videos were used to prepare patients for their blood to be taken.

Oral health

Having regular dental checks is an important part of health care. Some of the ways that you can improve oral health at home include using three headed brushes, a mouth probe or extra strong toothpaste. At the Oral Health Service we ask if you need extra support with communication. Some of the ways we provide extra support include booking longer appointments, using easy read information and spending time to talk to patients and understand their care needs.

Adapting respectful relationships education

Love Bites is a program run in schools that teaches students about respectful relationships. The program was adapted for students with intellectual disability. Some changes were made to the program to better suit the needs of the students. The change made included: content presented over 3 days, more teachers to support the students and less students in each session. Practical demonstrations were included in the course to help students understand the content.

Co-designing safer, more inclusive healthcare

People with communication support needs may need extra assistance to access health information, be understood and be included. Working in partnership with people who have communication support needs will make sure that communication is more inclusive in health services.

Virtual care for people with disabilities

This project co-designed resources to help people with intellectual disability and their carers access virtual care. The resources also helped health professionals improve virtual care for people with intellectual disability and know when it is safe to do virtual care.

Make a picture with the sun

Arts Out West held an art workshop at lunchtime as an act of kindness and care. Participants enjoyed making their own artwork.

This is a special type of artwork that uses the sun to make the picture.



Yarning for better health

The second panel session explored culturally safe care and the importance of working with the whole family to improve health outcomes. The panel members yarning about 'being, knowing and doing' and how we can work together to create culturally safe facilities and policies.

Both verbal language and body language are important when working with Aboriginal people and help to build trust and respect. True partnerships are based on respect and must be earned.

The panel yarning about the importance of recognition of culture in health services through arts and signage programs, how this helps to create a culturally safe environment and increases engagement in treatment and care.



Stallholders

Stall holders provided delegates with information about services and supports available to support intellectual disability and provided opportunities for networking and collaboration.

This setup facilitated valuable discussions on intellectual disability and healthcare, offering attendees opportunities to network and form connections.



Conference booklet

The conference booklet included presenter biographies, a summary of the presentations and information about the Specialist Intellectual Disability Health Team, Intellectual Disability Mental Health, Council for Intellectual Disability and National Centre for Intellectual Disability Health.

The conference booklet was co-designed and written in Plain English to make the information more accessible to all attendees.



Masterclass: Voices of experience – listening to people who use our services

The masterclass was designed to give participants the opportunity to hear first-hand experiences of caring for a person with intellectual disability - the challenges, barriers and opportunities to work in partnership to improve access to health care.

During the session, we heard about the layers of people with intellectual disability and the importance of looking at the whole person who is being treated.

We also heard about the importance of working with families to understand the 'baseline' of each person and the importance of having accessible communication for everyone. For the families and carers of people with intellectual disability, advocacy is not always a choice. It can be exhausting and relentless but an essential part of supporting access to healthcare.



Feedback survey

The information below is a summary of the survey responses provided by attendees at the Community Conference.

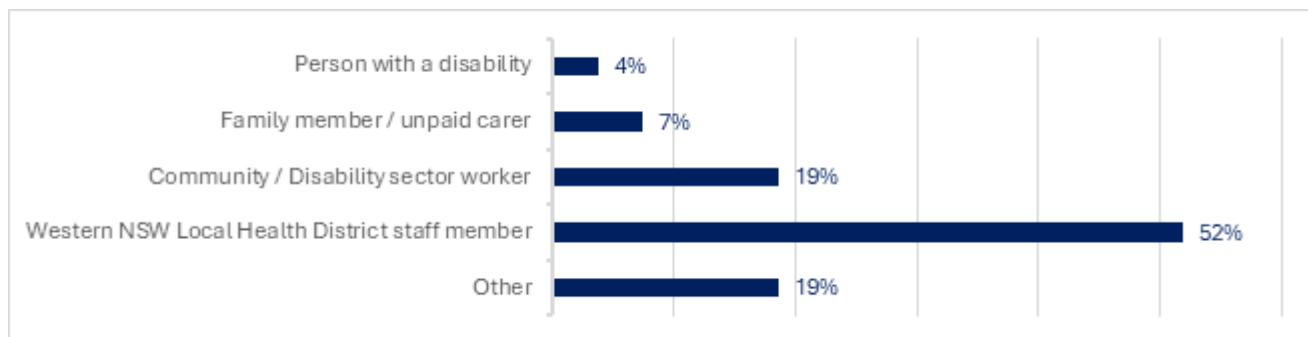
115 people attended the conference, with an equal mix of staff and representatives of partner organisations. Over 30 attendees were people with intellectual disability or families or carers of people with intellectual disability.

