



National Centre for
Disability Advocacy

Consultation Report

for the establishment of
a National Centre for
Disability Advocacy

April 2023

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Executive Summary

Overview

Disability Advocacy Network Australia (DANA) has been funded for three years by the Department of Social Services (DSS) to establish a National Centre for Disability Advocacy (The Centre). The Centre aims to improve access to and the quality of individual advocacy services as part of the Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031. It will do this by executing three main functions:

- Capacity¹ building
- Identifying and addressing unmet demand and need
- Identifying and elevating systemic advocacy issues.²

The priorities and activities of the Centre are being designed in close consultation with the disability advocacy sector and other relevant stakeholders such as the Older Persons Advocacy Network, the state-based Councils of Social Service and other relevant not-for-profit organisations. As part of the commitment to design the Centre in collaboration with the advocacy sector, 14 consultation sessions were held around Australia and online between October 2022 and February 2023. Face-to-face consultations were held in Sydney, Melbourne, Perth, Adelaide, Hobart, Brisbane and Darwin with 140 participants from across the disability advocacy sector attending.

These consultations provided an opportunity for the Centre to hear directly from advocates and managers about how the Centre could best support their work.

¹ These activities include both capacity and capability building. According to the sector 'capability' refers to having a workforce, including the skills and experience, to do the work, whereas 'capacity' refers to having the time to do the work. Capacity building will be used in this report as it is consistent with the aim of the centre, which is to deliver resources to the sector to build their capacity to deliver more services to clients.

² The Activity Work Plan identifies these activities as:

- provide sector workforce development activities;
- build an evidence base approach that addresses unmet demand and service gaps; and work with relevant government and non-government bodies to advance and elevate systemic issues for people with disabilities and their families.

The key themes identified in the consultations

Each consultation had its own flavour, based on factors such as the knowledge and insights of participants and jurisdictional differences. Key themes that emerged from consultations, included that the Centre should:

- operate and be evaluated in accordance with a set of operating principles such as collaboration, independence, facilitation, good practice, and practice based on evidence from the sector
- not duplicate existing resources but, rather, gather and/or complement them
- be a “one-stop shop” that, filters and organises information
- reflect the diversity of the sector including organisations using different approaches to advocacy including citizen, family, legal, self and individual advocacy
- develop and share a suite of best practice resources, including bringing together existing resources from across the sector
- develop a methodology, guides and training resources that allow organisations to collect consistent, comparable and meaningful data; while being aware of potential impacts on workload
- capture data that can be used for a variety of purposes including to demonstrate the lack of capacity across the sector and the need for more advocacy funding
- include the word “disability” in the name of the Centre to make it clear that the role of the Centre is to resource and promote the independent disability advocacy sector.

Suggested activities for the Centre

The sector has been engaged in the consultation process and contributed many practical ideas around the Centre’s main functions. A summary of suggested activities that could be undertaken is detailed below.

It is acknowledged that the Centre will not be able to achieve everything suggested during the consultations. A forward work plan is being developed to outline the objectives, activities and outcomes of the Centre.

1) Capacity building

- Developing a training calendar for advocates that includes training opportunities to be delivered by the Centre and external providers.
- Developing and delivering an induction program for new advocates that complements organisational induction to assist with building capability in the sector and developing consistent standards and approaches.
- Identifying and developing basic training materials and resources for:
 - individual advocacy (dealing with challenging clients, ethical practice, running an AAT matter);
 - systemic advocacy (“How to Get Heard” seminars with involvement from decision-makers and an annual roundtable to gather and facilitate ideas); and
 - organisational governance (regulatory updates and materials).
- Establishing communities of practice to enable advocates to discuss how to engage and work on an issue. These could potentially be facilitated by senior advocates and use de-identified case studies.
- Bringing together case studies and best practice examples demonstrating how best practice advocacy was provided in different circumstances.

2) Identifying and addressing unmet demand and unmet need

- Encouraging the collection of data to demonstrate unmet demand including:
 - recognising the value of data collection software
 - developing a guide to foster consistency in data collection
 - establishing protocols to ensure consistency of data collection.
- Undertaking an annual “Census Week” may provide a snapshot of sector capacity and capability to manage enquiries, intake and waitlist.
- Undertaking a social media campaign promoting the value of disability advocacy.
- Developing a directory of services to facilitate appropriate referrals.

3) Identifying and elevating systemic advocacy issues

- The Centre will not conduct systemic advocacy itself; its role will be to elevate systemic issues to relevant government and non-government bodies.
- The Centre could implement several different strategies to identify and elevate systemic advocacy issues such as:
 - developing and maintaining a systemic advocacy tracker to record what systemic advocacy work different providers are focusing on, and provide opportunities for greater collaboration across the sector
 - compiling case studies of individual advocacy issues for use by providers when advocating on systemic advocacy issues and/or reporting emerging systemic issues
 - hosting forums to discuss systemic advocacy.

