



**You lead,
we support**

**Melba recognises
Truth telling,
Treaty and
Reconciliation with
the overarching
agenda of all
people having
a voice which is
embedded into
Melba's practices
and values.**

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we work and live. We recognise their continuing connection to Country and community.

We pay respect to the Elders of the past, present and future.

Artwork by Gerard Black



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A message from the CEO and President

The past year has been one of profound change, not just for Melba but for the world. In an era where change has become the new norm, organisations like ours must adapt to thrive. At Melba, we have embraced the challenges of change, turning them into opportunities to grow, innovate and strengthen our foundations for the future.

Change is hard, but it is necessary. More importantly, it is constant. In this rapidly evolving environment, we can either keep up or risk being left behind. At Melba, we choose to lean into change with resilience and agility, embedding adaptability into every layer of our organisation. We are proud to report that this shift is unveiling a more mature, dynamic Melba – an organisation ready to meet the future head-on while staying true to The Melba Way.

Our progress is reflected in the lives of people we support and the exceptional work of our employees. Their dedication to providing supports that empower people to live the life they choose remains at the heart of everything we do. This commitment was recognised on the national stage when Melba proudly received the 2023 Excellence in Service Quality award at the National Disability Awards. This honour affirms the quality of our services and the human-rights-based approach that underpins our work.

We also continue to lead in providing Positive Behaviour Support, delivering high-quality, evidence-based, trauma-informed and person-centred approaches. This proactive practice ensures that the environment and daily supports for people are tailored to their needs, enabling them to thrive.

Our achievements over the past year are numerous. From expanding our Supported Independent Living (SIL) services and



Hayley Dean, CEO and Andrew Cairns, President

Disability Accommodation (SDA) partnerships to empowering individuals through the Meaningful Homes initiative, we have remained focused on our strategic pillars. We also took significant steps to streamline operations, including transitioning to a company limited by guarantee and investing in IT projects to enhance service delivery and employee experience.

As we look ahead, our priorities are clear:

- Reducing operating costs through smarter processes and systems.
- Withdrawing from areas that no longer align with our strategic goals.
- Enhancing the Melba experience through innovative service models.
- Remaining steadfast in our commitment to The Melba Way – supporting individuals, respecting individuality, and fostering creativity, passion and fun.

We are incredibly proud of what we have achieved together. To the people we support, our employees and supporters: thank you for being part of this journey. Your contributions and belief in our shared purpose are the driving force behind Melba's success.

Together, we are creating a future where every person we support can live their best life, the way they choose.

The Melba Way

Melba continues to lead the way in shaping a society where the individuality and rights of all people are fully recognised and celebrated. With a strong purpose to open up a world of opportunities, we are dedicated to supporting people to live life proudly, joyously, creatively and adventurously – however they choose. Every person is an individual who has their own goals, dreams and potential, and we provide personalised care and unwavering support for people to reach their own chosen potential.

Our values of human rights, passion, creativity, flexibility and fun guide everything we do, ensuring our support reflects the dignity and diversity of each person. Human rights are at the core, driving a commitment to equity and respect.

Everyone at Melba is guided by The Melba Way – it's how we do things, it combines our values, practice framework and The Melba Way Charter and is the key to opening up a world of opportunities for people to live the life they want.

The heart of The Melba Way is seeing every person as an individual with their own skills, abilities and characteristics. We find out as much as we can about each person and we record, respect and lean into that individuality. It's this individuality that guides how we create, maintain and refine a person's individualised service plan – minute by minute, hour by hour and day by day. This highly personalised approach allows us to support each person by offering tailored support that grows and changes with them.

Our Values



Human Rights



Passion



Creativity



Flexibility



Fun





And the winner is...

Melba proudly took home the 2023 Excellence in Service Quality award at the prestigious National Disability Awards in December 2023, solidifying our position as a leading organisation in the disability sector.

Held annually, the awards shine a light on the remarkable individuals and organisations that are working to foster a more inclusive and equitable Australia – one where people with disability are respected, valued and empowered to contribute fully to their communities.

The Excellence in Service Quality award is one of the event's highest honours, recognising the dedication and commitment of organisations that go above and beyond in providing exceptional services that uphold the human rights and dignity of people with disability.

For Melba, this accolade is a recognition of our steadfast commitment to ensuring that people with disability not only receive the best possible support, but also have their voices heard, their rights upheld and their needs met in a dignified and respectful manner.

The win highlighted our innovative and comprehensive approach to ensuring people experience the highest standards of support. Central to this is Melba's human rights-based framework, which serves as the foundation of everything we do.

A key element of our commitment to human rights is the Advocacy, Rights, Representation, Outcomes and Worth (ARROW) initiative. This unique program empowers people with disability to take an active role in shaping the services they receive, ensuring their voices are heard at every level of the organisation. Through ARROW, Melba provides a platform for people to influence not only their own individual support plans, but also the broader policies and practices of Melba.

"Our ARROW groups are born from a commitment to advocacy," Melba's CEO Hayley Dean explained. "They give people the opportunity to direct how their services are delivered and ensure their human rights are respected at every step of the process. It's about empowering people to lead their support, being active participants in their own lives, not just recipients of services."

Melba's Complex Health model is another standout aspect of our service delivery. This "wraparound" approach places the person at the centre of a holistic support system that includes their family, healthcare providers and Melba employees.

The model is designed to promote and safeguard the health and wellbeing of each person in a way that is fully aligned with their rights, preferences and needs. By fostering strong partnerships among everyone involved in a person's care, Melba ensures each person's health and wellbeing are protected and promoted in a respectful, person-led manner.

We are constantly looking for ways to enhance the services we provide. We believe that every person has the right to live a life of dignity and opportunity, and it's our responsibility to make sure that happens. This award is a testament to the hard work and dedication of everyone at Melba, who are truly committed to making a difference in the lives of people we support.

