

the advocate

A voice for accessible, equitable and empowered lives
Summer 2020

The latest in adaptive
mountain biking

Dianne's new view from her first ever power chair

Advocacy to access
assistive technology

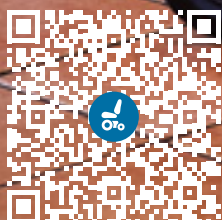
Know before you go:
our new Accessible
Australia app



Spinal Life
AUSTRALIA

2021 M-Series

Made for More



Find out more!

Permobil customer and
ambassador, Richard Tombs.

permobil

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CEO's message



Reflecting on the year that was

It's hard to believe that the end of 2020 is in sight, yet here we are, sharing the final issue of The Advocate for the year.

We have faced significant challenges this year and although it was extremely difficult, it has been heartening to see how this adversity has brought us all together – while staying a safe distance apart, of course.

I hope this newfound sense of community is what we take away from 2020 into the year ahead, as we look out for each other and work together to protect our community and improve things for the better.

In this spirit, as we look to 2021, we will be continuing our work to improve access and inclusion, in addition to delivering high-quality services to support you.

A key part of this is our new Accessible Australia app, an online resource which is available now for you to leave your reviews.

This has been a project many months in the making, sparked by feedback from our community on the daily challenges involved in finding accessible businesses and venues, for things like grabbing a coffee at a local café, or visiting a park to enjoy some fresh air.

Through the app, users are able to share photos and reviews of destinations they visit across Australia, providing invaluable insight and personal experiences to guide others in the future.

From hotels, restaurants and cafés, bathrooms, parks, beaches and more, the app is continuing to grow, with more locations, reviews and photos being added daily.

The app will also drive our advocacy efforts as we encourage businesses and venues to increase the physical accessibility of their premises and activities, improve staff training and provide relevant details to help potential customers make an informed decision before they visit.

We also hope the app will provide a welcome boost to the tourism and hospitality industry given the recent challenges, particularly in regional areas, highlighting places you can visit that are accessible and inclusive.

Like all projects, the Accessible Australia app has involved many key people and I'd like to personally thank the team from Telstra Purple for sharing our vision, as well as our Project Officers.

These Project Officers, and a group of other dedicated members, have been involved in testing the app and leaving reviews, to begin populating the app.

Thanks to everyone who has been involved in this project and has worked so hard behind the scenes. Your support has been invaluable in creating such an important resource for the community. To find out more, turn to Page 8.

Until next time, I wish you and your loved ones a safe and Happy Christmas and all the very best for a joyful, positive New Year.

Mark Townend
Chief Executive Officer

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Cover photo of Georgia Fowler and Dianne Weedon by Romy Photography.

GentleCath™ Glide

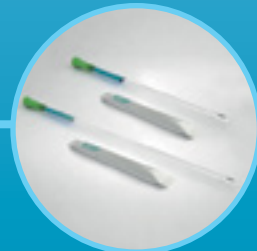
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*We
wish
you a
Merry
Christmas*

*After a year like no other, wishing
you a safe, happy festive season
and a year of new beginnings.*

We would like to thank Spinal Life member and acclaimed drone photographer Jaimen Hudson for allowing us to use this stunning image,
taken at Lucky Bay in Esperance, Western Australia.

New device makes parenting easier for wheelchair users



Townsville member Lochlan Kennedy and wife Sandra Haaland trialled the prototype earlier this year.



Parenting can be a challenging exercise at the best of times, let alone when trying to care for a newborn while using a wheelchair.

Queensland company PWA Mobility has invented a device that will make it easier for parents and grandparents, with the first prototype of 'The Care Station' now released.

The device attaches to a wheelchair and allows for easy feeding, changing nappies and interacting with newborns, as it can be tilted at multiple angles safely.

The Spinal Life team has supported this initiative by providing our expertise and advice, with our customers also sharing their feedback during the development and testing stages.

Spinal Life Peer Support Officer Katie Hammond, who has three daughters, said the device would have greatly helped her to manage tasks like bottle feeding.

"This prototype takes into consideration that every disability is different, every parent is different, every baby is different, and it's definitely going to help new parents," she said.

With the first prototype released, PWA Mobility has held a campaign on Kickstarter to raise funds to manufacture the device.

Visit kickstarter.com/projects/pwamobility/the-care-station to find out more.

New transport advisory council provides early input

We recently welcomed the announcement of new independent advisory council that will inform the Queensland Government on accessibility for transport and road projects across the state.

The new Queensland Accessible Transport Advisory Council (QATAC) will include representatives from the disability community and allow for early and authentic consultation on all major transport projects.

Spinal Life Chief Advisor – Government John Mayo said the announcement followed the establishment of an Accessible Transport Networks team to explore the challenges faced by people with a disability.

"Given the major infrastructure projects that have commenced or are in the planning stages, it's critical that this advisory council will be able to support the Queensland Government to provide accessible, inclusive outcomes that are informed by first-hand experiences," John said.

Visit spinal.com.au/advocacy to learn more about our advocacy work.

Beach access in focus at Perth event



Nick Campbell enjoys the new beach matting. Photo courtesy of Town of Cambridge.

Our Western Australia team recently partnered with the Town of Cambridge Council to launch new accessible beach matting and a beach wheelchair at beautiful City Beach.

A “Come and Try” session was held on 18 November at the City of Perth Surf Lifesaving Club to trial the matting, as well as the new Sandcruiser Beach wheelchair that is available for use.

Spinal Life Peer Support Officer Karen Harvey said she hadn’t been in the water for more than 20 years and hoped the new accessibility features would give her that opportunity.

“Prior to the event, people could access the sand via the vehicle ramp at City Beach, but once you got to the sand you could not wheel any further and a beach wheelchair was not available, and you were not able to access the water,” she said.

Karen said she had worked with the Council to provide her feedback on the placement of the matting and hear

more about their plans to make the beach even more accessible in future.

“We have so many beaches in WA and a pristine, beautiful long coastline, yet many beaches are not accessible,” she said.

“It’s great to see some Councils proactively considering the needs of the whole community and make their beaches inclusive and City Beach is the latest to do that.

“Each new one is a celebration to know we can experience everyday beach activities, and hopefully this will also prompt more Councils to implement strategies to make their beaches accessible as well.

“At the end of the day all we want is to have access to everyday things which bring value and enjoyment to our lives, just like the rest of the community.”

You can read Karen’s review of City Beach on the Accessible Australia app. Visit accessibleaustralia.com.au to find accessible beaches in your region or leave a review of your own for others to see.



Navigating accessibility made easier with new app



Finding your way around a new city can be a challenge for anyone but throw into the mix accessibility requirements, and it can feel like an impossible task.

Spinal Life member Rohan Sills has experienced firsthand some of the difficulties, whether moving around where he lives in Ipswich or when visiting other parts of Queensland and Australia.

“It can be a real challenge identifying accessible places in the community to visit, especially if it’s an area you’re unfamiliar with,” Rohan said. “Issues like steps, availability of bathrooms and physical layout of spaces can all pose a challenge, for people who use wheelchairs and other mobility aids, or even older people and parents with prams.”

