

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Real change or more of the same? Analysing Australian media's portrayal of intellectual disability during the NDIS rollout

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Abstract

Background: Through the filtering of information, the creation, and reinforcement of stereotypes, media moulds attitudes and set agendas on critical social issues including public policy and disability.

Methods: This study explored Australian media representations of the care of people with intellectual disability during a crucial period in disability policy change: the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) rollout (2013–2018). Search criteria identified 168 news stories, examined via content analysis and news framing.

Results: Four major issues were identified: Roles and responsibilities of government; housing; mistreatment of persons with intellectual disability, and responsibility of care for families. Stories tended to be presented negatively, however, regional and local/community metropolitan stories were more balanced or positive compared with major metropolitan stories.

Conclusion: Despite significant disability policy change, media presentations continue to reinforce stereotypes of people with intellectual disability and position the government as one continuing to fall short in critical areas of funding, safety, and support.

KEYWORDS

Australian media, caregiving, government funding, intellectual disability, news framing

1 | INTRODUCTION

As western governments continue to promote a community care model for people with intellectual disability, the media portrayal of such models requires scrutiny. The media is a powerful entity in constructing representations of issues related to intellectual disability. Such constructions may influence both social policy and disability services as well as critical family decision making regarding current and future care. The power of the media can sway public opinion and set agendas in relation to political and social issues (Saunders et al., 2018). Thus the public remain somewhat at the mercy of the media as communities rely on it to be informed on policies and issues, yet information filtered through the media can be non-factual and represent hidden agendas

(Bowey et al., 2005). Thus, examining such media representations may help explain societal and familial beliefs in relation to intellectual disability, caregiving roles, and suitability of care options.

Definitions of intellectual disability have evolved over time from a historical emphasis on intelligence quotient (IQ) scores, to a more contemporary emphasis on functional and environmental considerations. In this study, intellectual disability is understood as an intellectual impairment manifesting prior to age 18 (AAIDD, 2010) with varying degrees of social and functional limitations as identified and categorised in the DSM-5 (APA, 2013). Despite the evolution of formal definitions, mass media has been accused of reinforcing traditional ideologies, such as typecasting people with intellectual disability as an 'object of pity,' 'eternal child,' 'outcast' or dependent on others

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(Renwick, 2016; Starke et al., 2016; Wolfensberger et al., 1972; Worrell, 2018). If society and families adopt such characterisations this can lead to an absence of expectation that the adult with intellectual disability is capable of adaptive functioning. Starke et al. (2016) refers to this as a 'disablist' view that can stigmatise and categorise the person with intellectual disability such that available roles are constrained, for example living independently. Recent research into media representations of disability more broadly suggest some positive change (e.g., Devotta et al., 2013; McGillivray et al., 2021; Suharto et al., 2016). Worrell (2018) categorised alternate representations as 'progressive' models with one such sub-category identified as the 'supercrip' – described by Worrell as hero characters representing persons who 'overcome' their disability to such an extent they perform 'superhuman feats' (p. 19). Thus, even within these so-called progressive representations disability continues to be portrayed as problematic. With the persistence of such stereotypes there may be unique challenges to shifting disability stereotypes of people with intellectual disability.

In a review of mass media representations of people with intellectual disability, Renwick (2016) found that print media tends to focus on children rather than adults and focuses on less severe disability and less complex needs. In Australia, around 62% of the estimated 668,000 people with intellectual disability required frequent or periodic support with mobility, self-care or communication (ABS, 2012; AIHW, 2008), the complexity of such experiences may therefore be lacking from a majority of media portrayals (Dowse et al., 2019). Alternate views may be particularly significant considering that the care requirements of some adults with intellectual disability impact both preferences for care planning and caregiving within the family home (Burke et al., 2018; Dillenburger & McKerr, 2009).

2 | THE AUSTRALIAN CONTEXT AS MODEL FOR UNDERSTANDING MEDIA PORTRAYALS OF DISABILITY AND OF POLICY CHANGE

The deinstitutionalisation movement in the late 1900s marked a global shift in disability policy and funding from government or public care to community-based care (Wiesel & Bigby, 2015). By the early 2000s, OECD countries began to introduce what has been deemed 'cash-for-care' benefits (Da Roit et al., 2016). In 2013, Australia followed this trend introducing the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). This scheme represented a much-needed paradigm shift in disability ideology, funding, and policy in Australia following three decades of slowly downsizing and closing major institutions throughout the country. The scheme operates via a needs-based tiered system of funding, providing no-fault insurance to Australians under the age of 65 meeting the criteria for physical, cognitive, or psychosocial disability (Collings et al., 2016). The aim is to provide more individualised support than had been previously available. This major policy represents a marked change in financial and care assistance programs from state to national funding, furthermore, it aims to place the person with the disability at the centre of all decision making thus

challenging some disablist views, in particular regarding intellectual disability (Howard et al., 2015). The media portrayal of this major policy change in Australia can shed light on how media can influence perception of policy changes and the intellectually disabled in OECD countries and with appropriate changes in other nations as well.