27 people completed the survey = 23% response rate.

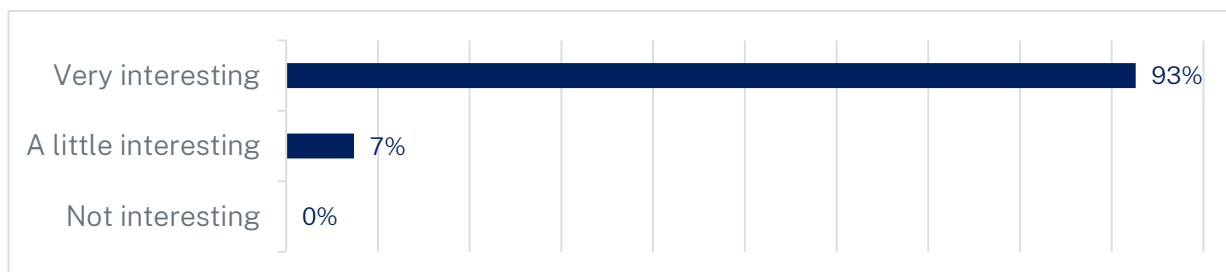
Note that due to small response rates from people with a disability and their carers, feedback is not representative and cannot be analysed separately. Participants could provide feedback via a QR code or paper-version in both easy-read and plain English format.

Participant feedback was overwhelmingly positive with all respondents stating they enjoyed the conference and 96% indicating they enjoyed it 'a lot'.

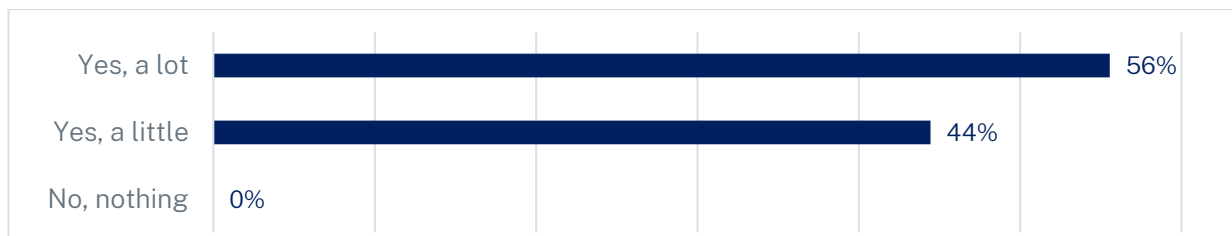
Respondents



How interesting did you find the presentations?



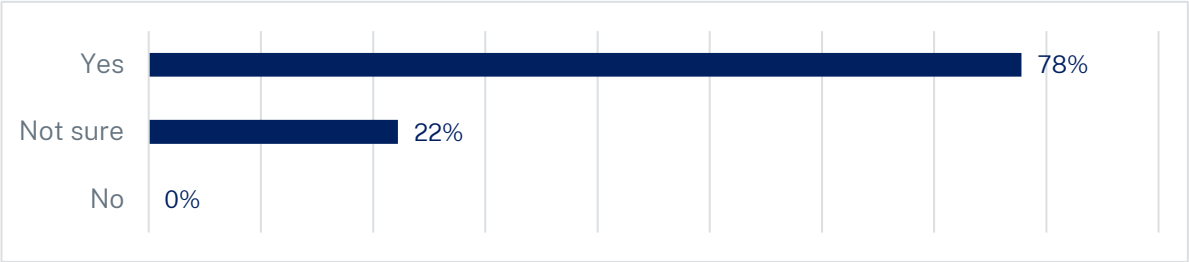
Did you learn something new about Intellectual Disability from the presentations?



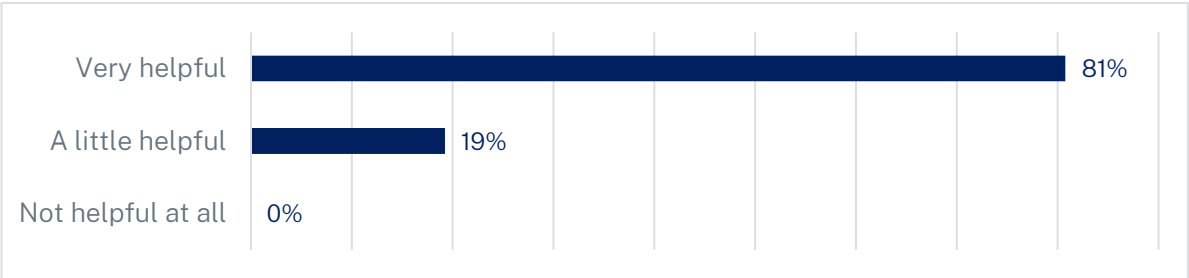
Did the presentations tell you more about services for Intellectual Disability in Western NSW?



