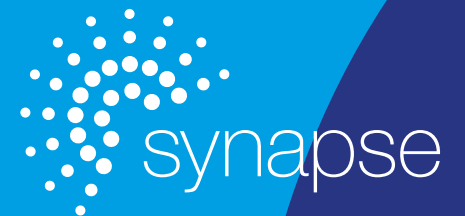




Annual Report

Making an impact

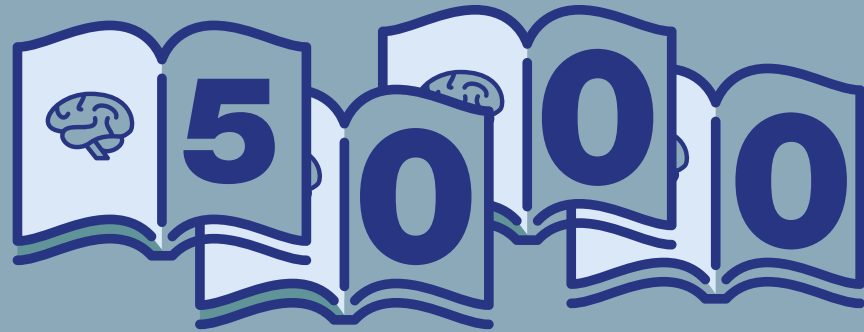




+40%
more website visits
comparing the beginning to end of the financial year



70,455
hours of accommodation support



Copies of ABI: The facts resource books sent out across Australia



individuals participating in awareness training



Completed construction of Australia's first purpose-built housing initiative
for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People with neurocognitive disability.

1,196

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People attending NDIS participant readiness sessions



164
participants in Guddi neurocognitive disability research

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Chair's report

This has been another notable year for Synapse, delivered through the continued passion, hard work and commitment of our staff and volunteers.

The tireless Synapse team believes that those affected by brain injury are entitled to lead a life of quality, based on their own decisions and choices. This is the creed that drives them every day to, as the team says, do more and do better.

This is why—in addition to continuing to deliver on key services—Synapse has this year reviewed and redefined its strategy. Staff, volunteers, policy professionals and the Board took part in a detailed engagement exercise to strengthen individual and organisational commitment and participation, ensure clarity in purpose, and set a vision for the coming five years and beyond of Synapse service delivery.

“Synapse has this year reviewed and redefined its strategy.”

Expanding the definition of brain injury to ‘neurocognitive disability’ has been one of the outcomes of this process. It is an important change as it broadens our horizons in offering essential support services and contributing to policy and social conversations.

We also recognised the services Synapse provides are relevant for people of all ages, so we have expanded our mission to reflect this.

Synapse currently has four key services: referrals and access to direct support, pathways to the NDIS, advocacy for better policies and social outcomes, and critical information for all those affected by neurocognitive disability.

But Synapse’s work provides meaning far beyond these four pillars.

In this Annual Report, you will read about Lisa, who has returned to her life-long passion of horse-riding, championed by her Synapse Support Co-ordinator. You will also learn about our wonderful new hospital support program, where a Synapse Family Liaison Officer will, for the first time, provide an essential link between hospital staff and families, helping them navigate the stressful and confusing experience of a loved one being diagnosed with a neurocognitive injury. You will read about Synapse’s research work, which provides evidence-based insights to inform policy, community capacity and wider social conversations in this all-important and under-resourced area.

And you will read about the unique Guddi Partnership that enables much-needed support and access to services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People in a culturally-safe environment.

The Board and the Executive Team are committed to delivering the objectives in our strategic plan – that is to support more people who are affected by neurocognitive disability to live with a greater degree of independence.

Our focus for the coming twelve months is sustainability and growth, to be achieved through the capability and skills building of our staff and volunteers, and the fostering of collaborations for national reach and social impact.

I believe the team is well-placed to deliver, and on behalf of my fellow directors, confirm that the Board remains committed to driving the continued success and critically important work of Synapse.

Melanie Farris
Chair

Executive's summary

Over the past year, we have been working to position Synapse as the organisation of choice for people affected by neurocognitive disability.

We are achieving this by promoting quality of life, self-determination and choice, and by operating nationally with partnerships across Australia to deliver a range of capacity-building activities.

We have continued to focus on marginalised people, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, those living in rural/regional Australia and those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

During the year, Synapse extended our strategic partnerships with other organisations, which has allowed for the national expansion of the Guddi research. New partnerships were formed with Coast2Bay Housing and Ausmar Assist, which resulted in a purpose-built house for four tenants.

We have also recognised the importance of developing new models of service delivery. In 2017, we launched Guddi Health weeks, an initiative designed to provide a single point of clinical assessment for neurocognitive disability and NDIS readiness.

Synapse continues to recognise the gaps in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ access to services. In 2017, Synapse secured an extension of the NDIS Participant Readiness Initiative (PRI), which is a model that focuses on community consultation and capacity building.

In April, we celebrated a major milestone with the completion of Australia’s first purpose-built, and culturally-supported accommodation. The property became operational in October 2017 with tenants moving into their units.

Finally, we spent time setting the strategic plan for Synapse for the next few years. I am pleased to announce that while brain injury remains a core focus for Synapse, we are broadening our scope to cover other aspects of neurocognitive disability.

I would like to thank the Board for their continued support of Synapse. This year we are saying goodbye to some of our longstanding and committed Directors while also welcoming new Directors. I would also like to take the opportunity to thank our dedicated staff for their outstanding contribution to Synapse during the year.

Jennifer Cullen
Chief Executive Officer



“We have been working to position Synapse as the organisation of choice for people affected by neurocognitive disability.”

About Synapse

“We believe that everyone affected by neurocognitive disability is entitled to a life of quality, based on their own decisions and choices.”

Synapse is dedicated to reconnecting the lives of those affected by neurocognitive disability.

We do this through services delivered with integrity, fairness, and a vision for what the future for people with neurocognitive disability could be.

Neurocognitive disability is any type of brain damage or neurological disruption that causes partial or permanent cognitive functional disability or psychosocial maladjustment. Neurocognitive disorders can affect memory, attention, learning, language, perception, personality and behaviour. In this report we refer to neurocognitive disability as a collective term of injuries.

We believe that everyone affected by neurocognitive disability is entitled to a life of quality, based on their own decisions and choices. In working to achieve this, Synapse delivers a range of services across Australia.

Information, referral and advocacy

Synapse provides a national information and referral service for individuals and families impacted by neurocognitive disability. Our advocacy work aims to ensure opportunities for people, families and communities to actively participate in and lead decisions that impact their lives and the things important to them.

