ACOLA®

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL OF LEARNED ACADEMIES

ANNUAL REPORT

2025-26

Australian Council of Learned Academies Annual Report 2025-26. This document is a true and accurate account of the activities of the Australian Council of Learned Academies for the financial year 2025-26, in accordance with the reporting requirements of its Constitution, the ACNC, and for the conditions of grants made by the Australian Government under the Higher Education Support Act 2003 (Cth).

ACOLA is an established and approved Australian Research Institute by the Australian Government; is a registered charity with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC); and holds Deductible Gift Recipient status.

Acknowledgement of Country

ACOLA staff live and work on the lands and waters of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across Australia. We acknowledge the Traditional Owners and Custodians of Country and pay our respects to Elders past and present.

As we work to inform national policy and address complex national and global challenges, we recognise the more than 65,000 years of research, science and innovation embodied in the knowledges of the world's oldest continuing cultures. We seek always to respect that knowledge and the people who hold it.



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Year at a glance

In 2025-26, ACOLA brought together the collective expertise of Australia's five Learned Academies to set national research priorities, translate evidence into practice and strengthen Australia's research system. Our work focused on four themes:

- **Setting national research priorities**: The Australian Energy Transition Research Program
- **Translating evidence into practice**: The Disability Responsiveness Program
- **International partnerships**: Supporting the KONEKSI Program
- **Strengthening Australia's research system**: A collective voice on national priorities

5 Learned Academies and 3,500+ Fellows

working together through ACOLA

22 Fellows and experts

serving on project Steering Committees and Expert Advisory Panels

80+ experts

convened at the **Accelerate 2035** National Energy Transition Research Summit, in partnership with the Net Zero Economy Authority

2 national reports and 300+ registrants

at the **Powering Fairness: Evidence for an Inclusive and JUST Energy Transition** webinar

$3 million in grant funding

to lead the development of co-designed education and training Toolkits and a National Roadmap for ACOLA's **Disability Responsiveness Program**

International partnership

supporting **KONEKSI, the Australia-Indonesia knowledge partnership**, now in its third year

Health, education and justice sectors

engaged through the national Disability Responsiveness Program

25,000 new website users

up 150 per cent, following the launch of our refreshed website

120+ significant engagements

across **government, industry, community and professional organisations**

2025 2026

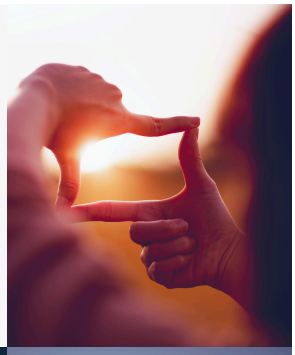


About ACOLA

We deliver independent, interdisciplinary insight to help decision-makers navigate complex national challenges. By connecting expertise across sectors, we translate research into practical guidance for government, industry and the community.

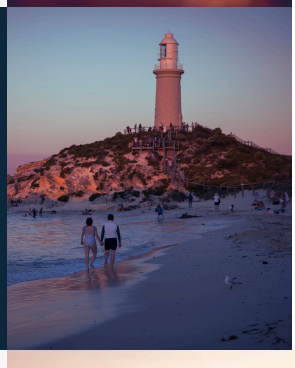
Vision

ACOLA aims to be a key source of high-quality, robust, and independent interdisciplinary advice for Australia's decision-makers and the public on complex challenges and issues.



Mission

To provide a forum that brings great minds, broad perspectives, and knowledge together to help solve complex societal issues for the benefit of Australia.



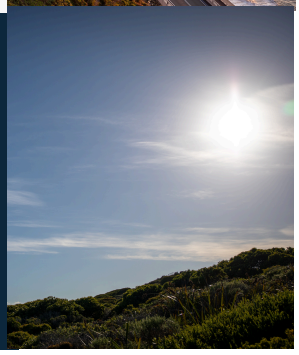
Purpose

Advising Australia by advancing discussions on complex issues through trusted, independent, and interdisciplinary evidence-based advice.



Values

Integrity | Rigour | Transparency | Inclusiveness | Creativity | Collaboration | Interdisciplinarity



Who we are

Members

The Australian Council of Learned Academies (ACOLA) brings together Australia's five Learned Academies to provide independent, interdisciplinary expert advice on complex national challenges. Each Academy holds this formal recognition through identification under the Australian Government's Higher Education Support Act (HESA).

Drawing on more than 3,500 Fellows across the health and medical sciences, humanities, sciences, social sciences, and technological sciences and engineering, ACOLA connects the best of Australian expertise with the people and organisations shaping national policy.

Partners

ACOLA's work is strengthened by partners who contribute expertise, resources and shared commitment to addressing national priorities.

We gratefully acknowledge the support of our member Academies and the following partners throughout 2025-26:

- Department of Education
- Department of Health, Disability and Ageing
- Net Zero Economy Authority
- KONEKSI, the knowledge partnership program jointly managed by the Australian and Indonesian governments.

We also acknowledge the Australian Academy of Science for providing ACOLA's finance, human resources and information technology services.