Melba took to the stage as a group to accept the award, with members of ARROW and the Complex Health team celebrating the win together. Hayley Dean took the opportunity to acknowledge the incredible work of the Melba team.

"It's wonderful that Melba is recognised tonight for service quality," Hayley Dean said. "We invest in ensuring that our dedicated and hardworking employees are supported to deliver our person-directed, human rights approach and are trained and coached in providing best practice support. This is because we are absolutely committed to removing barriers for people we support."



Our integrity

Integrity is important to us. We are committed to doing whatever we can to improve the lives of people with disability. We want people to know that they can trust us, that we will do what we say we will and that they or their loved one are in safe hands. We demonstrate this with our commitment to human rights, by being an NDIS registered provider, having a Child Safety Action Plan and having well-managed risk and compliance processes in place.

We have been a registered NDIS provider since 2017, when NDIS first announced it would provide funding for Supported Independent Living. We welcome the rigorous screening and independent oversight that comes with our registration. This registration certifies our credentials and declares us to be a credible, trustworthy and accountable organisation.

Melba is one of only about 16,000 registered providers, while the number of unregistered providers is about 160,000.

Unregistered providers encounter very little scrutiny and are not required to go through the same process as organisations such as Melba. They don't take part in independent audits or conduct employee criminal history checks; they also don't have to prove that the people they employ have the appropriate skills and competencies for the support they are providing.

This poses significant risks and compromises the wellbeing and safety of the people the NDIS is set up to support, particularly people with complex needs where there is no other independent oversight or advocacy available.

Provider registration update

In September 2024, NDIS Minister Bill Shorten announced a mandate requiring all NDIS providers to be registered.

Melba wholeheartedly supports this decision. We are pleased that people with disability and their loved ones will no longer have to navigate a system where not all providers are held to the same standards.

Not only will this change mean greater protection for people receiving support, it will also elevate the overall standard of support across the NDIS, with all providers needing to meet essential quality and safety requirements.

“A bartender needs more certification than an unregistered NDIS service provider! You need an RSA (responsible service of alcohol) to serve a beer, but you can support someone to have a shower or go to the toilet with no safety screening or training. It’s ludicrous!”

– Hayley Dean, CEO

Complex Health

Janet McLeod, Melba's Outcomes Specialist – Complex Health, was the keynote presenter at the inaugural Disability and Palliative Care Conference in May 2024. Janet presented on the challenges of accessing a dignified death for people with disability. We continue our advocacy and education around choices in this area and recognise the importance of a death that is aligned to a person's needs and preferences.

“I have hope for the future and a tomorrow where, no matter what supports you require in life, you can access a dignified death,” Janet McLeod said.



What is ARROW?

Advocacy Rights Representation Outcomes Worth



Our self-advocates group ARROW gives people we support a direct voice about how Melba is run and how our services are delivered. It's an avenue for people we support to advocate for themselves and others and offer valuable feedback. The group ensures their voices are heard and their experiences shape the future direction of our services. ARROW has an ongoing role in the employee induction program and meets regularly with Melba's Board through the Practice Quality and Safeguards Committee. By empowering people to speak up for their rights and represent their interests, we ensure people we support are at the centre of everything we do.



Ryan

Inspiration is a word that gets thrown around a lot in disability circles. It's always well meaning, but it's often condescending. You hear it a lot during the Paralympics, for example. An athlete with disability is "inspiring" simply because they are competing. Every athlete, with or without disability, has to overcome obstacles to compete at the highest level so why do Paralympians get labelled as inspirational so much more than able-bodied Olympians? That's where the often unintended condescension comes in.

Sometimes the label fits. Sometimes it's not condescending, it's simply appropriate and just. Sometimes a person does something that gives you reason to pause and reflect on your own life. And often that pause comes down to the adversity they've overcome.

Ryan, for example, is an inspiration to those who come into his orbit. He doesn't see himself as particularly inspiring, and ironically that's part of the reason he is.



Ryan, 48, has cerebral palsy, which gives him curvature of the spine and a twisted foot – he also has ADHD – but, no, that's not what makes him inspirational.

Ryan inspires the people who get to know him because he refuses to let disability define him. He just gets on with it. He sees a problem and solves it. He knows he has challenges, but rather than let them overwhelm him, as some might, he chooses to meet them head on and does what he can to overcome them.

About 15 years ago, Ryan was putting on weight and his problem foot, coupled with his back, was struggling to hold him up. He was given two choices: get fit or get a wheelchair.

That ultimatum changed the trajectory of Ryan's life. From that moment on, Ryan threw himself into getting healthy. He joined a gym, got a personal program, and followed it to the letter. Today, Ryan still goes to the gym three days a week for a workout.

'I wasn't going to let the pain stop me from living'

He also cycles and goes for extended walks. He says he hasn't put on a kilo in all that time and no one is suggesting he consider getting a wheelchair anymore.

"Back then, I was told if I put on more weight I'd be like the Hunchback of Notre Dame," Ryan says.

"But it wasn't just that. I have a lot of back pain and that was just going to get worse. So basically, if I didn't go the gym I wouldn't be able to walk.

"I wasn't going to let the pain stop me from living. I've put a lot of muscle on my back and it's helped me a lot too."

Ryan's attention to detail and determination to stay as fit and healthy as possible isn't limited to the gym. He also taught himself how to cook so that he could eat healthy food.

"I do have junk food days," he confesses, "but not very often. I try to be as healthy as I can."

Ryan's independence is important to him. But he also needs support to stay on top of things and this is where Melba comes in.

"I have someone from Melba come and visit me three days a week and just help me with things," he says.

"I've been with Melba for about 20 years and without that support I wouldn't be where I am today."