Recent research indicates that family members hold generally positive perceptions of the NDIS, although lack of inclusion is an issue for some (Lloyd et al., 2020). This issue appears two-fold; Firstly, the person with intellectual disability was largely absent from the decision making in part due to a lack of skills by NDIS planners engaging with people with intellectual disability; secondly, parents reported a lack of options for inclusive community-based activities for their family member (Lloyd et al., 2020). Although Lloyd et al.'s (2020) sample was small, similar issues have been reported in a qualitative study interviewing 10 adults with intellectual disability (Perry et al., 2019). Perry et al. (2019) found that these adults experienced similar barriers engaging in decision making with NDIS planning failing to meet their needs. Other studies on the NDIS identified opportunities for unlocking new housing options for people with intellectual disability (Wiesel, 2015). Thus, there are a number of ways such reform may be presented to the public through the media.

Regardless of measurable outcomes, governments rely on media representations of policy reforms to inform and engage the public in these policies (Jacobs, 2015; Kang, 2013). As such the introduction of the NDIS and subsequent rollout heralds a critical period for the potential shaping or reshaping of public attitudes, including those of family members, in relation to intellectual disability, caregiving, and care planning for accommodation within the context of this new political and disability landscape.

The current study therefore aims to explore media representations of intellectual disability, caregiving, and residential care as presented in Australian print, newswires, and national radio broadcasts during 6 years of the NDIS rollout (2013–2018). Three key research questions frame this macro level exploration: (a) how have issues relating to intellectual disability, care accommodation, and family care been presented in the news media since the introduction and rollout of the NDIS?; (b) what role(s) do adults with intellectual disability, families, and other significant sources (e.g., government) play in the representation of these topics?; and (c) have these representations changed over time as the NDIS has been rolled out?

3 | METHOD

3.1 | Content analysis and news framing

An augmented analytic approach drawing upon quantitative content analysis (CA) and news framing was conducted. Content analysis more broadly falls within the umbrella term of 'textual analysis' described by White and Marsh (2006) as a cluster of approaches for analysing text or communication (e.g., qualitative and quantitative approaches). News framing is included within this umbrella term as it too is concentrated on the effects of communication and similar to CA has been

widely applied to media coverage of particular issues (Nelson et al., 1997). As it applied in this study, the addition of news framing analysis allowed for a richer contextualisation of media portrayals through detailing the issues and sources presented.

One of the benefits of CA is that it can reveal trends, patterns, and change as it occurs across large bodies of content and across significant periods of time (Krippendorff, 1989; Neuendorf, 2017; Stemler, 2001). Thus, it is a methodology that allows for insight into media representations of issues such as disability across cultures and time. More specifically, quantitative CA can reveal if these representations changed across this 6-year period as the NDIS moved from a trial phase to full rollout. However, adopting a strictly 'count' approach to the data can be restrictive (Krippendorff, 2004) and may misrepresent all messaging as equally salient.

A news frame is used to organise and structure meaningful information that is socially shared and persistent over time (Reese, 2009). Journalists participate in the construction of news frames by not only determining what and who is included in the news frame (issue and sources presented in the frame), but also determining what or who is excluded from the news frame (absence of issues/sources in the frame). This is defined by Gamson (2001) as part of the production process, selecting certain sources to quote whilst excluding others, which can result in a marginalisation of certain perspectives. Entman (1993) further emphasises that what is absent carries just as much significance as what is present, as absence can act to reinforce judgements and elevate salience of the selected information.

3.2 | Data selection and extraction

Australian news stories were sourced from digital news repository Factiva and from the EBSCOhost Australia and New Zealand Reference Centre. Whilst similar research designs often rely on a single database such as Factiva (e.g., Fraser & Llewellyn, 2015; Wardell et al., 2014) the current study searched dual databases providing access to archival Australian newspapers and news wires to strengthen search rigour. Archived articles and news wire transcripts published from January 2013 to December 2018 were included in the search. Multiple key search terms relating to intellectual disability, family care, and accommodation were used in the search (see Appendix A, Tables A1 and A2). Search terms were limited to those relevant to the Australian context, for example, 'learning disability' is predominantly a U.K. term encompassing intellectual disability. Furthermore, during the period reviewed news media in Australia were explicitly advised that terms including 'mentally retarded' were to be avoided thus these words were excluded from the search terms. Terms used predominantly reflected the media body's acceptable alternatives 'intellectually disabled', 'has an intellectual disability' 'has Down Syndrome' (Australian Communications and Media Authority, 2010, p. 61). Additionally, one of the primary causes of intellectual disability is reported to be autism spectrum disorder with between 33% (AIHW, 2016) and 70% (Banks, 2016) of Australians diagnosed with autism also reporting an intellectual disability. Due to the high prevalence of comorbidity with Autism and potential for

diagnostic transfer (Bourke et al., 2016), the search term 'Autism' was also included, though articles were excluded if concomitance with intellectual disability was unclear or absent.

Database searches yielded 646 results. Headlines and summaries of key words in context were scanned to determine the relevance of the articles. Relevant articles ($n = 235$) were downloaded and imported into qualitative software program NVivo 12 (QSR International, 2018). Duplicate articles were removed ($n = 28$) with remaining articles scanned to ensure inclusion criteria were met. Articles deemed to be primarily reporting on issues outside of the scope of this study were removed (e.g., news focused on law reform in disability abuse cases, sexual assault cases unrelated to accommodation, or issues of dementia). This left a final sample of 168 news stories to be analysed using an augmented approach drawing upon quantitative CA and news framing. Figure 1 illustrates the search process that yielded the sample of articles analysed.