National Disability Insurance Scheme

As the roll out of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) continues across Australia, we offer services for

individuals ahead and after the NDIS roll-out in their area.

Synapse is committed to providing information and support to individuals, communities and families to maximise participation in the NDIS. We work with individuals and communities to develop skills and confidence to lead decisions about their current and future needs and goals. We partner with communities to facilitate participant readiness activities and NDIS pre-planning ahead of NDIS engagement. As a registered NDIS provider, Synapse also provides assistance to individuals to build skills in coordinating and managing their NDIS plan based on the individual’s expressed needs.

Synapse is also a provider of NDIS Appeals. This service provides support for individuals to raise concerns about their NDIS plan or NDIS access outcome.

Resources

We produce a number of nationally-recognised resources for individuals and organisations. These publications aim to build and share contemporary knowledge and understanding of the impacts of neurocognitive disability across diverse communities and life stages.

Peer support

We value the power of connection, sharing and learning from others’ stories and experiences. Synapse Reconnections is a national network connecting individuals and carers for peer support.

Research

The Synapse Research and Development team undertakes research in Queensland and other locations to inform community understanding of the extent and nature of neurocognitive disability. Our research enables Synapse to respond effectively to community need and to advocate for social change. We have strong partnerships with communities, agencies, government departments and universities.

Indigenous services

Our team work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities nationally and in rural and remote communities to explain and talk about the availability of services, including the NDIS. Our research and development focus is on marginalised people, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples with neurocognitive disability and a range of co-morbid conditions within the context of the NDIS environment.

Housing support

Synapse provides support to individuals to live well in their home of choice. Through various housing options, Synapse supports individuals to design services that maximise choice and control over their daily lives. Synapse recognises that life opportunities and choices are strengthened through quality support coupled with stable housing.





New housing options

“Claire said that she has become a happier and healthier person after moving into her own home.”



Synapse has forged strong partnerships leading to the establishment of new specialist housing on the Sunshine Coast. The housing has been purpose-built and designed to improve accommodation options for people living with disability.

Claire had previously lived in a house that was not readily accessible and didn't meet her support needs.

Claire said she felt uncertain and anxious about a move into a new home with a new support provider, but working together with Synapse, Claire has increased her confidence and independence. Claire now has control over her daily life, including regularly spending time with her daughter and partner in her own home.

Claire says that she feels like she has won the lottery by being able to move into this new home, which meets all of her needs. She also said that she has become a happier and healthier person with the assistance of the Synapse team and that they are there for her beyond her immediate care needs.

Claire now has control over the things that are important to her.

Advocacy has expanded in the past year

Synapse has expanded advocacy capability informing our work nationally. With the roll out of the NDIS throughout NSW, funding was provided by the Department of Social Services to ensure individuals have access to support when seeking review of NDIA decisions.

Synapse was successful in securing the opportunity to deliver this service in NSW.

Launching in February 2017, NDIS Appeals assisted 41 individuals from across NSW before 30 June.

Synapse is also one of three providers who was selected to assist NSW icare participants with support and advocacy in relation to a dispute or complaint.

icare provides long-term care and support needs to anyone who is severely injured in the workplace or on roads within NSW.

Synapse is pleased to be involved with the initiative, drawing on our advocacy expertise and ongoing partnership with icare. This is a great fit for Synapse with the program involving around 1,100 participants, 80 per cent of whom have a neurocognitive disability.

Building capability in partner organisations



Synapse is committed to work in partnership with others to build awareness and understanding of the impacts of neurocognitive disability.

In March 2017, Synapse had the opportunity to build knowledge in NSW Fair Trading to provide better services to people with neurocognitive disability across the state.

A total of 136 Customer Service staff at 19 NSW Fair Trading centres received neurocognitive disability awareness training that was tailored to meet their requirements.

This was a great chance for Synapse to work with a large government organisation to build their skills so that people with neurocognitive disability would receive services from an organisation that understands their experiences.

“136 Customer Service staff at 19 NSW Fair Trading centres received brain injury awareness training.”



Supporting choice and control in the NDIS

In July 2016, as the area of Sydney where Bruce lives began its transition to the NDIS, Synapse started to work with Bruce and his mum, Nerida, to provide support in accessing services under the scheme.

Bruce suffered a traumatic brain injury in 1978, which resulted in a lengthy rehabilitation period. However, following his rehabilitation, Bruce did not receive any formal support. He was very reliant on his mother for general support and decision-making, and Nerida was concerned (as she is ageing) about who would look after her son when she was no longer able to.

“Bruce is now halfway through his first NDIS plan, which has resulted in an increase in his social and community participation.”

In January 2017, with support from a Synapse advocate, Bruce requested access to the NDIS. By mid-February, Bruce, supported by a Synapse pre-planner, had developed his pre-planning workbook, which was submitted to the Local Area Coordinator prior to his planning meeting.

Less than a week after the meeting, Bruce had his NDIS Plan which provided significantly more support than he expected. Unfortunately, support coordination was not included in the plan, which Bruce and his mother felt was necessary as he had no experience dealing with support providers. Therefore, Bruce requested a plan review with support coordination included.

By mid-March, Bruce had his reviewed plan approved, which included support coordination. Bruce is now halfway through his first NDIS plan, which has resulted in an increase in his social and community participation, and he is working towards developing the required skills for his goal of independent living.



A record number of brokerage applications

The Synapse Brokerage Program continues to provide an invaluable service for people affected by a brain injury, to access goods and/or services that will help them reach their goal.

There were a record number of applications in the 2016/17 financial year, with 115 applications processed and 98 approved. Synapse has focused on strengthening reach, awareness and engagement in rural and remote areas to ensure access to valuable services. More applications than ever were received from individuals residing in regional and rural areas of NSW.

This year, a large number of the applications received were for neurological assessments to support entry into the NDIS and for occupational therapy to return to driving.

Synapse received an application from a young man who wanted to start a small business on his land in Northern NSW. He had tried to maintain a job after his brain injury, but it was too fatiguing for him. He requested \$1,700 of funding to cover the cost of five beehives and training.

Synapse recently received an update on his progress. Things have been ‘buzzing along’ and the man has grown in confidence and is enjoying his newly developed skill set. The first drum of honey is almost ready for sale, with over 250 kg of honey extracted from the now 40 beehives.



Supporting meaningful outcomes

“Lisa’s goal was to improve her physical mobility so that she could return to her lifelong passion.”

Lisa is a younger person living in a nursing home who received an NDIS Plan while under a short-term guardianship order.

The public guardian had previously worked with Synapse and knew of our strong commitment to supporting people with a neurocognitive disability to live with dignity and independence.

