

Plain English Summary

Disability Arts History Australia

Archivist Report

October 2025

What is this Report about?

The Disability Arts History Australia (DAHA) website shares historical records, conversations, links to websites, and other information to help us learn about the history of Disability Arts in Australia from the 1970s to the 2020s.

This report discusses how the research team created the Disability Arts History Australia (DAHA) website, including learnings for creating similar websites.

What is in the Report?

Acknowledgements – Showing thanks to important people

The report begins with –

- **Acknowledgement of Country**, paying respect to Indigenous Australians, as the first artists on the lands on which this website was created.
- **Acknowledgement of the Disability Community**, thanking the d/Deaf, Disabled, and/or Neurodivergent artists and supporters who have fought for a very long time to make it easier for us to make art.

Table of Contents – List of what is included in the report

This report includes –

- information about the project, and the project team
- a timeline of events in the history of Disability Arts in Australia
- a summary of main ideas in the historical records
- a summary of the main that came up in conversations with artists and supporters
- problems d/Deaf, Disabled, and/or Neurodivergent artists experience
- ideas for improving the arts industry to make it easier for d/Deaf, Disabled, and/or Neurodivergent artists to take part the future
- a list words used in the report, which explains what the words mean

What does the Report talk about?

Disabled People in Australia

- d/Deaf, Disabled, and/or neurodivergent Australians face barriers when it comes to learning, getting jobs, getting good healthcare, and other things
- The Australian Bureau of Statistics collects information about learning and work – it says we are less likely to finish School and University and less likely to have job

Disabled People in the Arts

- Creative Australia has studied who participates in the arts, and learned that there are more d/Deaf, Disabled, and/or Neurodivergent now than in the past
- These artists still face barriers
 - Other people tell our stories, in ways we do not agree with
 - Not enough money to make work
 - Not enough regular, reliable money to keep going with our work
 - Need for allies (people who support us) and cultural safety (people and places who make us feel comfortable)
 - Need to fix extra problems that First Nations, LGBTIQ+, and regional artists face

Why document our histories?

- We looked in archives which collect historical records, and libraries, and we did not find many records of d/Deaf, Disabled, and Neurodivergent artists
- We did not feel we were included
- When we were included, it was not in the way we wanted
- Some people have tried to fix these problems
 - Iain McIntyre created 'The Disability Protest Timeline', which tells about times we have spoken up for ourselves, and published it the Commons Library
 - The National Disability Arts Collection and Archive (NDACA) in the United Kingdom shared records of Disability Arts in the United Kingdom
 - Professor Bree Hadley, Dr Morgan Batch, Dr Nimal Wijeseri, and Dr Donna McDonald worked together to add records of Disability Arts in Australia to the AusStage Live Performance Database
 - Some companies – for example, Back to Back Theatre – have a lot of records with information about their work on their websites

Most Australian archives are still hard to access and do not have much information about us.

- This means we, as d/Deaf, Disabled, and/or Neurodivergent people
 - Feel like our stories are forgotten
 - Do not have control over how our lives and stories are represented
 - Do not have the information to say many other Disabled people also experience the barriers we have faced, and want to see the same changes we want to see
 - Find it harder to go back, collect, and share the work of Disabled artists now, because we do not know what to look for, or where to find it

Building a Disability Arts archive?

We found it difficult to build the Disability Arts History Australia archive for three main reasons

- **Underrepresentation**
 - our work has not been collected
 - if our work has been collected, it is boxes in offices or State Libraries, that are not in any order or format that we can read easily
 - artists and arts organisations have to think about if people in the records of the past would have understood these might be shared with everyone
- **Exclusion**
 - we do not have equal access to learn, work, and make money
 - we do not have equal chance to ask for money to make work
 - we do not have as much time available to us to do 'volunteer' labour because we have to spend a lot of time on 'disability administration' tasks
 - including appointments with medical and health professionals
 - and government agencies
 - as well as the 'life administration' everyone has to do
- **Access**
 - Archives, and the software used to create, share, and read archives, do not have the access features we require to engage with them easily (font contrast, screen readable content, captions, etc.)

How did we build the Disability Arts History Australia website?

We used –

- Conversations with artists and allies
- Searches in libraries and online to find records
- Scanning old records to make them digital documents we could share online
- Tagging conversations to make it easier to find out what location, artform, community, and topic they are about
- Tagging with categories based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (UNCRPD) – for example, tagging with terms like Access, Education and employment.
- Working together with d/Deaf, Disabled, and/or Neurodivergent artists at workshops to talk about how we should build the website

to create the www.disabilityartshistoryaustralia.net website.

What does the Disability Arts History Australia website include?

At the start, in 2025, the website includes –

- 🖨 **1661 Archival Records:** Annual Reports, Programs, Promotional Flyers and Cards and more, available via URLs or PDFs.