3.3 | Characteristics of sample

Publisher data from the sample were collected to enable an exploration of overall media representations based on geographic areas of distribution. Distinctions were initially made between metropolitan and regional publication areas, with further distinctions identified between major metropolitan newspapers and local community newspapers available within a restricted metropolitan zone (e.g., suburb-focused paper). This distinction between major metropolitan, local/community newspapers, and regional newspapers reflects the Audited Media Association of Australia's (AMAA, n.d.) categories of publication type. A detailed table of media distribution can be viewed in Appendix A, Table A3, an extended list of source data can be found in Appendix A, Table A4. Consideration has been given to geographic areas of distribution when exploring each coding category.

3.4 | Analytic process

For the content analysis, coding schemes and measurement details were constructed to operationalise concepts and establish relevant and valid categories for mapping text into appropriate data language (White & Marsh, 2006). In this study, a coding template from previous research exploring disability and media representations was revised to allow for the systematic analysis of content of each article and transcript (see Wardell et al., 2014). This template was piloted, tested, and revised by two coders. At each stage (e.g., piloting, testing) the two sets of coding were compared with discrepancies discussed. This ensured confidence in the final coding categories (see Table 1).

Following the quantitative CA of the dataset, each story was revisited by the same two researchers in order to answer a set of four news framing questions. This sequential analytic process was repeated across all 168 news stories. Kang (2013) suggested that news framing of people with disabilities can be categorised through three frames: (1) the issue presented, (2) the representative or source

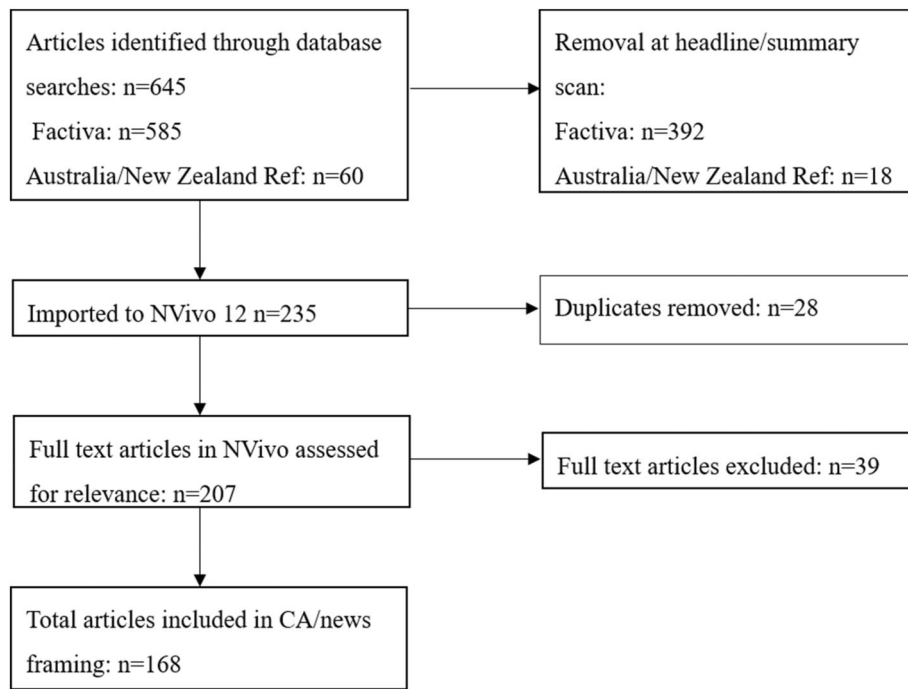


FIGURE 1 Flow chart of news content search.

TABLE 1 Coding template for content analysis (Codebook_V4).

Variables (category code)	Coded answers
What was the overall tone of the article/transcript?	1 = more negative, 2 = neutral/balanced, 3 = more positive
What was the role of intellectual disability in the article/transcript?	1 = integral, 2 = part, 3 = incidental, 4 = absent
What was the role of the individual with ID in the article/transcript?	1 = integral, 2 = part, 3 = incidental, 4 = absent
What was the role of family (parents/siblings) in the article/transcript?	1 = integral, 2 = part, 3 = incidental, 4 = absent
What was the role of accommodation in the article/transcript?	1 = integral, 2 = part, 3 = incidental, 4 = absent
Was the issue framed in the article/transcript as episodic (individual responsibility) or thematic (social responsibility)?	1 = episodic, 2 = thematic, 3 = not identified
What issues regarding intellectual disability and accommodation were presented in the article/transcript?	Examples include personal stories, abuse, accommodation shortages, family distress.
Who was/were the source/s in the article/transcript?	Examples include parents, care providers, politicians.
What textual frames were present/absent?	Examples include a gain/loss frame, human interest frame.

used in the presentation of the issue, and (3) the framing of responsibility, that is, does the news frame emphasise individual responsibility or is the issue presented from a broader social or political context? The framing of responsibility can either facilitate social/government intervention or reinforce individual problem solving. In this sense, there are frames within frames, as the source frame is not independent of the issue frame, nor is the responsibility frame. However, Gamson (2001) notes that alternative ways of extracting news frames from within the same discourse are complementary.

The questions answered via the news framing analysis were:

- What issues regarding intellectual disability were presented in the news story?
- Who was/were the source/s in the news story?

- Was the issue framed in the news story as individual or social responsibility?
- What textual frames (including sources) were absent?

Though a list of a priori framing categories for questions such as issues could not be established, guides from the disability sector (e.g., personal stories, policy, legal case) were provided as initial examples. Through the same pilot and testing process described in the quantitative CA, coders established consistency in identifying dominant issues.