Lisa’s NDIS plan included Support Coordination hours and she engaged Synapse for this role. One of Lisa’s goals was to improve her physical mobility so that she could return to her lifelong passion of horse riding.

The role of Synapse’s Support Coordinator was to liaise with different service providers

(physiotherapy, occupational therapy and direct support workers) to ensure that everything was in place for Lisa.

It has been a long process but over the last two months, Lisa has started to spend time with horses and participated in group activities as she moves towards meeting her goal.



Guddi health weeks

Guddi health weeks aim to provide a culturally-safe assessment that facilitates access to the NDIS for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who live with a permanent disability. The Guddi Partnership (Synapse, Specialist Disability Services Assessment and Outreach Team [SDSAOT], Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability, and Griffith University) worked with the Townsville Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Corporation for Women [TATSICFW] to run the first health week in Townsville in February. SDSAOT provided on-site health assessments using the Guddi Protocol. TATSICFW supported participants to discuss their needs with SDSAOT and to complete NDIS applications. The week in Townsville assessed 53 participants and also helped raise awareness about the NDIS for the community.

There were many learnings from the new model of delivery, which have been shared and used in further health weeks. We are pleased that in addition to participant outcomes, the weeks have promoted relationship building, collaboration and communication between community members, individuals, families, services, NDIA staff and Local Area Coordinators.



Connecting differently

The Synapse Reconnections program provides the opportunity for individuals with a neurocognitive disability to connect and share their experiences with people who can understand and relate to the challenges that arise due to neurocognitive disability.

The Reconnections program has been expanded with the launch of a Reconnections Facebook group, which provides a place of support and relationship building online. The group is a dedicated private space for individuals experiencing neurocognitive disability and has grown to 47 regularly

contributing members.

Some of these online connections have also resulted in face to face meetings and friendships.

Participants post about events they are going to and invite people in the group to join them. Due to its growing popularity, the Reconnections program now runs regular group gatherings with plans to expand.



A new way of providing early support in hospital

Synapse understands the need for a service which provides support and information for families and individuals in hospital following a brain injury or stroke and throughout the rehabilitation journey. Synapse has launched a new program to address this need: the Brain Injury Family Liaison Service.

The aim of the Brain Injury Family Liaison Service is to increase the health, well-being, and independence of the individual and family upon discharge from hospital. Our Family Liaison Officer will build relationships with families during the acute stages of hospital admission and be a link between the hospital staff and family. They will help translate clinical information regarding assessments, prognosis, rehabilitation and services available to families who are undergoing a highly emotional experience. Synapse will continue to provide information and support to the family and the individual after discharge. Synapse is

undertaking comprehensive research and evaluation to assess the effectiveness of the program, and ensure that we are continuously improving our service.

This service has been made possible through generous donations from family and friends of people who have experienced stroke.

Donations like those that have made the Brain Injury Family Liaison Service possible are powerful examples of the very real impact of everyday individuals.

Our voice

While Synapse has its foundations in the Sunshine State, the journey over the past few years has brought a national focus, in particular with the joining of the Brain Injury Association of NSW. For the first time, the proportion of online visitors to Synapse from New South Wales was larger than that of Queensland. Synapse welcomes this growth in our audience as we seek to reach further across Australia.

Visits to the website increased during the year, with an average of 40 per cent more weekly visits comparing the first and last weeks of the year.

Also, in December Synapse published the latest edition of *ABI: The facts*, our resource for individuals and families experiencing neurocognitive disability.

In the six months to June, over 5,000 copies were sent out to individuals and organisations across Australia.

Our April edition of *Bridge* magazine featured larger fonts and article layout in a design update to ensure accessibility for all readers.

A follow-up survey returned a 92 per cent reader approval with the new format.



A national platform for research



Synapse is committed to contributing to knowledge and evidence that informs better services for people with neurocognitive disability. Synapse strives to remain at the forefront of change and practice that delivers real and meaningful outcomes to individuals and communities.

Synapse has strong research and development capacity. Synapse uses research to advocate for social change, and improved community capacity and professional practice for people with a neurocognitive disability.

Over the last twelve months, the R & D team have shared their findings to raise awareness and increase understanding of marginalised Australians with a neurocognitive disability. Synapse has engaged with a range of government departments, researchers and community services to share our research findings and to use these findings to develop better services for people with neurocognitive disability.

A number of articles have been published in journals, in addition to various presentations at national conferences and workshops. Our research has also been featured on state and national radio.

Publications include:

Townsend, C., White, P., Cullen, J., Wright, C. J., & Zeeman, H. (2017). Making every Australian count: Challenges for the NDIS and the equal inclusion of homeless Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples with neurocognitive disability. *Australian Health Review* (IF 1.343), e-pub ahead of print. doi:10.1071/AH16229/

Somerville, R., Cullen, J., McIntyre, M., Townsend, C., & Pope, S. (2017). Engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the 'Proper Way.' *Newparadigm: The Australian Journal on Psychosocial Rehabilitation* (14).

Townsend, C., McIntyre, M., White, P., Wright, C. J., Lakhani, A., Cullen, J., & Bishara, J. (in press). Inclusion of marginalised Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples with neurocognitive disability in the NDIS. *Disability and the Global South* (Special issue: 'Intersecting Indigeneity, Colonisation and Disability'), provisionally accepted for publication June 2017.

Lakhani, A., Townsend, C., & Bishara, J. (in press). Traumatic brain injury amongst Indigenous people: A systematic review. *Brain Injury*, accepted for publication August 2017.

Fetal alcohol spectrum disorders

It has been a busy year for our resident Senior Research Fellow and Elder-In-Residence, Aunty Janet Hammill, PhD. Aunty Janet is a renowned researcher in the field of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD), particularly amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Aunty Janet reports a considerable increase in requests for her input whether it be for seminars or FASD education and training.

Using a streamlined approach, the delivery sessions comprise a team of experts from developmental paediatricians, psychiatrists, interventionists, and Indigenous specialists.

Requests for presentations and education sessions have come from professional, community and academic sources, which see Aunty Janet and her collaborators delivering at least one session per week, as well as fielding inquiries daily from the legal system through to parents and carers of children with FASD.

Sharing the dangers of neurocognitive disability and road safety

Over three days in August, Synapse participated in the annual bstreetsmart event held at Sydney Olympic Park. The event aims to reduce the fatality and injury rates of young people by promoting safe behaviour as drivers, riders, and passengers.

This year, almost 24,000 young people attended, most being students between school years 10 and 11. Those in attendance were able to see first-hand the effects of road trauma, with realistic crash re-enactments and presentations from emergency and medical professionals.

The event was a chance for Synapse to interact with and inform young people about the lifelong effects of traumatic neurocognitive disability.