Introduction

DANA has been funded for three years from 1 July 2022 to establish a National Centre for Disability Advocacy (The Centre) to improve access to and the quality of individual advocacy services across Australia. This initiative was announced as part of Australia's Disability Strategy.³

The Centre is being designed in close consultation with the disability advocacy sector. During consultation there has been discussion about the delivery of “best” practice and “good” practice. Best practice implies, based on evidence, that there is only one way to achieve an outcome. Good practice indicates that, in a diverse sector, there are several different models of advocacy. These include individual, self, citizen, legal, family, and systemic advocacy. Each model operates within different frameworks to achieve the best possible outcomes for their clients. Good practice requires advocacy to deliver consistent, high-quality advocacy that is:

- a) independent of the organisations providing supports or services to the person with disability;
- b) provides independent advocacy for the person with disability, to assist the person with disability to exercise choice and control and to have their voice heard in matters that affect them;
- c) acts at the direction of the person with disability, reflecting the person with disability's expressed wishes, will, preferences and rights; and
- d) is free of relevant conflicts of interest.⁴

It is not the intent of the Centre to prescribe a universal model of advocacy that all advocacy organisations are to follow. The aim of the Centre is to enhance the sector through its three main functions – namely:

- Capacity building
- Identifying and addressing unmet demand and unmet need
- Identifying and elevating systemic advocacy issues across Australia.

The success of the Centre will be evaluated in accordance with its capacity to deliver on a set of operating principles that include being collaborative, independent, facilitative, good practice and evidence-based.

³ Under *Australia's Disability Strategy*, there is a \$9.9 million investment to improve individual advocacy services.

⁴ *National Disability Insurance Scheme Amendment (Quality and Safeguards Commission and Other Measures) Act 2017* (Cth) s9.

Methodology

The Centre is being designed in close collaboration with the disability advocacy sector. Between October 2022 and into February 2023, DANA's Board Chair, Chief Executive Officer, Chief Operations Officer, and the Centre Manager met with disability advocacy organisations to discuss the work of the Centre and hear how it might best support the sector. Online sessions were held for people unable to attend a face-to-face session. DSS staff attended several sessions as observers.

An example of the agenda is attached as Appendix 1.

A list of consultations and engagement is shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Consultations on Centre Work

Location	Date	Attended In person
Sydney	10 October 2022	9 sector participants 3 DANA
Melbourne	12 October 2022	14 sector participants 3 DANA
Brisbane Queensland Independent Advocacy Network	10 and 11 October 2022	19 participants
Online consultation with VicRAN	15 November 2022	11 sector participants 2 DSS observers 2 DANA
Perth	21 November 2022	13 sector participants 5 DSS observers 4 DANA
Adelaide	23 November 2022	14 sector participants 2 DSS observers 4 DANA
Online consultation	28 November 2022	10 sector participants 5 DSS observers 2 DANA
Online consultation	29 November 2022	8 sector participants 4 DSS observers 1 DANA
Online consultation	2 December 2022	5 sector participants 2 DSS observers 2 DANA
Hobart	7 December 2022	5 sector participants 4 DSS observers 3 DANA
Melbourne	9 December 2022	12 sector participants 3 DSS observers 2 DANA
Brisbane	21 February 2023	26 sector participants 2 DSS observers 5 DANA
Darwin	23 February 2023	6 sector participants 1 DSS observer 3 DANA

A note on the name - the National Centre for Advocacy

Participants in the consultations provided feedback on the proposed name “National Centre for Advocacy”. This feedback included:

- *Yes – clarity that it relates to disability sector.*
- *Advocacy is a buzz word – so we need disability in the title to indicate who/ what it’s there for.*
- *If yes, does this limit the Centre in the longer term?*
- *Without disability – it may mean other sectors may reach out wanting “entry”.*
- *No – we want to normalise disability – should be differentiated? (Or are we too “early” for this!).*
- *We need to tweak our thinking around the word disability.*
- *Do not care what it is called provided it does good work.*
- *The current name is a bit bland.*
- *“Independent”? Make it clear that we are not part of the government.*
- *DANA is a strong brand - in the sector could we look at a DANA Resource Centre. DANA Resource Centre or Disability Advocacy Resources Australia.*
- *The name suggests it is where you go to for advocating rather than for resourcing the advocacy sector.*
- *Perhaps it needs to go out to market research. This is not something we should be discussing at this forum. Suggested need for a focus group.*
- *To some extent the name should define who we are and what we do.*

There was a clear preference during the consultations to include the word “disability” in the name. One stakeholder from another advocacy sector felt that National Centre for Advocacy name implied that the Centre was claiming to be in a position of influence on all forms of advocacy, not just on the disability sector. Some people at the consultations also presented the argument against including disability in the name as it was felt that society should be moving away from labelling organisations and people with disability. Those presenting this argument also conceded that they are looking at an ideal world, but we are not at that point yet.