Sources were identified as such if (a) a person was interviewed, or (b) a person, department/organisation or document (e.g., report) was clearly cited as the source of the information presented. Coders were instructed to code news stories as individual if the story emphasised personal responsibility, whereas news coverage of an issue placed

within a broader frame of social/government responsibility was coded as social.

Finally, the establishment of absence of frames was an iterative process. Through coding issue, source, and responsibility for the initial testing phase of the codebook ($n = 43$), coders were able to establish patterns in the data with attention given to both dominant frames and minor frames. Consideration was also given to government policy and standards of media practice in determining whether particular news frames that may be expected in the data were absent. Coders then revisited each of the initial 43 news stories to establish the absence of issues and voices. All coding was housed within an NVivo database using NVivo classifications of attributes with frequencies and relationships between attributes explored via NVivo matrices and visual data charts.

Throughout the search and analytic process, a number of strategies were employed to ensure trustworthiness. Firstly, the use of dual databases was employed to increase confidence in the data collection process; secondly, coding schemes and measurement were replicated from past research supporting the validity of categories (Neuendorf, 2017). Thirdly, pre-testing of the code book via piloted trial coding conducted by two researchers independently with in-depth discussions of differences and difficulties supported modifications of the code book, the continuation of double-coding supported the quality and clarity of the coding scheme (Schreier, 2012). Finally, contextual details regarding units of analysis (e.g., geography) supports the reader's judgement regarding transferability of results (Elo et al., 2014).

4 | RESULTS

4.1 | Content analysis

Temporal distribution of the 168 news stories is presented in Figure 2. A peak in the largest number of articles per year coincided with the launch of the NDIS in 2013. For most other years, distribution was relatively stable, however, a secondary peak occurred across

2015 in regional publications toward the end of the NDIS trial period (2013–2016).

Tone of the news stories was determined based on frequency of positive, negative or neutral lexis. For example, a positive tone news story was categorised as such if it contained a high frequency of positive lexis and a low frequency or absence of negative lexis. Across the data, 54.8% of the news stories were negative in tone ($n = 92$), 28% of the news stories were positive in tone ($n = 47$), the remaining news stories presented a neutral or balanced account of the topic. Positively toned news stories increased to almost 40% in 2016, then declined from 2016 to 2018. In exploring tone of news stories by region, major metropolitan was the only area that consistently published more negative than positive news stories across each of the 6 years. More than 50% of Metropolitan news stories in each year were negatively toned. In comparison, there tended to be an equal number of positively toned and negatively toned news stories over time in local/community metropolitan publications. Regional publications also tended to be less skewed toward negatively toned news stories in more recent years with equal numbers of positively and negatively toned news stories in 2015, 2017, and 2018.

Though the term intellectual disability or a related term was present in all news stories, intellectual disability was integral (i.e., the primary focus) in 55 news stories (32.74%). Overall, regional publications featured the largest proportion of news stories focusing on intellectual disability, followed by major metropolitan publications. Even when intellectual disability was integral to the news story, people with intellectual disability were only integral in 29 news stories (17.26%) and were completely absent in 36 news stories (21.43%).

4.2 | News framing

Over 20 different categories of sources were identified throughout the news stories. These included, but were not limited to, family members, medical professionals, government and non-government representatives, financial advisors, reports and surveys, union representatives, police, and the media (see Table 2).

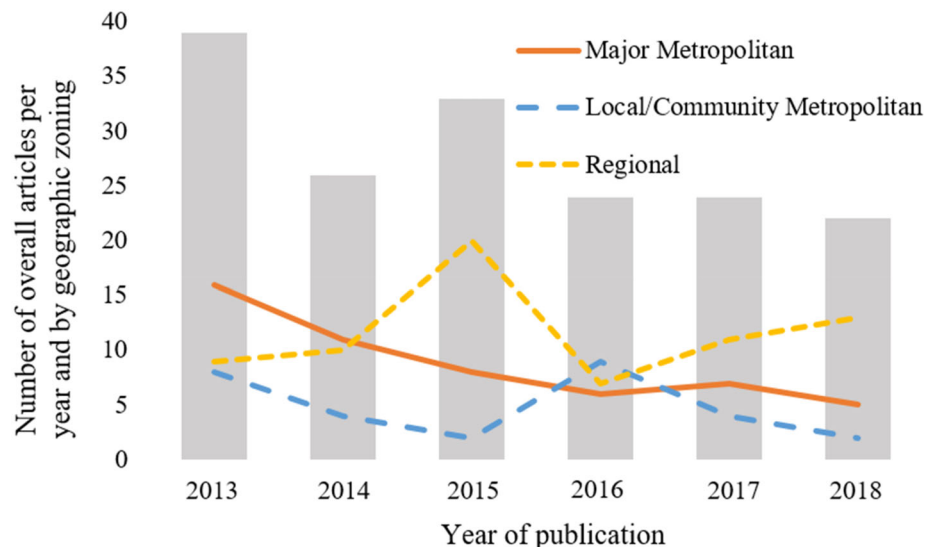


FIGURE 2 Temporal distribution of the number of articles included in analysis, and number of articles by three major geographic zones.

TABLE 2 Temporal frequency of sources (multiple allocations counted).