Synapse has had a presence at bstreetsmart for a number of years now and we were delighted that this year over 1,000 students visited our stand.



Synapse Cairns — partnering for change

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience at least twice the level of disability as non-indigenous Australians yet they frequently lack culturally safe supported housing options. The Cairns community identified a need for a safe place of belonging for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with a disability.

In April, Synapse proudly celebrated the completion of our Cairns housing initiative. Australia's first purpose-built housing initiative for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people with complex disability has been possible through 9+ years of partnership with community, traditional owners and

elders. The initiative provides eight homes and support services that have been intentionally designed to ensure cultural safety and informed by an unwavering commitment to Indigenous social and emotional well-being.

Synapse Cairns will offer Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with complex disabilities the opportunity to access culturally safe support and increase their sense of autonomy to live a life of choice, connected with the things that are important to their identity. It will build capability and opportunity for people to live beyond the immediate support environment and to develop skills and confidence to access more

appropriate housing options, return to country or a home of true choice.

In traditional supported housing, supports and activities of daily living become substitutes for natural relationships and connections. This increases service users' reliance on funded supports and diminishes reciprocity and connection. The support model is designed to build these natural relationships and connections. Varied skills and workforce design are required to deliver on this.

Synapse Cairns has an alternative workforce design and structure. The design and structure supports culturally safe practices that is aligned to the principles of social and emotional well-being. These include; health as holistic, the right to self-determination, the need for cultural understanding, impact of history in trauma and loss, recognition of human rights, the impact from racism and stigma, recognition of centrality of kinship, recognition of diversity, and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres

Strait Islander strengths. Culturally safe practice will also provide meaningful opportunities for people to be self-directed and attract, engage and retain a strong workforce that acknowledges, respects and preferences community and cultural knowledge.

The Synapse practice model focuses on cultural mentoring and capability building. Cultural mentors will be external to the support worker function. The mentor role will enable:

- (a) Service design to be firmly grounded in the stories and experience of individuals
- (b) Tenants to self-direct
- (c) The support worker team to work in culturally safe ways (tenant-led and mentor enabled) identified in the person's Futures Plan; and
- (d) Workforce roles will be drawn from Community thereby leveraging and strengthening social capital.



Coming together to yarn up

Connecting with each other, to country and culture. Caring for our people and strengthening connections to belonging. Synapse Participant Readiness Initiative artwork by Aunty Semah Mokak-Wischki.

NDIS participant readiness goes from strength to strength

During the year, a total of 1,196 individuals attended Synapse NDIS Participant Readiness Initiative (PRI) sessions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People in areas across Queensland, including South East Queensland, Townsville, Cairns, Mackay, Bowen, and Sarina.

Our approach to PRI is based on a community development model of engagement, ensuring that activities are community-led and culturally appropriate. Synapse consults local community on what would work best for them before commencing sessions. Synapse is pleased to

report that this approach received endorsement from the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services.

Synapse also received an extension on funding to continue PRI into 2017/18 — an illustration of the success of Synapse's recent work, and the impact of our approach to PRI on participants.

Synapse also successfully secured Commonwealth Government funding to increase NDIS awareness in hard-to-reach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Delivery of sessions commenced in July

and will be delivered throughout the Cape and Gulf areas in Far North Queensland.

“Our approach is based on a community development model of engagement.”



Partnering on the Sunshine Coast

Our services delivered at a home in Sippy Downs on the Sunshine Coast have a strong foundation in building capability and impact through partnership. The home was purpose-built for four tenants by Ausmar Assist, a specialist disability accommodation builder and part of the Ausmar Group. The home features wider entries and safe, accessible fixtures to ensure that the tenants have appropriate access to live their everyday life. Managing the tenancy is Coast 2 Bay Housing, who manage affordable housing options in the Sunshine Coast region.

Synapse entered the partnership as the support provider, with our Lifestyle Support Workers assisting the daily living and longer-term goals of the four tenants.

Sippy Downs has been successful for both the tenants (see Claire's story on page eight) and partners. One of the strengths of this approach is that it allows each partner to focus on their core delivery capability, ensuring that each tenant receives a high service standard.

The partnership approach has been the first of its kind for Synapse and signifies the potential for similar opportunities to impact individuals and the community in the future.

“One of the strengths of this approach is that it allows each partner to focus on their core delivery capability.”



The Brain Injury Network

Photo: A Synapse Brain Injury Network meeting

“It is a great opportunity to meet with colleagues who normally may not have the chance to talk face to face.”

This year saw the relaunch of the Synapse Brain Injury Network Group. The Network is made up of service providers, allied health specialists, researchers, volunteers, and professionals who work in the field of brain injury. The group shares information on new services, new providers, and emerging research, and discusses various topics related to brain injury. It is also a great opportunity to meet with colleagues who normally may not have the chance to talk face to face.

Synapse held the annual networking breakfast in May 2017 with 30 people attending. There was a positive atmosphere as people had the chance to talk about their services and find out more through networking with others.

As part of relaunching the group, we wanted to know

what would be most meaningful and engaging for participants. It was suggested that we hold two half-day mini-conferences per year, with various guest presenters talking about their services and experience.

We received many great topic ideas, and these formed the basis for the presenters for our inaugural conference in July 2017. Topics at the conference included Common Law and people's rights, community rehabilitation, Advocacy, and the NDIS.



Cairns Point Prevalence Project

The Cairns Point Prevalence Project began in late 2014 at Anglicare North Queensland's Quigley Street Night Shelter, supported by funds from a philanthropic trust. The research was undertaken in collaboration with Synapse, SDSAOT, and James Cook and Griffith Universities.

44 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples between 20 and 69 years of age participated in the research. 23 also participated in qualitative data collection through open-ended yarning sessions. The research found that:

- there were high levels of head injury and neurocognitive disability.
- many participants had impaired cognitive function, poor concentration/ planning and problem solving.
- participants had high levels of complex mental health problems including serious mental illness, acute psychosis, high level PTSD and depression.
- participants reported problematic cyclical homelessness, problems obtaining and sustaining housing, poor health and psychosocial well-

being, imprisonment, family dislocation and loss, and a lack of physical and emotional safety.

The Quigley Street Night Shelter have continued to regularly use The Guddi Protocol in their service and appreciate the increased understanding they have of their clients.

Additionally, Synapse has unique research data, enabling us to advocate for marginalised Australians with a neurocognitive disability. Synapse is engaging government and other potential partners with the findings of this research.

Partnering with Mission Australia

Mission Australia in Cairns has invited the Guddi Partnership (Synapse, Specialist Disability Services Assessment and Outreach Team [SDSAOT] Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability, and Griffith University) to support the implementation of the Guddi Protocol in three of their homelessness services.

