

Research on disability advocacy services

What we learned from our research

An Easy Read report



How to use this report



The Australian Government Department of Social Services (DSS) wrote this report.



An organisation called ASK Insight collected the research for this report.



When you see the word 'we', it means DSS.



We wrote this report in an easy to read way.

We use pictures to explain some ideas.

Bold

We wrote some words in **bold**.

Not bold

This means the letters are thicker and darker.



We explain what these words mean.

There is a list of these words on page 39.



This is an Easy Read summary of another report.

This means it only includes the most important ideas.



You can find more information on our website.

www.dss.gov.au/nationaldisabilityadvocacyframework



You can ask for help to read this report.

A friend, family member or support person may be able to help you.

What's in this report?

What's this report about?	5
<hr/>	
What's our research about?	8
<hr/>	
Who was part of the research?	11
<hr/>	
What did we learn?	14
<hr/>	
Why people with disability need advocacy services	16
<hr/>	
How advocacy services are supporting people now	26
<hr/>	
Gaps in disability advocacy services	29
<hr/>	
What can governments do to fix these problems?	35
<hr/>	
Contact us	38
<hr/>	
Word list	39

What's this report about?



This report is about our research into **disability advocacy** in Australia.



Disability advocacy is when someone supports you to speak up for your **rights**.



Rights are rules about how people must treat you:

- fairly
- equally.

Disability advocacy supports people with disability to take part in:



- decisions that affect them



- the community.



We also researched **advocacy services**.



Advocacy services:



- support you
- help you have your say
- give you information and advice.



There are different groups that can deliver advocacy services.

For example:



- family and friends



- **providers** – who support people with disability by delivering a service



- **advocacy organisations** – groups that speak up for people with disability.

What's our research about?



Governments wanted to learn why more people with disability need advocacy services.

This includes the:



- Australian Government



- state and territory governments.

In December 2019, governments agreed to work together to find out:



- why people with disability need advocacy services



- what gaps there are in disability advocacy.



In March 2020, we asked ASK Insight to do this research for us.



They finished their research in December 2020.



This is part of the first step governments took to work together for disability advocacy.

The research didn't include:



- the way advocacy services affect people with disability



- how well the services work.

Who was part of the research?



ASK Insight talked with staff from state and territory governments.

They also talked with people who provide disability advocacy services, including:



- providers



- 8 Disability Representative Organisations



- the **Disability Discrimination Commissioner (the Commissioner)**.



The Commissioner works to make sure people with disability are safe.



ASK Insight also invited 78 advocacy providers to be part of the research.



48 of them agreed to take part.

What ASK Insight asked



ASK Insight asked why the number of people with disability who need advocacy services is going up.



They asked how this affects:

- people with disability
- advocacy organisations.



They asked how advocacy organisations are dealing with this.



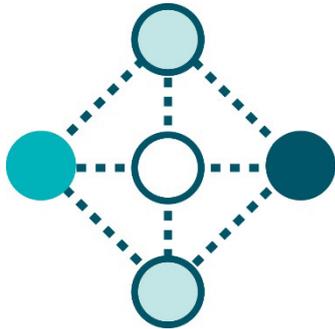
For example, if they have:

- enough staff
- the right skills and plans.



They also asked what gaps there are in disability advocacy services at the moment.

What did we learn?



A **system** is made of different parts that work:

- together
- towards the same type of goal.

A system can be made up of organisations and people.



We learned there's no system that checks how many people need advocacy services.



Or who needs them but can't use them.



There's no way to check where people can find and use advocacy services in Australia.



There's also no way to check how much **funding** different advocacy services get.

Funding is money from the government to pay for supports and services.



We also learned it's hard to know the ways advocacy services don't support people in Australia.

Why people with disability need advocacy services



Everyone told us that in the last few years, more people with disability have needed advocacy support.



70% of people who took part in the research shared that this number has gone up by a lot.



They shared some reasons why this number is going up.



People with disability need support with some government services because they can be hard to understand.

For example, the NDIS.