Source	2013 (n = 39)	2014 (n = 26)	2015 (n = 33)	2016 (n = 24)	2017 (n = 24)	2018 (n = 22)	Total N
Family of person with intellectual disability	31 (79.49%)	20 (76.92%)	16 (48.48%)	14 (58.33%)	11 (45.83%)	12 (54.54%)	104
Politicians/government officials	12 (30.76%)	8 (30.77%)	9 (27.27%)	10 (41.67%)	7 (29.17%)	6 (27.27%)	52
Care agency	11 (28.21%)	8 (30.77%)	8 (24.24%)	8 (33.33%)	8 (33.33%)	5 (22.72%)	48
Government reports	4 (10.27%)	6 (23.07%)	1 (3.03%)	6 (25.00%)	4 (16.67%)	5 (22.73%)	26
Other report/survey	9 (23.08%)	7 (26.92%)	2 (6.06%)	2 (8.33%)	0 (0.00)	4 (18.18%)	24
Advocates	4 (10.27%)	3 (11.54%)	4 (12.12%)	5 (20.83%)	4 (16.67%)	3 (13.64%)	23
Other agency representative	3 (7.69%)	2 (7.69%)	1 (3.03%)	4 (16.67%)	3 (12.50%)	5 (22.73%)	18
Family of (or) person with other disability	3 (7.69%)	2 (7.69%)	1 (3.03%)	5 (20.83%)	2 (8.33%)	1 (4.54%)	14
Parent-run accommodation/respite group	0 (0.00%)	1 (3.85%)	2 (6.06%)	5 (20.83%)	2 (8.33%)	1 (4.54%)	11
Adult with intellectual disability	3 (7.69%)	1 (3.85%)	0 (0.00%)	2 (8.33%)	3 (12.5%)	1 (4.54%)	10
NDIS/NDIA	3 (7.69%)	0 (0.00%)	1 (3.03%)	1 (4.17%)	2 (8.33%)	2 (9.09%)	9
Medical/hospital	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	3 (9.09%)	2 (8.33%)	0 (0.00%)	3 (13.64%)	8
Other	9 (23.08%)	7 (26.92%)	6 (18.18%)	3 (12.5%)	6 (25.00%)	9 (40.90%)	40

Issue	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Total
Government	19	17	18	6	11	8	79
Housing	11	10	16	12	7	7	63
Mistreatment	7	2	9	4	3	4	29
Responsibility of care	5	5	2	5	1	2	20

TABLE 3 Temporal distribution of main issues present across news stories.

The most frequent sources cited in the news stories were family members of a person with an intellectual disability. These family members were predominantly parents, with only a small number of news stories citing siblings. Other frequent sources were politicians and government officials, government or other reports, representatives from care organisations, and advocates for people with disabilities.

Whilst the inclusion of some sources remained relatively stable over time, in 2013 almost all news stories cited family members as sources, however, in 2015 this decreased to around half of all news stories and remained consistent through to 2018. In 2015, there was a small spike in news stories citing parent/family run respite and accommodation groups which may coincide with the opening of accommodation homes for people with intellectual disability. Persons with intellectual disability however were most often discussed in third person with less than 6% of the news stories including the voice of the person with the intellectual disability ($n = 10$). Persons with intellectual disability were not present as sources at all in 2015. Few news stories used the NDIS or National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) as a source, in fact across 6 years of NDIS rollout the NDIS or NDIA (including spokespeople) were only sources in nine news stories.

4.3 | Issues

Overall, topics addressed in the news stories centred around four major issues:

1. Role and responsibilities of the government ($n = 79$). This included funding concerns, the government's abolition of the group home/institutional care model, government policy (rules/regulations), and community disability models.
2. Housing ($n = 63$), including costs, availability, innovative and independent living options.
3. Mistreatment of persons with disability ($n = 29$); and
4. Responsibility of care for families, including need for respite ($n = 20$).

Temporal distribution of the four major issues is presented below in Table 3. It should be noted that often more than one major issue was present, for example, availability of housing as an issue may have been presented alongside the issue of government funding.

4.3.1 | Role and responsibilities of the government

A majority of all news stories from 2013 to 2015 focused on roles and responsibilities of the government, with a decrease from 2016 onward. These news stories tended to position the government more negatively ($n = 51$, 64.56%) and primarily used parents as sources ($n = 47$, 60%).

Government funding was most frequently labelled inadequate, in 'crisis', or critical with families described as 'fed up with government inaction' (Sorensen, 2015). This was framed as adding to the financial

burden of care. Parents were also positioned as mostly sceptical of change to disability funding, including the NDIS, with one article labelling the NDIS as a way for state governments to 'avoid disability funding' (Fears NSW using NDIS deal, 2013).

Both national and state governments were positioned as having a moral obligation to promote and maintain the well-being of persons with disability via appropriate policy and private sector regulations that would ensure the safety and security of adults with intellectual disability. Representations of the Australian government in these news stories reinforced the government's position as a welfare state, responsible for financial aid, and support services.

4.3.2 | Housing

News stories focusing on housing issues peaked in 2015 with almost 50% of the 2015 news stories focusing on these issues ($n = 16$). In the remaining years, media stories on housing declined. Around half of all articles in local/community metropolitan and regional publications featured housing issues, whereas housing issues only featured in a quarter of metropolitan articles across the 6-year period.