Objects

The Objects for which ACOLA is established:

- To benefit Australia by developing and supporting interdisciplinary collaboration, research and scholarship in humanities and the arts, social sciences, natural and physical sciences, technological and engineering sciences, and health and medical sciences to address issues of national and regional importance utilising the expertise of the Learned Academies and consistent with the Objects of ACOLA, including:
    - engaging disciplinary experts to advance research and scholarship
    - promoting application of interdisciplinary expert knowledge
    - declaring and disseminating interdisciplinary expert knowledge
    - advocating standards of research and scholarship to encourage excellence.
- To deliver evidence-informed interdisciplinary advice to support and guide policy decision making processes.
- To engage and contribute interdisciplinary perspectives to public debate and awareness raising on emerging national and regional issues.
- To promote an appreciation within the community and amongst decision makers of the value that interdisciplinary research and scholarship provides as an evidence-base for public policy.
- To collaborate with the Learned Academies, professional institutes, other learned societies and educational institutions in matters of mutual interests.
- To establish and maintain cooperative relations between ACOLA and overseas bodies having similar objectives in the disciplines represented by ACOLA's members.



Chair's report

The past year has brought significant change to Australia's research, science and innovation system, with renewed attention to how we coordinate expertise, invest in research and translate knowledge into lasting public benefit.

Ambitious Australia, the final report of the Government's Strategic Examination of Research and Development, set out a long-term blueprint for a more focused and better coordinated system. The Government and the Minister's commitment to establish a National Resilience and Science Council provides a foundation for reform. Alongside it, increased investment through the Medical Research Future Fund and the conclusion of negotiations on Australia's association to Horizon Europe offers new opportunities to translate research into practice and strengthen international collaboration.

The success of these reforms will depend on bringing different kinds of knowledge together. The challenges facing Australia, from the net zero transition to health, resilience and social cohesion, managing the impact of AI, all cross disciplinary boundaries. Addressing them requires the sciences, engineering, health and medicine, social sciences and humanities to work together from the outset.

As governments, researchers and industry consider how these reforms should be implemented, the need for independent, trusted and multi-disciplinary advice becomes increasingly important.

This is where ACOLA makes a distinctive contribution. Drawing on the collective expertise of more than 3,500 Fellows across our five member Learned Academies, we bring independent, multi-disciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives to complex national questions. We connect research with policy and practice, creating opportunities for experts, decision-makers and communities to shape responses together.

Our energy transition work demonstrated this approach during the year. The Powering Fairness report launch brought vulnerability and justice into focus, while the Accelerate 2035 Summit convened more than 80 experts to help shape national research priorities.

Both reinforced the importance of understanding people and communities alongside the technologies driving Australia's transition.

Another important area of work during the year was the Disability Responsiveness Program. Bringing together research evidence, lived experience and professional expertise, the program builds on ACOLA's previous work in this area through the development of practical toolkits and a National Roadmap to support improved outcomes for people with disability across health, education and justice.

As national reforms take shape, ACOLA stands ready to assist government and sector partners in building a research and innovation system that draws on the full breadth of Australian expertise. Our experience shows the value of connecting disciplines and perspectives around a shared purpose and keeping the people affected by change central to the response.

I thank my fellow Directors and the Presidents, Fellows and staff of our member Academies for their partnership and contributions throughout the year. I acknowledge the leadership of our former Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Prerana Mehta, and thank our Executive Director, Dr Lauren Palmer, and the ACOLA team for their professionalism and commitment through a year of transition.

The task ahead is not simply to generate new knowledge, but to ensure Australia can draw on the full breadth of expertise needed to address complex challenges. ACOLA is well placed to support that effort.

Professor Stephen Garton
AM FAHA FASSA FRAHS FRSN
Chair, ACOLA Board
President, Australian Academy of the Humanities



Executive Director’s message

This year has been one of transition, collaboration and progress for ACOLA. I am proud to lead a team committed to connecting interdisciplinary expertise with the decisions shaping Australia's future.

In 2025-26, our work centred on three connected goals: setting national research priorities, translating evidence into practice and strengthening Australia’s research system.

In energy, we moved the Australian Energy Transition Research Program into its next phase. In December 2025, *Powering Fairness* launched two national reports examining vulnerability and justice in the energy transition. In February 2026, ACOLA convened *Accelerate 2035*, with support from the Net Zero Economy Authority, bringing together more than 80 experts to help shape national energy transition research priorities. A central message emerged: the next decade will be shaped as much by people and communities as by technology. This insight is informing the development of a National Roadmap for energy transition research.

Our Disability Responsiveness Program demonstrates how ACOLA is translating evidence into practical support for change. Commissioned by the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing, the program brings together lived experience, research and professional expertise to strengthen disability responsiveness across health, education and justice. During the year, we established governance and engagement foundations, scoped practical toolkits and commenced preparation for a National Disability Responsiveness Roadmap. With people with disability sharing leadership of the work, the program is building an approach that connects workforce learning with improvements in organisational practice and people’s experiences of services.

We also brought the collective voice of the Learned Academies to national discussions on Ambitious Australia, the Medical Research Future Fund and Australia’s capacity for invention. Internationally, we continued to support research connections through the Australia–Indonesia KONEKSI partnership. Our refreshed website now makes ACOLA’s work and the expertise of the Academies easier to discover and use.

In 2026-27, our focus will be on turning these foundations into practical outputs and stronger opportunities for collaboration. We will progress work on the National Energy Transition Research Roadmap, and work with people with disability and sector partners to co-design, develop and test Disability Responsiveness Program resources. We will also continue supporting KONEKSI and work with governments, research organisations and the Learned Academies to strengthen ACOLA’s contribution as a trusted source of interdisciplinary advice as Australia’s research reforms take shape.

I thank our member Academies for their partnership and contributions. Our work depends on the Fellows, experts and people with lived experience who contribute their time, knowledge and perspectives so generously. I would like to thank Emeritus Professor Ken Baldwin FTSE for his leadership of the Australian Energy Transition Research Program, and the Steering Committee for its guidance and support of this work. I would also like to thank Professor Karen Fisher FASSA and Professor Jackie Leach Scully FAHA FAcSS FRSN for their leadership of the Disability Responsiveness Program, and the Steering Committee and Expert Advisory Panel for their guidance and expertise.

