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Chitta
Initiative for Research by Pacta

LANDSCAPE OF FUNDING DISABILITY CONVENING



BENGALURU

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“At its core, philanthropy must step in where markets fall short and public systems can’t adequately respond, even when the path forward is arduous.
The disability sector exemplifies this. Despite the scale of opportunity and its profound impact on lives of both individuals and families, disability remains one of the most under-served areas within India’s development landscape.”

Archana Chandra
(CEO, Jai Vakeel Foundation) &
Amit Chandra
(Chairperson - Bain Capital India Advisors
& Co-Founder ATE Chandra Foundation)

INTRODUCTION



Pacta's report,
The Landscape of Funding for Disability in India, is a first-of-its-kind study that maps the funding landscape for the disability sector in India, examining how resources currently flow, where gaps persist, and the structural factors shaping access to funding.

Drawing on insights from NPOs, funders, and intermediaries, the study identifies opportunities for more equitable and sustained support. Building on the findings of the study, Pacta convened a series of curated gatherings across Bengaluru, Mumbai, and Delhi, each anchored in the study's insights and focused on advancing ideas for strengthening the sector.

The Bengaluru convening, held on 6 May 2026, brought 45 participants from civil society, philanthropy, research, and ecosystem leadership. The convening began with an overview of the study, followed by a data walk-through of its findings, facilitated breakout discussions, and an open-floor session for cross-table synthesis and reflection.





EXPLORED THEMES

01 MAINSTREAMING DISABILITY IN MENTAL HEALTH

02 MAINSTREAMING DISABILITY IN SPORTS

03 FUNDER AND NPO MATCHMAKING

04 GRANT PROCESSES THAT FACILITATE NPOS IN THE DISABILITY SECTOR

05 CAPACITY BUILDING

06 OPEN DATA AND DASHBOARDS

01. MAINSTREAMING DISABILITY IN MENTAL HEALTH

Acceptance, awareness, and accessibility were identified as the foundational conditions for disability-inclusive mental health systems. The more substantive tension, however, was between individualised support and collective models of care, and what a genuinely inclusive approach demands in terms of scope and resourcing.

There was broad agreement that disability-inclusive mental health interventions should be comprehensive in scope, covering all 21 categories of disability and extending to caregivers. ***The caveat was an important one: comprehensiveness without adequate resourcing produces inclusion in name only.*** The question of who funds what, and on whose terms, shapes what is actually delivered.

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Categories of Disability Covered

Funder-driven priorities were identified as a structural constraint. They frequently do not map onto the individual and contextual needs of persons with disabilities, producing a persistent gap between what gets funded and what the sector needs to do. Bridging this gap requires sustained, cross-sectoral collaboration among funders, service providers, caregivers, and persons with disabilities. **The current tendency toward siloed intervention is both a design failure and a resource problem.**



02. MAINSTREAMING DISABILITY IN SPORTS

The progress represented by para-sport, and the limits of that progress, framed the discussion. The Paralympics and the growing visibility of para-athletes are genuine achievements. At the same time, sports involving persons with disabilities continue to be received as a curiosity rather than as sport, a distinction that carries real consequences for how funding, policy attention, and media coverage are allocated.

A grounding example:
Para-athletes at the TCS Marathon ran barefoot because appropriate footwear was unavailable, even as organisations like Nike have developed dedicated lines for persons with disabilities. The gap between what exists commercially and what reaches athletes in practice is a systemic failure. More broadly, the sports and disability intersection remains underfunded and lacks a coherent policy pathway beyond para-sport recognition.



Early intervention was identified as the highest-value site for investment. Inclusive sports facilities at the foundational level serve multiple functions simultaneously: accelerating athlete development, creating conditions for social integration, and allowing athletes and para-athletes to train and compete alongside each other rather than in parallel systems. This case for investment is more durable, and more demanding, than the one typically made.

03. FUNDER AND NPO MATCHMAKING

The communication gap between funders and disability organisations is structural, not incidental. Frameworks for impact, fundability, and theory of change were not designed with disability work in mind and consistently fail to capture what the sector produces. Conventional metrics reward visible, proximate outcomes while discounting the foundational, long-term work that makes those outcomes possible.

