

NEURODIVERSITY IN THE STEM WORKPLACE

FOSTERING INCLUSION &
VALUING DIVERSE MINDS

Presented with the support of NeuroAdvisory Newcastle



HUNTER *wise*
Hunter Women in STEM Network

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We respectfully acknowledge the Awabakal and Worimi people as the traditional Aboriginal owners of the land we are gathered on today. We recognise their enduring connection to land, water and community.

We pay our respects to the wisdom of Elders past and present, and extend that respect to all First Nations people joining us today.

**GUEST SPEAKER
& EVENT HOST
JODIE SIMPSON**

NeuroAdvisory Newcastle



**GUEST SPEAKERS
KATRINA DWYER
ROMANY MCGUFFOG
DANIELLE SIMMONETTE**

ABOUT NEUROADVISORY NEWCASTLE

*Championing neurodiversity by conducting research
and teaching in partnership with neurodivergent people*



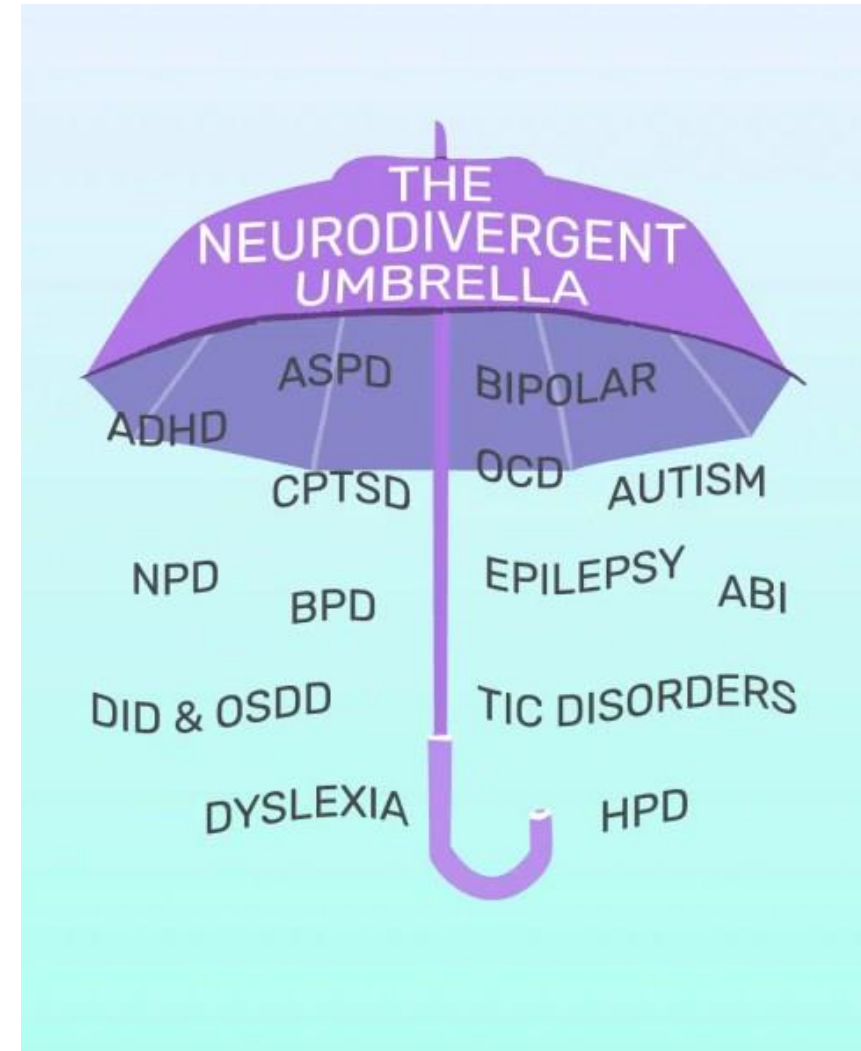
ABOUT NEUROADVISORY NEWCASTLE

- The first **neurodivergent advisory group** of its kind in the Newcastle region
- 13-person panel established late 2023
- Designed to guide research and teaching priorities
- Work together in every step of the research process, including setting research priorities
- We are committed to inclusive research and teaching practices
- We strive to create a culture in which neurodivergent people are recognised as **experts by experience**



ABOUT NEUROADVISORY NEWCASTLE

- Natural variation in how people think, learn, and interact with the world
- The term **neurodivergence** refers to variations from what is considered typical – one differs in some way from what society views as ‘normal’.
- Neurodivergent and Neurotypical