That’s what makes our latest initiative, the Accessible Australia app, a genuinely innovative and inclusive project. Focused on providing relevant and real-time information on venues and facilities around Australia, the app looks to empower its users – so they know before they go. The added feature of peer-to-peer reviews provides even more choice and control to users, who can share their own personal experiences to help others.

As one of the Project Officers supporting the app development, Rohan has been involved the whole way through, including attending meetings and updates with the developers from Telstra Purple, calling Councils about making their data available, plus adding reviews and providing feedback on features.

The app was launched recently, and the number of points of interest and reviews are growing each and every day.

“It’s great having something like the Accessible Australia app that’s easy and free to use,” Rohan said.

“It supports people with accessibility requirements by giving them access to quality and trusted information. Not to mention it helps remove some of the anxiety that can come with navigating around cities and towns.”

Rohan is one of four million Australians with a disability¹ urging businesses and governments to put accessible design at the forefront of their thinking, particularly in the recovery from disruptions caused by COVID-19.

“So many people think accessibility is only important to the individual, but we know accessibility benefits everybody and can lead to better commercial outcomes.”

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the accessible tourism market represents 18% of the Australian population and has an estimated value of more than \$8 billion per year² – a spend larger than the inbound Chinese market.

With local tourism anticipated to spike due to the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on true accessibility has never been more important, or more lucrative for tourism operators and local business alike.

The app will also enable our Advocacy team to increase their efforts in supporting operators and businesses to make their services more inclusive, including providing training to raise awareness of the opportunities presented by accessible tourism.

Visit **accessibleaustralia.com.au** to view the app and start leaving your reviews.

¹ <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/disability/disability-ageing-and-carers-australia-first-results/2015#key-findings>
² <https://www.travability.travel/blog-node/understanding-opportunity-australia-accessible-tourism>




Spinal Life members Rohan Sills (left) and Jocelyn Stocker test out the app.



How to use the app?

Using the app is easy, just follow the steps below to get started.

1. Visit www.accessibleaustralia.com.au
2. Click on the  to log in with Facebook or Google
3. Complete the fields including your name and mobility device you normally use
4. Use the search bar (on the left-hand side for desktop computers and at the top for mobile devices) to search a location or venue
5. Click on the venue or point of interest to view its accessibility rating
6. Leave a review by clicking on the 'review' button

First power chair makes Dianne feel like she's 'won the lotto'



*"I didn't even
know anything
like this existed"*



For more than 40 years, Dianne Weedon looked out at the world from a stretcher bed. For most of that time, her view was of the four walls of her home.

That all changed recently, when a simple conversation led to a life-changing opportunity.

"I've had two separate freak accidents and was told I'd never walk or sit again," she says. "I've spent so many years in hospital and rehab, and was confined to my bed for so long that my carers were worried about me.

"I decided to go somewhere to get hydrotherapy – you get freedom from pain and more movement in the pool, and it makes a great difference."

And so Dianne headed to the Spinal Life Healthy Living Centre in Cairns, bravely enduring the flight from her home in Northern New South Wales to enjoy a month of warmer weather and the benefits of daily hydrotherapy.

It was after one of these sessions that Dianne spoke with Spinal Life's occupational therapists, Georgia Fowler (pictured left with Dianne) and Lucy Burke. They told her about an innovative power wheelchair that would allow her to stay reclined and completely supported.

"I didn't even know anything like this existed," says Dianne. "Until then, I'd been using a stretcher bed, also known as a flotation bed, to move around. It was cumbersome for my carers. But I've always had to lie totally flat, because if I sat up any jolts would send my back into painful spasms."

Georgia and Lucy arranged for Dianne to trial the Permobil M5 Corpus power chair through the ILS showroom, located on-site at the Healthy Living Centre.

"The power chair provides a combination of tilt and recline, as well as leg elevation," says Georgia. "It gives Dianne a body position as close as possible to how she would normally lie on her flotation bed, while still allowing her to move around independently."

Dianne was able to trial the chair over repeated sessions, making sure she could drive it safely and comfortably, and had adequate vision from her reclined position.

Initial trials took place in her room, before she took it for a test drive across the road from the Healthy Living Centre, along the beautiful Cairns Esplanade.

"It was so rewarding," says Georgia. "Dianne was able to go and have lunch with her friend Trish, and even eat out in the chair."

Dianne was referred to an occupational therapist back at home, and after a further assessment and trial were completed her NDIS funding was approved. She's now in a hire chair while she awaits her brand new power chair.

"It's much more comfortable than my stretcher bed, and I can stay in it longer," Dianne says. "The power chair's going to totally change my life and give me freedom to go out. It's been incredible, and I get all emotional when I even think about it.

"I rang my brother and he said, 'You're so excited, have you won Lotto?' I told him, 'I *feel* like I've won Lotto!'"

Visit spinalhealthyliving.com.au to plan your next trip to the Healthy Living Centre.

Tim realises lifelong dream singing Grand Final anthem



“Hopefully it touched one person out there to go out and achieve their goals”

In October, Brisbane singer and Spinal Life Peer Support Officer Tim McCallum recognised a lifelong dream: to sing the national anthem at an AFL Grand Final.

Having performed the anthem more than 300 times – including at Olympic and Commonwealth Games ceremonies – the keen football fan knew he had to put his name forward when it was announced the final would be held in Queensland.

Following a public campaign, the AFL chose Tim for the honour and he rose to the occasion, delivering a rendition that drew roars from the crowd – not that Tim could hear any of it!

He was wearing in-ear monitors that blocked out the noise of the stadium – all he could hear was a countdown and the backing music as he sang.

“For me it was completely silent. I couldn’t hear the 30,000 people in the crowd; I couldn’t hear the bands beforehand; I couldn’t hear the players running around warming up,” remembers Tim.

“I wheeled out onto the ground 20 minutes before I had to sing the anthem, so I was able to relax and take a few deep breaths. It was nothing like the manic experience I was expecting; it was a very calm and peaceful lead-up.”

Tim finally got to hear the roar of the crowd watching replays later, and was humbled to receive so many positive comments about his performance.

“My favourite part was sharing the experience with family and friends, and those who helped make it happen,” he reflects.

“It was really special when people reached out to me afterwards. My singing teacher from 21 years ago called to

congratulate me. He played such a big part in my returning to the stage, so to talk to him was amazing.”

Singing the anthem at the Grand Final was an incredible opportunity for someone with a disability to take the main stage and showcase their hard work.

“I hope that anyone in the community who might be doing it tough could potentially have seen a motivation in that moment,” says Tim. “Hopefully it touched one person out there to go out and achieve their goals.”

