

# National Drug Research Institute Strategic Plan



National Drug  
Research Institute,  
Curtin University

2023-2027



## **Preventing harmful drug use in Australia**

**The National Drug Research Institute at Curtin University is supported by funding from the Australian Government under the Drug and Alcohol Program**

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CRICOS Provider Code 00301J

# NATIONAL DRUG RESEARCH INSTITUTE STRATEGIC PLAN

2023 - 2027

## Summary

The National Drug Research Institute (NDRI) Strategic Plan 2023-2027 outlines the Institute's strategic objectives, key performance indicators and framework to achieve desired outcomes.

It has been endorsed by the Institute's Advisory Board and core funder, the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care (AGDHAC).

The NDRI Strategic Plan aligns with the National Drug Strategy 2017-2026 and the Australian Government Drug and Alcohol Program. The work of the NDRI is articulated by the NDRI Work Program, which is updated annually and adopted after Advisory Board endorsement and AGDHAC approval. The NDRI's purpose is to:

- Conduct and disseminate research that supports evidence-informed policy and practice to prevent and minimise alcohol and other drug (AOD)-related health, social, cultural and economic harms.

In pursuit of this NDRI aims to:

- Strengthen the evidence base to support policy and practice to prevent and minimise AOD-related health, social, cultural and economic harms.
- Engage with stakeholders to codesign, conduct and translate research to support effective AOD policy and practice; and
- Enhance national capacity for AOD research and build sector research literacy.

## About this document

The NDRI Strategic Plan has been developed in the context of Australia's current National Drug Strategy, and related national strategies and plans, such as the National Preventive Health Strategy, the National Alcohol Strategy and the National Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) Strategic Action Plan. This plan has also been developed in the context of, and consistent with, the research and development priorities of Curtin University and the Curtin 2030 Strategic Plan.

This 2023-2027 edition of the Strategic Plan is a revision and updating of the previous NDRI Strategic Plan rather than a wholesale reworking and restructuring, as the overall focus of the Plan remained fit for purpose. Noteworthy in this revision are reshaping of the Statement of Purpose and Key Result Areas and a streamlining of KPIs against these.

## STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Conduct and disseminate research that supports evidence -informed policy and practice to prevent and minimise alcohol and other drug-related health, social, cultural and economic harms.

### KEY RESULT AREA 1

Strengthen the evidence base to support policy and practice to prevent and minimise alcohol and other drug-related health, social, cultural and economic harms.

Research activity for Key Result Area 1 is strategically grouped across 6 priority research areas:

- Alcohol and other drug policy and strategies
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health
- Innovation in prevention and early intervention
- Social contexts of alcohol and other drug use
- Reducing harm among people who use alcohol and other drugs
- Innovation in the management of alcohol and other drug problems.

### KEY RESULT AREA 2

Engage with stakeholders to codesign, conduct and translate research to support effective alcohol and other drug policy and practice.

NDRI is an academic institute with a defining tenet to provide research activity focused on relevance, application and impact, that contributes practical and real-world solutions to alcohol and other drug-related issues in Australia and internationally. Central to this is the engagement of community stakeholders (e.g. Aboriginal organisations, policy makers and consumers) in the design and conduct of research and in translation and application of research findings in local, national and international policies and strategies.

### KEY RESULT AREA 3

Enhance national capacity for alcohol and other drug research and build sector research capacity and literacy.

As a leading provider of innovative, high quality research on alcohol and other drug use, its consequences and policy and practice responses, NDRI develops new researchers and enhances sector capacity to use, contribute to and conduct research, and to enhance the evidence-informed understanding of alcohol and other drug issues and effective responses in the wider community.

## NDRI VALUES

- Impactful, real-world solution focus
- Social equity & justice
- Commitment to Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Australians
- Working with communities in research codesign, conduct & translation
- Rigour & evidence in policy & practice development & implementation
- Encouraging peer & stakeholder review
- Academic independence, excellence, productivity & ethical conduct
- Excellence in workplace culture & support for Early Career Researchers
- Respectful & collegiate team environment that values all members

## Alignment with United Nations' SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The National Drug Research Institute's research is consistent with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. Specifically, NDRI's research aligns with Goal 3: '*Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages*', and, in particular, Target 3.5: '*Strengthen the prevention and treatment of substance abuse, including narcotic drug abuse and harmful use of alcohol.*' Individual research projects may also align with other UN Sustainable Development Goals and Targets, depending on their focus.

