



Briefing Paper for Members of Parliament:

Funding to make sure people with disability get a fair go and someone to stand by them

Our vision

People with disability to continue to have a seat at the table, access to local expert advice, and champions to fight for them, so they can have a fair and decent life, a meaningful say over decisions, and control over their own lives.

Context

People with disability have the same drive and need as everyone else to belong, and to contribute our talents in the places where we live, work, love and play. But for many people with disability, life can be hard not because of the disability, but because the way society responds to the disability. People with disability can be excluded, mistreated, or seen as a problem first and a person second. It can be hard for people with disability to do the everyday things other Australians take for granted: go to school, see a doctor, catch a bus, get a job, or pay bills.

Without a seat at the table, champions to fight for us or experts on our side, it is a whole lot harder for people with disability to belong, and for communities to enjoy the full benefits of everyone's voice, agency and participation.

Disability advocacy organisations undertake both individual and systemic advocacy as well as information provision, representation and capacity building. Their key priority is to protect and uphold the rights of people with disability.

People with disability rely on advocacy organisations to break down barriers so they can access mainstream services equally. Because of advocacy, people with intellectual disability can use Medicare to get an annual health assessment each year, or avoid unfair incarceration in the justice system; more children with disability are enrolled in regular classes; domestic violence services have tools to help them measure and improve their inclusiveness; and physical access to railway stations and other modes of transport, the Sydney Harbour Bridge, sporting venues and places of residence is gradually improving.

Problem

Currently the NSW Government funds approximately 50 specialist disability advocacy, information and peak representational organisations services located across the state to provide independent supports and advocacy. This is about \$13 million per year, through the Department of Ageing Disability and Home Care (ADHC).



The NSW Government has decided that all disability funding in NSW will be redirected to the NDIS from June 30 2018.

However, NDIS funding covers service providers not advocates. This means that a core piece of disability support infrastructure is about to disappear. This will leave significant gaps in advocacy, information and representational services for the 20% of people living in NSW with disability– the largest single minority group in NSW, and some of its most vulnerable citizens.

And the introduction of the NDIS in no way reduces the essential role disability advocacy organisations play in the lives of people with disability and their families and support networks. In fact, as people with disability experience more choice and control over their lives, they are also likely to encounter more barriers. Many of these barriers will be outside the NDIS system. More than ever, they will need someone “in their corner” to stand by them and assist them to understand their rights and gain meaningful control over their lives.

The Productivity Commission’s Report into the NDIS costs (released Oct 2017) recommendation 10.4 clearly states ‘that Australian State and Territory Governments should continue to fund disability advocacy organisations, acknowledging that disability advocates also play an important role and help participants in a way that NDIS supports cannot.’ It also states within the report that ‘advocates can help participants get better plans, find supports, navigate the new scheme with its new jargon and complexities, and provide systemic advocacy about difficulties faced by people with disability.’

Importantly only 10% of all people with disability will be provided with an individually funded plan under the NDIS. For the other 90% the loss of funded advocacy, independent information and peak representation will mean an even greater gap in access to services/supports, and barrier to full inclusion in the NSW community.

The Federal Government has communicated that it will not cover the \$13 million needed to retain disability advocacy in NSW and that it is the responsibility of the NSW Government.

If the NSW state government doesn’t continue funding for these essential disability advocacy and information services then these services will no longer be available to people with disability in NSW. The result will be a huge gap in service provision and that lives and the well-being of many people with disability in NSW will be put at risk.

It will mean that people with disability in regional and rural NSW will no longer have a local advocate to stand by them if they’re having issues with education, discrimination, health, justice, transport, employment, or access to the community. Essential advocacy services throughout NSW already operate on a shoestring budget and currently struggle to meet community demand, we should be expanding them not removing them.



Solution

The National Disability Strategy, which all State and the Federal Government agreed to adhere to, clearly recognises the importance of advocacy, both individual and systemic. It recognises that advocacy is essential in allowing people with disability to have the opportunity to participate in decisions that affect their lives, and advance their rights, wellbeing and interests.

Continued funding of this important sector ensures that people with disability have a voice, input and control over the decisions that affect their lives. It also ensures we do not lose the policy development and research work done by specialist disability advocacy organisations which has brought about many improvements in the lives of people with disability.

The Victorian Government has committed to fully funding disability advocacy after the NDIS has fully rolled out. Federal Minister for Social Services, Christian Porter, has called on all other States to follow Victoria's lead, in making an investment to ensure a strong and sustainable advocacy and information sector, which supports people with disability to be full and active citizens.

Action

The Disability Advocacy Alliance calls on the NSW government:

- to ensure that there is funding provision of \$13 million per annum for NSW specific disability advocacy organisations beyond June 2018.

We need all Members of the NSW Parliament to stand by us, to enable us to have the resources to keep serving people with disability in NSW, so that they can participate fully in their communities.

Will you #standbyme?