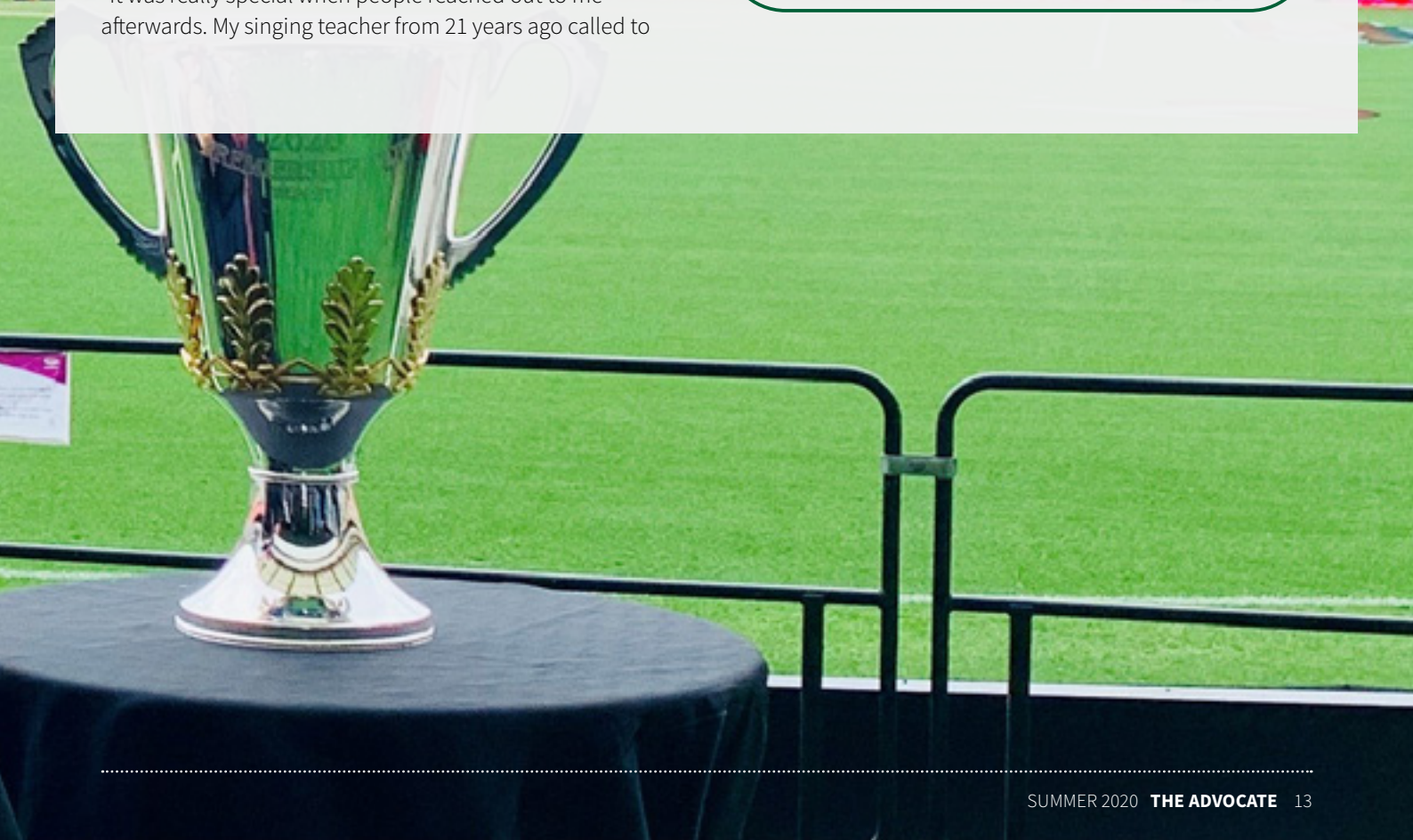
Tim sustained a spinal cord injury when he was 18, at the start of a promising career in the music and theatre industry.

He was told by doctors that he would never again sing the way he used to, given the respiratory challenges of having quadriplegia. But Tim set out to prove them wrong, developing his own breathing and singing techniques that allowed him to pursue his passion.

He recently released his first Christmas album, ‘Let Your Heart Be Light’, featuring much-loved classics and other songs that send a message of joy, hope and love.

“I think that’s really important, given what everyone’s gone through this year,” says Tim. “I hope people can play it not just at Christmas, but when they need some music to lift them up. I’m really proud of it and hope people get as much joy out of hearing it as I did singing it.”

Visit timmccallum.com.au to read more about Tim, or spinal.com.au/peersupport to find out more about the Peer Support team.



Renee reignites passion for riding using adaptive mountain bike

If you're familiar with the terms berm, biff and bark tattoo, chances are you're a fan of mountain biking. If not, you might also not be aware that there's a range of adaptive mountain bikes designed to meet every rider's specific needs.

For former champion BMX rider, Renee Junga, who was looking for ways to return to cycling after an injury in 2006, the Explorer 3 was the answer.

It's a kneeling handcycle with the drive wheel at the back, and two front wheels for steering and balancing.

"It has hand pedals on the frame between the handlebars and where you kneel," she explains. "I got the electric-assist option to help with pedalling if needed, and added a throttle in case I get stuck or it's too risky to take my hands off the handlebars."

Renee also recently discovered the first trail in Queensland built specifically for adaptive mountain bikes. Called Sidewinder, it's located at Boomerang Farm Bike Park at Mudgeeraba on the Gold Coast.

It's a far cry from most trails, which present numerous challenges to adaptive mountain bikers. Sidewinder, however, is the answer to Renee's mountain biking dreams.

"It's plenty wide enough the whole way down and also has 'B lines' to get around the jumps if they're too difficult to get over," she says. "But it doesn't mean the track is easy or boring – it's still one of the most popular trails at the park for 'regular' mountain bikers."

Since visiting the track, the Boomerang Farm Bike Park team has invited Renee back to get photos and video to promote the trail and the sport of adaptive mountain biking.

After trying a traditional handcycle while in the Spinal Injuries Unit, Renee's introduction to adaptive mountain biking came at a 'Come and Try' day in 2018.

"It reignited the passion for riding again that I hadn't realised I missed so much," she reflects.

"I started racing BMX at the age of five, after getting bored watching my brothers race," she says. "A bike is the first sort of 'vehicle' and independence we get as a kid, and I guess I latched onto that. I loved the speed, competition, adrenaline and freedom of riding."

Renee was able to purchase a new adaptive mountain bike in February 2020. "I'd only just started my first NDIS plan, so I got in contact with Spinal Life to get an occupational therapy report done to hopefully get an adaptive mountain bike funded." The funding was approved, and the rest is history.

Today, Renee goes out riding most weekends with friends and her partner, Neil.

"I enjoy the freedom of being out in nature again and having a fun, healthy activity to share with my partner and friends again," she says.

"It's also been helpful to cope with all the COVID stuff going on. I don't think there are many places safer to escape all the craziness than the middle of the bush with hardly anyone around."

Visit our **Facebook page** to watch the video of Renee in action.



*"I enjoy the freedom of
being out in nature again"*



Photos courtesy of Eduardo Knoch

Mackay trip reviews regional tourism opportunities

As part of our ongoing campaign to make tourism more inclusive, Advocacy Officer Lachy Chapman recently visited the Mackay region to learn more about local venues and attractions.

The trip was part of a series of tourism audits, aimed at raising awareness of accessibility, providing advice to businesses and operators, and adding reviews to our new Accessible Australia app.