PREVALENCE 2022 DATA

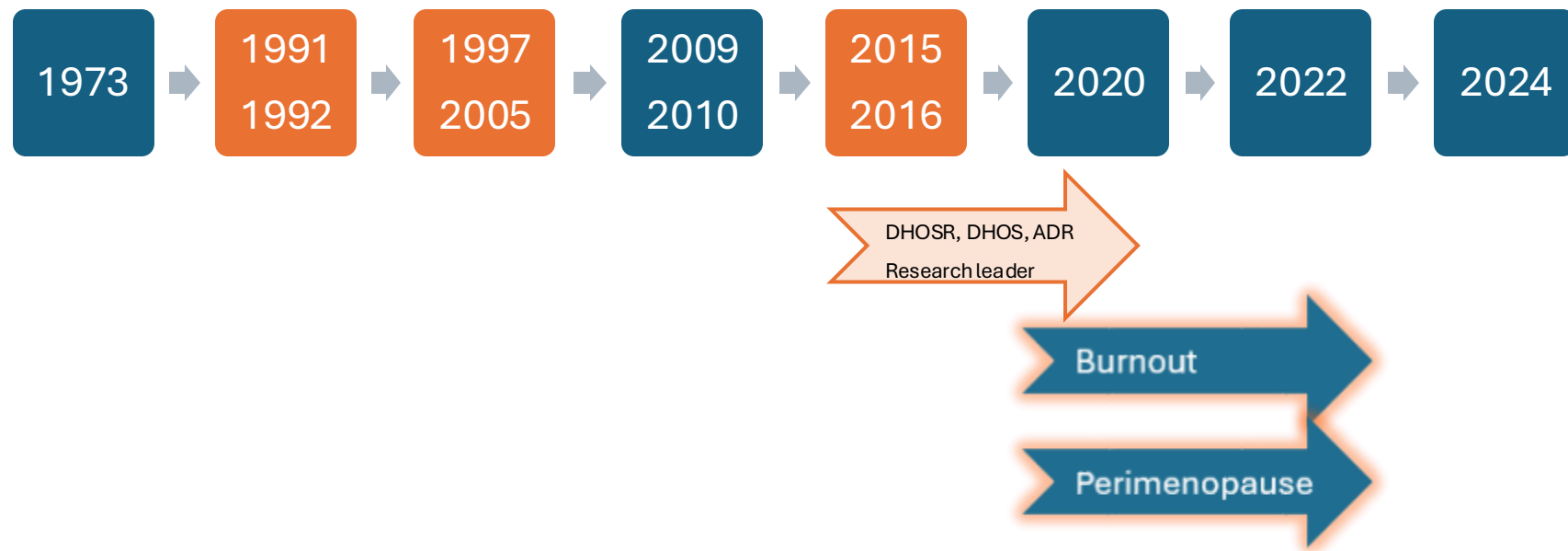
AUTISM

- 290,900 (1.1%) Autistic Aussies
- 41.8% ↑ from 2018
- 90,900 (0.7%) autistic females - a 95.5% ↑

ADHD

- Medication use ↑ ~ 300% in 10 years
- Increase was sharper in adults
- And specifically, women

MY PATHWAY TO NEURODIVERGENCE



LATE DIAGNOSED AUTISTIC ADULT

BINGO

People pleasing tendencies <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Routines are sacred <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Trouble getting into bed	Secret stims <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Knowing more about others than yourself <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Listening to the same song over and over	Stomach issues	Sticking to safe foods	Triggered by light touch	Needing extra time to process what someone just said
"I can't hear you. The lights are too bright."	Making a list then immediately hating it	RESEARCH MODE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Sitting in your car for longer than you intended to	Headphones make things better <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Sensitive to caffeine/alcohol/meds	Feeling what others are feeling <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Wanting to be alone but feeling lonely <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Needing to know "WHY?"	Wishing other people asked good questions, too
Comfy clothes always <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Easily upset by injustice <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	"Why isn't everyone as blunt as me?" <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Not wanting to appropriate the term "autistic"	Planning things perfectly and being unable to execute