This project will include community engagement, the use of culturally safe

methodologies (including the Guddi Protocol), staff training, and the building of a data repository that will contribute to an accurate evidence base regarding the extent and nature of complex disablement amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

Following initial training in the Guddi Protocol, Mission Australia services Douglas House, Woree Supported Accommodation, Street to Home

(Mission Australia) and the Guddi Partnership will conduct neurocognitive assessments using the Guddi Protocol.

A Memorandum of Understanding has been signed by Mission Australia and the Guddi Partnership. We look forward to our future work with Mission Australia.



Synapse Cairns construction partnerships

In September 2016, Synapse broke ground on the Warner Street site in Cairns following an eight-year development journey.

The funding for the construction of the building came from the Commonwealth Government and was the result of several Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, non-government, and corporate groups.

During the year, Synapse continued to work with architects, People Oriented Design and Indij Design, project managers AECOM, and construction company Hutchinson Builders,

local elders, and the community.

The successful completion of the project relied on the dedication of, and communication between, the partners to deliver through the construction phase, including the tropical Far North Queensland rainy season.

Synapse is delighted with the completion of the construction. Because of the commitment of our partners, Synapse Warner Street is set to support up to eight tenants in a culturally appropriate setting.

Stroke Peer Support

There are 475,000 individuals who have experienced a stroke and as a result are living with a brain injury in Australia, according to a report by Deloitte in 2017.

Our Synapse Options team provide the initial information and referral service whereby details and referrals to local health and support services are offered to our callers. Synapse has developed strong links within the community, which has enabled us to build a database of services who are experienced working with stroke and/or brain injury. On top of this service, we also offer a Stroke peer support service where those who are affected by stroke are able to speak with others who have survived. This is a non-medical support service which gives people a chance to talk with someone who has been through a similar experience. Our peer support team volunteer their time with Synapse and are passionate about helping others to maximise their rehabilitation

potential, as well as finding access to local stroke support groups.

In 2018 Synapse will be further enhancing our stroke support services, releasing our updated version of our stroke information kits, which are a guide to assist individuals who have experienced a stroke and their families. Our kits contain information on common effects of a stroke, stroke prevention, and details of national, state, and local services related to stroke and rehabilitation. Furthermore, we aim to increase the participation in the NDIS for those affected by a stroke and brain injury as previous reports indicate minimal participation. Synapse will do this by creating easy to use NDIS resources which will be available nationally by December 2017.





Our people

During the year, Synapse expanded to provide two new housing initiatives on the Sunshine Coast, recruited for the launch of our Cairns services, and welcomed additional staff to our existing services.

By the end of 2017, we will have 100 full-time, part-time and casual staff. Our team have also been supported by a number of generous volunteers.

Last year Synapse reported commitment to greater diversity in the gender breakdown of our team. In 2015/16, 70 per cent of our staff were female, this is representative of the community services sector in which we operate.

This year we are pleased to report progress on the gender diversity of our staff, with male staff now making 39 per cent of our team.

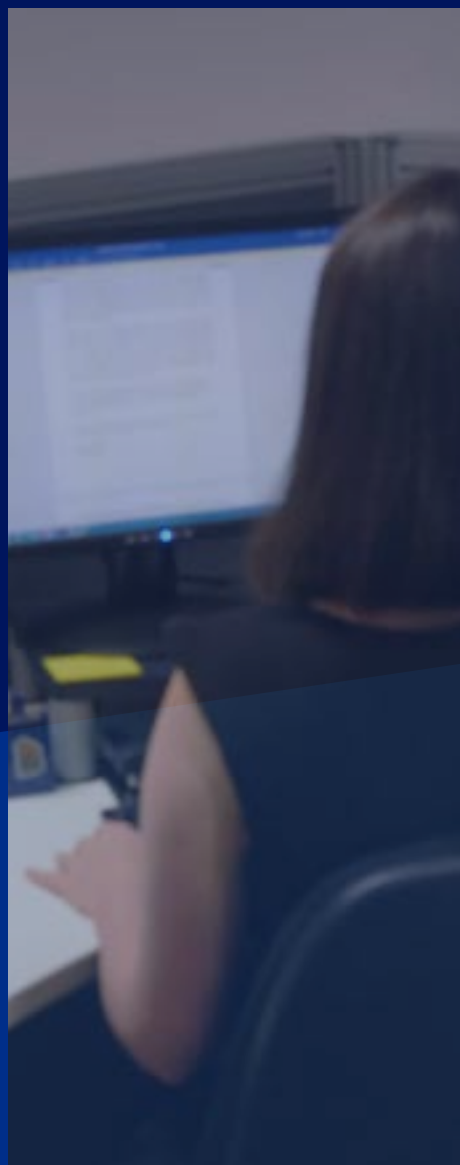
Corporate services

Synapse has a dedicated corporate services team that work to support the delivery of our services.

During the year the team focussed on improving efficiencies. A new time and attendance system was implemented removing the need for paper based timesheets which required manual entry into the payroll system. This system now also manages the rostering of our supported accommodation team members. Overall, the system has reduced the number of hours spent in time-keeping and the potential risk of user error.

Another way in which our corporate team has supported service delivery is in the introduction of NDIS Financial Plan Management (FPM). FPM provides a service to NDIS clients by our Finance Department. Synapse now provides 16 clients with management for their NDIS plan finances.

Delivering FPM has increased our understanding of the NDIS, knowledge that is now influencing other Synapse services that involve the NDIS.



Making an impact with donations

“Our donors help increase the impact of Synapse. Their support makes our services go further.”

Our donors help increase the impact of Synapse.

Their support provides the extra resource that makes our services go further. This year Synapse saw two significant contributions.

Just before Christmas, Synapse started an awareness partnership with local brewery Brisbane Brewing. Synapse now has a presence on the counters at their West End and Woollahra premises. It is in some ways an unlikely partnership – a neurocognitive disability organisation partnering with a business in the alcohol industry. However, as Synapse works to reach those most at risk, it is critical that messaging around the safe consumption of alcohol is made accessible. For Brisbane Brewing, a family run craft brewery, responsible drinking is a large part of their culture. As well as raising awareness, the partnership also raises ongoing donations that support the production of Synapse resources for those experiencing neurocognitive disability.

Also, as mentioned earlier in the report, our new Brain Injury Family Liaison Service has been developed solely from the generosity of family and friends impacted by stroke. The service will provide a Family Liaison Officer in Brisbane's Princess Alexandra Hospital, with a view to reaching other hospitals as the service develops. The Family Liaison Officer will provide support to families from the point of injury through to post-discharge, linking between hospital staff, families, and ongoing rehabilitation services.