Lachy's report made a series of recommendations that could be addressed by local tourism and government authorities working together to create an accessible tourism strategy.

Recommendations for improvement included:

1. **Improving skills of existing tourism operators** including providing disability etiquette and awareness training sessions for staff.
2. **Improving the availability and ease of finding information** about accessible accommodation and experiences in the Mackay region, including ensuring tourism operators understand what type of information is helpful for people with a disability.
3. **Enhancing marketing efforts** for existing tourism activities, experiences and infrastructure that are already accessible, such as developing and promoting accessible itineraries.
4. **Increasing the number and diversity of tourism offerings that are accessible**, including hotel accommodation upgrades during refurbishments, renovations or new property builds, as well as improved tourism opportunities.
5. **Seeking commitments from transport operators**, from airlines to cruise-liners and ground transport providers, to retain and improve existing capacity.

6. **Considering pursuing an application to the United Nations World Tourism Organisation 'Best Accessible Destination' award**, which would result in a coordinated approach to improve local outcomes.

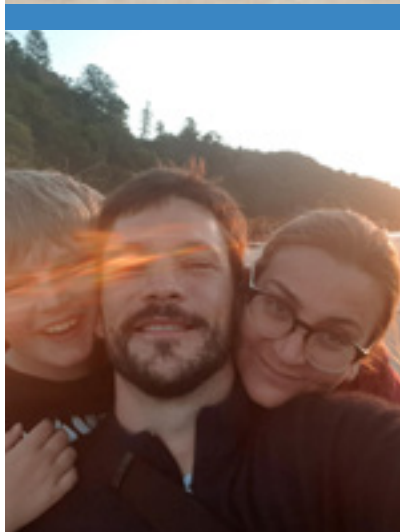
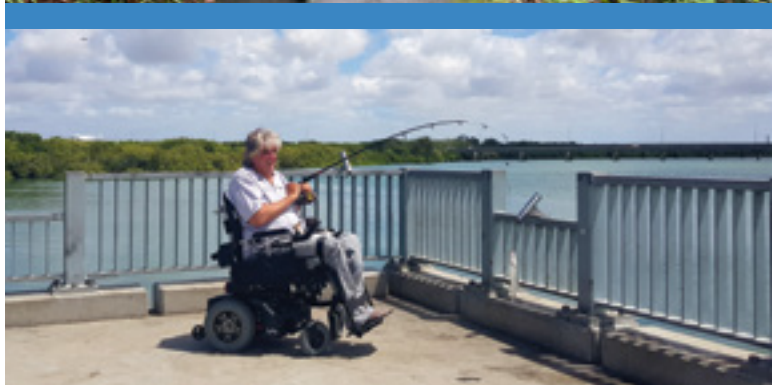
As part of our accessible tourism efforts, we successfully advocated for an inclusive tourism recognition program to be included in the state and national tourism awards, which is expected to commence in 2021 – giving regions such as Mackay the opportunity to showcase their accessible experiences and destinations.



Lachy's trip to Mackay followed our first tourism audit, which was conducted by Advocacy Officer Dane Cross and travel consultant Bill Forrester in late 2019 in Cairns.

Dane has also recently conducted a review in the Moreton Bay region, with more to come in future – check out the next Advocate for details!

Visit accessibleaustralia.com.au to check out Lachy's reviews of the Mackay region, and share your own experiences.



Lachy's top five

1. Sarina Sugar Shed

"After spending five days driving around the region and being surrounded by sugar cane as far as the eye can see, you have to check out the Sugar Shed. A fun educational tour that will take you back in time to learn about the sugar cane industry and how the sugar you use in your morning coffee really comes about, I guarantee you will be surprised!"

2. Mackay Botanical Gardens

"The Botanical Gardens in Mackay are simply beautiful and peaceful. Whether or not you are into this sort of stuff, it is a great solo or family activity. The pathways and terrain throughout the gardens are well constructed making it a nice leisurely push for the most part. Top it off with breaky or lunch at the Botanical Gardens café and take in the view from the rear deck."

3. Bluewater Lagoon

"Given Mackay's beautiful sunny (and hot) climate, you can't visit and not head over to the Bluewater Lagoon for at least a few hours to cool off in the pool. It is a completely accessible facility with a pool chair available for use, and plenty of shaded seating areas that are well designed for comfortable wheelchair access."

4. Mackay Harbour breakwater & beach

"Enjoy a morning stroll along the paths that overlook the marina and out along the breakwater. It is hard to believe water can be so blue. A little further south of the breakwater is the Mackay Surf Club. It's the only club in Mackay that has a beach chair available for use and the beach is patrolled. After a dip at the beach, relax at J.m.mulherin Memorial Park which has accessible playgrounds and plenty of shaded seating areas."

5. Eungella National Park

"A trip to this area would not be complete without visiting natural attractions like Eungella National Park. Be sure to stop at the Melba House Visitor Information Centre and at the Pinnacle Hotel for one of the best pies you might ever eat! Try your luck spotting the iconic Aussie platypus at Broken River and check out the spectacular views at the Sky Window Lookout – both trails are accessible."

Assistive technology campaign seeks equal access for over 65s



Mark Hunter says that people with a disability who are aged over 65 should not have to ‘just make do’ with the funding they receive.

The Gold Coast resident and Spinal Life member has joined calls to improve access to assistive technology for all people who are not eligible for the NDIS, many of whom are over age 65.

Spinal Life is part of the Assistive Technology for All (ATFA) Alliance, which brings together peak bodies and consumer advocates from both the ageing and disability sectors, aiming to address the current inequities between funding systems.

The term ‘assistive technology’ refers to any aid or piece of equipment that provides a practical solution to help someone complete an everyday task.

Mark, who has a background as a teacher, writer, and public speaker, is advocating to the Queensland and Australian

Governments asking for a review into the current NDIS age limit.

“I missed out on the NDIS by six months because I live in one of the late areas to be included in the scheme, otherwise I would have been able to get what I need,” he said.

“The NDIS promises to support you with everything you need to live a fulfilling life – except if you’re over 65. It just doesn’t make sense.”

Mark said he received funding assistance from Queensland’s Medical Aids Subsidy Scheme (MASS), which still required co-payments for equipment such as wheelchairs, and accessed some support agencies for domestic help and bathroom modifications.

He said he believed the Queensland Government’s support for MASS was highly inadequate and did not provide equitable access to assistive technology for those who missed out on the NDIS.



ATFA Alliance key recommendations:

1. Add an assistive technology and home modifications category within upcoming revisions to the aged care funding program, which have been recommended by the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety.
2. Ensure equity for people with disability receiving aged care, who should receive daily living supports and outcomes equivalent to the NDIS.
3. Introduce annual reporting to Parliament by the Disability Discrimination Commissioner and the Age Discrimination Commissioner, as part of the new National Disability Strategy, advising of the number of aged care recipients with disabilities and the access to supports they are receiving.

“The MASS scheme has not been reviewed by the Queensland Government since 2008, and significant funding was removed from the scheme when the NDIS was implemented.”