@taylor_heaton_

SOME OF THE COOL THINGS I HAVE LEARNED

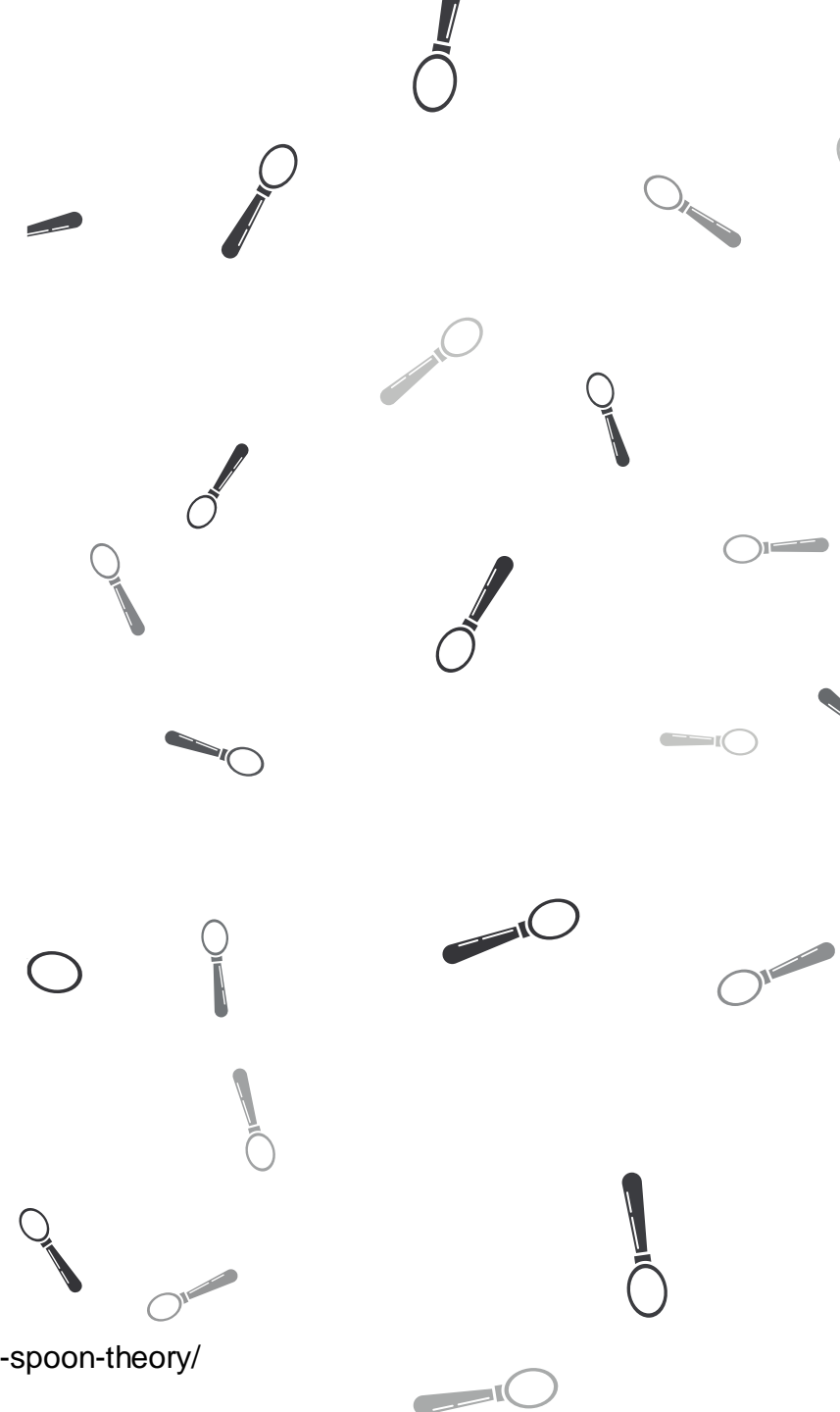


- When I sing random lines from songs without warning – Echolalia
- When I know I don't feel ok but cannot tell you exactly what it is – Alexithymia
- I walk into walls and trip on a flat surface – proprioception
- I never really feel full and am not sure if I am in pain – Interoception
- When I think your response means I have done something wrong – Rejection sensitivity

ABOUT SPOON THEORY

The basics:

- Tasks cost spoons
- You have finite spoons in a day
- Use more spoons than your limit = emotional overwhelm, exhaustion, more tired the next day
- Executive function difficulties mean neurodivergent people use more spoons



SPOON THEORY

Things that have helped me:

- Think of tasks in terms of energy instead of time
- Pair 'high cost' tasks with 'low cost' tasks
- Plan ahead for tasks that cost a lot of spoons
- Let others know you're low on spoons (if safe to do so)



ABOUT ACCOMMODATIONS FROM THE ADVISORY

“Accommodations are not just preferences for ways of existing, we need them. If I say that I need regular breaks, I am not just saying I want them, I need them to literally be able to get through the day and not feel absolutely wiped out all afternoon and evening”

“Being neurodivergent is not a curse or a disease. Whilst it comes with its own set of challenges, it also has its advantages. It is society’s responsibility to help mitigate those challenges and make the best use of the advantages neurodiversity offer”

WHAT ARE ACCOMMODATIONS AND ADJUSTMENTS?