Ryan is an active member of ARROW and gives semi-regular talks about The Melba Way to new employees.

"I just tell them my story and how Melba's helped me," he says.

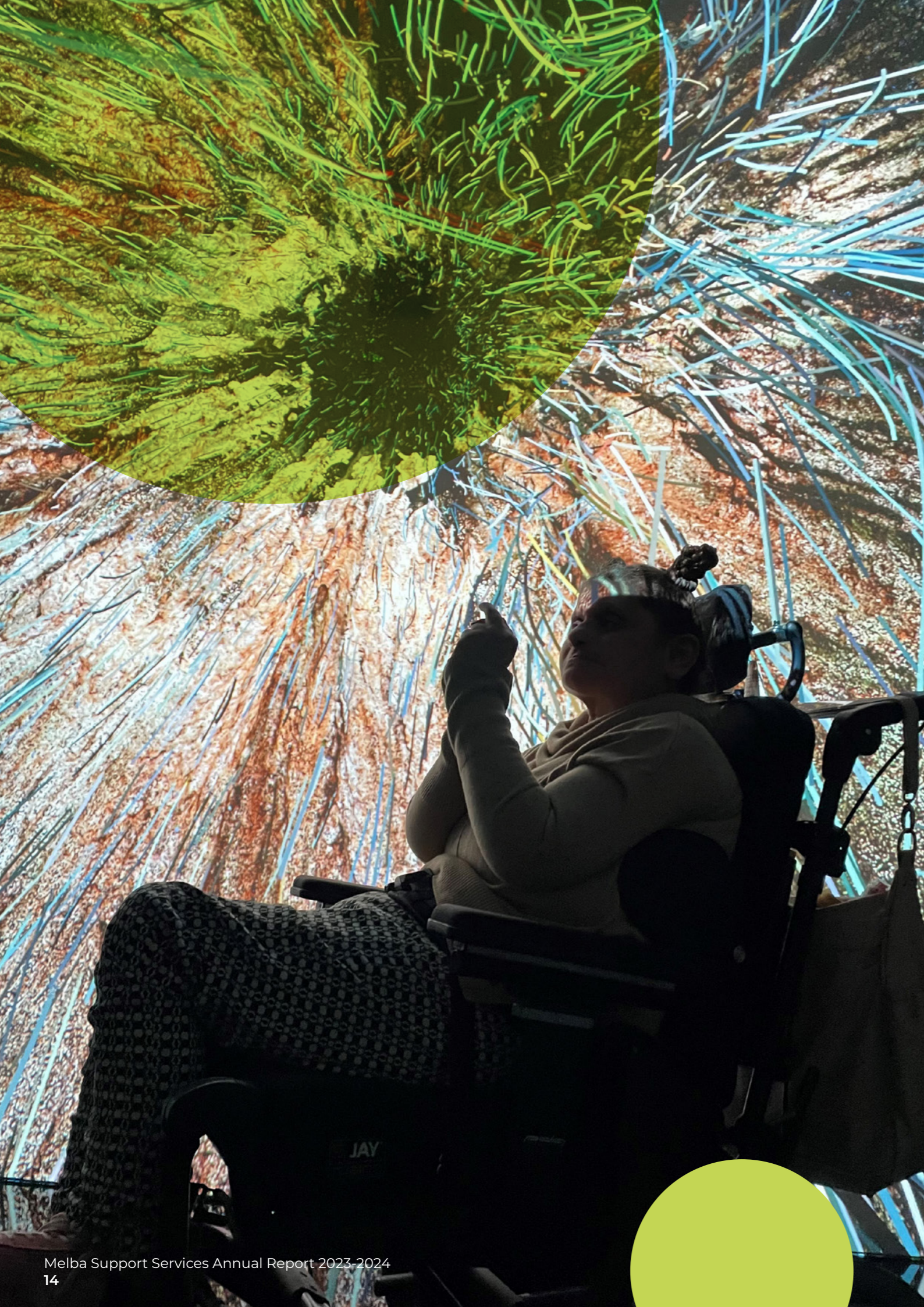
"And I like ARROW because it changes things. It makes things easier for people. We even won an award (the 2023 NDS Excellence in Service Quality award). That's what I like about ARROW – it makes a difference."

Melba's David Glazebrook has known Ryan for longer than he can remember and when asked to describe Ryan he replies: "He's just a ripping bloke. He doesn't let things get in his way – he just gets on with it. He cares about others and, just as importantly, he cares about himself and looks after himself."

And that's Ryan's message to others with cerebral palsy.

"Try different things and find out what you can do," he says. "If it hurts, try something else, or try a different strategy, but keep trying until you find it."





Our strategy

It's a challenging time for the disability sector and there are some even more challenging headwinds coming. Regulatory changes, higher compliance activity, and a cost of living focus by governments, companies and the community alike, have all culminated in a fast moving, changing and fiscally challenging environment. Melba has been working diligently to develop sound strategy to combat the current market challenges and to build a stronger Melba for the future and people we support. We have been working hard to deliver on our 2040 Melba Strategy and in the past year have developed further sub-strategies to strengthen our service offer, our employee experience and our financial sustainability.

We have refreshed our approach to program and project delivery and continue our laser-sharp focus on improved service management, enabling systems and investing in the technical foundations we need.

During the year, as part of best practice we conducted a review of our transformation approach. While we had celebrated some successes along the way, findings of the review and a changing landscape have seen us transition to a slimmed down Project Delivery Model. We have successfully incorporated large change projects into the remit of responsible executives and have narrowed our focus to priorities that deliver the greatest value. Most excitingly, all executives are aligned and their teams are playing a dynamic role working with the Project Management team to deliver organisational change projects. We remain committed to our five strategic pillars and delivering on strategic objectives.

Most importantly, we remain focused on people we support and making sure we are providing people with the support and services they want and need, now and into the future.