Opacity in funder decision-making compounds this. Disability organisations consistently report having no access to selection criteria, no feedback after rejection, and no understanding of how funding decisions are reached. Inconsistent reporting requirements across funders impose an administrative burden that falls most heavily on smaller organisations. **The accountability relationship, as currently structured, runs in one direction only.**



Intermediaries were identified as a structural response: translating between organisational realities and funder expectations, building the domain knowledge funders need to assess organisations on relevant terms, and **creating the conditions for multi-year relational funding rather than one-time transactional grants.** Credibility benchmarking, distinct from compliance and focused on domain depth, reach, and governance, was identified as a missing piece of sector infrastructure. It was also noted that endorsements from established funders carry significant signal value and could function as a mechanism for expanding the pool of capital entering the sector without requiring new institutional structures.

04. GRANT PROCESSES THAT FACILITATE NPOS IN THE DISABILITY SECTOR

The structural misalignment between grant design and organisational need is well understood within the sector and poorly addressed by it. Tied funding, short award cycles, and financial year constraints under CSR compress planning horizons and transfer operational risk to organisations already working with limited reserves. **The absence of unrestricted funding was the most consistently raised concern.**

Compliance and documentation requirements are extensive and disproportionate in impact. **Organisations operate with minimal tolerance for failure while absorbing the full weight of accountability to funders.** Delays in grant disbursal compound this asymmetry. The disability sector's invisibility within CSR funding priorities was assessed as a structural problem rather than a communications one: **the architecture of CSR does not make disability a natural or prominent priority, and that is unlikely to change without deliberate intervention.**

Calls from the room centred on multi-year and unrestricted funding models, simplified compliance frameworks, stronger intermediary support for smaller organisations, and investment in research and organisational capacity alongside direct service delivery. A funder readiness assessment was proposed: **a mechanism to evaluate whether corporate partners are themselves prepared to provide reasonable accommodations before the burden of demonstrating success is placed on implementing organisations.**



05. CAPACITY BUILDING

Three capacity gaps were identified with consistency: Fundraising Capability, Succession & Second-line Leadership, Ability to communicate impact in terms that are legible to funders without being reductive. These are not new diagnoses. They persist because the sector lacks shared infrastructure for assessing, addressing, or tracking them at scale.

A significant part of the problem lies with funder-side knowledge. **Limited domain understanding among funders means organisations are frequently indistinguishable from one another in grant assessments, regardless of the specificity or depth of their work.** This produces poor capital allocation and rewards legibility over substance. The absence of a sector body, an apex organisation with the standing to set norms, build shared standards, and represent the sector in policy spaces, was named as a structural gap that capacity building efforts cannot compensate for on their own.

Existing tools such as OCAT and Meerya were acknowledged as useful but remain narrowly adopted. Peer learning from larger to smaller organisations was described as both underexplored and as a collective responsibility that no single actor has stepped up to own. The case for structured, facilitated peer cohorts was made alongside the case for a formal working group to explore the mandate and governance of a NASSCOM-equivalent for the disability sector.



06. OPEN DATA AND DASHBOARDS

The sector operates in **near-total information asymmetry** on funding, entitlements, and impact. UDID data exists but its function as a gateway to entitlements is poorly understood by both disability organisations and the beneficiaries it is meant to serve. Government portals carry outdated information. The repeated observation that discovery is expensive captures a systemic failure whose costs fall on those least equipped to absorb them.

Tamil Nadu has made meaningful progress in capturing NCD and disability data, but it remains siloed with no equivalent in other states. **RTI is currently the primary mechanism** by which organisations extract disability data from government systems, which signals how far proactive data sharing practices have to develop. **The 2% reservation for persons with disabilities exists in policy but has no live monitoring or enforcement data infrastructure supporting it.**



A governance question surfaced that no one in the room could answer: **who owns the dashboard?** Impact data is scattered, unpublished, or held by individual funders. Aggregate sector-level progress is neither tracked nor published. What changed for persons with disabilities in India between 2019 and 2024 could not be answered collectively, a signal the room took seriously. A **federated data architecture** was proposed, built on a custodian-plus-orchestrator model, anchored by a **publicly accessible, regularly updated disability data portal** developed in collaboration with DEPwD.

MEDIA COVERAGE AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Non-profits in disability sector receive low CSR funding, State allocation: Report

The Hindu · May 13, 2026

Disability sector gets only 1% CSR funds, says report

Deccan Herald · May 16, 2026

Study Finds Disability Sector Receives Only 1% of CSR Funding in India

The CSR Universe · May 20, 2026



Building a Stronger Disability Ecosystem: Nivedita Krishna on Funding Inclusion and Systemic Change

The CSR Universe · June 24, 2026

Why Disability Remains Overlooked by Funders

IDR · June 25, 2026

EP 2006 | Only 1% CSR Funding for Disability?

Radio Udaan

GALLERY





















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