Mark has now been looking to move to the Australian Government’s My Aged Care funding scheme but is concerned it still won’t meet his needs.

Spinal Life Chief Advisor – Government, John Mayo, said people with disability who were not eligible for the NDIS could receive support under the Commonwealth Continuity of Support Program, as well as My Aged Care or state-based aids and equipment programs such as MASS.

However, he said in many cases the current level of funding provided was nowhere near the level of the NDIS, forcing many people to go without or purchase items themselves.

He said the ATFA Alliance was making some positive headway.

“The ATFA campaign recently made a submission to the development of the new National Disability Strategy consultation, and also to the Disability Royal Commission,” he said.

“ATFA also made a submission to the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, which recently made its recommendations to the Australian Government, including providing better access to assistive technology.”

In addition, Spinal Life Board Director Del Childs and Far North Queensland members recently participated in a video conference with Australia’s Disability Discrimination Commissioner Dr Ben Gauntlett to share their experiences and discuss the issue.

Visit spinal.com.au/publications to read the National Disability Strategy submission or assistivetechforall.org.au to sign a petition and find out how you can become involved.



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Message from the Chair



Annual General Meeting held virtually for first time

Thank you to everyone who participated in our 2020 Annual General Meeting, which was held as a virtual meeting for the first time.

The health and safety of our community is so important to us and, given the current uncertainty around the COVID-19 pandemic, we felt having an online meeting was the right decision.

As part of the AGM, Spinal Life members had the opportunity to have their say online during the meeting and through proxyholders.

This included voting in the election of directors, with two places available on the Board.

After the votes were counted, current Board Directors Mark Dillman and Professor Phillip Morris retained their positions, after being required to submit for re-election under the rules of our Constitution.

Members also voted to officially waive the membership fee, after it was

temporarily removed by the Board earlier in the year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

All votes, including proxies and through the online platform, were managed independently by Link Market Services, the external company we engaged to conduct this year's meeting.

Ahead of the AGM, we published our 2019-20 Annual Report, which provides a great summary of the year that was, and I encourage you to read this document if you'd like to find out more about our achievements.

As always, if you have any questions or feedback for the Board, please feel free to get in touch with me at chair@spinal.com.au.

You can visit spinal.com.au/agm2020 for all the results and to view a recording, as well as read our 2019-20 Annual Report.

Until next year, I hope you have a safe and happy Christmas and wish you all the very best for 2021.

Gyl Stacey
Board Chair



Honorary members announced

In the 2020 Annual General Meeting, members voted to recognise Dr Ben Lawson (posthumously) and former Chair Alan Ashford as Honorary Life members, for their exemplary service to and support of the organisation.


Dr Ben Lawson (posthumously)

Ben began his role with Spinal Life Australia's Board in November 2016 after first joining the organisation as a member in the late 1990s. As part of the Board, Ben shared his invaluable professional skills and personal lived experience to lead Spinal Life, including how he faced the challenges of navigating education, work, parenthood, and the health system with a physical disability. He sadly passed away in June last year due to illness.

Alan Ashford

Alan Ashford was part of the Spinal Life Australia Board for 10 years before retiring in August 2019, which included five years as Chairman. He thoughtfully led the organisation through many changes and challenges, including the transition to the National Disability Insurance Scheme. Alan has been a long-active member of the Spinal Life community with more than 45 years of membership and continues to be involved in member events and activities.

Be prepared: for storms and cyclones



"We can help you prepare an emergency plan"

As we move further into summer, it's important to ensure you are prepared in the event of an emergency, including storms, cyclones, and bushfires.

For residents in the northern parts of Queensland, as well as Western Australia, the tropical cyclone season runs from November to April, while the bushfire season is ongoing throughout the summer months.

Many parts of Queensland and Western Australia also experience significant storms over the Christmas period, with strong wind, hail and flooding.

Ways you can prepare

We can help you prepare an emergency plan and provide one-on-one assistance to our Personal Support and Home Care Services customers to do this.

This ensures we can respond directly to your needs in the event of a natural disaster or storm situation, with a clear understanding of formal and informal supports you have in place.

When an emergency happens, our team

conduct welfare checks and work to provide updates on your services, along with offering assistance to get things back in order afterwards.

While we always aim to continue delivering services, our Personal Support Workers are unable to attend a customer's home if it is unsafe to do so, and will contact us to advise if this is the case so we can make alternative arrangements if possible. You may need to consider using your emergency plan should you need to at this stage.

In this situation, if you do not have informal support such as family, friends and neighbours, you should contact the State Emergency Service (SES) on 132 500 and ask for assistance.

If you do not have an emergency plan in place, contact your Client Service Officer for assistance.

Where to find help

The 'Get Ready Queensland' website has a range of resources that are available to assist you, including fact sheet and templates for making an emergency plan and emergency kit, planning with your neighbours, preparing your home for an emergency, and staying informed during a disaster.

The Australian Red Cross also has a RediPlan template, which you can complete to have all your information in the one place, including contacts, evacuation options, details on your medical conditions or disability, insurance and more.

The Bureau of Meteorology also provides the latest information on cyclone, flood and storm activity.

PUT TOGETHER YOUR EMERGENCY KIT

Your kit should include:



Non-perishable food items and bottled water



Extra medical, continence and sanitation supplies



Light such as a torch or battery powered lantern with extra batteries



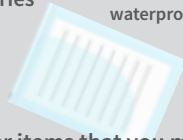
Important documents in sealed plastic bags (consider scanning copies and place on a USB in a waterproof bag).



Clothing and footwear



A battery-powered radio with extra batteries, and other communications devices



Other items that you may need, for example infant formula and nappies, spare keys and pet food.

- › Make sure you think of your pets in preparing for any emergency: include pet food in your emergency kit and make sure they are registered and microchipped.
- › Know which loose items in your yard like outdoor furniture and toys will have to be put away if a storm approaches.

Useful links

- › Get Ready Queensland – getready.qld.gov.au
- › Bureau of Meteorology – bom.gov.au
- › Emergency RediPlan – redcross.org.au/prepare
- › Self-Recovery (mobile app) – vital information about disasters and emergencies in Queensland
- › Emergency+ (mobile app) – uses the GPS functionality of smart phones to enable callers to provide emergency operators with location information.

Visit spinal.com.au/emergencyplan to see our tips and resources.

Things you can do now

- › Prepare an Emergency Kit (see above)
- › Register for severe weather alerts through your local Council
- › Have an emergency contact phone list – include 000 (triple zero) and SES (132 500)
- › Clear gutters, downpipes and stormwater drains
- › Trim tree branches well clear of your house
- › Check your insurances (home and contents, and car) are current and provide enough coverage
- › Understand your property's risk of flooding

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Staying cool in summer

As temperature regulation is controlled by the autonomic nervous system, this can be affected by a spinal cord injury.

People with higher levels of injury and complete injuries are more likely to experience issues, which can mean increased sweating above the level of injury and minimal or no sweating below the level of injury.

With the loss of the ability to sweat, heat cannot escape the body, so it's important to look after your health and wellbeing during the hotter months.