I thank the ACOLA Board for its strategic direction, our former CEO, Prerana Mehta for her leadership, and the ACOLA team for the commitment, creativity and care they bring to our work.

I extend my gratitude to the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing, Department of Education, the Net Zero Economy Authority and our other partners.

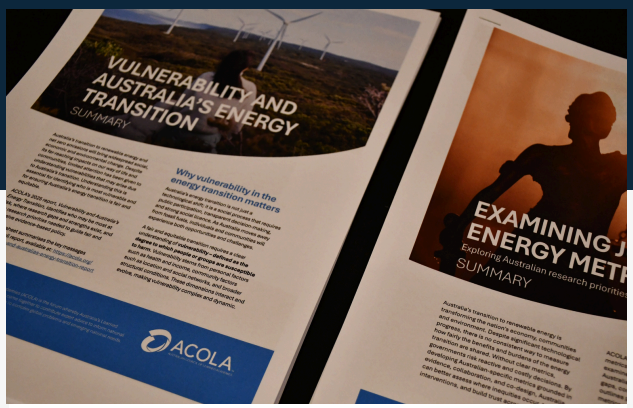
As we look ahead, our focus remains on ensuring that interdisciplinary expertise informs the decisions shaping Australia's future. By connecting researchers, policymakers, practitioners and communities, ACOLA can help translate knowledge into practical action and lasting impact.

Dr Lauren Palmer
Executive Director, ACOLA



Year in review

In 2025-26 ACOLA's work focused on four key themes, bringing together the expertise of Australia's five Learned Academies.



Setting national research priorities

The Australian Energy Transition Research Program

Two national reports and the Accelerate 2035 Summit.

See page 12



Translating evidence into practice

The Disability Responsiveness Program

A $3 million national program for health, education and justice.

See page 16



International partnerships

Supporting the KONEKSI Program

Connecting Australian and Indonesian expertise.

See page 19



Strengthening Australia's research system

A collective voice on national priorities

A joint response to Ambitious Australia and wider research reform.

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Setting national research priorities

The Australian Energy Transition Research Program

Australia's transition to net zero depends on understanding people and communities as well as technology. ACOLA's Australian Energy Transition Research Program provides a nationally coordinated blueprint for interdisciplinary research to support a fair, inclusive and efficient transition.

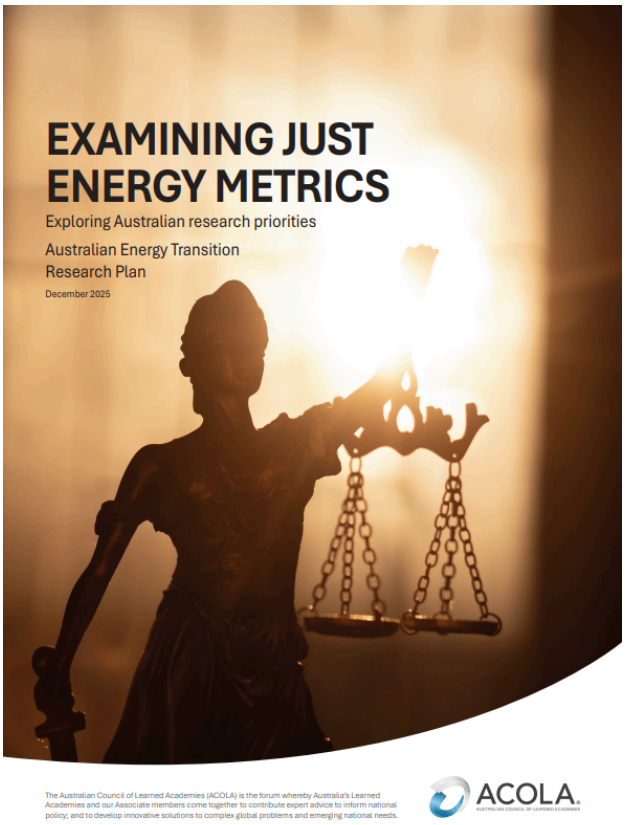
Initiated in 2019, the Program entered a new phase in 2025-26, with two major events placing people and communities at the centre of the national research agenda.

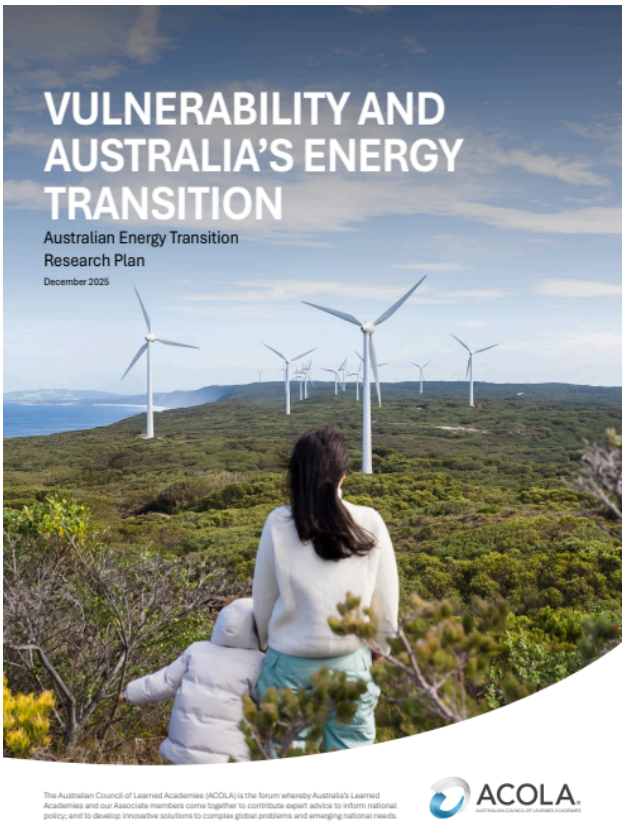
New research on vulnerability and JUST Energy metrics

Two reports were released under the Australian Energy Transition Research Program during the year.