## Fit within the University's Curtin 2030 Strategic Plan

NDRI's activity is embedded in, and reflects, the Curtin 2030 Strategic Plan.

### Curtin 2030 Vision

Working in partnership we will make a difference for people and our planet.

### Values

|                   |   |
|-------------------|---|
| <b>INTEGRITY</b>  | To act ethically, honestly and with fairness. |
| <b>RESPECT</b>    | To listen, value and acknowledge.             |
| <b>COURAGE</b>    | To lead, take responsibility and question.    |
| <b>EXCELLENCE</b> | To strive for excellence and distinction.     |
| <b>IMPACT</b>     | To empower, enable and inspire.               |

### Strategic objectives:

#### PEOPLE

- **Student Experience:** Deliver a sector leading student experience that builds aspirations, fosters critical thinking, nurtures ethical leadership, and creates life-changing memories.
- **Staff Engagement:** Cultivate a culture and working environment that provides an inspiring, rewarding, and meaningful experience for staff so that they can deliver world-class teaching and a sector leading student experience.
- **Community Belonging:** Develop our people to champion diversity, inclusion, and belonging to make a difference to our communities.

#### PLANET

- **Sustainable Future:** Strengthen our teaching, research, and outreach activities that support the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals to develop a sustainable future for all.
- **Sustainable Operations:** Prioritise our own operational activities to significantly reduce our carbon footprint, food waste, water usage, and help others do the same.
- **Global Impact:** Strengthen our position around the Indian Ocean Rim by developing further opportunities for learning, research and community engagement at our global campuses.

#### PARTNERSHIP

- **First Nations Voices and Perspective:** Embed voices and perspectives of First Nations peoples at the forefront of our decision making to create an environment in which everyone thrives.
- **Strong Relationships:** Create strong, meaningful relationships with external stakeholders, driven by our culture of innovation, thought leadership, and action to make a difference.
- **Community Outcomes:** Create new partnerships that deliver real engagement and outcomes for our local and global communities and enhance opportunities for students.

## OVERVIEW

The National Drug Research Institute (NDRI) was established in 1986 as the National Centre for Research into the Prevention of Drug Abuse, as part of the National Campaign Against Drug Abuse.

Core funds are provided by the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care under the Drug and Alcohol Program. Additional resources are obtained from competitive research funds and contract work, and NDRI also receives significant funding from Curtin University, where the Institute has been housed since inception.

NDRI achieved Curtin University research institute status in 1999 and is designated as a World Health Organization (WHO) Collaborating Centre for the Prevention of Substance Use and Substance Use Disorders.

NDRI's Statement of Purpose and Key Result Areas have been determined through contractual arrangements with the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care. Research priority areas and related objectives have been developed in consultation with stakeholders, the NDRI Advisory Board and NDRI staff.

NDRI focuses on research and outputs that have policy and practice relevance and impact. As such, a key aspect of NDRI's work is to establish and maintain collaborative relationships and activity with Australian local, state, and federal governments; health, social and law enforcement services; communities and consumers; and, a range of other academic and service organisations. Broad and enduring impacts and capacity building of the field, communities, and individual researchers are central to NDRI's work.

The changing nature and context of alcohol and other drug use and related harms means that NDRI must be responsive to emerging issues and embrace a range of research and dissemination approaches. The experience of alcohol and other drug-related harm is not evenly distributed throughout the population, and it is important for NDRI to provide some focus on at-risk, disadvantaged and hard-to-reach populations.

NDRI research has, among other impacts, significantly informed and contributed to policy and evidence-based practice. Nationally it has contributed to strategies such as the National Amphetamine-Type Stimulants (ATS) Strategy, the National Drug Strategy, the National Alcohol Strategy and policy documents for Aboriginal Australians.