Melba's five strategic pillars highlight our focus areas

Experience

Best-in-class experience for the people we support



Engaged and connected

Melba as an employer of choice



Culture

Melba Way aligned practice and culture for today and tomorrow



Operational excellence

Streamlined and reliable operations



Innovation

Contemporary and innovative services and solutions



Project spotlights

Strategy Planning Framework (SPF)

A major milestone was the launch of the SPF, designed to enable dynamic decision-making and performance measurement across the organisation. This framework empowers the Executive Leadership team to capture strategic insights, monitor progress and prioritise initiatives as needed. The framework's comprehensive approach ensures Melba's leadership has the tools necessary to adapt to challenges and seize new opportunities, ensuring sustained progress towards its long-term vision.



Successful rollout of the TechCONNECT project

A standout achievement this year was the successful rollout of the exciting TechCONNECT project, transforming the way we support our SIL (Supported Independent Living) and Respite services. This project means our workforce is now equipped with cutting-edge technology – including laptops, mobile phones and iPads – giving them instant access to essential information, wherever they are. This empowers our teams to deliver faster, more responsive and higher-quality supports. But the benefits don't stop there! In addition to equipping our employees, people we support now have access to Melba's Wi-Fi network, opening up new opportunities for connection, engagement and independence. TechCONNECT is revolutionising how we operate, reinforcing our commitment to delivering exceptional care and support.



Kickoff of key digital projects

As part of our digital transformation strategy, we have started work on two key digital projects: the Human Resources Information System and the Support Management Platform. These platforms are designed to enhance service delivery, streamline operations and improve employee experience. These projects are underway and will be completed in 2025. Both projects represent significant progress towards Melba's vision of creating a superior service offering and a more efficient and responsive organisation. By integrating these advanced technologies, Melba aims to reduce administrative burdens, facilitate better communication, and ensure that support services are delivered more effectively to people we support. Ultimately, these initiatives are not just about adopting new technology; they reflect Melba's commitment to continuous improvement and excellence in service provision, setting the stage for a future where people we support and employees benefit from a more cohesive and supportive environment.





‘Melba truly puts the people we support in charge of their own lives’

“When the pandemic hit, I saw an ad for offering online Certificate IV courses,” Sharlene said. “I had always wanted to work in disability, but taking time off to study wasn’t financially viable. With this opportunity, I decided to take the leap and completed my Cert IV while working full time.”

Sharlene’s passion for disability support was put to the test when she worked for another organisation before joining Melba. Drawn in by the promise of advocacy and human rights, she sadly soon found herself disillusioned by practices that contradicted those ideals. After 10 months, she decided to leave the industry, believing that maybe disability support wasn’t what she had envisioned.

Then, Melba came along.

“When I saw Melba was hiring in my area, I was hesitant at first,” Sharlene said. “But after hearing from my daughter’s friend, who worked at Melba and loved her job, I decided to give it another try. I’m so glad I did.”

What struck Sharlene from her very first shift was the genuine empowerment of the people Melba supports.

At her previous organisation, people supported were not even allowed in the kitchen. At Melba, the people supported were involved in every aspect of their lives, from cooking to decision-making.

“It was a complete shift from what I had seen before,” Sharlene said. “Melba truly puts the people we support in charge of their own lives and we’re there to back them. That’s why I’m proud to work here.”

As a house supervisor, Sharlene’s job is multifaceted. She leads her team of about 20 support workers, with seven permanent staff members, from diverse cultural backgrounds. But what sets her role apart is the fact that she also works “on the floor”, directly supporting the four women in the residence.

“I love that I can still work floor shifts,” Sharlene said. “It helps me build relationships with the people we support and understand their needs better. It also means I can lead my team from a place of knowledge because I know first-hand what we’re all working toward.”

For Sharlene, being a support worker goes beyond providing day-to-day assistance. It’s about advocacy – ensuring the women her team

supports have the opportunities they deserve, whether it’s standing up to medical teams or navigating community barriers, or even dealing with their families. But it’s also about fun and joy.

“We have a lot of fun together,” she said. “The four women we support are like sisters. They’re like my sisters, too.”

Sharlene’s commitment to growth doesn’t stop with her work. She’s currently studying for an Advanced Diploma in Community Sector Management, further developing her skills to lead and advocate more effectively.

Outside of work, Sharlene and her husband channel their creativity into home renovations. They are currently on their fifth project – although Sharlene jokes her husband insists it will be the last.

Sharlene’s journey from the corporate world to disability support may seem unconventional, but her story is a testament to the transformative power of following one’s passion.

At Melba, she has found a place where her advocacy, leadership and care converge – making a real difference in the lives of the women she supports.



Sharlene

At Melba, we believe in creating a space where people not only feel supported, but empowered to lead the lives they choose.

For Sharlene Ireland, House Supervisor at Wonthaggi, this mission resonates deeply. Leading a team of support workers who provide dedicated care to four women, Sharlene’s role is more than just a job – it’s a calling.

Sharlene’s path to Melba wasn’t a straight one. After 16 years of leadership roles at the Commonwealth Bank, she made the courageous decision to pivot her career towards something she had always felt drawn to: disability support. With a husband and daughter who are hearing impaired and another daughter recently diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, Sharlene had long been an advocate for her family. But the barriers to changing careers seemed too high until COVID-19 opened an unexpected door.

Our impact 2024

1,378,850 
hours of support delivered

142 
homes

47 people 
supported under new Positive Behaviour Support billing structure

19,108 km 
travelled to provide positive behaviour support

54 
ARROW meetings

1264 
employees trained in Level 1 Mealtime Assistance

948 
employees trained in Level 2 Mealtime Assistance

20,000+ 
hours of online learning

27 
Future Melba champs attended 10 monthly meetings

10 
Number of employees identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander

74 
Number of employees identifying as having a disability

1 
purpose-built beauty studio open for business

12 
new accommodation opportunities confirmed





Stephen

Stephen has spent much of his life living with a lie, a lie no person should have to endure. His is a story of separation, uncertainty, grief, loneliness ... but ultimately one of joy.