When people have problems with these services, advocacy services need:

- time to fix their problem
- resources, like staff with the right skills.

Using the NDIS



ASK Insight asked providers about how they support people with disability to take part in the NDIS.



They shared they spend **46% of their time** helping people with the NDIS.

It's the most common support they give people with disability.

They support people to:



- understand the NDIS



- take part in the NDIS.

Providers also shared that often they are not sure what:



- they should be doing



- NDIA staff or providers should be doing.

Housing



Providers shared they support people a lot with housing services.

This includes supporting people to:



- find a place to live



- keep their home clean and safe



- live in an **accessible** home.

When something is accessible, it is easy to:



- find and use



- move around.



They shared that some of the issues with housing also affect how NDIS supports work.

Other services



Providers support people with disability with other services that can be hard to understand.

These services include:



- government payments



- legal support



- the **justice system**.

The justice system includes:



- police



- the courts



- the law



- prisons.

Providers also shared that they support people with disability with other services like:



- education



- health and aged care



- transport.

Other things that affected advocacy services



Providers shared there isn't enough funding to support people with disability to make decisions.



This means advocacy services often need to support people with making legal decisions.

For example, signing a document.



There are also advocacy services in **rural and remote areas.**

Rural and remote areas are places far away from cities or towns.



It can take more time and money to deliver advocacy services in these areas.



People with disability also need support to tell governments what they think.

For example, about laws and government plans.



And COVID-19 has also made it harder to deliver advocacy services.

How advocacy services are supporting people now



ASK Insight asked providers how they're helping all the people with disability who need support.

3



Providers shared 3 main things they do when they can't support everyone.



1. They try to support people who need it most before helping others.

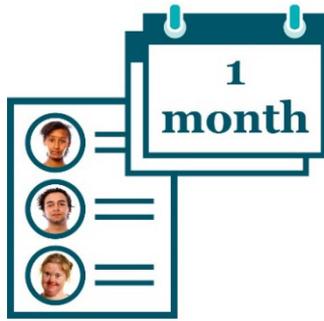
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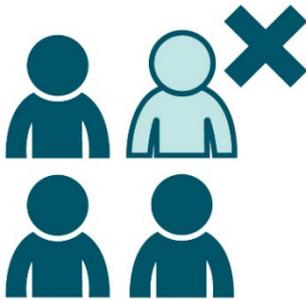
2. They pass on people's information to other organisations that can help.



3. They keep a list of everyone who needs support and work their way through it.



But people with disability often must be on the list for more than a month before they can get support.



Between 1 July 2018 and 30 June 2019, about 1 in 4 people weren't getting support.



This can make things a lot harder for people with disability.

It can be frustrating.

And can lead to people with disability not getting the support they need.



People shared that advocacy organisations can't support everyone who needs advocacy.



They explained there isn't enough time and staff to support everyone.

This means organisations:



- work a lot



- have stressed staff



- lose staff quickly.



Some advocacy groups also don't have enough time and staff to support any new people.

Gaps in disability advocacy services



ASK Insight asked providers what gaps there are in disability advocacy services.



They shared they don't get enough funding to:

- deliver their services properly
- support everyone who needs them.



87% of providers explained they can't plan their services because they don't know if they'll get funding.

This includes hiring and keeping staff.



Providers shared that different advocacy organisations often apply for the same funding.

This means they don't always work together.



It also means organisations spend a lot of time applying for funding instead of supporting people.

Support for people living in rural and remote areas



Providers shared that they need more funding to support people in rural and remote areas.



They don't have enough resources to support everyone that needs it.

And this affects people with disability living in rural and remote areas more than other people.

They shared that it's important to create good relationships:



- in rural and remote areas



- with First Nations communities.



This includes respecting:

- what the local people know
- how they do things.



This helps to make sure the advocacy services work well.

Training staff



Providers told us that sometimes staff don't have the right training to do their work well.



Staff members often need special skills to support people with services that are hard to understand.



But there is so much work that there isn't time to build skills.



There also aren't many training programs for staff members.