On an international level NDRI has also made significant contributions, including to the WHO Global and Regional Strategy to Reduce Harmful Use of Alcohol and the WHO Community Management of Overdose Guidelines and the WHO Guidelines for the Identification and Management of Substance Use and Substance Use Disorders in Pregnancy.

NDRI research has directly contributed to Australian and State government alcohol and illicit drug policy; informed liquor licensing decisions and government debate regarding cannabis policy and overdose response and the wider availability of naloxone; contributed to the evaluation of safe injecting facilities; documented the economic and social costs of drug use in Australia; increased the capacity of Aboriginal controlled and mainstream health care services to respond to AOD harm; significantly contributed to national and international policy on evidence-based school interventions; informed prevention approaches to FASD; and, influenced NHMRC guidelines to reduce alcohol health risks.

## ALIGNMENT TO NATIONAL DRUG STRATEGY

Since the Institute was founded, NDRI's Strategic Plans, as well as the work programs and key objectives that underpin them, have consistently aligned to the National Drug Strategy of the day.

NDRI's objectives, research activities and outputs are guided by the three pillars approach of the National Drug Strategy – demand, supply and harm reduction – and are consistent with the aim of the NDS:

*To build safe, healthy and resilient Australian communities through preventing and minimising alcohol, tobacco and other drug-related health, social, cultural and economic harms among individuals, families and communities.*

In particular, NDRI's strategic approach and research activities are closely connected to Australia's longstanding commitment to harm minimisation and are aligned with National Drug Strategy principles of: evidence-informed responses; partnerships; coordination and collaboration; and national direction, jurisdictional implementation.

Importantly, NDRI's Research Priority Areas and the Key Result Areas and Values that govern its activities strongly reflect NDS priority areas.

While recognising the importance and return on investment of whole-of-population strategies, NDRI also acknowledges that much of the harm from alcohol and other drug use takes place in specific, often 'hard-to-reach' populations. Thus NDRI conducts research with many of the groups listed as National Drug Strategy priority populations, for example, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people with coexisting mental health conditions, those in contact with the criminal justice system, and younger and older Australians.

NDRI research addresses National Drug Strategy priority drug types, ranging from alcohol, cannabis, methamphetamine and other stimulants, opioids including heroin, non-medical use of pharmaceuticals to new psychoactive substances.

Consistent with the National Drug Strategy, NDRI's strategic direction and research programs are also informed by, and respond to, emerging trends in AOD consumption and harm. NDRI continues to conduct a range of alcohol and illicit drug monitoring projects that act as early warning signs of changes in trends and has a strong focus on leveraging advances in communication technology to complete research and deliver interventions.

The importance of the cooperation of health and law enforcement sectors and engagement with key stakeholders as articulated by the National Drug Strategy is reflected in the composition of the NDRI Advisory Board, strong stakeholder engagement in all NDRI activity, and direct collaboration with law enforcement and health stakeholders in many NDRI research projects.

The National Drug Strategy focus on partnerships, coordination and collaboration is further reflected in NDRI's strategic outlook and daily activities. Examples include being an active participant in the Strategic Reference Group which comprises the CDHAC Research and International Policy Section along with the directors of the Alcohol and Drug Research Centres, and also at project-level where NDRI collaborates with at least 50 organisations.

### NATIONAL DRUG STRATEGY (NDS)

#### PILLARS

- Demand Reduction
- Supply Reduction
- Harm Reduction

### NDRI PRIORITY AREAS

- Alcohol and other drug policy and strategies
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health
- Innovation in prevention and early intervention
- Social contexts of alcohol and other drug use
- Reducing harm among people who use alcohol and other drugs
- Innovation in the management of alcohol and other drug problems

### NDS 2017-2026 OBJECTIVES

#### *Demand Reduction*

- Prevent uptake and delay first use
- Reduce harmful use
- Support people to recover

#### *Supply Reduction*

- Reduce illicit drug availability and accessibility
- Control licit drug and precursor availability

#### *Harm Reduction*

- Safer settings
- Reduce risk behaviours



## ACTIVITY

**Key Result Area 1: Strengthen the evidence base to support policy and practice to prevent and minimise alcohol and other drug-related health, social, cultural and economic harms.**

Research activity for Key Result Area 1 is strategically grouped across these following priority research areas.