Stephen's story took a turn for the worst when, in the early 1970s, his parents separated and he and his three siblings were placed into a children's home. At first, the four children remained together, but eventually Stephen was removed and placed into the state disability system. He would not see his family again for more than 40 years. Indeed, for much of that time he did not even know he had a family, having been raised to believe he was an orphan.

Stephen's sister Lisa also had a traumatic upbringing and said she spent most of her adult life believing Stephen was dead.

"We tried for years to track him down, but didn't hear anything, so you just assume the worst," she said. "I'd given up all hope of ever seeing him again."

But that all changed in late 2022 when State Trustee, who manage Stephen's affairs, reached out to the family and told them Stephen was alive and well and being supported by Melba.

"When I saw the letter, I went into shock," Lisa said. Initially, she thought the letter was to confirm that Stephen had died. But as she kept reading, shock turned to disbelief, which set off a train of emotions.

"Even reading it, I couldn't believe it," Lisa said. "I had to read the letter several times. It's hard to explain what goes through your head, but I was just so happy."

Planning commenced and a date was set for Stephen to meet his mother and sister and, late last year, the three were finally reunited.

'I just broke down in tears, thinking about all those years of wondering if he was even still alive'

"Seeing him again, I couldn't believe it," Lisa said. "Even though I was sitting right next to him, holding his hand, it still didn't feel real. I just broke down in tears, thinking about all those years of wondering if he was even still alive."

What also gave Lisa and her mother comfort was knowing Stephen was being well cared for.

"The people at Melba are amazing," Lisa said. "They treat Stephen like family, you can see how much they care for him. Mum and I wouldn't have been able to look after him as well as Melba has."

Lisa said reuniting with Stephen had given herself and her mother a sense of peace.

"My mum was in shock at first," she said. "It was overwhelming to reunite with a child you thought you'd lost forever. But now, knowing he's safe and cared for, she's at peace. She keeps pictures of Stephen by her bed and looks at them every day."

While the years of separation can never be reclaimed, Lisa and her mother are now focused on the present. She visits Stephen as often as she can, despite the challenges of shift work and distance, and Stephen's support workers regularly send photos and updates.

"It's a relief to know where he is," Lisa said. "And that after all these years, we're together again."



Home and living

Providing people with a place to live has been at the core of the services Melba provides for more than 50 years and today is no different. What is different and constantly improving is the quality and living styles of the homes available.

New developments

Prahran: as of 30 June 2024 actively seeking tenants.

Kensington: in final construction now with an opening expected in early 2025.

Horsham: new house that can accommodate four people.

Traralgon: complete with three people now moved in.

Moe: working with the SDA provider to be completed by end of 2024. New three-bedroom homes under construction with expected completion in 2025.

Morwell: house and two villas – under construction with expected completion in 2025.

Newborough: new three-bedroom homes under construction with expected completion in 2025.

Partnerships

Forming strategic partnerships with Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) property developers is vital to Melba. These collaborations help ensure new homes are built in the locations where people want to live and reflect their preferences and needs. They mean we can support people to make choices, foster independence and ensure every person can live in a home that is truly meaningful to them.



New partnerships

Home in Place: Melba has a collaboration agreement in place to work together on accommodation opportunities in the west, south and east of Melbourne. Current projects include Sunshine and Kensington.

Good Housing: Melba has an agreement with Good Housing to explore current and future housing opportunities along the Mornington Peninsula.

Vera Living: Melba has a collaboration agreement with Vera Living, with five accommodation projects linked to our Meaningful Homes approach underway in the Gippsland region. Future projects being explored include opportunities for more new SDA properties across Gippsland and other soon-to-begin projects in Cheltenham, Bentleigh and Moorabbin.

Ongoing partnerships

Guardian Living: Melba continues to expand our relationship working on accommodation opportunities in the Gippsland, Central Highlands and Mornington Peninsula. Current projects include Traralgon and other soon-to-begin projects in Wendouree and Frankston.

Community Housing: Melba and CHL's working relationship continued to grow with the new SDA apartments at Prahran.

Housing Choices Australia: Melba continues to work closely to discuss and assess properties and to identify and prioritise improvements for people we support.

The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing manages 50+ of the homes where we provide support, and a number of these homes are selected each year for renewal. This year four people living in an older home moved into a newly built SDA property, designed for their support needs.

Meaningful homes

Our Meaningful Homes approach is revolutionising the lives of the 320 people we support in former state-run group homes. Historically, many of these people had little-to-no say in where they lived, who they lived with, or how they lived. Today, that is changing, as Melba is empowering every person to define what a "fabulous life" looks like for them.

By listening carefully to people's preferences, as well as having conversations with their support networks, we are transforming these insights into tangible outcomes, providing people with the opportunity to live in homes that truly reflect their desires and needs.

For many, this means moving into homes with friends or having spaces that accommodate mobility devices, such as walkers and wheelchairs. Most people express a preference for living with fewer people, having access to newer homes with private ensuites, and creating living environments that better align with their personal preferences. People are sharing specific details on what they do and don't want, reflecting a strong desire for change.

Some people want a home that is open to pets, friends and intimate partners, some want a home that is closer to public transport, friends, family or their favourite hairdresser.

It is great to see that every person's preferences are not only heard but treated as entirely possible. We are committed to turning older houses into truly meaningful homes, where people can live the life they choose on their terms.



Key achievements

Development of 125 individual housing plans

These housing plans are tailored to meet the specific needs, desires and visions of people we support. The plans serve as blueprints for creating homes that foster independence, comfort and choice.