Synapse is a deductible gift registered not-for-profit. Support received at all levels increases the impact that we can make in the lives of individuals and families experiencing neurocognitive disability. Donations over \$2 can be used as tax deductions; this means that while Synapse receives the full impact of the contribution, donors also receive value back in return.

To make an impact through the work of Synapse visit synapse.org.au/donations, or contact us at info@synapse.org.au to find out more.



Meet the Board

Synapse has an experienced team of Non-Executive Directors providing leadership on our Board and strategic input to the direction of Synapse.



Melanie Farris
Chair, Non-Executive Director

Melanie is an experienced governance, communications and operations professional. Currently in governance roles with Invion Limited (ASX:IVX), Factor Therapeutics (ASX:FTT) and Telix Pharmaceuticals, her previous roles include HRH The Prince of Wales's Office (UK), Global Asset Management (UK), Imperial Cancer Research Fund (UK), and The Prince's Foundation (UK). Melanie holds a Bachelor of Communication (Public Relations), and a Graduate Diploma in Applied Corporate Governance.



John Chambers
Non-Executive Director

John had a varied experience in his early career - working as a carpenter, boat builder, commercial fisherman, and in real estate. He later gained entry to the University of Queensland where he graduated with degrees in Commerce and Law. John commenced practice as a solicitor in 1991. In 1994 he was made a Senior Associate at Ebsworth and Ebsworth, becoming a Partner in 1996. In 1998 John became a Partner at Murphy Schmidt until his retirement in 2015. John also serves on the Queensland board of the Nurses and Midwifery Board of Australia.



Anthony Thompson
Non-Executive Director

Anthony has over 25 years' experience in senior executive, consulting and company director roles in Australia, Asia, Europe, and the USA. Originally qualifying in engineering, Anthony subsequently completed an MBA and further qualification areas including corporate governance and risk management. He has also lectured at QUT in Brisbane. In 2005, with three others, Anthony founded and became Chairman of the not-for-profit 'Safe Places for Children'. Anthony currently serves as a director for a number of companies across Australia and Asia. He also spends time coaching senior management across private and government organisations.



Neil Jackson
Non-Executive Director

Neil retired as Assistant Auditor-General with the Queensland Audit Office after nearly 40 years' experience in financial and information systems external auditing. He is a past President of the Queensland Division of CPA Australia, and was a Queensland Divisional Councillor for eight years. Currently he is an external member on the Audit Committees of the Departments of Housing and Public Works, Transport and Main Roads, and Premier and Cabinet.



Siena Perry
Non-Executive Director

For close to 15 years, Siena has worked in Australia and internationally in the strategic communication, fundraising, digital communication, change management and engagement space, with a focus on not-for-profit organisations. She currently works for an Asia Pacific Internet governance and development organisation, and in the past has advised on the University of Queensland, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, Suncorp Group, Queensland Government Department of Premier and Cabinet, Jeans for Genes Day, and Surf Life Saving Foundation, among others. A family member of Siena's suffered a severe brain injury, and she serves in his memory.



Paul Raciborski
Non-Executive Director

Paul experienced a severe brain injury as the result of a fall on 22 December 2003. Since then he has striven to make a difference for others who have been through similar experiences. Paul works as a Team Leader in a residential home for four people with intellectual and physical disabilities. In his previous career he worked in corporate project management, with additional experience in manufacturing and supply chains. Paul is married with four children and his wife is the Principal of a special school. In his spare time he enjoys choral singing, rock climbing, mountaineering, and woodwork.



Dr Paul White
Non-Executive Director

Dr Paul White (MB, BS, FRANZCP) has extensive experience in many facets of health care, including: governance, education, sector planning, development and management; clinical leadership, public health, and direct clinical care. He has held a number of leadership positions in the health care sphere. He is a psychiatrist working across the state of Queensland, with a particular interest in Far North Queensland. He is Clinical Director of the Specialist Disability Assessment and Outreach Team, Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services, Queensland.



Paul Watson
Non-Executive Director

Paul is a Director of Berrill & Watson Lawyers and is an expert in superannuation and life insurance. Paul has run seminars and workshops for disability support groups, financial counsellors and the consumer movement to improve the lives of people with a disability, injury or chronic illness for over a decade. Paul was awarded an Honorary Life membership with Palliative Care Queensland as a result of the support he provided to that organisation.



Michael Dahl
Non-Executive Director

Michael is a Chartered Accountant, a member of the Australian Institute of Company Directors and has worked in senior commercial and financial roles for over 25 years. He also brings broad operational and systems expertise from his time working within a diverse portfolio of businesses. Michael is focused on supporting the team at Synapse to continue delivering high levels of care and service as they transition through the implementation of the NDIS.

Our Leadership

Synapse has a very capable leadership team that is responsible for providing strategic and operational management for the organisation. The team represents a wealth of experience in specialist disability services, research, and corporate management.



Jennifer Cullen
Chief Executive Officer

Jennifer Cullen is an Adjunct Associate Professor and CEO of Synapse. Jennifer has over 26 years’ experience in disability and aged care services. In 2013 she was appointed to the NDIS Independent Advisory Council as the Queensland Member and in 2016 was appointed to the National Disability and Carers Advisory Council as a Member.

She leads a range of research initiatives and projects that focus on supporting Indigenous Australians with complex neurocognitive disabilities, including FASD. Jennifer is a descendant of the Wakka Wakka people.



Adam Schickerling
National Disability Reform Manager

Adam Schickerling has over 15 years’ experience within the government and community sectors in a variety of nationally-oriented general management and executive management roles. He has qualifications in Applied Science, Disability, Management and Training.

With experience in business improvement and organisational development functions, Adam has expertise in leading national expansion and growth strategies focussing on disability and community care.



Clare Townsend PhD
Research and Development Manager

Dr Clare Townsend is the National Manager, Research and Development at Synapse and an Adjunct Associate Professor at Griffith University and James Cook University.

She is Chief Investigator on a suite of research projects which aim to improve identification and understanding of neurocognitive disabilities amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Queensland and Victoria. This work includes the Guddi project - research with homeless people in Cairns.

Clare also has a background in mental health policy research and service provision.



Judith Hunt
Chief Financial Officer

Judith’s role includes the management of accounting at Synapse as well as general business support in corporate services, marketing, and communications. She has over 20 years of financial management experience across two countries, including in the not-for-profit environment. Judith also serves in a volunteer role on the Board of Directors for Community Queensland.



