Media Release

Announcing 2025 recipients of the inaugural auDA Churchill Fellowship

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.au Domain Administration (auDA) and the Winston Churchill Trust are delighted to announce **Jordan O'Reilly (NSW)** and **Cara Penton (NT)** as the inaugural recipients of the auDA Churchill Fellowships.

The auDA Churchill Fellowship supports projects that strengthen Australia's digital and internet landscape. Through this partnership, auDA – the administrator of the .au domain – will support research and innovation that delivers social and economic benefits for the Australian community.

Christine Dacey, CEO of the Churchill Trust, said the partnership's value was clear.

"Our Fellows are everyday Australians tackling some of society's toughest challenges," Ms Dacey said. "Through the support of auDA, Jordan and Cara will explore how digital innovation can be applied ethically and effectively in very different but equally vital areas—disability support and conservation."

Bruce Tonkin, CEO of auDA, congratulated the inaugural recipients of the auDA Churchill Fellowship, Cara and Jordan. "auDA supports Australians online by providing a trusted .au domain. The new auDA Churchill Fellowships are another way in which auDA supports the digital ecosystem and delivers benefits to Australians online."

"Jordan and Cara's research projects will deliver valuable insights into the utility of AI in two important areas of need - disability services, and biodiversity protection in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. We wish them every success and hope their work has lasting impact".

The fellowship projects

Australia's National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) has transformed lives but faces increasing pressures from rising costs and workforce shortages. Jordan O'Reilly, a social entrepreneur and disability advocate, believes artificial intelligence (AI) could help secure its future. "AI presents an opportunity not just to tackle these issues but to transform disability support services," Jordan said. "My Fellowship will examine how leading countries are using AI in disability and social care systems, and how Australia can learn from them."

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Jordan co-founded Hireup, now Australia's largest online care platform, and has worked with government and the sector on disability policy reform. Through his Fellowship, he will explore global best practices in AI-enabled care, aiming to develop models that reduce costs, improve quality, and build trust in the NDIS.

For Northern Territory ecologist Cara Penton, AI is a powerful tool to help protect biodiversity and empower Indigenous land management. Based at Warddeken Land Management and Charles Darwin University, she works alongside Indigenous rangers in Arnhem Land on conservation strategies ranging from fire management to threatened species monitoring. "I'm passionate about the intersection of digital innovation, environmental stewardship, and local application," Cara said. "My goal is to understand how AI can support biodiversity while empowering Indigenous communities."

Her Fellowship will take her overseas to study how communities and Indigenous groups are using AI to enhance ecological monitoring and decision-making. She aims to bring back insights to help develop ethical, transparent systems that foster trust, inclusion, and long-term conservation results.

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Note to media:

The auDA Churchill Fellowship is an initiative under auDA's Public Benefit Program, delivered in partnership with The Winston Churchill Memorial Trust. The Public Benefit Program aims to unlock the social and economic value of the internet for Australians and also includes the auDA Community Grant Program and Research and Development Program.

About the Churchill Fellowship

A Churchill Fellowship is a life-changing opportunity for Australians from all walks of life to travel overseas, learn from the world's best, and bring back ideas that make a difference. If you're curious, determined and ready to make a difference, a Churchill Fellowship could be your opportunity too. www.churchilltrust.com.au

For further information:

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About auDA:

.au Domain Administration Limited (auDA) is the trusted administrator of the .au domain name system (DNS), which is Australian critical infrastructure, supporting more than 4 million .au domain names. auDA is a not-for-profit, community-based organisation, endorsed by the Australian Government to innovate and invest in the Australian internet ecosystem to improve the utility of the .au domain for all Australians. Through its steady stewardship of the .au domain and support of internet governance through multi-stakeholder decision making, auDA strives to ensure the internet remains open, free, secure and interoperable.

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