Tips to stay cool this summer

- › Avoid prolonged exposure to direct sunlight and seek shady areas.
- › Drink plenty of water each day. Experts advise to drink alcohol in moderation to avoid dehydration.
- › Wear lightweight breathable fabric such as cotton.
- › Consider using a cooling vest, carrying spray bottles with cold water or a cool compress that can be applied loosely around the back of the neck.

Swimming tips

- › When swimming in the pool, make sure your wheelchair is removed from direct sunlight to prevent metal components such as footplates from becoming too hot.
- › Cushions should also be removed from direct sunlight or turned over to avoid sitting on a hot surface when you return.
- › Rough pool surfaces or edges can also be problematic and cause skin abrasions; consider using a towel or a cushion on the side of the pool to prevent this from occurring.
- › If you float in an upright position, you may experience 'toe drag' on the bottom of the pool; wearing socks can be effective in preventing damage to the skin.

Did you know you may be able to access funding support for cooling and heating electricity costs, if you need help regulating your temperature due to a medical condition?

In Queensland, this is called the Medical Cooling and Heating Electricity Concession Scheme, while in Western Australia this is called the Thermoregulatory Dysfunction Energy Subsidy.

Both schemes are aimed at supporting people with chronic medical conditions who require financial support to operate equipment to control the temperature of their homes, due to issues regulating their temperature. Medical certification from a specialist is required as part of the application process.

For Queensland, visit qld.gov.au/community/cost-of-living-support/concessions and click on the link under 'Medical and disability concessions'.

If you're in Western Australia, visit concessions.communities.wa.gov.au and click on 'Health and Disability' to find out more.

There is also an increasing range of equipment to promote and encourage more active lifestyles, including a range of beach wheelchair options.

Visit accessibleaustralia.com.au to find and leave reviews of places to visit and stay cool this summer, including accessible swimming pools and beaches.



Physiotherapy helps to maximise potential

You can also make an appointment with Anthony at our Woolloongabba clinic in our dedicated consultation room.

We also have two physiotherapists, Julie Ince and Tina Newton-Modlmayr, available to assist at our Healthy Living Centre in Cairns.

If you haven't had the opportunity to catch up with our physiotherapy team, a quick reminder that they can help with:

- › hands-on manual therapy to help reduce pain, improve joint mobility and movement patterns
- › personalised rehabilitation programs including exercise programs
- › mobility and strength review and practice
- › functional recovery and daily activity training

- › equipment prescriptions to determine the best equipment to enhance your function and provide a safer and more consistent way to move
- › pain management and assessments
- › hydrotherapy
- › reports for funding bodies, medico-legal, insurance, and sports.

The team are ready to help you maximise your potential, as well as address any concerns or challenges you are facing.

They can also advise on funding that is available for physiotherapy, including through the NDIS.

Visit spinal.com.au/physio to find out more about our Brisbane services, and spinalhealthyliving.com.au for our Cairns services.

Our physiotherapist, Anthony Nakhle, is ready to support you from our Spinal Life clinic, which is now located at the new Sporting Wheelies gym in Albion.

The clinic has moved to Sporting Wheelies' new sports and fitness centre at 31 Dover Street, Albion.

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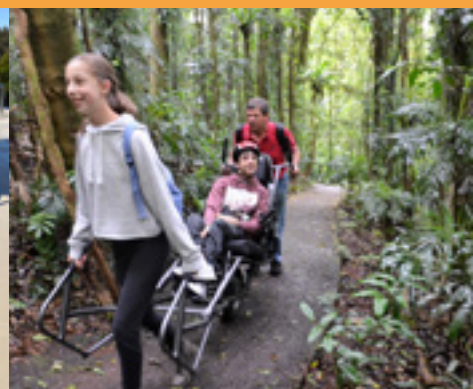
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Supporting NDIS participants since 2013



Holiday tips this summer

Like most Australians, Julie Jones' family loves spending time in the great outdoors in summer. Here she shares her tips, as the creator of the [Have Wheelchair Will Travel](#) blog and editor of the [Travel Without Limits](#) magazine.



Our country offers an abundance of outdoor activities, but travelling with a family member who is a wheelchair user has required us to become excellent researchers for our day trips and holidays. We've found thorough planning means the difference between success and disappointment.

When choosing a holiday destination we first research the range of activities our family will be able to participate in together. Cairns has always been a favourite holiday spot for us because it offers such a diverse range of accessible and inclusive fun. From the reef to the rainforest, we're able to explore the region together. The Kuranda Scenic Railway, Skyrail Rainforest Cableway, Hartley's Crocodile Farm, Cairns Aquarium, The Australian Armour and Artillery Museum and the Quicksilver Great Barrier Reef trip all provide access for our son who is a manual wheelchair user.

While we enjoy our holidays, we also believe summer's weekends are made for fun. As a beach-loving family we are happy to see beach wheelchairs becoming readily available at many beaches. Some regions are recognising there's no one-size-fits-all approach to the needs of people with a disability with a variety of chairs available from the more reclined WaterWheels beach wheelchair to the upright seating of a Sandcruiser. A few beaches even have a self-propelling beach

wheelchair. My son's beach chair has opened up a world of opportunities for our family, providing independence to visit lakes, beaches and even a water park to meet friends.

Cooling down at public pools has become easier with many supplying pool wheelchairs, hoist and ramp options for accessing the water. Some even offer a Changing Places facility.

Leaving the coast for the bush we've discovered some National Parks offer a TrailRider to help visitors with a mobility restriction explore bush tracks. At Dorrigo National Park, near Coffs Harbour, a TrailRider allows guests to access the base of the mythical-like rainforest floor.

This summer, with some destinations still affected with COVID-19 restrictions, it's more important than ever to plan and book activities in advance. Our family is certainly looking forward to making the most of the warm weather. Our adventures bond us and create wonderful memories.

Read more of our adventures at [havewheelchairwilltravel.net](#) and check out a range of stories from contributors with lived experience at [travelwithoutlimits.com.au](#)

If you're visiting Cairns, consider staying at the Spinal Life Healthy Living Centre. Visit [spinalhealthyliving.com.au](#) to find out more.