JUST Energy Metrics, led by Associate Professor Madeline Taylor, examined how fairness, participation and accountability might be understood and assessed in Australia's energy transition, and explored how the JUST framework (Justice, Universality, Space and Time) might guide the development of consistent metrics.

Vulnerability in Australia's Energy Transition, led by Professor Sara Bice and Dr Richard Parsons, examined who may be most vulnerable during Australia's energy transition, how and why vulnerabilities arise and where further research and policy attention are needed.





Powering Fairness: Evidence for an Inclusive and JUST Energy Transition

To mark the release of the reports, ACOLA hosted the *Powering Fairness: Evidence for an Inclusive and JUST Energy Transition* webinar on 1 December 2025.

The event brought together researchers, policy-makers, and sector leaders to explore who is at risk of being left behind in Australia's energy transition and how progress towards a fair transition can be assessed.

Following presentations by the lead authors, Emeritus Professor Ken Baldwin FTSE (Australian National University), Professor Fran Baum AO FAHMS FASSA (University of Adelaide) and John Connor (Net Zero Economy Authority) joined the authors to discuss the implications for policy and research.

Conversation focused on community vulnerability, participation and justice, and the research gaps requiring urgent attention.

A live Q&A provided attendees with the opportunity to engage directly with the authors and panellists. The webinar attracted more than 300 registrants, reflecting strong interest in the social dimensions of the energy transition. The recording is available on ACOLA's website, providing ongoing access to the findings and discussion.

Australia's transition to renewable energy is reshaping communities, economies and everyday life, yet its impacts and benefits are not felt equally.

A fair energy transition means understanding who is at risk of being left behind, and how to measure progress towards fairness.



300+ Registrants

attended the webinar

5 Expert Speakers

across research and government

2 National Reports

launched on vulnerability and energy justice





Accelerate 2035: Shaping Australia's Energy Transition Research Priorities

What research does Australia need to deliver a fast, fair and inclusive transition to net zero?

On 27 February 2026, ACOLA hosted the Accelerate 2035: National Energy Transition Research Summit. Supported by the Net Zero Economy Authority, the Summit brought together more than 80 experts to help shape Australia's research priorities for the decade ahead.

Research for a decisive decade
Australia's commitments to reduce emissions by 62 to 70 per cent below 2005 levels by 2035, reach 82 per cent renewable electricity by 2030 and achieve net zero by 2050 demand a coordinated research effort.

To support Australia's transition to net zero, greater collaboration across disciplines, sectors and institutions is needed to address gaps, accelerate delivery and realise the economic, social and security benefits of the transition. The Summit provided a forum to identify where coordinated research could make the greatest difference.

Connecting expertise and setting priorities
David Shankey, CEO of the Net Zero Economy Authority, opened the day with a plenary address, followed by a conversation with Emeritus Professor Ken Baldwin FTSE, Chair of ACOLA's Australian Energy Transition Research Program.

A panel moderated by Redmond Barry Distinguished Professor Emeritus Lesley Head FAHA FASSA brought together perspectives from science, climate policy, electricity system planning, industry and innovation. Panellists included:

- Professor Tony Haymet FTSE, Australia's Chief Scientist
- Kath Rowley, CEO of the Climate Change Authority
- Nicola Falcon, Executive General Manager of System Design at AEMO
- Louisa Kinnear, CEO of the Australian Energy Council
- Emeritus Professor Roy Green, Special Innovation Advisor, University of Technology Sydney

Participants then moved from discussion to priority-setting through two facilitated workshops led by Fellows from the Research Program's Steering Committee and members of the co-design committee. Drawing on expertise across research, government, industry, law, finance and regulation, participants identified challenges and opportunities across the six sectors of the national Net Zero Plan, then refined the research priorities with the greatest potential for impact.

Following the Summit, the Chair, Steering Committee, moderators and scribes met to shape the Summit Statement.

Key insights

A clear message emerged: The next decade of the energy transition will be shaped as much by people's decisions, experiences and participation as by technological progress.

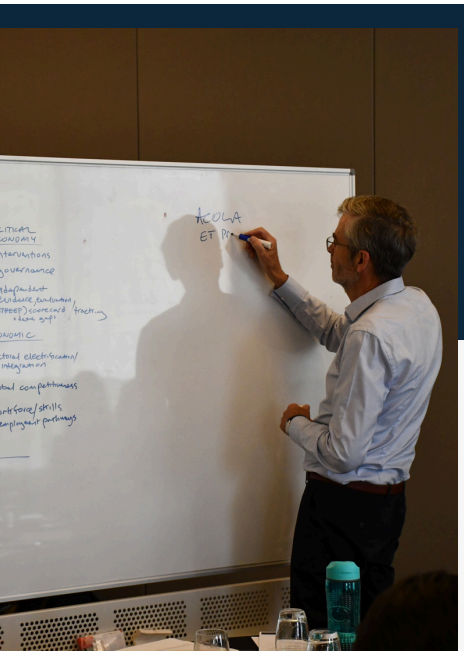
Participants emphasised the importance of meaningful partnerships with communities, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and those in regional and rural Australia. These partnerships are essential to building lasting confidence in the transition and supporting equitable decisions about new infrastructure.