Welcoming three women to their new home

Helen, Jennifer and Susanne have moved into their new home, which includes a purpose-built beauty studio. The joy of being able to paint their nails in a space they requested symbolises the profound impact of this approach.

Development of key accommodation partnerships

Partnering with like-minded SDA providers and developers has been a key enabler for Melba to unlock the true potential of our Meaningful Homes approach and provides us with the ability to innovate and grow within the complex disability accommodation landscape.

Day-to-day support

Our day-to-day support options nurture personal growth, social connection and community engagement. Our team is dedicated to providing individualised support that helps each person find meaningful ways to engage with, and enrich, their chosen communities.

These day-to-day support options focus on areas such as:

- Self-care, health and wellbeing
- Friendships and healthy relationships
- Living independently
- Working, learning and volunteering
- Making choices and having control in your life.

Day-to-day supports include Individualised Support Arrangements and our range of day programs.



Some more numbers

116 dozen – biggest weekly egg order

Sold close to **35,500** eggs

Collated and delivered **16,500** pamphlets

15 new programs developed at Community Connections

40 arts practitioners enrolled in classes

21 different art subjects studied

3466 metres above sea level: Highest altitude where support was provided

Individualised Support Arrangements

This is exactly what it sounds like – support that is tailored to a person's individual needs. Our Individualised Support Arrangements provide one-to-one support for people to do whatever it is they want or need to do.

This looks different for everyone and may include support to get tasks done around the house, personal care activities or support to learn a new skill. It might be even be trips to do shopping or to meet new friends.

We work with people to find meaningful ways for them to engage with their chosen communities that work best for their individual needs.

Day programs

We have a range of day programs in various locations that cater to a wide range of people and activities, with a focus on achieving goals.

We work with people to find and support activities and engagement opportunities that support the achievement of identified goals. This includes both individual and group activities. This looks different for each person.



What is the Leisure and Recreation Program?

Melba's Leisure and Recreation Program offers tailored holiday options for people with disability with scalable levels of support. These options range from day trips to overseas adventures and can be funded through a range of options.

We specialise in small group or individual holidays where people are provided with the right support to ensure they get the most out of their holiday. We work closely with people to understand their goals and identify ways to achieve them.

Arthur Creative

Melba's Arthur Creative offers a range of arts-based workshops for emerging and established artists with disability.

Based in Ballarat, it offers a safe place for people to express themselves, in their own way, and provides a pathway for people looking to explore creative opportunities or careers.

Workshops are led by practising artists and range from regular, weekly offerings through to sessional and seasonal options and holiday programs, providing people with the chance to explore a wide range of artistic pursuits.

Workshops include:

- Cabaret
- Studio art
- Film
- Acting
- Theatre performance
- Music performance
- Photography
- Fine art
- Screen printing
- Ceramics.



Breaking Ground

Breaking Ground is a small, group-based day program in Mount Martha that celebrated its 10th birthday in October 2023. This program focuses on achieving goals through creativity, friendship and fun. Running one day a week, people have the opportunity to foster connections with others and their natural surroundings.

Breaking Ground thrives on thoughtfully crafted activities that cater to individual interests and needs.



Community Connections

Based at Melba's founding suburb of Lilydale, Community Connections is all about enjoying meaningful days and endless possibilities. We offer a variety of engaging and enriching opportunities that cater to diverse interests that go beyond just activities.

We provide opportunities for people to develop and hold valued roles within their local and chosen communities.

Through regular outings and participation in community events, we aim to support people to actively participate in their chosen community and build a strong sense of belonging.





Fiona

We all have things we don't like or are hesitant to do. Things that give us the heebiejeebies, in other words. For some, it might be flying in a plane, especially when taking off or landing, for others it could be something as simple as giving blood. Whatever it is, we all have them and Fiona is no different.

Fiona's fear is stairs. She just doesn't feel safe and secure climbing stairs – or at least she never used to. That all changed in May this year in the most unlikely of places – Italy!

Fiona was part of a six-person, 11-day trip to Italy, organised by Melba's Leisure and Recreation team. The trip, which took Fiona through some of the country's most beautiful and historic cities, presented Fiona with a lot of stairs to negotiate.

Italy, with its ancient ruins, grand palaces and winding cobblestone streets, can be a challenge for even the most seasoned traveller.



But for Fiona, it became the backdrop to an incredible personal transformation.

Melba's Leisure and Recreation Outcomes Lead, Davide Scagliarini, one of two support workers who accompanied the group, said one of the highlights of the adventure was seeing Fiona's confidence grow.

"At the start of the trip, when we came across some stairs, Fiona would hang on to the rail for dear life and didn't really want to go up," he said.

"She had to be helped up very slowly, but by the end of the trip she was climbing the stairs on her own with no fear whatsoever."

Fiona agrees that one of the unforeseen benefits of that 11-day odyssey was the personal growth she experienced.

"I never liked climbing stairs," she said. "But I don't worry about them now. I feel much more confident. I even climbed up the mountains!"

Fiona faces her fears in the mountains of Italy

The trip to Italy was special for another reason, too – Fiona celebrated her 51st birthday in one of the world's most iconic cities, Venice.

"That was definitely a highlight," she said with a smile.

Davide says the benefits to travelling overseas extend beyond basic sightseeing – it takes people out of their comfort zone and embeds a deep sense of friendship.

"When you're travelling overseas you have to be super organised," he said. "You have to be ready to go at a certain time each morning and work together as a team sometimes, people aren't used to that, but they adapt very easily."

Davide said another benefit the holiday provided was a shared sense of camaraderie. Spending an extended period of time together brought the group closer.

"The other great thing is the socialising," he said. "To see the joy on people's faces is incredible. The excitement and happiness is contagious."