There were also suggestions that “DANA” or “independent” be included in the name to connect it back to the strong reputation DANA has in defending the independent advocacy sector. The Centre will operate independently of DANA’s role as a peak body and a Disability Representative Organisation and build its own materials, resources and reputation. The Centre also has a role to deliver capacity building activities to all National Disability Advocacy Program (NDAP) providers regardless of their membership to DANA.

Finally, there was some support for the “Australian Centre for Disability Advocacy (ACDA)”. However, there are several disability organisations using the acronym ACDA⁵ and thus concerns that it would be difficult to build a brand around ACDA.

⁵ Namely:

- Australian Chinese Disability Association www.myacda.org.au
- Assisting Communities through Direct Connection www.acda.org.au
- Disability People Organisation Australia was also known as Australian Cross Disability Alliance (ACDA)

Several factors needed to be taken into consideration when choosing the name including:

- availability of the name and acronym in the business and domain names registers
- whether there are other similar organisations using the acronym that may cause confusion
- the reputation the current name has in the sector.⁶

Based on this feedback, it has been determined that the Centre be called the National Centre for Disability Advocacy (NCDA). In this regard, it is noted that there is a strong connection between the Centre and the National Disability Advocacy Program.

Who should benefit from the activities of the Centre?

During the consultations it was identified that there are a small number of advocacy organisations who only receive state or territory government funding to deliver individual disability advocacy. Under the current funding agreement for the Centre, these organisations would only have access to the public facing part of any proposed website and not have access to the proposed portal containing resources for capacity building and other functions.

Participants in the consultations strongly recommended that given the Centre is part of Australia's Disability Strategy, it should be able to resource all disability advocacy organisations regardless of their funding source. Furthermore, as the Centre may draw on and promote resources developed through state government and philanthropic funding, this could be considered as in-kind support from the states and territories. Participants asked the Centre to discuss with DSS the possibility of them considering the in-kind contribution made by the states to enable expansion of sector development to include all independent disability advocacy organisations.

⁶ One suggestion during the consultation was that the Centre should engage a market research consultant to run focus groups looking at the name, logos, style guides and websites and see how it is perceived by the public. Given the narrow clientele of the Centre – namely, disability advocacy providers involved in the consultations – it was decided that it was more important to consult on the name, rather than developing the branding of the Centre.

Feedback on Centre functions

1) Capacity Building

An important function of the Centre is to “provide sector workforce development activities”, defined here as capacity building. Participants at the forums were clear that the capacity building function of the Centre was a key priority.

Participants believe the Centre could help to strengthen the disability advocacy sector by:

- developing and providing training resources
- sharing strategies and best practice approaches
- co-ordinating networks and forums for advocates and managers to increase collaboration, and to build and share knowledge.

During the consultations, there were discussions about the need for minimum advocacy standards that include a competency framework specific to advocates. DANA has been working with the Older Persons Advocacy Network and Standards Australia to explore options for an advocacy-specific standard, noting that any changes to certification requirements for Commonwealth-funded providers would be a decision for government.

It was also discussed that the Centre should work towards developing and delivering accredited training for advocates that is consistent with any relevant standards.

Participants suggested capacity building activities could fall into two distinct streams: capacity building for advocates, including individual and systemic advocacy; and capacity building for organisational governance.

a) What could be the focus of the capacity building?

Capacity building training could be categorised into three types:

- induction training for new advocates
- ongoing professional development
- training and information on organisational governance.

Induction training for new advocates

There was strong support for the development and delivery of an induction training program for new disability advocates with the aim to:

- help new advocates to develop good practice skills
- expose advocates to broader views of advocacy than a single organisation may be able to offer
- enhance the consistency and quality of service delivery across the sector
- assist organisations as managers would not need to spend as much time training new advocates.

One of the key messages from the consultations was that an induction process should be consistent across Australia and that the Centre should try to ensure there is no duplication of resources and existing induction training resources should be reviewed. Potential resources to review may include:

- To new advocates⁷ online e-learning course (Disability Advocacy Resource Unit [DARU])
- Australia Online Courses Certificate for Advocacy⁸ (a certificate course)
- AWARE Advocacy Workforce – Advancing Rights and Equity (AWARE) (a 12 Week program developed in WA and targeted for advocates working in social justice and human services).⁹

Potential topics that could be included in an induction program include:

- What is good advocacy practice (individual and systemic)
- Ethical issues faced by advocates
- How to develop a good advocacy plan with a client to achieve outcomes
- Applying a human rights framework on the work that advocates do
- How to deal with clients with complexed needs
- What could be in a code of conduct for advocates
- How to understand relevant government frameworks and legislation
- Child safe training
- Information about supported decision making.

Based on this feedback, it might be appropriate to develop an induction program in stages as resources are collated and designed. It may include, for example, programs that are staged as follows:

- Short term – a 2-3 hour program that will be presented on a regular basis.
- Medium term – a multi-session program to develop specialised advocacy skills.
- Long term – partnering with a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) to develop an accredited certificate course with recognised qualifications in advocacy.