Research has a critical role in understanding community priorities and identifying pathways that share the benefits and burdens of change fairly.

Acknowledgements

ACOLA thanks the Net Zero Economy Authority for its partnership and all speakers, panellists, facilitators and participants for their contributions. Particular thanks go to Emeritus Professor Ken Baldwin FTSE and the Steering Committee and Co-design group for their leadership in shaping and delivering the Summit.

The next decade of the energy transition will be shaped as much by people's decisions, experiences and participation as by technological progress.



80+ Experts

brought together

8 Expert Speakers

across research and government



Translating evidence into practice

The Disability Responsiveness Program

Bringing together lived experience, research and professional expertise to build more inclusive, accessible and rights-based services.

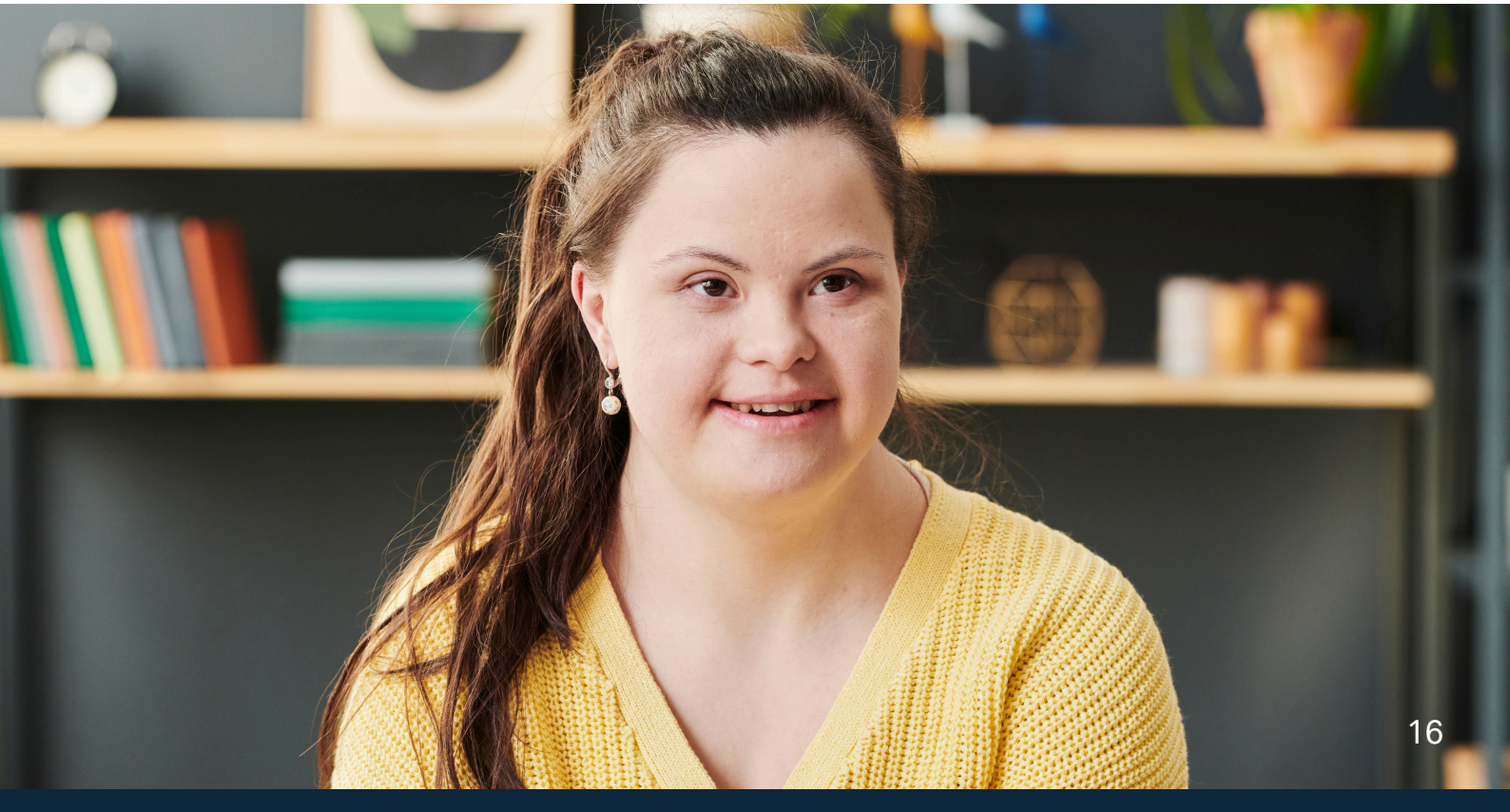
Disability responsiveness takes shape in everyday interactions, professional decisions and the way organisations design and deliver services. ACOLA's Disability Responsiveness Program (DRP) aims to strengthen this practice across Australia's health, education and justice sectors.

In 2025-26, ACOLA was awarded $3 million by the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing (DHDA) to progress this national initiative. Building on ACOLA's award-winning 2022 report, *Ensuring Occupations are Responsive to People with Disability*, the program is translating evidence into practical evidence-informed resources that support workforce capability, organisational change and more inclusive, accessible and rights-based services. Its first full year focused on establishing governance, building partnerships and setting priorities for resource development across the health, education and justice sectors.