👤 **49 Interviews:** With d/Deaf, Disabled and Neurodivergent artists and supporters, with Auslan interpretation, captions, and transcripts for each video

🔍 **Search Tools:** To find 10,864 people, organisations, and works, and filter for location, artform, or topics such as Access, Education and employment, Participation in public and political life

📅 **Timeline:** Important moments in Disability Arts practice, policy, and activism

📖 **Reference List:** Books, articles, reports and other helpful information

📁 **Curated Histories:** Pages focused on specific themes such as Disability Arts Festivals or Government Policy, Strategy, and Funding

What are the main recommendations in the Report?

What needs to change to improve future archives?

This project taught us a number of ways to improve archives, and access for d/Deaf, Disabled, and/or Neurodivergent people to create and use archives, in the future –

- Make sure d/Deaf, Disabled, and/or Neurodivergent people lead the work
- Pay d/Deaf, Disabled, and/or Neurodivergent people to do the work
- Support d/Deaf, Disabled, and/or Neurodivergent people to get the knowledge, skills, and resources to do the work
- Set standards for language and accessibility
- Use accessible tools and systems
- Provide money for ongoing updates, including updating the language and access, when new materials are added to collections

How do I contact the authors?

Contact Us

💻 Visit the Disability Arts History Australia website at:
<https://disabilityartshistoryaustralia.net>

👤 For media, interviews, further information, or enquires about tailored reports, contact Professor Bree Hadley, bree.hadley@qut.edu.au

What are some key terms / concepts in the Report?

Words and Ideas in this Report

- **Disability Arts History Australia:** A website that shows stories, records, and history of d/Deaf, Disabled, and Neurodivergent artists in Australia.
- **Archive:** A collection of records and histories.
- **Digital Archive:** A collection of records saved on a computer or website.
- **Community Archiving:** Disabled people collect and share their own history

- **Interoperability:** Archives can share data with each other
- **Arts Organisations:** Groups that help artists make and share their work.
- **Industry:** A type of business, where people do a type of work, e.g. arts
- **Project:** A plan of work done by a group of people. This project made a website to share Disability Arts history.
- **Funded / Funding:** Money given to help a project happen. This project got money from universities and arts organisations.
- **Records:** Old papers, photos, videos, or stories that show what happened in the past.
- **d/Deaf, Disabled, and Neurodivergent people:** People who are Deaf or hard of hearing, have a disability, or think and learn in different ways.
- **Accessible / Accessibility:** Easy to use, easy to understand, and open to everyone
- **Inclusion:** Making sure everyone can take part
- **Participation:** Being part of something. Example: joining a meeting or making art.
- **Equity:** Fair
- **Captions:** Words on a screen that show what people are saying in a video.
- **Description:** Words that explain what is in a picture, video, or document.
- **Plain / Easy English:** Simple words and short sentences that are easy to read and understand.
- **Bias:** Unfair ideas or actions. Example: when a computer thinks disabled people are less important.
- **Representation:** Showing the real experience of real people in stories
- **Misrepresentation:** Wrong or unfair way of showing someone or something.
- **Power:** Being in charge, telling people how things are going to be done.
- **Labour:** Work that takes time and energy.
- **Cost:** Money needed to do something.
- **Upload:** Put something (like a photo or document) onto a website.
- **Search:** Look for something online or in a document.
- **Consent:** Saying yes to something. Example: agreeing to share your story or photo.
- **United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (UNCRPD):** A global agreement that says Disabled people must be treated equality, and have the same rights as everyone else, in all parts of life.
- **National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), Employment Assistance Fund (EAF), Disability Support Pension (DSP):** Government support programs
- **Deficit-based language:** Describing people by what they can't do
- **Disability-led practice:** Disabled people lead the work
- **Cultural Safety:** Feeling respected and understood
- **Allyship:** Supporting Disabled people to succeed
- **Diversity:** different identities (e.g. race, gender, disability)
- **Intersectionality:** Having more than one identity (e.g. race, gender, disability)

- **Sustainability:** Having enough support to keep going
- **Disability Administration:** Extra work Disabled people do to manage life
- **Relaxed performance:** A show that is made more comfortable for people. The lights and sounds are softer. People can move, make noise, or leave and come back. It is good for anyone who finds normal shows too loud, too bright, or too strict.
- **Social enterprise:** A business that sells goods or services to make money, but also uses the money to do good things for people or the community. The main goal is to help, not just to make profit.
- **Collaboration:** Doing things together with other people.
- **Ensemble:** A group of people who work together to make art, music, dance, or theatre. Everyone in the group is important. They share ideas and perform as a team, not just as individuals.
- **Policy:** A plan, or set of rules, that says how we should do things