Ongoing professional development

As 90% of advocates' time in NDAP-funded organisations is spent delivering advocacy to individuals, the focus of the Centre training should be on the development of skills that support advocates to work more efficiently and effectively with their clients.

The Centre could assist build capacity of advocates and save them time by sourcing suitable training that would meet certification standards. Suggestions for professional development training include:

- upskilling advocates to be able to assist clients in self-advocacy where appropriate
- delivering culturally safe practice to clients including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI), Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) cohorts and LGBTIQ+
- mental health first aid
- writing documents and letters in easy English
- self-care and stress management

⁷ <https://www.daru.org.au/courses>

⁸ <https://www.australianonlinecourses.com.au/courses/certificate-of-advocacy/>

⁹ <https://evolvewa.com.au/advocacy-workforce-advancing-rights-and-equity/>

- mediation skills
- working collaboratively
- supported decision making
- disaster preparedness (person-centred emergency preparedness in local communities for the vulnerable).

Professional development could also focus on how to elevate the voice of clients through systemic advocacy by training in:

- having an outcomes-focus and theory of change
- enlisting people willing and trained to talk to the media
- effective policy and submission writing
- how to prepare for a meeting with a Minister or Member of Parliament
- operating within parliamentary cycles.

Training and information on organisational governance

During consultations, many executives and managers expressed they are on the verge of burnout due to funding uncertainty, staff shortage pressures and increased compliance and reporting requirements. Participants noted that funding bodies and regulations require increased reporting and compliance, with no additional or dedicated funding or resources for this work. In fact, many advocates and managers suggested that the extra time and resources spent on compliance and reporting comes at the expense of an organisation's capacity to do advocacy.

It was also noted there is an expectation on small advocacy organisations to meet the same level of compliance and reporting as larger organisations. Participants agreed that compliance is essential, but noted it takes organisations away from their core business and purpose. This stops organisations from doing what they are passionate about, which is advocating for people with disability, their families and supporting their staff.

Resources the Centre could assist organisations to develop include:

- risk management policy, procedures and assessment tool templates
- cyber security policies and check list
- meeting child safe standards
- human resource policies, procedures and recruitment templates.

It was noted there are many organisations providing quality training and resources regarding governance currently, including the Institute of Community Directors, the Australian Institute of Company Directors and Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission.

The Centre may be able to add value to these existing resources by:

- providing training on the specifics of the independent disability advocacy sector and how organisations need to manage conflict of interest
- developing a version of "governance for good" in easy English
- developing resources to enable people with cognitive disability to be on governance boards. Work has already been done like "Voice at the Table".¹⁰

¹⁰ A project to ensure people with cognitive disability have real and equal voice at the board table. www.voiceatthetable.com.au

b) How could training and capacity building resources be delivered?

The key points the participants raised included:

Website and proposed portal

A website and portal will be a critical resource for the Centre to develop as they will be used to collect and store data, information, and resources. The website and portal will:

- be used to disseminate this information to the sector and broader community
- be designed to interact with the “Salesforce” Customer Record Management (CRM) system which will be used to manage data collected from organisations
- interact with other web platforms like Eventbrite and Mailchimp to maximise ease of use.

A password protected portal has been proposed as part of the website and might be the main method of access for NDAP-funded organisations. This also includes the Centre providing individual advocates with information and resources specifically targeted for their use in service delivery.

During consultations, there was discussion as to whether the Centre will have its own website or sit within the DANA website. The discussion also covered what content will be available to the public and what content might be on a password-protected portal only available to NDAP-funded organisations.

Participants raised several issues around the website and portal, including ensuring:

- **Resources are easy to find and access:** Participants noted any portal established by the Centre needs to be easy for advocates and managers to find and download the information they are looking for.
- **Information is correct and up-to-date:** Develop a process to review the content to ensure it remains current – for example, there will be a need to review all content at least every 12 months.
- **Content reflects good practice for delivering advocacy:** The Centre will develop guidelines of good practice.
- **The portal can be used to host a safe online forum:** Any communities of practice would need to be behind a password-protected portal where advocates have a safe place to share ideas and information.
- **Content is considerate of different jurisdictions:** The Centre will need to manage content that reflects legislation, policies, and processes that exist in each state and territory. For example, there may be a similar process when dealing with child protection or guardianship issues, but specific actions will change depending on location. Resources will need to be structured in a way that enables advocates to understand both the jurisdictional similarities and differences.
- **Access to the portal is clear:** During the consultation there were questions about who would have access to the portal. Including:
 - Will there be one login per organisation, or will each person have their own login with different levels of access?
 - Will DSS have access to the portal?
 - Will managers have access to the advocates section?
 - Will volunteer board members and citizen advocates have a level of access?

These questions indicate the need to address privacy and confidentiality issues during the development of the website and portal.

Suggestions regarding the content of website and portal

The content of the website and proposed portal would cover the various functions of the Centre and include the following:

General

- information about the Centre.

Capacity building

- an event calendar
- a resource library
- webinars and training sessions
- communities of practice.