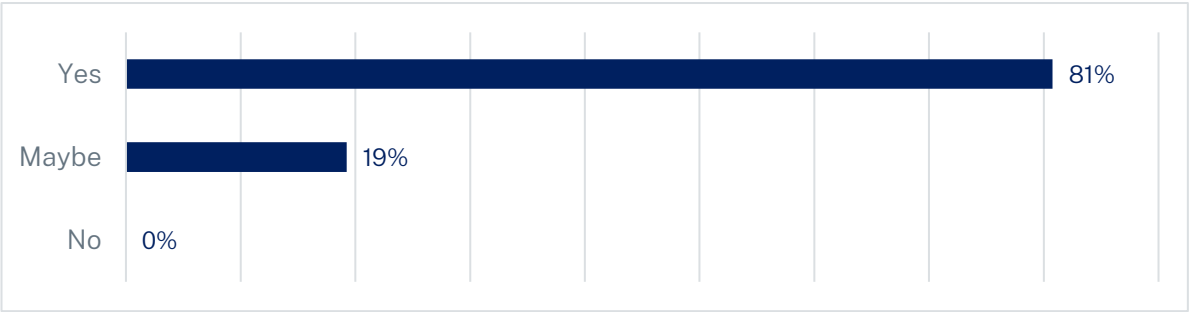
Do you know where to find more information on unconscious bias?



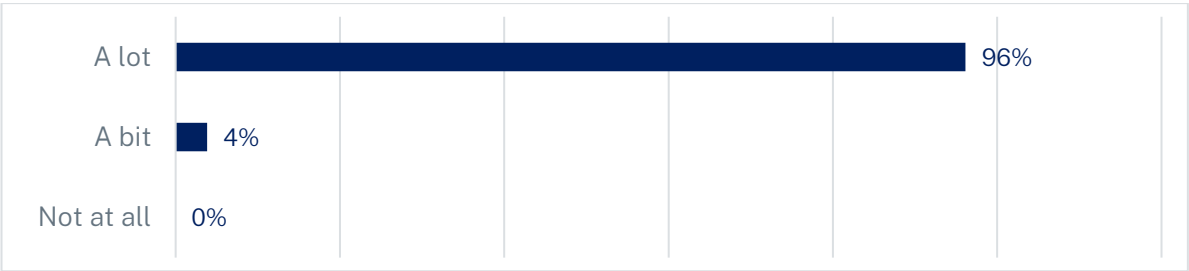
How useful was the conference booklet?



Would you like to come to more events about Intellectual Disability Health?



How much did you enjoy the conference?



Comments

Thank you for organising a great day!

I didn't realise how many services are around, especially in Dubbo.

Wonderful conference to be a part of, thank you.

Thanks for putting the day together I enjoyed each part especially the lived experience stories which teach/ help us to work out how to do things better.

The conference was really great with lots of discussion on unconscious bias and good chats about real issues people face where geography and bias intersect to make access to care almost impossible. I applaud all the parents who spoke and shared their stories bravely and this is a real credit to the LHD that these folks were invited to share. I absolutely loved the yarnning session and could have listened and learned for hours more.

Thank you to those consumers for sharing their stories, I'm sure it wasn't easy for them at all.

It was great that the conference included people with an Intellectual Disability.

This was an exceptional event; I found it thought provoking and exciting. Sometimes it's hard to remember that we are improving the world of people with disability, and it was uplifting to hear about the programs, concepts and ideals happening. This conference was very worthwhile.

Think this has been a valuable day, wish more clinicians were here. Already thinking about how we can engage them more in this! Enjoyed hearing the lived or observed experience.

What's next?

We heard there are lots of things we could do to provide health care that supports people to lead healthy and active lives, and our staff told us how helpful it was to hear from people with intellectual disability.

Some of the ways we will follow up include:

- Promote training including the Inclusive Health Care – My Health Learning Module to Western NSW Local Health District staff and GP's

[Just Include Me - Inclusive Health Care eLearning - Council for Intellectual Disability](#)

- Share recordings from the conference with staff and include the recordings in education sessions delivered by the Specialist Intellectual Disability Health Team.
- Hold a follow up session in Bathurst in 2026
- Continue to explore opportunities to include people with intellectual disability in service planning, design and delivery
- Increase staff awareness and use of AUSLAN interpreters
- Develop a disability strategy and inclusion action plan

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