Aunty Janet Hammill PhD
Senior Research Fellow

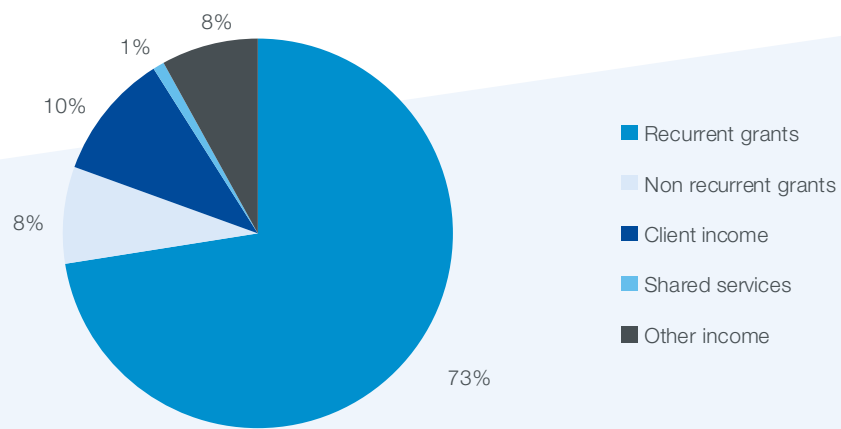
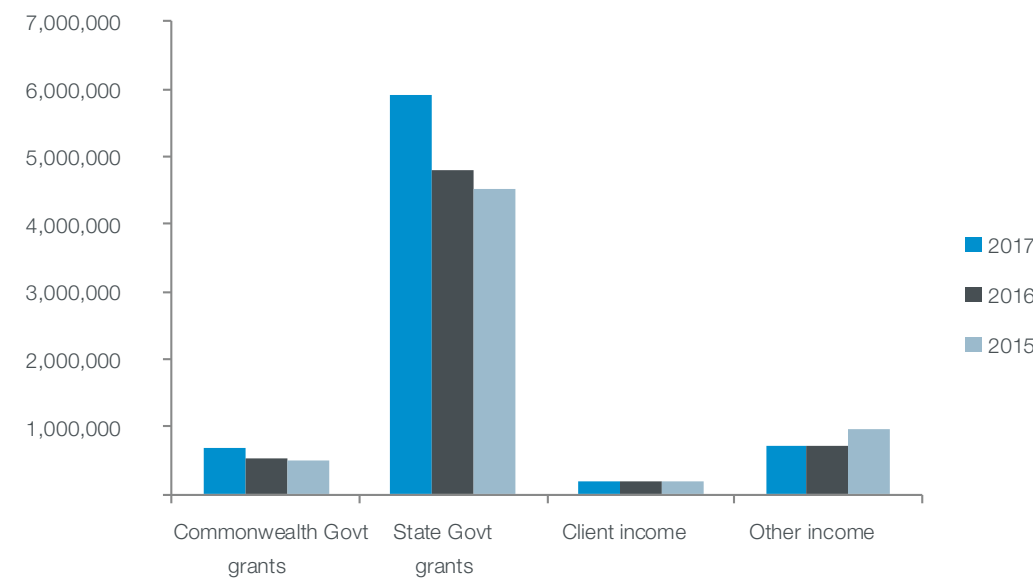
Dr Jan leads the Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorders Research stream at Synapse. She is also the coordinator of the Collaboration for Alcohol Related Developmental Disorders (CARDD), formerly the Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) Research Network, at the University of Queensland Centre for Clinical Research and is a member of the National Indigenous Disability Researcher’s Network.

Having a shared ancestry with the Gomeroi people of the NSW Pilliga Scrub and of the first convicts into the area, Jan’s primary interest is in Indigenous health outcomes.

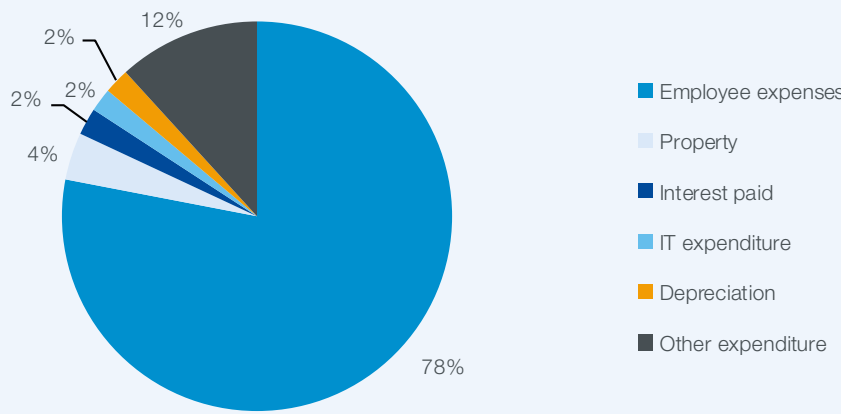
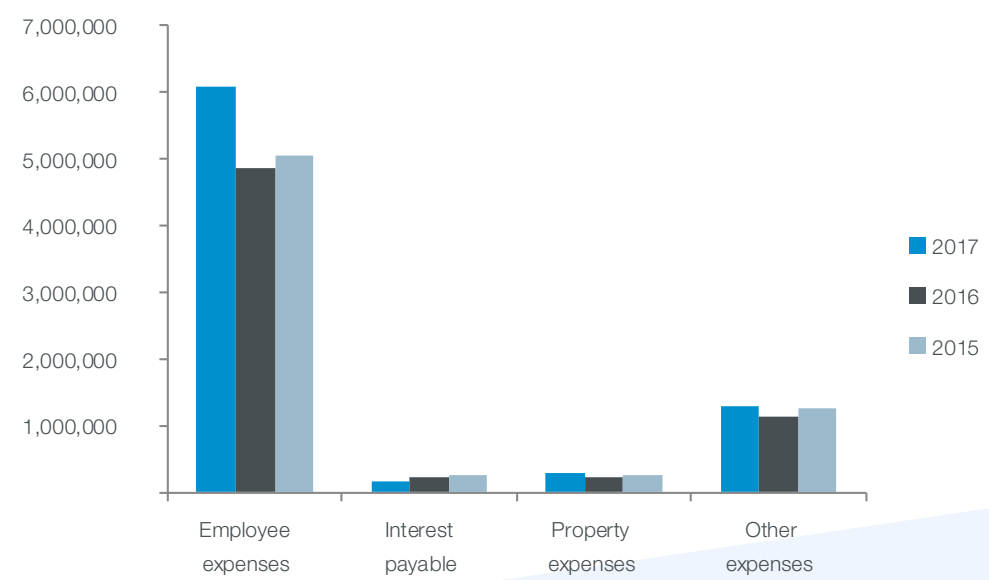
Financial summary

Synapse operations grew significantly in 2017, with growth in the capacity for services and new supported accommodation locations. As a result, employee expenses noticeably increased. Overall, Synapse ended the year in a strong position, increasing our comprehensive income and equity.