Identifying and addressing unmet demand and unmet need

- an advocacy services finder that will facilitate effective and appropriate referrals.

Identifying and elevating systemic advocacy issues

- a systemic advocacy tracker
- a case study database.

Information about the Centre

The website needs to be clear about its purpose, the functions of the Centre, the relationship to DANA and provide a level of publicly facing information in addition to the more specialised information that sits behind the proposed portal.

An event calendar

An event calendar could promote the activities of the Centre with information on:

- training provided by the Centre
- training provided by external providers
- state-based network meetings
- consultations on systemic advocacy, including key dates
- sector specific events such as conferences, webinars, learning opportunities.¹¹

A resource library

The Centre could develop a library of resources (including collating existing resources) for access by advocates and managers. The resource library could include:

¹¹ There was support for the Centre (or DANA) to hold an annual national conference to facilitate further thinking around best practice and bring people from different states and territories together. Such a conference could bring in an international speaker to look at current good practices, as well as what is happening in disability advocacy around the world. This would be a medium-term objective.

- template letters for advocacy
- fact sheets on the role and scope of an advocate for support coordinators, local area coordinators or case managers
- practice guides including intake process, and step-by-step guides for NDIS appeals
- case studies providing examples of good practice
- governance policies and procedures
- access to research, trials and academic papers linking advocates to known disability specific research
- information about international advocacy agencies – where good practice is evident
- good practice guides for disability advocacy service delivery
- information about short courses on issues such as mental health first aid or cultural competency training.

During the consultation, organisations indicated they were willing to share resources they had developed with the Centre. This approach would help avoid the risk the Centre duplicates existing resources. The Centre will explore this option in more detail, including consideration around ownership and copyright of documents in the resource library.

Webinars and training sessions

The Centre may hold regular webinars for NDAP providers that may include a panel of experts to speak on a specialised topic of interest to the sector, e.g., “how to effectively present a message to a decision-maker” or “how to advocate at a guardianship tribunal”. The webinars could (pending further consideration of privacy implications) be recorded and included on the Centre website. This will enable NDAP providers to review the content at time convenient to them (see OPAN website as an example).¹²

Communities of practice

Establishing communities of practice and advocate peer forums was discussed as a way for advocates from around Australia to come together to provide peer support and develop good practice. Each community of practice group could consist of 10 to 15 advocates and be facilitated by a senior advocate who could be engaged by the Centre. The community of practice would provide a safe place for advocates to share and discuss ideas including issues they are currently working with and how they plan to resolve these issues. Participants at the consultations spoke about the opportunity to present case studies and discuss them with their peers. These activities will help develop networks and collaboration within the disability advocacy sector, with a goal to increase the quality of service to clients as advocates are able to discuss current cases. The community of practice could be used to obtain feedback on resources the Centre is working on as a co-design strategy.

As communities of practice can take time to be properly established, they could begin with monthly advocate peer forums facilitated by the Centre staff where advocates can join and ask questions. Similarly, advocates requested an online forum where they could share ideas and get feedback from their peers. The online forum would be monitored by the Centre staff.

¹² See Older Person Advocacy Network (OPAN) website as an example.
<https://opan.org.au/information/resources/videos-and-webinars>

c) What can we learn about the advocacy workforce?

The biggest asset in the disability advocacy sector is a committed and diverse workforce. The Centre believes it is important to build a better understanding of the disability advocacy workforce, and proposes to undertake a workforce survey to help identify current and future workforce needs, including training requirements. A workforce survey might consider a number of factors related to the disability advocacy workforce, including demographics (e.g. gender identity, cultural identity, age, disability status), education, training, qualifications and retention rates.

During 2015, DANA undertook an advocacy sector workforce survey¹³ to find out more about the people employed in the sector. The survey findings included:

- The disability advocacy workforce is relatively small but has a consistent quality of a strong commitment to upholding the human rights of people with disability.
- Disability advocates come from all kinds of backgrounds.
- One third of advocates had a diploma or degree in a variety of disciplines including law, social work, social science, education, and community services. About one third have postgraduate qualifications. One third had no formal qualifications but may have lived experience of disability.
- That there was a relatively low number of people with lived experience of disability than what was expected in the disability advocacy sector. During the consultations it was raised that there is an issue with attracting and maintaining people with disability in advocacy. It was raised that there is still a culture of ableism in the sector.

The Centre will explore the option to repeat the workforce survey during 2023 and then annually as part of a “Census week” (see details below). The workforce surveys will provide an invaluable benchmark that can be used as part of evaluating the success of the Centre.

2) Identifying and addressing unmet demand and unmet need

The second core function of the Centre is to build an evidence base that addresses unmet demand and service gaps.

Participants reported anecdotal evidence that there is both increased demand for advocacy, and that advocacy issues are becoming more complex and broader advocacy needs are not being met. However, without solid data it is difficult to demonstrate the business case for additional funding. Participants were clear that the Centre can assist by collating and analysing data on requests for advocacy, unmet demand, and service gaps.