Accommodations and adjustments are strategies implemented to minimise barriers to participation for people with disabilities, thereby ensuring equitable access and involvement.

Each individual that is Neurodivergent is different from the next despite sharing diagnostic criteria, our needs and adjustments will vary as much as our personalities vary.

Accommodations and Adjustments can't be effective if we don't talk about them first.

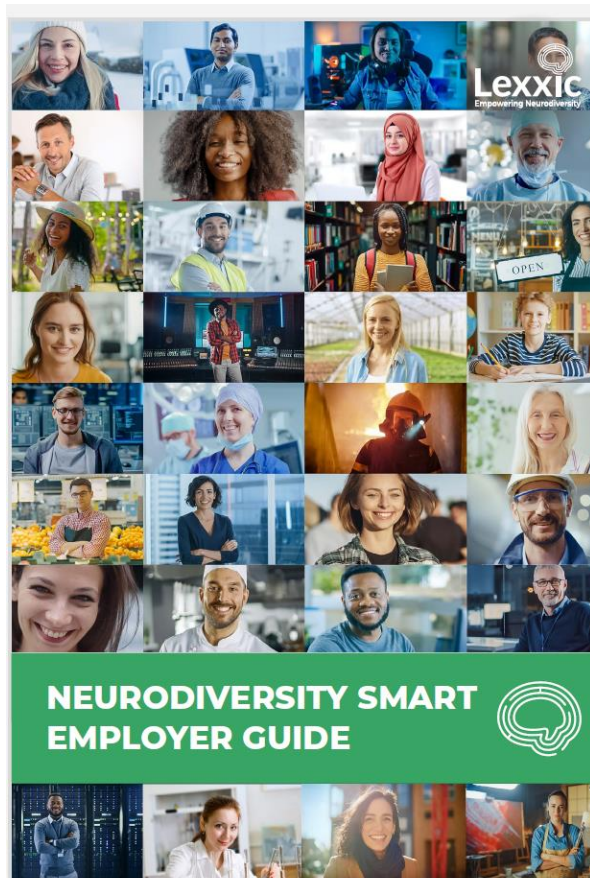


STEM ACCOMMODATIONS AND ADJUSTMENTS

- Sensory Sensitivities
- Communication
- Meetings and Environment
- Flexibility
- Assistive Technology
- Furniture
- What, Why, When



WHAT DIVERSE MINDS CAN ADD TO A WORKPLACE



According to the Harvard Business Review, companies that embrace neurodiversity can also gain a competitive advantage. This is because **neurodivergent individuals often possess strengths which are critical to our future economy.**

These can include:



Creativity, innovation and big-picture thinking



Entrepreneurialism and leadership skills



Energy and hyperfocus



Attention to detail, logic, problem solving



New perspectives, honesty and integrity

Neuro-inclusive organisations which empower individuals to maximise these strengths and remove barriers to their success, **can increase productivity, revenue and reputation.** Leading organisations such as EY, Microsoft, GCHQ, Goldman Sachs and JP Morgan Chase are already recognising these benefits.

WHAT NEURO-INCLUSIVE WORKPLACES LOOK LIKE

CIPD

Neuroinclusion at work

What does a neuroinclusive organisation look like?

Neuroinclusion is a journey, not a box to be ticked



Creating an inclusive workplace for all types of thinkers



Supporting individual needs



Developing a neuroinclusive culture, leading to greater comfort and belonging



Teams need to be more empathetic to be more effective



Neurodiversity and recruitment



Career progression, skills and talent development



Neuroinclusion can improve external stakeholder relationships



HOW TO FOSTER A NEURO-INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE

Example: “Manual of Me”

- Best conditions for working
- Most productive hours/times for working
- Best way to communicate with me
- Challenges I may face
- Things that support me
- Things that I love
- Other things to know about me

Things that support me:

- **PREPARATION FOR CHANGE:** Change takes time for me to process and to re-establish a routine. If a significant change is to occur (e.g., changing work location, changing line of communication), clear communication and time to prepare is incredibly helpful.
- **MOVEMENT:**
 - Regular movement helps keep me productive.
 - Keeping my hands busy during meetings helps with focus (e.g., fidget toys, crocheting, etc.).
- **DEADLINES:** Having different deadlines allows me to work to an earlier goal and have a failsafe if I need more time.
 - Soft deadlines – when you would prefer task completed.
 - Hard deadlines – when you need the task completed.