Almost half of the news stories addressing housing issues positioned these issues positively ($n = 28$, 44.44%). A majority of these positive news stories presented new and innovative housing solutions that offered alternatives to more traditional group home options. These housing options were often provided by private care organisations or not-for-profit advocacy groups (predominantly run by parents of adults with intellectual disability). The more negative reports on housing tended to focus on a lack of availability of housing and rising costs of housing and predominantly relied on family members as sources.

4.3.3 | Mistreatment of persons with disability

News stories addressing the issue of mistreatment of persons with disability were more frequent in 2013 and 2015 than any other year investigated. This issue was the focus of more than half of the news stories broadcast on national radio ($n = 8$, 57.14%).

Abuse, neglect, and general mistreatment of persons with disability were explored within the context of government run facilities and services, private care organisations, and from within family homes by family members. Primary sources across these stories were family members, except for news focused on abuse within family homes, which relied on government sources. Only one of the 29 stories sourced the narrative from the person with intellectual disability. Despite the different contexts for mistreatment, government was often positioned as responsible for the safety and security of these people.

4.3.4 | Responsibility of care

Most stories relating to responsibility of care for families of adults with intellectual disability were published between 2014 and 2016

($n = 15$). Difficulties with respite for parents caring for persons with disabilities were often presented in these news stories. Fifty percent of all 'responsibility of care' stories appeared in regional areas. Half of all 'responsibility of care' news stories were presented more negatively in tone ($n = 10$), with 25% presented more positively ($n = 5$). Family members were cited as sources in 75% of stories ($n = 15$). Importantly, this was the only major issue to not feature adults with intellectual disability as a source.

4.4 | Responsibility

Most issues were framed by the media as a social responsibility, one that fell predominantly on the government ($n = 113$, 67.26%). A small number of news stories covering each of the four major issues were framed as personal responsibility, however the largest number of those news stories focused on housing ($n = 8$). Those news stories generally presented families of adults with intellectual disability who had chosen to take steps themselves to raise money, apply for funding, build appropriate housing or locate accommodation for their adult children rather than wait for government intervention. Issues surrounding mistreatment of persons with disability was predominantly framed as a government responsibility in that the government was presented as responsible for the protection of persons with disabilities and establishing and enforcing appropriate laws to do so. Despite responsibility of care revolving around family or parental caregiving, this issue was still largely framed as a social responsibility, in that the challenges of caregiving were associated with the lack of appropriate supports and funding.

4.5 | Absence of frames

There were a number of notable absences across the 168 news stories. The most frequent absence was that of persons with intellectual disability being cited as sources. One-hundred and forty-two news stories addressed an issue that was placed within the context of intellectual disability, a mere 10 news stories cited persons with intellectual disability directly. Siblings of adults with intellectual disability were also frequently absent as sources. In most personal stories, parents were frequent sources, with a focus on parent and the adult child with intellectual disability only.

Despite study search dates encompassing the NDIS rollout period, the NDIS and/or NDIS/NDIA representatives were frequently absent as sources, and as a notable funding source in relevant news stories. This meant that key issues including funding, housing, and responsibility of care were rarely placed within the context of this new disability paradigm and political policy. Though government in general was often placed at the heart of the issue in terms of responsibility, government representatives or viewpoints were also frequently absent from these particular stories. Notably, across all news stories none reported any actions taken to contact sources for comment and refusal of such opportunities.

5 | DISCUSSION

News media are important vehicles for understanding societal beliefs and the perceptions of families as they can act to reinforce dominant narratives and stereotypes or generate alternative perspectives. This study explored the influence of journalistic and media representations of disability related issues, and has, to our knowledge, provided the first exploration of Australian media constructions of issues relevant to intellectual disability, families, and residential care during the NDIS rollout period. Therefore, the present research provides a broad framework for understanding the shaping of public perceptions in Australia within this new disability paradigm. Such findings can be useful in other countries when considering the role of media in shaping societal perceptions of intellectual disability and relevant political policy.

The current study revealed that despite significant policy change, dominant narratives appear embedded in the media and may be difficult to change. The distinct absence of policy and political sources enabled media to position the government through the repetition of 'bureaucracy-bashing' narratives unrelated to policy changes (Rölle, 2017). Whilst such negative bureaucracy framing is a common global phenomenon in the media its influence on public perception continues to be debated (e.g., Caillier, 2020) and requires further exploration.

The absence of the public policy in housing related stories may suggest that Wiesel's (2015) prediction that the NDIS would drive new housing initiatives is either inaccurate or reliant on the persistence of family and advocates to turn funding into bricks and mortar. Furthermore, as housing related news stories focused on both lack of housing and innovative housing solutions, these representations may either act to reinforce parent concerns regarding adequacy of accommodation as previously identified in the literature (Bibby, 2013; Davys et al., 2015), or may present novel solutions to housing issues with funding provided by non-government agencies.

Across the 6 years analysed there were glimpses of new narratives; counter to the dominant narrative of government failings were stories of parents and advocates as protagonists. Research has previously shown that such positive positioning can influence recipients' self-belief (e.g., Isberner et al., 2019). These counter-stories may therefore empower families to drive innovation particularly in relation to housing, however the dual narratives may also act to reinforce fears that government funded solutions are inadequate, thus positioning parents and siblings as the only care options.