For the purposes of this report, “unmet demand” is defined as eligible requests for advocacy that are unable to receive support due to insufficient capacity of the organisation. “Unmet need” describes people who need an advocate, but they do not know of their existence, how to find them, or where they are located. During the consultations there was discussion about access for people in “closed” environments such as group homes and prisons.

¹³ Advocacy Workforce Survey Report 2015 DANA

Since the introduction of the NDIS, the complexity of issues people bring to advocates has also increased. Several organisations reported a change in clientele including an increase in the number of people with mental health issues seeking advocacy support. Adequately supporting this group can require advocates with a specialised skill set.

The Centre also has a potential role in raising awareness of disability advocacy by consulting with key disability and mainstream services. For example, it could develop strategies to raise awareness of disability advocacy and its availability and benefits among people with disability, families, carers, the disability support workforce, and the general population.

a) Reporting on capacity

A key role for the Centre is to gain an understanding of the capacity of organisations. Overall, most participants saw it as a positive for the Centre to be able to collect and analyse data and produce evidence for the need of additional funding to meet the unmet demand.

Participants believe that unmet demand and unmet need are issues in the sector. Given the lack of capacity to deal with unmet demand, there was little appetite for discussing unmet need or promoting advocacy to the wider community until capacity issues have been addressed. Participants noted that most new funding in recent times has been for specific advocacy including NDIS Appeals, the Disability Royal Commission Advocacy program and Independent Expert Review (IER).

Participants also expressed concern about the impact on unmet demand when the Disability Royal Commission Advocacy Program ends in June 2023 as there may be a reduction in the number of advocates in the sector after that date.

b) The wait-list

The consultations made it clear that organisations have different approaches to managing wait-lists, for example:

- Some organisations will have a wait-list to manage the client from the time of intake until they are allocated to an advocate. This may be less than a week or up to six months.
- The philosophy of some organisations is that there should not be any wait-list as a wait-list only creates an expectation that may not be able to be met.
- Some organisations will “close their books” when it is anticipated that clients will wait more than a month for a service.

The number of people on the wait-list in each organisation may not reflect the true demand and capacity as people may be on the wait-list of more than one organisation. Other issues discussed include:

- Advocates working more than their contract hours to keep up with the workload.
- Advocates can feel they are not able to provide quality advocacy due to pressures to move onto the next client on the wait-list.
- NDIS Appeals and the Disability Royal Commission advocacy activities tend to be longer term work and there can be long wait periods (for advocates and clients) between the different stages of the process.
- There has been increased complexity of issues clients bring to advocates.

- Changes to funding guidelines in some jurisdictions (such as NSW and WA) prevent organisations from working with client issues regarding NDIS and other Commonwealth programs. State-funded organisations report difficult in their ability to be able to refer to NDAP providers and they are at capacity. This is having an impact on the entire sector and their clients.

“We have been working with some clients for many years. They have complex issues and it is hard to separate issues. If they have an issue with Centrelink payment, we need to refer to an NDAP provider who often do not have capacity to assist the client. The client will often come back to us for help. They do not understand why we can no longer help and why they need to go on a wait-list for another organisation.”

Manager of a Sydney-based advocacy service

c) The collection of data

A role of the Centre might be to collect live data from advocacy organisations reflecting their capacity to take on new clients. Participants thought this data could be used to assist the Helpline’s referral process, inform DSS of advocacy demand, and support the case for additional funding. If this initiative were to go ahead, the Centre would work with the sector to find an effective way to capture data without adding unnecessary burden to organisations.

Participants made it clear that ideally the Centre would collect data that:

- covers both unmet demand and unmet need
- is consistent between Commonwealth and state data so that comparisons can be made
- is consistent between organisations
- is useful for the sector¹⁴
- doesn’t duplicate data that is already being collected
- is easy to collect¹⁵
- captures the time spent trying to reach hard to reach cohorts including ATSI and CALD, as well as rural and remote clients
- reflects what advocacy is being undertaken and the complexity/ time and effort involved in delivery of the service
- any data collected does not in any way breach confidentiality.

Data collected through DEX

During the consultations, participants spoke about their experience of reporting through Data Exchange (DEX). Participants felt that the system was not designed for the advocacy sector and that advocacy is being slotted into an existing reporting activity.

Some of the feedback received from participants was as follows:

- Organisations want to be able to use DEX data more effectively to inform their work and their future planning.

¹⁴ It was noted that QiDAN has created a data manual which has been rolled out across 11 organisations in Queensland.

¹⁵ Participants noted that collecting detailed data year-round is time-consuming and difficult. The idea was floated of a “Census Week” to collect data.