### **Alcohol and other drug policy and strategies**

This research priority area takes a broad approach to alcohol and other drugs (AOD) that spans issues of social, health, regulatory and enforcement policy relevance in Australia and overseas. This includes assessing impacts of policy change at national and international levels. Focus is on: conducting targeted data collection and trend analysis and monitoring; and evaluating impacts of various macro models of regulatory and legislative controls and policies on AOD use and its consequences. It aims to inform activities across the sector, in particular development of Government policies and strategies. Consequently, along with a major focus on evaluating policy options in Australia, it also investigates new and established models of control in other countries to build the evidence base; provides strategic advice to Commonwealth, State and Local Governments; and contributes to academic and public discourse on AOD policy here and internationally.

### **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health**

This research priority area contributes to prevention and reduction of the burden of harm caused by AOD among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. Research focuses on the inter-related topics of: changing patterns of AOD use; factors related to harmful use; more efficient and effective provision of services; and improved policy responses. Research is based on well-established partnerships with Aboriginal community-controlled health organisations and other stakeholders and informs and is informed by research conducted in other NDRI research program areas. Aboriginal community stakeholders and organisations are actively involved in all aspects of research from planning through to translation into policy and strategies.

### **Innovation in prevention and early intervention**

This research priority area explores factors that reduce early and problematic use of alcohol and other drugs and their adverse consequences, particularly during childhood and adolescence. It includes a focus on early intervention programs for high-risk children, families and communities. It incorporates research and evaluations of the social determinants of AOD use and work on the impact of AOD use during pregnancy. The research builds on international work exploring social and economic benefits of prevention and early intervention, particularly among marginalised populations, in terms of more equitable health outcomes, reduced hazardous and harmful drug use, safer children and more cohesive communities.

### **Social contexts of alcohol and other drug use**

This research priority area concentrates on the impacts of various social contexts on AOD use, and associated consequences. It includes qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method studies of drug use in diverse contexts. This research provides important insights on the relevance of social contexts to policy and practice locally, nationally and internationally, to increase the effectiveness of AOD policy, prevention and harm reduction efforts and reduce barriers to treatment.

### **Reducing harm among people who use alcohol and other drugs**

This research priority area informs policy, strategies and practice interventions that aim to reduce harm to individuals, families, organisations and communities for people who continue to use alcohol and other drugs. The scope of research is necessarily broad and involves NDRI researchers from several discipline areas and research teams. Research work includes interventions from the micro level, such as preventing harm for individual people who use drugs and their peers, to the macro level, such as contributing to development of more effective drug treaties and international conventions.

### **Innovation in the management of alcohol and other drug problems**

This research priority area aims to improve the clinical and other management of AOD problems by: developing and trialling new and innovative interventions; trialling applications and modifications of existing approaches to different AOD problems (e.g. brief interventions); and investigating the application of new technologies to AOD-related problems, such as trialling and evaluating the application of electronic-based brief interventions to at-risk alcohol and other drug consumers.

### *Deliverables*

- Conduct research projects across the above priority areas which respond to stakeholder interests and have relevance to policy and practice.
- Attract peer reviewed and commissioned funding to support the research activity.
- Produce academic outputs including peer reviewed articles and other publications.

## **Key Result Area 2: Engage with stakeholders to codesign, conduct and translate research to support effective alcohol and other drug policy and practice.**

### **Engaging with stakeholders**

NDRI is an academic institute with a defining tenet to provide research activity focused on relevance, application and impact, that contributes practical and real-world solutions to alcohol and other drug issues in Australian communities. Central to this is the engagement of community stakeholders (e.g. Aboriginal organisations, policy makers and drug consumers) in the design and conduct of research and in the translation and application of research findings in local and national policies and strategies.