Shaped by lived experience
Co-leadership with people with disability is a core principle of the DRP. Through governance, advisory and consultation activities, people with disability shape the program's direction and contribute their expertise to resource development.

This involvement connects research and professional practice with direct knowledge of how services are experienced, helping the program identify barriers, challenge assumptions and focus on changes that matter.

During the year, ACOLA established a cross-sector Steering Committee and Expert Advisory Panel involving people with disability, researchers, practitioners, professional bodies and government representatives. Together, they provided strategic oversight and specialist advice, shaped priorities and reviewed emerging findings, keeping lived experience, evidence and practical implementation central to the work.



Building partnerships and identifying priorities
ACOLA engaged with disability representative organisations, professional associations, universities, government agencies and sector leaders across health, education and justice. These conversations explored capability gaps, opportunities to improve practice and ways to embed resources in existing education, professional development and service systems.

A consistent message emerged: disability responsiveness needs to be embedded throughout an organisation. Workforce learning must be supported by leadership, organisational culture, accessible service design and clear accountability.

This engagement helped build a network of stakeholders committed to improving practice and informed priorities for the next phase of co-design and resource development. Participation in national forums provided further opportunities to share insights and strengthen partnerships.

Developing practical solutions for change
Two complementary areas of work progressed during the reporting period: sector-specific toolkits and preparation for the National Disability Responsiveness Roadmap.

The toolkits are being designed to help professionals and organisations put disability responsiveness into practice. Planned resources include practical guidance, implementation tools, case studies and learning materials that can be adapted to different roles and workplace settings.

The approach combines shared foundations, such as rights, communication and supported decision-making, with occupation-specific scenarios and tools for everyday use.

Health was the first sector to commence detailed toolkit development. Stakeholder engagement helped identify priorities and opportunities for implementation, providing a foundation for the next phase of co-design and resource development. Scoping also progressed for toolkits across the program's other two sectors.

A structured Toolkit Development Framework guides development of the resources, connecting evidence and stakeholder insights with practical implementation across different occupations and settings.

Accessibility is a design requirement throughout this process. The approach incorporates plain language, flexible formats and different ways to participate and learn, with user testing intended to identify barriers before resources are finalised.

Preparation for the National Disability Responsiveness Roadmap drew on evidence, stakeholder insights and the experiences of people with disability. The Roadmap is intended to provide a coordinated framework for action across professions and systems, identifying practical steps to support sustained change.

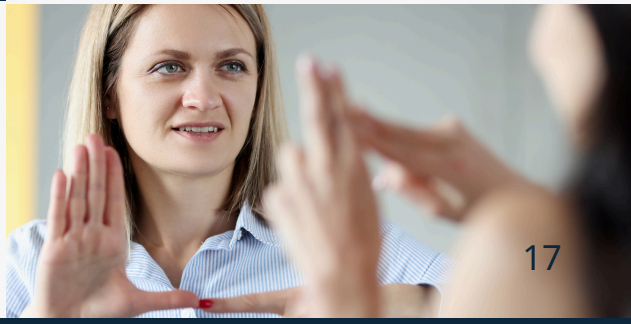
Together, these resources aim to connect improvements in everyday practice with the organisational and system changes needed to sustain them.



$3 million
funding to progress the national program

3 Sectors
Health, Education and Justice

60+ consultations
across peak bodies, government, and disability representative organisations



Connecting disciplines, policy and practice

The DRP draws on ACOLA's ability to bring together expertise from Australia's Learned Academies. Fellows and multidisciplinary experts contribute perspectives from the sciences, technological sciences and engineering, social sciences, humanities, and health and medical sciences.

By connecting this expertise with lived experience and professional practice, the program can examine disability responsiveness from multiple perspectives to develop resources that reflect the complexity of real service settings.

The DRP also extends ACOLA's established approach to synthesising evidence and informing policy. Through co-design and practical resource development, it is applying that approach to workforce capability, implementation and systems change.

A close working partnership with DHDA has supported strategic alignment, knowledge sharing and program delivery throughout the year. ACOLA acknowledges the Department's funding and ongoing support, with particular thanks to the Australian Disability Strategy Implementation Team.

Looking ahead

The next phase will focus on co-designing, testing and refining resources with people with disability and sector partners. Health-sector priorities include toolkits for pharmacists and nurse practitioners, applying disability-responsive principles to situations such as consultations, communication about medicines, supported decision-making and coordination between services.

Alongside this work, ACOLA will continue developing the National Disability Responsiveness Roadmap and identifying pathways for adoption. Implementation guidance and evaluation will help organisations consider how resources can be embedded in practice and how improvements can be assessed over time.

The aim is to equip professionals and organisations with practical ways to improve services, supported by the leadership, capability and accountability needed for lasting change.



International partnerships

Supporting the KONEKSI Program

Connecting Australian and Indonesian expertise through research and innovation.

KONEKSI is a five-year flagship knowledge partnership initiative jointly managed by the Australian and Indonesian governments (2023–27). As a supporting delivery partner, ACOLA draws on the expertise and networks of its five member Learned Academies to strengthen research connections and knowledge exchange between the two countries.

During 2025-26, ACOLA provided Australia-based support that connected researchers and institutions, shared insights from Australia's research and policy landscape, and created opportunities to exchange approaches to knowledge and innovation. This work included:

- **Sharing timely insights**: monthly sector scans summarised developments across Australian policy, innovation, research and the Learned Academies, helping inform KONEKSI's work.
- **Contributing to the bilateral conversation**: ACOLA's then CEO, Prerana Mehta, delivered a keynote address on the second day of the KONEKSI Knowledge and Innovation Exchange in Jakarta on 29 April 2026.
- **Connecting institutions and decision-makers**: ACOLA organised and facilitated one-on-one meetings between Australian knowledge and innovation precincts and Indonesian agencies and ministries, including the National Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN), Ministry of National Development Planning (Bappenas), and Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology (MoHEST).