- It would be good to be able to benchmark organisational performance against similar organisations.
- It can take more time to report to DEX than the interaction with the client – one organisation reported it takes 77 clicks of a mouse to enter a new client.
- Currently, there is not an easy way to record enquiries into DEX - that is, clients who may contact an organisation to get some initial support but do not progress to receiving advocacy support. This challenge is partly due to DEX requiring a date of birth and name in most instances (5% of cases are allowed without this information captured) as well as the time taken to record information in DEX. It is not always appropriate for a provider to ask for this information from a client. This means some providers are supporting more clients than what is indicated in DEX data.
- An organisation said they report into DEX to meet targets and once the target for the month is met, they do not continue to report for lack of time – likewise, if an organisation demonstrates they can easily meet the target they are concerned the funding body may increase the target.
- There are limits on reporting good data into DEX - for example, there are only four categories for disability (e.g. autism is not visible in DEX).

Based on the above feedback, the Centre has a role to play and will liaise with DSS to look at the most effective and informative data for the sector to capture and report to.

d) How can the Centre help with identifying and addressing unmet demand and unmet need?

Participants raised a number of ways the Centre could identify and address unmet demand and unmet need. These include:

- developing a guide to foster consistency in data
- investigating options for improvements to data collection software
- holding a Census Week
- running an awareness raising campaign
- developing a directory of advocacy services.

Develop a guide to foster consistency in data

The Centre may be able to assist the advocacy sector to collect and analyse data by developing a guide containing key definitions to use when collecting data. For example, the guide could define “advocacy issue”, “provision of information” and “referral”. This would assist organisations to collect consistent data, which could be analysed more easily across the sector.

Another issue is that there doesn’t appear to be clear and consistent data collected between advocacy programs funded by the Commonwealth and other jurisdictions, resulting in there not being a clear understanding of service delivery areas and any gaps in geographical coverage. The Centre may have a role to play in collecting, mapping, and analysing data delivered by organisations that are funded by different levels of government.

Investigate options for improvements to data collection software

Most organisations use a Client Record Management (CRM) system to collect data, while some smaller organisations simply use Excel spreadsheets or report directly into DEX. Participants suggested that the Centre could come up with a form of data collection software that all agencies could use so we can compare data.

“If everyone was using the same CRM, we would get economies of scales as there would only be one developer involved.”

Manager of an advocacy organisation in Victoria

“Provide us with the software to collect the data that you're looking for. Even if we have to pay for it. We need to be all using the one system so that there is consistency in the way data is collected and counted.”

Manager of an advocacy organisation in South Australia

At the same time, some participants noted that there are ways to collect consistent data without all organisations using the same CRM. For example, Queensland organisations can get consistent data from different CRMs by using spreadsheets. The important thing is to first determine what information and fields are needed, and then use these fields consistently across the sector. Other participants noted that CRMs need to be accessible to people with visual impairments who use screen readers. IVO¹⁶ is currently not accessible.

Hold a Census Week

Organisations consistently reported that they are doing a lot of work that is not currently captured by DEX. It was acknowledged that it would be difficult to collect data on every call that comes in, however, there was support for a “Census Week” – that is, one agreed week a year when organisations comprehensively record data as requested by the Centre. This would provide a snapshot of what is happening on the ground, and the type of enquiries received by organisations. To ensure data integrity, it was recognised that the Census Week should be held at the same time every year. It is noted that this approach will not capture the whole picture of unmet demand as some organisations report demand seems to go in waves due to, for example, school issues in February, Centrelink payments in July.

Participants agreed that:

- a census week should be at a time agreed to in advance, to provide time to prepare and train staff
- information collected should be simple to collect
- information should be de-identified so client privacy is protected.

It was noted that there would not be a need for a Census week if participants could easily report to DEX.

“If we're able to capture and report enquiries to DEX over the whole year that would be better than a Census Week. For example, a support coordinator might ring up and say they need advocacy for a client for this reason, and we say we can't assist because the client lives out of area, and we then send them off to somebody else. My discussion with the Funded Agency Manager (FAM) is that that shouldn't be reported because we don't have a date of birth for the person. The support coordinator isn't going to give the person's date of birth or name because for privacy reasons, but we will have provided them with some guidance and that may take 20 minutes. The details of the clients is not captured or should it be.”

Manager, advocacy organisation, Victoria

¹⁶ IVO is a CRM specifically designed for advocacy organisations www.1024.com.au/ivo/

Run an awareness raising campaign

During the consultations there were a range of suggestions of how the Centre could conduct outreach and promote the benefits of disability advocacy. It is acknowledged that there was not a budget to do a traditional media campaign or go around Australia delivering outreach activities on behalf of organisations, and participants suggested the Centre could explore the option of a social media campaign to promote the benefits of disability advocacy.

Develop a directory of advocacy services

Providers suggested the Centre could assist advocacy organisations with their referral process by developing an effective directory of advocacy services. There was strong support for a dedicated directory of advocacy services to be available on the website as the general view was that “Ask Izzy Advocacy finder” and similar existing directories are not fit-for-purpose. In an effort not to duplicate existing resources the Centre could liaise with the developers of “Ask Izzy” to improve the functionality of their advocacy finder.

An effective advocacy directory of service would enable the Helpline and other organisations to make appropriate referrals. A directory could be promoted to the public to enable anyone to search and find an appropriate advocacy organisation in their region. This would also assist in addressing unmet need.