### *Deliverables*

- Research projects and other activity conducted in collaboration with community group members and stakeholders, including with stakeholders as co-investigators or partners /or co-authors.
- Research results/dissemination launches conducted with community members and stakeholders as partners.
- Briefings and/or submissions to international agencies and Australian, state, and/or local government bodies, policy fora.

## **Key Result Area 3: Enhance national capacity for alcohol and other drug research and build sector research literacy.**

### **Enhancing national research capacity and literacy**

As a leading provider of innovative, high-quality research on alcohol and other drug use and its consequences, NDRI develops new researchers and enhances capacity of the sector to use, contribute to and conduct research, and to enhance the evidence-based understanding of alcohol and other drug issues and effective responses in the wider community.

### *Deliverables*

- Plain language research summaries/infographics released on NDRI website and other media.
- Significant academic commitments to the field in journal editorship and peer review (including scientific articles and grant applications).
- Contributions to teaching at Curtin and other Universities in Australia.
- Undertake Supervision of Higher Degree by Research students.
- Conduct NDRI seminars.

## PERFORMANCE INDICATORS – ANNUAL AVERAGES

### *Strengthening the evidence base*

- 50 ongoing research projects and 15 completed projects each year. Including examples of projects which:
  - Respond to stakeholder interests and current policy and practice.
  - Are conducted in collaboration with community stakeholders.
  - Are conducted with international, national and/or state organisations.
- WHO collaborating status will be retained and NDRI will be involved in an average of one WHO project/activity each year.
- \$1,500,000 from peer reviewed and commissioned funding sources including:
  - 4 new competitive (e.g. Cat 1: NHMRC, ARC, etc.) and (Cat 2: other govt.) grants.
  - 4 new projects funded from industry, philanthropy, and other (i.e. Cat 3) funding sources.
- 100 peer reviewed journal articles (including original research papers, systematic and other reviews) published or in press. Including:
  - 50 published in high-impact specialist alcohol and other drug and generalist journals.
  - 20 other academic publications (e.g. books, book chapters and reports).

### *Engaging with stakeholders to codesign, conduct and translate*

- 10 research projects and other activities conducted in collaboration with community group members and stakeholders, including:
  - Research conducted with stakeholders as co-investigators or partners.
  - Publication of research reports and papers with co-authors from community groups and government agencies.
  - Research results/dissemination launches conducted with community members and stakeholders as partners.
- 6 policy briefings and/or submissions (written and/or verbal) to international agencies and Australian, state, and/or local government bodies, policy fora or select committees.