Despite these small glimpses of progress, this study also confirmed that adults with intellectual disability continue to be grossly under-represented in the media, typically advocated for by parents. This may reflect media assumptions that people with intellectual disability must be spoken *for* but not spoken *with*. This is somewhat unsurprising considering that even those working in disability service provision have been deemed to lack necessary skills to engage with people with intellectual disability (Lloyd et al., 2020; Perry et al., 2019). Progress in this space may therefore be reliant on disability specific training for journalists and media to enhance their capacity

to increase the inclusion of, and social capital for, people with intellectual disability. This may hold particular significance considering Kárman et al. (2021) found that contact with people with intellectual disability, and equal positioning of persons, was crucial in driving positive attitude change.

It should be acknowledged that choosing parents as advocates does not necessarily reflect the media's rejection of disability rights. As Anderson and Bigby (2016) note, even those within the disability rights movement may not welcome the participation of people with intellectual disability, with stigma and concerns regarding the person's capacity prevailing. In fact, even the NDIS advisory body excluded people with intellectual disability, despite them representing a large portion of Australians using the scheme (Bigby, 2014). This exclusionary process may in part explain the poorer outcomes reported for people with intellectual disability under the scheme (Bigby, 2021). Once again, such findings further emphasize the importance of inclusion of people with intellectual disability in social processes.

Whilst there are clearly challenges in overcoming communication barriers, intellectual disability groups themselves argue that people with intellectual disability who can advocate, should act as voices for those who cannot (Simpson & Chan, 2019). Adults with intellectual disability conceptualise 'advocacy' as inclusive of advocating for others and collaborating with others with intellectual disability (Miller et al., 2022). Advocacy groups predominantly made up of people with intellectual disability can, therefore, offer media a voice of people with intellectual disability representing an alternative perspective to that of parent and carer. These alternative voices are particularly significant considering past research has identified divergence in parent and adult-child perspectives on critical issues including reported difficulties for parents in respecting their adult child's preferences and the implementation of controlling tactics (e.g., Bigby et al., 2022).

Though many issues were framed negatively, this study found that regional and local/community metropolitan publications were more likely to publish a higher percentage of positive news stories with a stronger focus on intellectual disability or persons with intellectual disability compared with metropolitan areas. Previous research has found that people living in regional and remote areas report greater life satisfaction and community connectedness compared to people living in major cities (Wilkins, 2015; Ziesch et al., 2009), therefore a larger number of positive news stories may reflect the positive impact of this connectedness and potential presence of associated informal supports.

It has also been argued that metropolitan and regional newspapers perform different roles, with journalism practised outside of metropolitan centres, coined 'local journalism', viewed as carrying out functions of advocacy and forum provision for local communities (Hanusch, 2015). Hess and Waller (2012) further suggest that regional newspapers are more likely to address 'low threshold' issues, which may be more acceptable in regional areas due to a lack of media competition that can be found in metropolitan markets (Bowd, 2012). Further, Hanusch (2015) found regional journalists were also more likely to support government policy and aim to grow political participation within their communities. This unique role of smaller

newspapers in generating community togetherness may lead journalists to either seek out or favour positive news stories or reposition news reports in a more positive light. If this is indeed the case, then perhaps the adoption of a similar function by metropolitan media would mitigate negative reporting bias.

Whilst the media are more likely to present issues of intellectual disability and caregiving negatively there were instances, particularly around the topic of housing, where print or radio broadcast media adopted a more balanced or positive position. The multiple constructions evident in these news stories may provide more realistic portrayals of residential accommodation options, including examples of successful transitioning from family to out-of-home supports.

6 | LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Study results must be considered within a number of limitations. Firstly, though the keyword search was broad, some stories may have been excluded if stories used specific terminology (e.g., a specific diagnosis such as Fragile X) or non-specific language (e.g., simply referring to someone as having a disability). Secondly, news representations of issues around intellectual disability may vary across media modalities. For example, television formatting may allow for a greater depth of reporting of issues via more flexible programming options. An exploration of television media may be informative in future research. Thirdly, there is increased recognition of the importance of intersectionality in disability research, future analysis should ensure coding schemes recognise the breadth of diversity of disability populations. Finally, this study analysed Australian media representations during a period of critical policy change, as such findings may not be generalisable to other countries or to times when policy is stable for a number of years.

This study revealed both an absence of policy in media reports, and in general, an absence of change for people with intellectual disability, however lived experiences may be different. Future research focusing on family experiences and people with intellectual disability specifically could offer a corrective narrative. Based on the findings from this study it would be beneficial for future research to consider effects of geographic diversity across metropolitan, suburban, and regional areas on family experiences and media representations, with those in non-metro areas potentially more positive.

7 | CONCLUSION

Negative media narratives of issues surrounding persons with intellectual disability, likely reinforces family perceptions of the burden of care and a sense of futility. The persistence of the failed government narrative and the general exclusion of NDIS and other government sources during a time of novel policy development and rapid change in the care system demonstrated a general triumph of that negative perspective over

attempts to influence the changes in motion during the rollout. Positive stories of innovative housing were present, if limited, and may have influenced more positive attitudes and actions toward planning. The relatively more positive stance of suburban and regional media found in this study may serve to guide government, advocates, and families toward those media in the future when they want to advance programming or change perceptions of persons with intellectual disability.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study.

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APPENDIX A

TABLE A1 Australia/New Zealand reference centre search summary.