Fiona's connection to Melba runs deeper than taking holidays. Her brother Doug credits Melba for changing her life.

"Fiona has been with Melba for many years now," Doug said. "Before she got involved she was very shy and wouldn't say much. Now she's much more confident around people."

"Fiona lives on her own and that can get a little lonely so the friends and connections she has

made at Melba are very important to her."

Fiona spends each Friday at Community Connections doing a range of activities and Doug says "it's been a great thing for her".

"The people at Melba have been so good to her, I couldn't be more grateful," he said. "In fact, I'm hoping Fiona might choose to spend two days a week at Melba next year. It's just been the making of her. She's a different person."

Away from Melba, Fiona enjoys a range of hobbies. She loves to cook, listen to music – especially ABBA – watch movies and attend musicals. And she's no stranger to hard work, either; Fiona has been working three days a week at Coles for the past 19 years.

Fiona's journey through life – whether at work, at home, socialising at Melba or climbing mountains in Italy – reminds us that challenges, no matter how daunting, can be overcome with persistence, courage and a little bit of adventure.

Fiona's story isn't just about conquering her fear of stairs; it's about embracing life with an open heart and a sense of wonder, ready for whatever comes next.





Diversity and inclusion

As part of our ongoing commitment to reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, we renewed our Reflect Level Reconciliation Action Plan. We commissioned Gerard Black, an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artist, to create a meaningful artwork to represent Melba and the commitment we have to the journey of reconciliation.



Melba's Leadership team spent a day at the Worawa Aboriginal College in Healesville learning about Aboriginal culture. Attending this session as a team was focused on building our shared knowledge and understanding of the importance of reconciliation. Melba CEO Hayley Dean said spending time with Aunty Lois was her highlight.

"Aunty Lois's generosity of spirit, wisdom and profound insights, shared against the backdrop of a cruel, brutal and inhumane history that still endures today, will stay with me forever," she said.

"The teachings of walking in two worlds, the personal relevance of each story and insight brought us closer to understanding the deeply intense connection to the land, culture and history that shapes the Aboriginal way of life."

The day broadened our perspectives as individuals and as a group and also instilled a deeper sense of appreciation and respect for the Aboriginal culture and the absolute necessity of self-determination and reconciliation.



Melba's approach to diversity and inclusion is rooted in our core belief that every person must be valued simply for who they are. We are committed to fostering a workplace that not only meets, but exceeds, industry standards in inclusivity. From creating policies that support diversity to offering training programs that build awareness, we ensure diversity and inclusion are central to our mission.

Our holistic approach includes empowering employees through educational resources, raising awareness of systemic barriers, and organising community events that celebrate the diversity of the whole Melba community.



Inclusive hiring practices

Creating employment pathways for people with disability remains a focus and partnering with platforms such as The Field has been key to progressing in this area. The Field specialises in connecting employers with candidates who identify as having disability. Part of being a workplace where everyone can thrive is ensuring our processes make it possible for everyone to be part of the Melba community. We have reviewed and amended our recruitment processes and will continue to do so.

Neurodiverse social support

We recognise the importance of fostering social inclusion for neurodiverse people. To support this, we have hosted "friend-dating" events, providing opportunities for neurodiverse people to meet new people and form meaningful relationships. These events helped to build social networks in an understanding and supportive environment, promoting wellbeing.

Comprehensive DEI (diversity, equity and inclusion) training

Education plays a pivotal role in driving lasting cultural change at Melba. All employees participate in training programs designed to deepen their understanding of diversity issues. These programs equip people with the skills and awareness needed to foster an inclusive, respectful environment where equity is embedded in everyday operations.



Melinda

Dr Melinda Smith is someone who defies categorisation. Dancer, poet, writer, visual artist, mentor – she wears many hats with passion and purpose.

Melinda describes herself as someone who is always in motion, constantly engaged in creative endeavours.

“I am a very motivated person and always have been,” she says. “I never experience boredom because I can always find something to do.”

One of her major projects this year was her one-woman show, *Conduit Bodies*, which she wrote and performed. The show debuted in October as part of the Fringe Festival, offering audiences a profound exploration of “the relationship between technology and the body, disability, assistive tech, and the natural world”.

Melinda, who has cerebral palsy, used “airsticks” strapped to her body and wheelchair to transform the performance space into something entirely new – an experience that expanded the boundaries of dance and questioned who it is for.

The “airsticks” are a remarkable piece of wearable tech, translating movement into sound, text and visual effects. Using cutting-edge motion tracking and wireless technologies, the “airsticks” gave Melinda complete control over gestural data, making every movement part of an immersive multimedia experience.

The audience could witness the magic of movement directly influencing the performance, offering a transparency that made the show even more compelling.

For Melinda, movement is at the core of everything she does. “Movement drives me to every aspect and every activity I do,” she says. “Dance is important to me, (as is) creative expression and being able to be who I am and what I want to communicate.”

‘I have a fantastic relationship with my cerebral palsy’

With *Conduit Bodies*, Melinda pushed beyond the expectations placed on her by society and embraced a deeper form of expressive mastery. The performance grew into a crescendo of sound, movement and visual art, culminating in a transformative experience for the audience.

Unique, innovative and thought-provoking, *Conduit Bodies* challenged stereotypes and preconceptions about disability. It invited audiences to reconsider the limitations of form and explore a new frontier in live performance.

Melinda wrote the show with a clear intention: to dismantle the conventional ideas about disability that she encounters in her daily life.

“I wrote *Conduit Bodies* to challenge stereotypes and preconceptions of disability,” she says. “Sometimes society is my biggest barrier because people assume that one size fits all.”

Melinda faces this societal misunderstanding often. “Most people who are not familiar with me wouldn’t think I’m employed and that I pay taxes like everyone else,” she says.