### *Enhancing national research capacity and literacy*

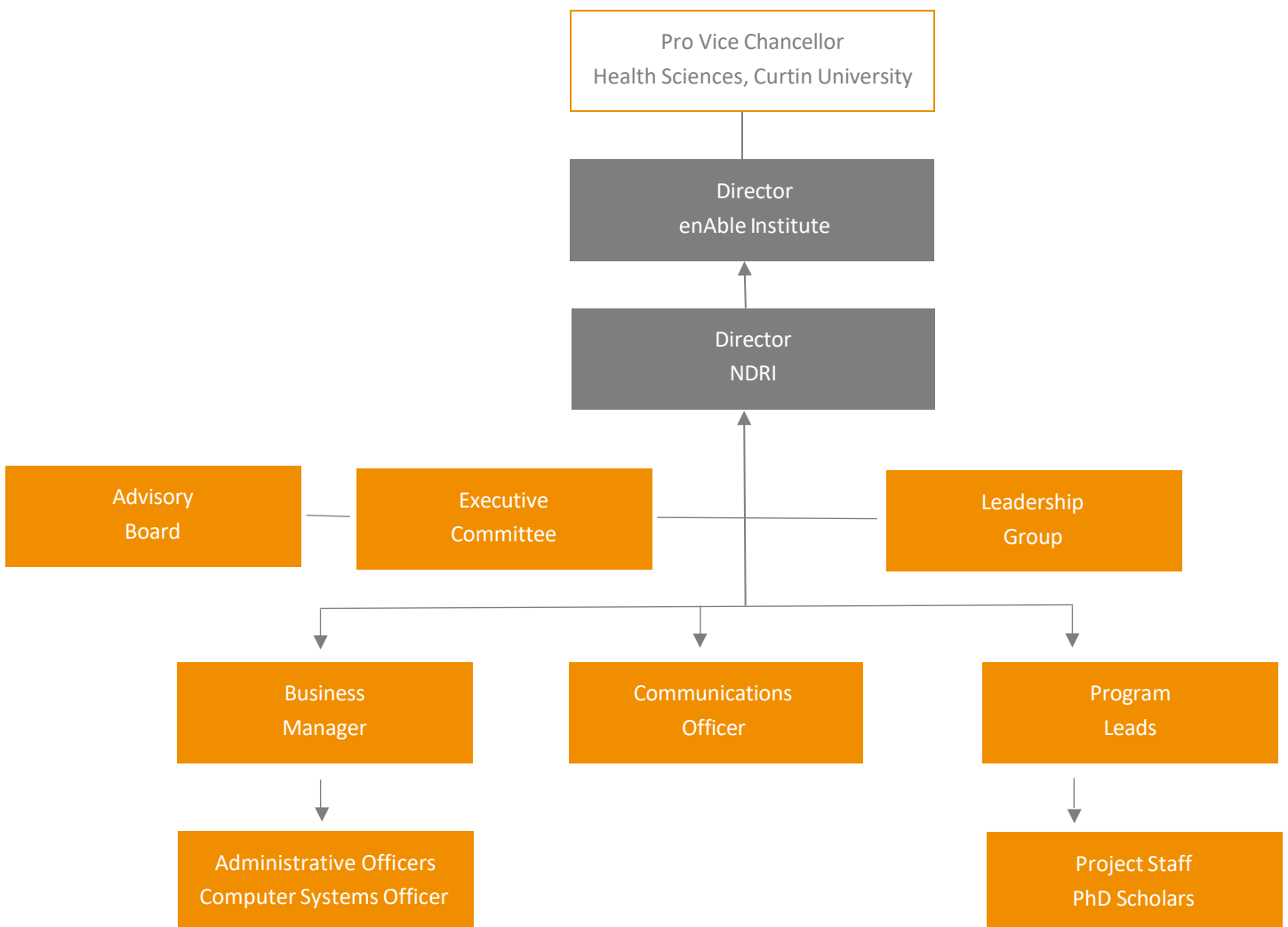
- 10 plain language research summaries/infographics released on NDRI website and other media.
- 20 significant academic commitments to the field including:
  - Senior or Assistant Editorial roles with journals.
  - Cat. 1 (NHMRC, ARC or similar) grant assessors/panel members.
  - Contributing to teaching at Curtin and other Universities in Australia.
- 10 postgraduate scholars under NDRI staff supervision.
- 4 collaborative research supervisions of students enrolled outside NDRI.
- 5 NDRI seminars.
- 25 conference presentations including 5 invited and 10 at international conferences.
- 1,000,000 page views and 3,000,000 hits on the NDRI website.
- 20 memberships or contributions to community and government working parties and committees.
- 2000 citations of NDRI published work.
- 10 citations in policy documents and case examples of applications to policy and practice.
- 500 stories involving or quoting NDRI's staff or research in print or electronic media.
- Testimonials by key stakeholders as to the relevance of NDRI research to addressing AOD issues in the real world.
- 6 Strategic Reference Group (SRG) meetings attended per year.
- 10 presentations by NDRI researchers for the AGDHAC.
- 3 *ad hoc* requests from the Department of Health on policy and practice will be undertaken by NDRI researchers each year.

## GOVERNANCE

### NDRI Advisory Board

- Chair – External to the University
- Nominee of the Commissioner for WA Police Force
- Other State/National Representatives x 1
- Representative with expertise on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues
- Non-government Sector Representative
- Other Western Australian Representatives x 2
- Consumer Representative Peer Organisations
- Consumer Representative AOD Treatment
- Deputy Vice Chancellor, Research Office at Curtin, Curtin University, or nominee
- Pro Vice Chancellor, Faculty Health Sciences, Curtin University

### NDRI Organisational Chart







**NDRI**

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national drug research institute