

StandByMe
Position Paper
Long term funding for disability advocacy

People with disabilities in NSW and their families and loved ones should have access to specialist, independent disability advocacy, representation and information, giving them a voice and someone to turn to when and where they need them to improve systems, policy and government processes. Today and always.

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. When problems arise 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.

Organisations providing advocacy, representation and information are essential supports to enable people with disabilities to fully participate and be included in the community. Funding for disability advocacy, information and representation supports (referred to from here as “disability advocacy”) means that people with disability have a free, local, independent champion in their corner. Someone to stand by them when things go wrong, and to help make things go right.

These organisations are also essential supports to good government, providing independent and expert advice to a broad range of government departments and functions.

Disability advocacy is distinct from the functions funded under NDIS, including the Information, Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) component of the NDIS. ILC funding does not replace the need for funding for disability advocacy. The Government’s own guidelines state that “we will not fund individual or systemic advocacy in ILC.”¹

With the introduction of NDIS, the NSW Government decided to redirect all its NSW disability funding to the Federal Government, including the funds for disability advocacy, information and representation organisations.² Without this funding, many organisations that make sure people with a disability have a voice; provide advice and expertise to government; and help break down barriers; were faced with closing down or drastically reducing their work.

¹ ILC Commissioning Framework, p21

² Approximately \$13 million pa

After a concerted campaign by people with disability and community groups, funding for disability advocacy support has been extended until the end of June 2021.

Problem

Disability advocacy is an essential support - for people with disabilities and their families and loved ones, and as a resource and asset for good government.

The National Disability Strategy, agreed to by all States and Territories and the Federal Government, clearly recognises the importance of advocacy, representation and information. The Federal Government contributes to disability advocacy by funding nationally focused work, however the NSW Government is responsible for local advocacy funding of \$13 million per annum, which will come to an end in June 2021.

Without secure long term funding commitments from the NSW Government, people with disabilities and their families and loved ones may not have local advocates to turn to when they face issues of discrimination, exclusion or poor treatment. This can happen in any area of life: education, health, justice, transport, employment, accessing infrastructure and community activities.

Without disability advocacy organisations, NSW Government departments would lose access to the input and expertise of disability advocates who participate in departmental and Parliamentary committees and help government get things right. Disability advocacy helps government understand the needs of people with disabilities and help stem problems before they blow up into preventable tragedies.

Without disability advocacy support, the 10% of people with disability provided with an NDIS funded plan, won't have access to an independent champion to help them navigate the fledgling NDIS system. The introduction of the NDIS is creating significant change in the sector and for people with disabilities, resulting in a greater need for independent disability advocacy. Disability services providers³, the NSW Ombudsman and the Productivity Commission⁴ have noted the crucial role of funded disability advocacy support, particularly with the introduction of the NDIS.

For the 90% of people with disability not receiving NDIS funding, the loss of disability advocacy will mean an even greater gap in access to supports and being included in their community.

³ Statement from NDS (28.02.2018): "At this time of significant change for the disability sector, advocacy services for people with disability are more crucial than ever. The NSW Government must ensure disability advocacy services are continued."

⁴ Productivity Commission Report into NDIS Costs, Oct 2017

Solution

State Governments have a clear responsibility for ongoing funding to ensure that people with a disability will always be able to turn to local, independent specialists when they need them. In NSW, that means ongoing funding of at least \$13 million per year for disability advocacy, representation and information services.

The Federal Government, through its Assistant Minister for Disability, and the Minister for Social Services, has made it clear that state governments need to maintain ongoing funding for disability advocacy.⁵

Independent reports such as the 2011 Productivity Commission Inquiry into Disability Care and Support noted that advocacy functions and their funding “should lie outside the NDIS, reflecting the potential conflict of interest that would arise were the NDIS to fund advocacy bodies whose role was to challenge the disability system overseen by NDIS. Current funding arrangements through state and territory governments should continue.”⁶ In 2017, the Productivity Commission again confirmed that State Governments are responsible for funding disability advocacy, separately to any handover of disability funding under arrangements for NDIS.

By comparison, the Victorian Government has explicitly recognised the responsibility of State governments for funding of disability advocacy supports.

The Victorian State Disability Plan (Absolutely Everyone 2017-2020) explicitly includes disability advocacy as a key priority area to ensuring fairness and safety for people with disabilities. The Plan is supported by \$1.5M new funding for disability advocacy initiatives.⁷ In announcing the funding, Victorian Minister for Housing, Disability and Ageing noted that this funding was a key complement to the NDIS: *“For the NDIS to deliver on the promise we made to people with a disability – greater choice and control, we need to make sure they have the tools to enforce their rights.”*

Ongoing funding should be designed and allocated to ensure that disability advocacy is trustworthy and successful. This means it must be:

- Independent: no financial conflict of interest
- Specialist: run by and for people with disabilities, with deep expertise in the unique challenges and possibilities faced by people with disabilities
- Long-term: here to stay, something every person who needs it can count on

⁵ Federal Disability Minister Jane Prentice at NDIS Commission Conference (5 June 2018); Federal Minister for Social Services Christian Porter (date)

⁶ Productivity Commission Disability Care and Support Inquiry Report 2011, p26

⁷ Funding announced in July 2017, the Victorian Government announced \$1.5M for disability advocacy, as part of its commitment to the “Absolutely Everyone State Disability Plan 2017-202”

Once the NSW Government provides long term funding for disability advocacy, disability advocacy organisations, people with disabilities and government can work together to make NSW a place where disability doesn't mean a lifetime of exclusion; where we can spot problems and fix them - tackling abuse and preventing tragedies before they happen.

Disability advocacy is essential and the people of NSW deserve to know it's here to stay.

Action

It's time to ensure people in NSW will always be able to turn to independent specialists in disability advocacy when they need them.

The Disability Advocacy Alliance calls on all NSW political parties to publicly commit to ongoing funding for disability advocacy, representation and information services for people with disabilities.

Members of the NSW Disability Advocacy Alliance:

Ability Advocacy

Action for People with a Disability

Blind Citizens Australia (NSW)

Citizen Advocacy Western Sydney

Deaf Blind Association of NSW

Disability Advocacy

Disability and Aged Information Services Inc (DAISI)

Ethnic Community Services Cooperative (ECSC)

Family Advocacy NSW

First People's Disability Network (FPDN)

Information on Disability Education and Awareness Services (IDEAS)

Intellectual Disability Rights Service (IDRS)

Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association (MDAA) Muscular Dystrophy NSW (MDNSW)

Council for Intellectual Disability (NSWCID)

PATH inc.

Penrith Disabilities Resource Centre (PRDC)

Physical Disability Council of NSW (PDCN)

People with Disability Australia (PWD)

Radio for the Print Handicapped (2RPH)

Regional Disability Advocacy Services (RDAS)

Spinal Cord Injuries Australia (SCIA)

Stroke Recovery Association

Synapse