Revenue For the year ended 30 June 2017



Expenditure For the year ended 30 June 2017



Statement of cash flows For the year ended 30 June 2017

	2017 \$	2016 \$
Cash flows from operating activities		
Receipts from donations, grants and client related activities	8,335,255	7,127,685
Payments to suppliers and employees	(7,049,953)	(6,089,563)
Interest received	57,223	109,542
Finance costs	(201,745)	(287,280)
Net cash generated from operating activities	1,140,780	860,384
Cash flows from investing activities		
Proceeds from sale of property, plant and equipment	615	2,273
Purchase of property, plant and equipment	(3,422,431)	(383,633)
Cash assumed from business combination	475,327	-
Net cash used in investing activities	(2,946,488)	(381,360)
Cash flow from financing activities		
Repayment of bank borrowings	-	(182,953)
Repayment of finance leases	-	(14,274)
Net cash used in financing activities	-	(197,227)
Net (decrease)/ increase in cash held	(1,805,709)	281,797
Cash and cash equivalents at beginning of financial year	4,644,877	4,363,080
Cash and cash equivalents at end of financial year	2,839,169	4,644,877

Statement of comprehensive income

For the year ended 30 June 2017

	2017 \$	2016 \$
Operating revenue	8,433,171	7,262,568
Accountancy and auditor's remuneration	(23,040)	(23,075)
Advertising and promotions	(63,471)	(38,328)
Client support services	(424,161)	(314,063)
Computer expenses	(154,627)	(111,217)
Consultancy fees	(179,430)	(27,383)
Depreciation and amortisation expense	(163,365)	(175,774)
Employee benefits expense	(5,774,118)	(4,848,521)
Finance costs and charges	(255,508)	(287,280)
Insurance	(62,299)	(64,316)
Legal expenses	(21,595)	(18,489)
Office expenses	(173,659)	(126,289)
Motor vehicle expenses	(48,118)	(52,938)
Other expenses	(306,336)	(233,315)
Property expenses	(220,621)	(155,702)
Gain/loss on disposal of assets	(2,452)	1,325
Operating surplus / (deficit) for the year	590,371	787,203
Non-operating activities	3,515,682	343,453
Surplus / (deficit) for the year	4,106,053	1,130,656
Other comprehensive income	-	-
Total other comprehensive income for the year	-	-
Total comprehensive income for the year	4,106,053	1,130,656

Statement of financial position

For the year ended 30 June 2017

	2017 \$	2016 \$
Current assets		
Cash on hand	2,839,169	4,644,877
Trade and other receivables	251,685	195,001
Other current assets	50,600	71,989
Total current assets	3,141,454	4,911,867
Non-current assets		
Property, plant and equipment	11,187,972	7,901,030
Total non-current assets	11,187,972	7,901,030
Total assets	14,329,426	12,812,897
Current liabilities		
Trade and other payables	858,567	416,367
Grants and revenue received in advance	884,080	3,947,338
Borrowings	-	161,383
Provisions	289,026	280,242
Total current liabilities	2,031,673	4,805,330
Non-current liabilities		
Borrowings	4,018,088	3,832,942
Lease liabilities	-	-
Provisions	95,250	96,263
Total non-current liabilities	4,113,338	3,929,205
Total liabilities	6,145,011	8,734,535
Net assets	8,184,415	4,078,362
Equity		
Accumulated surplus	7,712,458	3,606,405
Property revaluation surplus	471,957	471,957
Total equity	8,184,415	4,078,362

A renewed strategic direction

Over the course of the year, we have been reviewing Synapse’s direction and focus. Working across the organisation and with the support of our Board, we have developed a new strategic plan that will ensure Synapse continues to make a positive impact across several areas in the years ahead.

As part of the review, Synapse has identified the possibility of broadening our expertise to areas closely related to brain injury. We know that many of the individuals and families that we have supported often experience other neurocognitive conditions. Synapse will broaden its focus to collective neurocognitive disabilities, defined as *where a problem with the brain or*

neural pathways causes a condition(s) that impairs learning or mental/physical functioning (or both) such as after neurological illness, mental illness, drug use, or brain injury.

Synapse will focus increasingly on partnerships. As featured in this report, partnerships already play an important role in how Synapse impacts individuals and community. Partnerships bring additional resources, specialist focus, and greater impact. Synapse will continue to form partnerships that will positively impact on those affected by neurocognitive disability.

Synapse is well known for its services in Queensland and New South Wales. Increasingly, Synapse has been

undertaking research and sharing expertise across Australia. We have seen an increase in requests for resources and information from across the country. Synapse will continue to look at how we can better contribute across Australia.

Synapse will increasingly provide services to individuals regardless of their age. Previously we have focussed on adults. However, brain injury can occur even before birth, and early intervention is known to improve quality of life. Synapse has already built expertise with younger people through our Senior Research Fellow, Aunty Janet Hammill PhD working in the area of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders. We are also in the process of developing our Guddi Protocol tool for young people.

Looking ahead, Synapse will continue to support those experiencing brain injury. This experience will now also impact the lives of many others living with similar disabilities.

Our belief stands firm; we believe that everyone affected by neurocognitive disability is entitled to lead a life of quality, based on their own decisions and choices.

“Over the course of the year, we have been undertaking a review of the direction and focus of Synapse.”

Acknowledgments

Synapse would like to thank our stakeholders, partners and supporters who have contributed to our success this past year.

Funding bodies

Australian Government
New South Wales Government
Queensland Government

Major donors

Brisbane Brewing Company
Les Clarence
Music for the Brain event
J & R Cassimatis

Pro Bono lawyers

Clayton Utz

Research partners

Acquired Brain Injury Outreach Service (ABIOS), Queensland Health
Anglicare North Queensland
Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships (DATSIP)
Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability
Hopkins Centre, Griffith University
Mission Australia, Cairns
Mununjali Housing
Professor Dainius Puras, Vilnius University
Proffesor Margaret Kelaher, Melbourne University
Specialist Disability Services Assessment and Outreach Team (SDSAOT)
Townsville Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation for Women
Winda-Mara Aboriginal Corporation

Service partners

Ausmar Assist
Coast 2 Bay Housing

Volunteers

Heidi Cadies
Julian Saavedra
Robyn Magers
Suzie Wright



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formerly-brain-injury-association-qld](https://linkedin.com/company/synapse-formerly-brain-injury-association-qld)



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