Data type	Search summary
Text	(disability OR impairment OR disabled OR impaired OR autism) AND (intellectual OR intellectually OR 'down syndrome' OR 'down's syndrome' OR 'fragile X') AND (accommodation OR resid* OR housing) AND care AND (parent* OR sibling* OR family)
Dates Searched	01/01/2013–31/12/2018
Source	Newspapers (Domestic): The Age, Newcastle Herald, ABC Premium News, AAP Australian National news wire, Herald Sun, Canberra Times, ABC Regional News, Illawarra Mercury, Sunday Star-Times, Frankston Weekly, Peninsula Weekly, Sunday Age, Western Advocate, The Australian, Border Mail, Brimbank Weekly, Maribyrnong Weekly, Port Macquarie News, The Sunday Times, Sun-Herald, Sydney Morning Herald, The Advertiser, The Courier Mail, Bendigo Advertiser, Greater Dandenong Weekly, Gold Coast Bulletin, Townsville Bulletin, The Weekly Times.

TABLE A2 Factiva search summary.

Data type	Search summary
Text	(disability OR impairment OR disabled OR impaired OR autism) AND (intellectual OR intellectually OR 'down syndrome' OR 'down's syndrome' OR 'fragile X') AND (accommodation OR resid* OR housing) AND care AND (parent* OR sibling* OR family) AND re = Australia
Dates Searched	01/01/2013–31/12/2018
Source	'Major news and business sources' OR 'news digest sources' OR 'Newspapers: All' OR 'Transcripts: All'
Region	Australia

TABLE A3 Media ownership and distribution of stories.

Ownership	Metro	Local metro	Regional	National/wires	Total
News limited	12	22	10	10	54
Fairfax	28	5	46	-	79
Australian broadcasting corporation (ABC)	-	-	-	14	14
Australian provincial newspapers (APN)	-	-	10	-	10
Seven west media	3	-	-	-	3
Australian associated press (AAP)	-	-	-	2	2
McPherson media group	-	-	3	-	3
Independent	-	3	-	-	3
Total	43	30	69	26	168

TABLE A4 Full list of media sources included in final CA.

Media source	Media ownership	Location	Total articles
AAP-News Wires	AAP	News wires	2
ABC Transcript	ABC	Broadcast	14
Ballarat Courier	Fairfax	Regional	1
Bendigo Advertiser	Fairfax	Regional	15
Border Mail	Fairfax	Regional	1
Brimbank Weekly	Fairfax	Local metro	1
Cairns Post	News Limited	Regional	1
Comment News	News Limited	Local metro	1
District Northern News	News Limited	Regional	1

TABLE A4 (Continued)

Media source	Media ownership	Location	Total articles
Geelong Advertiser	News Limited	Regional	4
Gold Coast Sun	News Limited	Regional	1
Goondiwindi Argus	Fairfax	Regional	1
Herald Sun	News Limited	Metropolitan	2
Hobsons Bay leader	News Limited	Regional	1
Illawarra Mercury	Fairfax	Regional	7
Leader Messenger	News Limited	Local metro	1
Macarthur Chronicle	News Limited	Local metro	1
Maribyrnong Weekly	independent	Local metro	1
Maroondah Leader	News Limited	Local metro	1
Melton and Moorabool Star Weekly	Fairfax	Local metro	1
Merimbula News	Fairfax	Regional	1
Moonee Valley leader	News Limited	Local metro	2
Mornington Peninsula Leader	News Limited	Local metro	3
Newcastle Herald	Fairfax	Regional	15
Newsmail	APN Newspapers	Regional	1
Northern District Times	News Limited	Local metro	1
Parramatta Advertiser	News Limited	Local metro	1
Peninsula Weekly, Mornington	Independent	Local metro	2
Penrith Press	News Limited	Local metro	2
Port Curtis Post	APN Newspapers	Regional	4
Riverine Herald	McPherson Media Group	Regional	2
Shepparton News	McPherson Media Group	Regional	1
Southern Highlands news	Fairfax	Regional	1
St George Leader	Fairfax	Regional	1
St Mary's Star	Fairfax	Local metro	1
Stirling Times	News Limited	Local metro	1
Sunbury Leader	News Limited	Local metro	1
The Advertiser	News Limited	Metropolitan	2
The Age	Fairfax	Metropolitan	13
The Australian	News Limited	Metropolitan	10
The Canberra Times	Fairfax	Metropolitan	6
The Courier Mail	News Limited	Metropolitan	4
The Daily Telegraph	News Limited	Metropolitan	1
The Inner West Courier	News Limited	Local metro	1
The Maitland Mercury	Fairfax	Regional	1
The Mercury	News Limited	Metropolitan	2
The Morning Bulletin	APN Newspapers	Regional	1
The Northern Star	APN Newspapers	Regional	1
The Parramatta Sun	Fairfax	Local metro	1
The Queensland Times	APN Newspapers	Regional	2
The Sunday Times	News Limited	Metropolitan	1
The Sun-Herald	Fairfax	Metropolitan	1
The Sydney Morning Herald	Fairfax	Metropolitan	8
The Warrnambool Standard	Fairfax	Regional	2
The Warwick Daily news	APN Newspapers	Regional	1

(Continues)

TABLE A4 (Continued)

Media source	Media ownership	Location	Total articles
The West Australian	Seven West Media	Metropolitan	3
Townsville Bulletin	News Limited	Regional	1
Townsville Sun	News Limited	Regional	1
WA Today	Fairfax	Local metro	1
Waverley Leader	News Limited	Local metro	2
Western Suburbs Weekly	News Limited	Local metro	1
Whittlesea Leader	News Limited	Local metro	3