Through these activities, ACOLA helped connect expertise across disciplines, institutions, and countries, supporting the exchange of knowledge and development of relationships that underpin collaboration between Australia and Indonesia.

5 Learned Academies

connecting expertise across disciplines



Monthly sector scans

sharing insights from Australia's research, policy and innovation landscape

Bilateral connections

bringing Australian innovation precincts together with Indonesian agencies and Ministries



Strengthening Australia's research system

A collective voice on national priorities

In 2025-26, ACOLA brought Australia's five Learned Academies together to contribute a coordinated, interdisciplinary voice on issues of national importance. Through engagement with government, industry and the research sector, ACOLA connected expertise across disciplines to inform policy, support research reform and strengthen collaboration.

Connecting research with better health outcomes

ACOLA contributed to consultations with the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing on the evaluation of the Medical Research Future Fund's Research Missions program. Discussions considered the impact of the Missions, opportunities to strengthen their effectiveness, and their future role within Australia's health and medical research system.

Making research policy accessible

Following the Federal Budget on 12 May 2026, ACOLA published an analysis of the measures most significant for Australia's research and innovation sector.

The analysis highlighted the implications of Budget measures for research, innovation and higher education, contributing to informed discussion across the sector about the future of Australia's research system.

Supporting conversations on invention and innovation

As part of the broader conversation about research reform, ACOLA convened a cross-sector workshop in partnership with the University of Technology Sydney to explore how Australia can better support invention.

Participants examined what enables invention, what unintentionally constrains it, and how Australia's research system could evolve over the next 10 to 20 years. Discussions explored ways to support creativity, strengthen collaboration across disciplines and create conditions that help turn ideas into practical outcomes.

A united response to Ambitious Australia

On 17 March 2026, ACOLA and the Presidents of Australia's five Learned Academies held a joint media briefing in response to Ambitious Australia, released that day as the final report of the Strategic Examination of Research and Development (SERD).

Together, the Academies endorsed the report and called on the Australian Government to act on its recommendations. Each President contributed their discipline's perspective, reinforcing a shared message: Australia's major challenges require multidisciplinary responses, and scientific and technological advances must be understood within their social and cultural contexts. ACOLA and the Academies also offered their combined expertise to support implementation.

This engagement continued on 14 April 2026, when ACOLA and the five Academies joined Senator the Hon Tim Ayres, the Hon Dr Andrew Charlton MP and leaders from STEM, industry and business at a Sydney roundtable. Discussions explored the report's potential to strengthen Australia's industrial capability, build a more diverse and competitive economy, and create high-value jobs across research, development and innovation.

Communications and engagement

Making interdisciplinary expertise easier to find, understand and use

In 2025-26, ACOLA strengthened relationships across academia, industry and government, reinforcing its role as an entry point to Australia's Learned Academies and their Fellows.

Engagement focused on strengthening relationships across government, academia and industry, and identifying opportunities for interdisciplinary expertise to inform policy and practice.

A new digital front door

ACOLA's website connects policymakers, researchers, industry, media and the community with our work and the collective expertise of the Learned Academies. During the year, a strategic refresh made that expertise easier to discover and navigate.

The previous website had last undergone a substantial update more than a decade ago. Its report-focused structure, accessibility limitations and reliance on external maintenance highlighted the need for a more accessible, user-focused platform.

The refresh reorganised content around user needs, introduced new designs and templates, and added search filters for priority area, report type and date.

The refreshed website gives visitors a clearer understanding of ACOLA's role, direct pathways to the Learned Academies and easier access to research. Improvements to accessibility and in-house content management also provide a stronger foundation for future initiatives, including the Australian Energy Transition Research Program.

Our reach in numbers

ACOLA's digital channels extended the visibility of its work, with energy transition content attracting particular interest.

LinkedIn

- **595,359 impressions**
- **551 new followers**

LinkedIn figures cover 23 September 2025 to 30 June 2026, reflecting the available reporting period. Impressions include paid campaign activity and represent content displays, not unique people.

Website

The website attracted 25,000 new users, an increase of 150 per cent year-on-year. The leading countries of origin were Australia, China, the United States, Germany and Singapore.



551 new followers

joined ACOLA's LinkedIn audience



25,000 new website users

after the launch of our new website in 2025



595,000+ impressions

across 45 LinkedIn posts

Organisational excellence

Strong foundations for trusted, independent advice

Strong governance, sound financial management and effective organisational systems underpin ACOLA's work and support the delivery of its strategic priorities.

Our values of independence, inclusion, transparency, sustainability and professional pride guide how we work with the Learned Academies, Fellows and partners. Together these values support our commitment to providing trusted interdisciplinary advice and supporting Australia's research and innovation system.

Supporting effective operations

Throughout 2025-26, the Australian Academy of Science continued to provide ACOLA with financial, human resources and information technology services. This shared services arrangement supported ACOLA's day-to-day operations.

Boards and committees

During 2025-26, the ACOLA Board met 4 times, the Audit, Risk and Finance Committee met 3 times and the Research Committee met once.



Our Fellows and experts

Expertise shared across disciplines strengthens everything we do

Fellows of Australia's Learned Academies and the wider network of experts they connect us with are integral to ACOLA's work. Throughout 2025-26, they contributed to ACOLA through project leadership, advisory committees, roundtables, evidence assessments and co-design activities.