It's also hard for advocacy organisations to keep staff.

This means they must hire new people who might not have the right training.

Other problems



Providers shared that advocacy services need more information about:

- people with disability
- what support they need.



They shared that everyone uses different words to talk about advocacy services.

This means people don't always understand what other people mean.



They told us that there aren't services who know how to support certain groups.

These groups include:



- First Nations peoples



- people with **psychosocial disability** – a disability that affects your mental health



- **culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) people.**



CALD people:

- come from different cultures and backgrounds
- speak languages other than English.

What can governments do to fix these problems?



Governments know they need to work together to make sure disability advocacy works well.



Sometimes people with disability need more than one government to help them fix their problem.



We think people who need support should be able to find it no matter who they ask.



We also think governments need to talk about advocacy services in the same way.

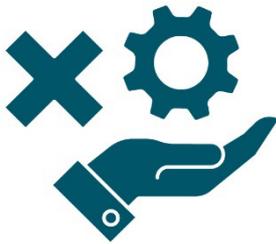


This should be the first step governments take as they start working together.

They should also do their best to understand:



- why people with disability need advocacy services



- what support people with disability aren't getting.



We created ways for governments to talk about advocacy services.

You can find our list of words on our website.

www.dss.gov.au/nationaldisabilityadvocacyframework

What governments have already done



Governments worked together to update Australia's Disability Strategy 2021–2031.

This is a plan to support people with disability in all areas of their life.

In this report, we call it the Strategy.



Disability advocacy is an important part of the Strategy.

It's part of the 'Rights to fair treatment and safety' section.



You can find the Strategy on the Disability Gateway website.

www.disabilitygateway.gov.au/ads/easy-read-strategy



Governments also updated the National Disability Advocacy Framework (NDAF).

The NDAF is a plan to make disability advocacy work better for people in Australia.



You can find the NDAF on the DSS website.

www.dss.gov.au/nationaldisabilityadvocacyframework

Contact us

You can visit our website.



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Word list

This list explains what the **bold** words mean.



Accessible

When something is accessible, it is easy to:

- find and use
- move around.



Advocacy organisations

Advocacy organisations are groups that speak up for people with disability.



Advocacy services

Advocacy services:

- support you
- help you have your say
- give you information and advice.

Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD)



CALD people:

- come from different cultures and backgrounds
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Disability advocacy

Disability advocacy is when someone supports you to speak up for your rights.



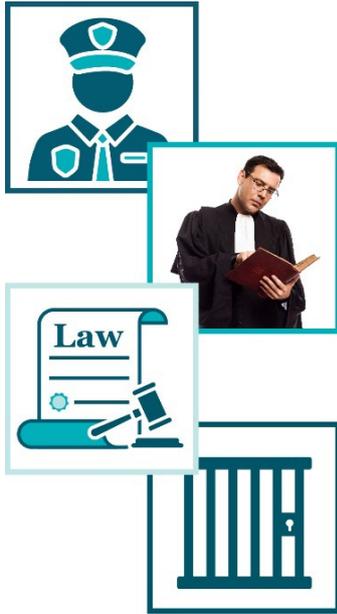
Disability Discrimination Commissioner (the Commissioner)

The Commissioner works to make sure people with disability are safe.



Funding

Funding is money from the government to pay for supports and services.



Justice system

The justice system includes:

- police
- the courts
- the law
- prisons.



Providers

Providers support people with disability by delivering a service.



Psychosocial disability

Psychosocial disability is a disability that affects your mental health



Rights

Rights are rules about how people must treat you:

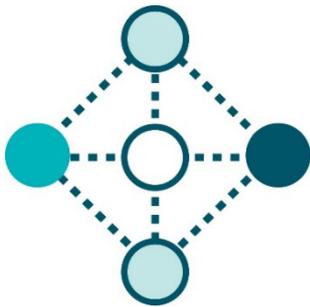
- fairly
- equally.



Rural and remote areas

Rural and remote areas are places far away from cities or towns.

System



A system is made of different parts that work:

- together
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