Q&A

- Please raise your hand to indicate that you have a question
- Wait for the mic to reach you
- Questions can be directed to anyone on the panel
- If you're on Zoom, please ask your question in the chat
- Questions can also be emailed after the event and directed to the panel

FIND OUT MORE

NEUROADVISORY NEWCASTLE

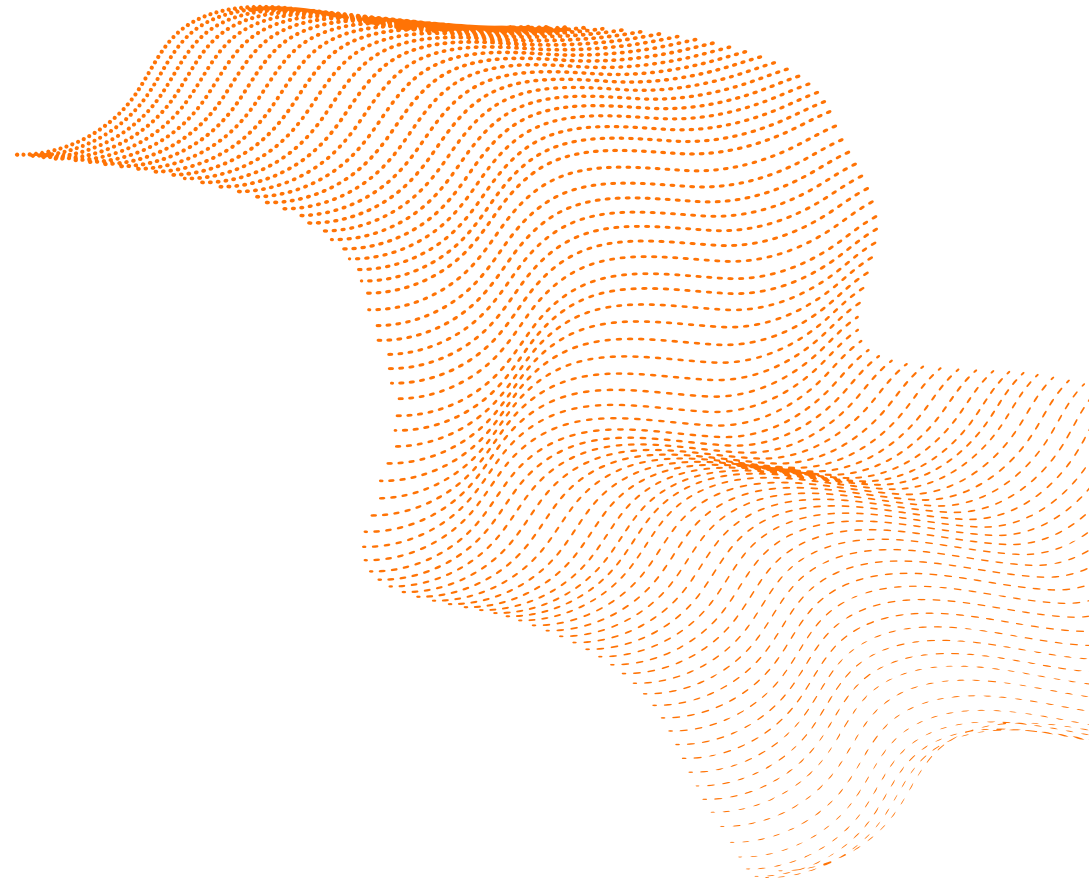
www.newcastle.edu.au/highlights/research/w/olivia-whalen

RESOURCES *(this list will be emailed to attendees)*

- www.kristyforbes.com.au/
- neurowild (Instagram)
- www.yellowladybugs.com.au/
- www.youtube.com/@ADHD_love
- www.linkedin.com/in/pete-wharmby-58a2131b2/

HunterWiSE

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This event was made possible thanks to the support of the University of Newcastle and the 2025 HunterWiSE industry partners