Their knowledge, independent judgement and willingness to collaborate strengthened the rigour and relevance of ACOLA's work, demonstrating the value of bringing disciplines together to inform decisions that shape Australia's future.

We sincerely thank the following Fellows and experts for their time, generosity and contributions throughout the year.

Australian Energy Transition Research Program

Steering Committee

- Emeritus Professor Ken Baldwin FTSE (Chair)
- Professor Fran Baum AO FAHMS FASSA
- Redmond Barry Distinguished Professor Emeritus Lesley Head FAHA FASSA
- Professor Thomas Maschmeyer FAA FTSE
- Emeritus Professor Sue Richardson AM FASSA
- Ms Merryn York FTSE

Accelerate 2035 Summit

Keynote speakers and panellists

- Emeritus Professor Ken Baldwin FTSE
- Nicola Falcon
- Emeritus Professor Roy Green
- Professor Tony Haymet FTSE
- Redmond Barry Distinguished Professor Emeritus Lesley Head FAHA FASSA
- Louisa Kinnear
- Kath Rowley
- David Shankey

Facilitators and scribes

- Olivia Allen
- Professor Fran Baum AO FAHMS FASSA
- Bonnie Bley
- Dr Kylie Brass
- Drew Clarke FTSE
- Kevin Cryan
- Allison Hortle
- Dr Will Howard
- Dr Sachini Kadaoluwa
- Austin Smidt
- Jordan Ward

Disability Responsiveness Program

Steering Committee

- Professor Karen Fisher FASSA (Co-Chair)
- Professor Jackie Leach Scully FAHA FAcSS FRSN (Co-Chair)
- Dr Erol Harvey FTSE CEng
- Professor Anne Kavanagh FASSA FAHMS
- Professor Julian Trollor AM FAHMS

Expert Advisory Panel

- Professor Eileen Baldry AO FASSA FRSN FANZSOC
- Professor Christine Bigby AO FASSA
- Emeritus Professor Branko Celler FTSE
- Professor Monica Cuskelly
- Dr Laura Davy
- Dr Dimity Dornan AO FTSE
- Dr Ebe Ganon
- Dr Dinesh Palipana OAM MBBS FRACGP
- Professor Steve Robson
- Professor Catherine Sherrington FAA FAHMS
- Professor Iva Strnadova

Key people

Board of Directors

- Professor Stephen Garton AM FAHA FASSA FRAHS FRSN (2026 Chair of the ACOLA Board)
- Professor Louise Baur AM FAHMS (2025 Chair of the ACOLA Board)
- Dr Katherine Woodthorpe AO FTSE FAICD (ended January 2026)
- Dr Cathy Foley AO FTSE PSM (commenced January 2026)
- Professor Kate Darian-Smith FASSA
- Professor Chennupati Jagadish AC PresAA FTSE (ended May 2026)
- Professor Samuel Berkovic AC PresAA FAHMS FRS (commenced May 2026)
- Ms Prerana Mehta (Chief Executive Officer, to June 2026)

Research Committee

- Professor Louise Baur AM FAHMS (Chair)
- Dr Katherine Woodthorpe AO FTSE FAICD (ended January 2026)
- Dr Cathy Foley AO FTSE PSM (commenced January 2026)
- Professor Chennupati Jagadish AC PresAA FTSE (ended May 2026)
- Professor Samuel Berkovic AC PresAA FAHMS FRS (commenced May 2026)
- Professor Kate Darian-Smith FASSA
- Professor Stephen Garton AM FAHA FRAHS FASSA FRSN

Audit, Risk and Finance Committee

- Professor Chennupati Jagadish AC PresAA FTSE (Chair, ended May 2026)
- Professor Kate Darian-Smith FASSA (Chair, commenced May 2026)
- Ms Melissa Abberton (commenced June 2026)
- Ms Anna-Maria Arabia OAM (ended June 2026)
- Ms Inga Davis
- Dr Chris Hatherly
- Ms Catherine Luckin
- Ms Kylie Walker

ACOLA management team

ACOLA's management team leads the organisation's strategy, programs and partnerships, supporting Australia's Learned Academies to provide independent, interdisciplinary advice for the national interest.

- Chief Executive Officer, Ms Prerana Mehta (August 2024 to June 2026)
- Executive Director, Dr Lauren Palmer (from June 2026)
- Company Secretary, Ms Diana Melham
- Director, Policy and Projects, Dr Lauren Palmer (to June 2026)
- Program Manager, Ms Ros Kewley
- Engagement Manager, Miss Ramesha Perera
- Senior Policy Manager, Dr Ella Relf

Glossary

Abbreviation or term	Meaning
ACNC	Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission
AEMO	Australian Energy Market Operator
ASIC	Australian Securities and Investments Commission
Bappenas	Ministry of National Development Planning (Indonesia)
BRIN	National Research and Innovation Agency (Indonesia)
DHDA	Department of Health, Disability and Ageing
DRP	Disability Responsiveness Program
FAA	Fellow of the Australian Academy of Science
FAHA	Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities
FAHMS	Fellow of the Australian Academy of Health and Medical Sciences
FASSA	Fellow of the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia
FTSE	Fellow of the Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering
KONEKSI	Australia–Indonesia knowledge partnership program
MoHEST	Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology (Indonesia)
SERD	Strategic Examination of Research and Development
STEM	Science, technology, engineering and mathematics

ACOLA®

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL OF LEARNED ACADEMIES

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