Melinda says she loves life because “I get to choose the way I am,” emphasising the empowerment and freedom she feels in being able to define her own identity, make her own decisions and live authentically on her terms. This sense of autonomy allows her to embrace life with confidence and joy, knowing she has the agency to shape her path and express herself fully.

Reflecting on her positive outlook she says: “I have a fantastic relationship with my cerebral palsy and I like to think that I work with my body’s movement rather than against it.”

This acceptance and collaboration with her body have become central to her creative process.

“These elements have defined my work practice,” Melinda says. “My biggest challenge has been time and communication. I will always need more time, no matter what I do and what I want to say.”

Melinda acknowledges the physical limitations cerebral palsy can impose, but she’s never allowed those constraints to hold her back.

“I’ve never limited myself,” she says. “I’ve achieved more than I ever thought I was capable of. Anything is possible if you put your mind to it.”

In 2019, Melinda was awarded an Honorary Doctorate by Deakin University for “her outstanding contribution to the arts and her tireless work in breaking down barriers to inclusion for people with disability in Australia and internationally”.

She is a lecturer at Deakin University in Inclusive Arts and a regular performer and Board Member with the Women’s Circus.

But the arts aren’t Melinda’s only passion – she mentors young people with cerebral palsy and complex communication needs, ensuring others have the support they need to thrive.

And then there’s her passion for travel.

“People who know me know how much I have travelled and how much I love it,” she says. “I would love to do some more travel. Places like Vietnam are on my radar.”

Melinda’s relationship with Melba began on Halloween Day in 2023 when she moved into an apartment built to specialist disability accommodation (SDA) standards. The transition has been a transformative experience.

“Moving into an SDA apartment and being able to access Melba Support Service has been incredible and a life-changing experience,” she says.

“Being able to connect with Melba Support has allowed me to feel safe and secure in my apartment at all times of the day and night.

“Although I am very independent, sometimes I have difficulty completing certain tasks, but Melba has always been there when I needed them. Getting to know all the staff has been a very personal and professional experience.”

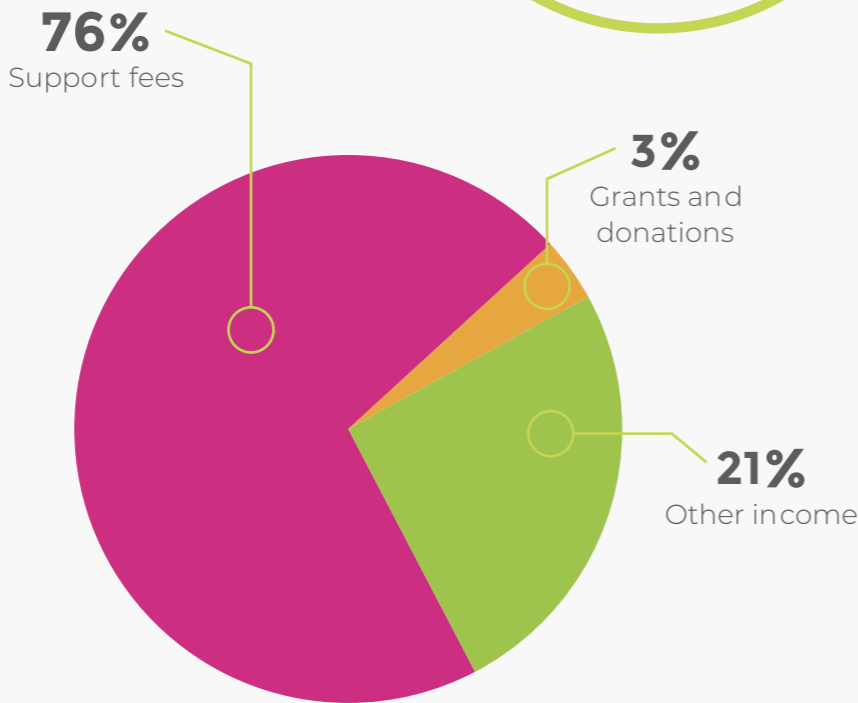
With her boundless energy, fierce independence and passion for challenging perceptions, Melinda continues to push the limits of what’s possible, redefining how we understand disability, creativity and the body’s relationship to the world.

Finance and numbers

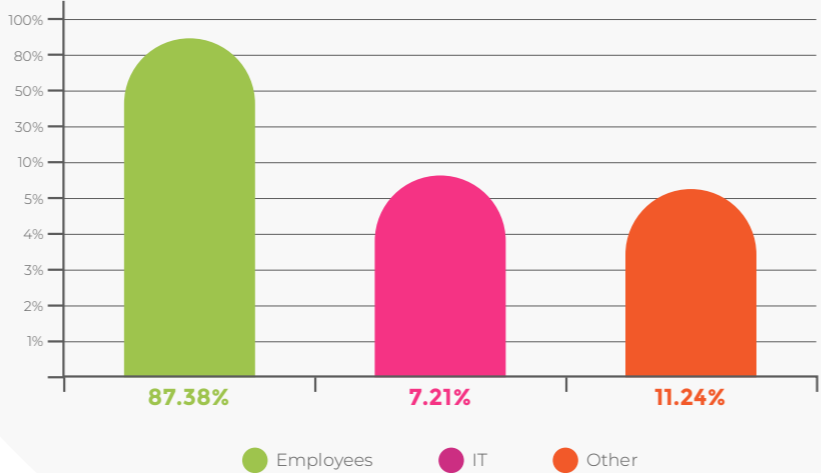
Melba continues to be financially secure and well managed. We manage our funds carefully, ensuring we provide for our future and that we continue supporting people to live the life they choose.

Further details are available by visiting the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission website.

Roger Chao,
Treasurer, 2024



Expenses



Melba Support Services acknowledges the support of the Victorian Government.







melbasupport.com.au