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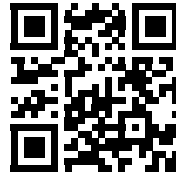
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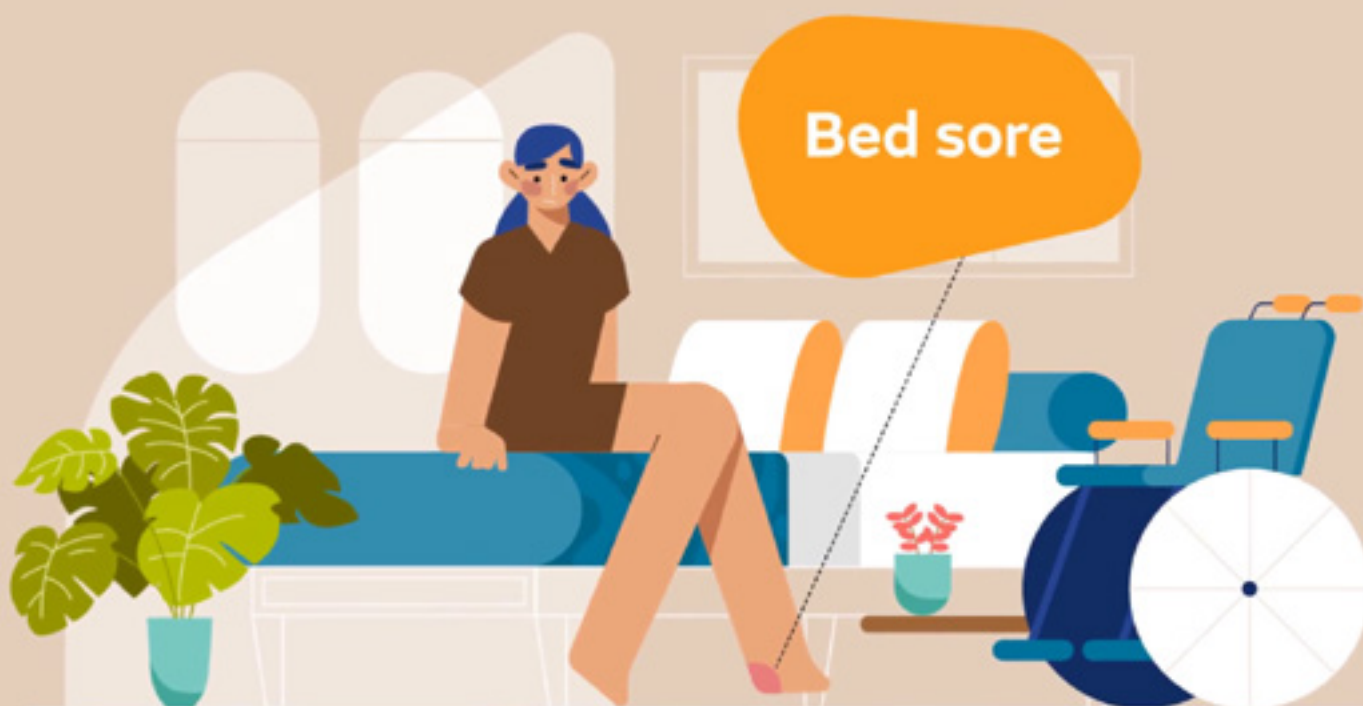
To find out more about wound care supports on the NDIS visit

smith-nephew.com/ndis



Or scan
the QR code





Protect your skin and prevent pressure injuries

With STOP Pressure Injury Day held on 19 November across the world, wound care experts Smith & Nephew raise awareness on the importance of caring for your skin.

Pressure injuries, also known as bed sores, are skin wounds that are caused by staying in one position for too long. These types of wounds often take a long time to heal, can become infected, and cause great discomfort and pain; and can potentially be life threatening if left untreated.

Smith & Nephew spokesperson Margo Asimus, a registered nurse who specialises in wound management, said it was vital to routinely monitor and care for your skin.

"The skin is our barrier against infection, so any breaks in the skin can put us at greater risk from invading germs," she said.

"Avoiding rubbing, inspecting for red areas, cleaning and moisturising with pH neutral products can all help keep skin healthy.

"Healthy skin is much more resilient to everyday wear and tear compared to skin that has become damaged from dehydration, moisture or irritation."

Pressure areas are most likely to appear on areas where your skin and bones are close, such as your elbows, back, ankles, hips, heels and other areas of skin that are under pressure for a long time.

Risk factors can include being overweight or underweight, being immobile, poor circulation, damaged nerves, incontinence, heart or kidney disease and taking certain medications.

It's important to check your skin regularly for any reddened areas or other changes such as purple or maroon areas, blisters, spongy areas or swelling, if your skin feels warmer than usual or you are sweating more.

You also should make sure you are eating well and drinking enough fluids, and make sure your clothes and bed linens are dry and not soiled.

If you see any signs of pressure injuries,

voice your concerns to your healthcare provider immediately, who can also help with advice on prevention and pressure relief devices.

Visit smith-nephew.com/anz/wounds/pressure-injuries to find out more, including funding wound and pressure care supports through the NDIS.

This information is not intended to be a substitute for the advice of a health care professional or a recommendation for any particular treatment plan. It is important that you contact your health care provider if you have any questions or concerns.





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Have your say on NDIS changes

The National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) has released four consultation papers seeking feedback on proposed changes to the NDIS.

These improvements cover areas including access to the NDIS, planning and plan flexibility, as well as support for young children and their families.

The consultation process follows the announcement of a range of reforms to the scheme, aimed at making it easier for participants and their families to access and navigate the NDIS.

The reforms included a series of recommendations made by an independent review of the NDIS Act last year, along with a newly-created NDIS Participant Service Guarantee and Participant Service Improvement Plan.

You can visit the NDIS website to read each consultation paper, answer questions and have the opportunity to make a submission on some or all the papers.

Visit [ndis.gov.au/community/have-your-say](https://www.ndis.gov.au/community/have-your-say) to find out more. Feedback closes Tuesday 23 February 2021.



Assistive technology funding extended for NDIS participants

The Australian Government has announced the extension of a range of temporary measures that were introduced to help NDIS participants continue to access supports during COVID-19.

These measures include using plan funding to purchase low-cost assistive technology, including smart devices (up to \$1,500).

In the case of computer tablets or iPads for telehealth and care, or participating in online classes and programs, advice from assistive technology specialists is that most NDIS participants will not need more than a standard tablet which costs no more than \$600.

Visit [ndis.gov.au/coronavirus/latest-advice-ndis](https://www.ndis.gov.au/coronavirus/latest-advice-ndis) to find out more.

Changes to plan management ABN requirements

In late October, the NDIA introduced a new requirement for plan managers to include the Australian Business Number (ABN) of providers when paying for any goods or services.

This means that all suppliers must have an ABN, which is clearly stated on their tax invoice, for your NDIS invoices to be paid.

We offer a plan management service to assist with financial administration, in addition to NDIS Supports Coordination. Visit spinal.com.au to find out more.

You can also visit [ndis.gov.au/participants/creating-your-plan/ways-manage-your-funding](https://www.ndis.gov.au/participants/creating-your-plan/ways-manage-your-funding) to find out more about the ways you can manage your funding.



“Dr Palipana was given the prestigious honour of Queensland Australian of the Year at a ceremony in Brisbane”

FNQ members hear from Dr Dinesh Palipana, Queensland Australian of the Year

Queensland Australian of the Year 2021, Dr Dinesh Palipana OAM, was the guest of honour at a special event in Cairns, where he shared more about how he became the state's first medical graduate and medical intern with quadriplegia.

The event was held at the Healthy Living Centre, which offers specialist therapies and services to support people with spinal cord damage or other physical

disabilities, including fully accessible accommodation, a hydrotherapy pool and rehabilitation gym.

Dr Palipana was given the prestigious honour of Queensland Australian of the Year at a ceremony in Brisbane on 10 November, ahead of the national Australia Day awards to be announced in January.

He is a senior resident doctor at Gold Coast University Hospital and a doctor

for the Gold Coast Titans physical disability rugby league team; and was also recently admitted as a lawyer.

Among his many accomplishments, Dr Palipana is co-founder of Doctors With Disabilities Australia, working with the Australian Medical Association to create first-of-kind national policies for inclusivity in medical education and employment.



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Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Dr Palipana has advocated for equitable treatment for people with disabilities, including as a witness to the Disability Royal Commission.

He is also co-lead of the BioSpine Project being conducted at Griffith University's Gold Coast campus, contributing to scientific advances in treating spinal cord injury and restoring function to people with paralysis.

Visit spinalhealthyliving.com.au to find out more about the Healthy Living Centre.



His Excellency the Honourable Paul de Jersey AC.

Patron hosts Spinal Life to support app

On Tuesday 8 December, the Governor of Queensland, His Excellency the Honourable Paul de Jersey AC, hosted an event to celebrate the launch of our new Accessible Australia app.

The Governor of Queensland has shown his support to Spinal Life and our community throughout his term, as patron of our organisation.

As part of the afternoon tea event, the Governor met with our Project Officers who have worked to bring the app to life, members who shared their feedback in the initial stages, the development team from Telstra Purple, and generous donors who have supported the project.

We thank the Governor of Queensland and are honoured that he has chosen to support our mission to enable people with spinal cord damage to live accessible, equitable, and empowered lives.



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Catch up with your community

Our Peer Support catch-ups are held across Queensland and Western Australia, guided by the latest advice from health authorities in response to COVID-19.

Keep an eye on Facebook and our website for updates on upcoming events, including online opportunities.

If you'd like to connect with our Peer Support, Post Polio or Transverse Myelitis Groups in your region, please use the contact details below.

Spinal Life Peer Support Groups

Bribie Island: Bill Peacock on 0403 686 998.

Combined with Post Polio group.

Brisbane: Bill Simpson on 0412 729 843.

Bundaberg: Pat Allison on 4153 1005.

Cairns: Jeanette Kretschmann on 1300 774 625.

Combined with Post Polio group.

Fraser Coast: Jeanette Kretschmann on 1300 774 625.

Ipswich: Eric Rushton on 0403 191 698.

Mackay: Debra Reaves on 0487 021 735.

Moreton Bay: Tom Dutton on 0448 949 910.

Rockhampton: Robynne Clifton on 0473 576 107
or Anne Guthrie on 0407 116 035.

Toowoomba: Wendy Adams on 0422 799 580.

Combined with Post Polio group.

Western Australia: Aileen Ward on 0420 985 734.

Post Polio Groups

Cairns: Joy Hay on 4055 5795.

Gold Coast: Lyn Glover on 0448 206 856

or Joan Radanovic on 0413 178 073.

Sunshine Coast: Cathy Newman on 5447 6608.

Townsville: Eric Collins on 4729 0275.

Transverse Myelitis Group

Contact Louise Remilton on 0414 254 531.

Join our community today at spinal.com.au/membership
or call 1300 774 625 to find out more.

CALENDAR of important dates

24 December (1pm) – 4 January

Spinal Life Australia offices closed

26 January

Australia Day public holiday

8 March

International Women's Day

About our services

At Spinal Life Australia, we aim to support people with spinal cord damage to live an accessible, equitable and empowered life.

Personal Support and Home Care Services

Our team provides reliable services seven days a week* including:

- › Personal care at home and work
- › Specialist complex personal care
- › Domestic assistance around the home
- › Lifestyle support to attend appointments, activities, holidays and events
- › Transition support from hospital to home.

* Seven-day service available in most locations. Contact us for more information.

Allied Health Services

Our dedicated professionals include physiotherapists, exercise physiologists, occupational therapists and registered nurses, who can assist with:

- › Access to expertise and funding schemes
- › Mobility, seating and equipment solutions and prescriptions
- › Specialist personal advice and assessments
- › Workplace/home modification assessments and pressure mapping
- › Continence and wound assessment and management
- › General health assessments and respiratory support
- › Specialised physiotherapy
- › Hydrotherapy and exercise programs for home or gym
(available at the Spinal Life Healthy Living Centre)

The team is offering telehealth appointments wherever possible in response to COVID-19. Services available in some areas only. Contact us for more information.

NDIS Supports Coordination

Our experienced team can help you navigate the NDIS and assist with planning and coordinating your supports.

Member Services

Our members can access a range of services including peer support, individual advocacy assistance, events and activities, and more. You can also help set our course and have an active voice in our organisation.

Our Peer Support team also regularly visits the Princess Alexandra Hospital's Spinal Injuries Unit to assist newly-injured patients and their families.

Employment, study and workplace assistance

The Spinal Life Australia Back2Work® program supports patients in the Princess Alexandra Hospital's Spinal Injuries Unit to return to work or study, while our Allied Health team also provides detailed workplace assessments and equipment solutions.

Plus, we deliver disability awareness workshops to educate staff on inclusiveness, conducted by our Training Solutions facilitators.

Sharing your feedback

We value your feedback, as part of our commitment to continuous improvement. You can submit feedback and view our Feedback and Complaints Policy by visiting spinal.com.au/feedback.

Contact us today on **1300 774 625** or enquiries@spinal.com.au to find out how we can support you or follow us on Facebook and Twitter for the latest news and information.

Congratulations Tayarra Smith

Winner of the Empowered Travel Prize

Coloplast partnered with Spinal Life Australia to offer a 4-day vacation to the brand new Spinal Life Healthy Living Centre and a \$1,000 voucher to go towards flights or centre services such as gym or therapy.

Featuring seven fully-equipped accommodation units, Allied Health and therapy services, a rehabilitation gym and hydrotherapy pool, as well as a community café, the Healthy Living Centre is the perfect holiday destination, allowing you to go away without worry!

Want to know more about how you can travel without worrying about your bladder or bowel needs? Coloplast can help you feel empowered whenever you plan to travel, through Coloplast IC Care!

The personal support program for intermittent catheter (IC) users.

Whether you have been catheterising for 6 months or 6 years, there are always questions on how to fit intermittent catheterisation into your lifestyle and routine.

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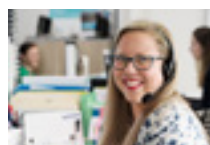
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A welcome kit with helpful products to keep good hygiene



Funding expertise

Support with the NDIS and funding for Continence needs

Coloplast's Care team is dedicated to empowering you to have a memorable trip away where urinary problems don't hold you back.

To find out more about Coloplast IC Care:



1800 316 650



<http://coloplast.to/AU-Winner>



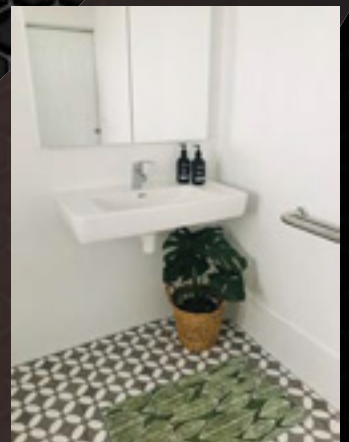
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