The design of the directory could enable people to search by:

- Name of the organisation
- Location of office
- Region covered (LGAs, statistical area and postcodes)
- Specialty (intellectual disability, child protection, justice)
- Type of advocacy provided (individual, family, citizen, systemic, self, NDIS)
- Funding source (state and Commonwealth)
- Funding – NDAP and/ or state funding
- Intake process.

3) Identifying and elevating systemic advocacy

The third core function of the Centre is to identify and elevate systemic issues within the advocacy sector to relevant government and non-government bodies, in order to improve the design of programs and policies that impact people with disability.

It is not intended that the Centre undertake systemic advocacy activities. The role of the Centre is to be involved in developing and implementing a process to monitor, identify and elevate systemic issues for people with disability and bring them to the attention of government, the disability advocacy sector and broader civil society. The Centre will provide a channel for individual advocacy organisations to report emerging systemic issues.

Many NDAP providers have limited capacity to participate in systemic advocacy as nominally funded allocation is for 10 percent systemic advocacy. In this context, many organisations report that much systemic work is ad hoc and often done “off the side of the desk” with very little planning involved. Most of their systemic activity is focussed on local issues.

a) How can the Centre assist with identifying systemic issues?

Develop a Systemic Advocacy Tracker

A Systemic Advocacy Tracker could be developed to record systemic policy issues organisations are working on/ aware of.

Potential functions of a tracker might include the following:

- map the systemic efforts of the sector (who's doing what) and facilitate collaboration between providers
- identify and track systemic issues against Australia's Disability Strategy categories
- facilitate searching the database by issue, activity, or milestones
- capture individual advocacy case studies that can be used for systemic advocacy
- operate as a clearing house for submissions and reports with the potential for providers to endorse submissions from other providers
- track outputs and outcomes from systemic activities.

This database could sit on the proposed Centre portal with the option of providers reporting their systemic issues directly into it.

Create a database of case studies

Some advocacy organisations do not have capacity to write or contribute to submissions, however they might be in a position to provide case studies that could be used in systemic advocacy. The Centre may be able to collect case studies capturing individual advocacy issues and develop a database. The de-identified case studies could be made available for use when advocating on systemic advocacy issues and reporting emerging systemic issues.

Host forums

Participants raised the idea of the Centre hosting regular online and face-to-face forums to identify and discuss the type of systemic issues they are working on. This would enable discussion of systemic issues, collaboration on submissions and strategic projects, and facilitate the collection of case studies.

Reporting on developments and the state of play

The Centre will prepare a regular report that will provide a summary of the systemic issues the sector is working on and identify emerging systemic issues. The report will be provided to DSS for their information. The Centre will have regular meetings with DSS where there will be an opportunity to discuss the contents of the report and any other emerging systemic issues that the Centre may have knowledge of.

There are several peak bodies within the disability advocacy sector and in broader civil society (such as the Australian Council of Social Service [ACOSS] and state COSSs) that do systemic advocacy. These organisations undertake several policy activities including submissions, reports to government and campaigns on a range of issues, including those relevant to the disability advocacy sector. Where relevant, the Centre can assist this work by providing information and case studies to support the case being presented.

Tracking outcomes of the Centre



The success of the Centre will be measured on its ability to engage with the disability advocacy sector to develop an evidence-based approach to deliver high quality, consistent and timely disability advocacy. The sector will also be able to work towards increased capacity to be able to meet the challenge of the unmet demand and unmet need for advocacy. The NDCA will look to engage a consultant to work with the Centre to develop an evaluation plan that may identify the data that can be collected to measure the effectiveness of the Centre in meeting its objectives.

The success of the Centre will be measured on how effectively it can deliver different elements of the project as outputs, including the number of organisations and advocates that engage with the Centre and benefit from the activities.

The long-term measure will be how the Centre will be able to impact the disability advocacy sector to be able to:

- **Improve service quality** – advocacy providers consistently deliver high quality service to people with disability.
- **Good practice delivery of advocacy** – providers use, communicate, and promote good models of disability advocacy.
- **Policy and procedures** – advocacy providers use, communicate and promote sound administrative frameworks and governance mechanisms.
- **Evidence base** – the Centre produces high-quality evidence-based advice on advocacy for policy/ program design and communicates this to the Australian Government and the relevant state and territory governments.

Final thoughts from the consultations

At the end of each consultation session participants were asked to nominate one thing the Centre should focus on in the first 12 months. Below is a summary of some of the comments.

Capacity building

- *Initially: building capacity of the sector (training individual and systemic advocates)*
- *Be a clearing house of information - resources – and a one-stop-shop*
- *Including materials, templates, factsheets on the portal that we can share*
- *Calendar of events*
- *Public Noticeboard – within the sector (not openly public)*
- *“I’d like to see a collaborative place for the whole sector to have access to”*
- *“I love the idea of the portal having ‘best practice resources’ ”*
- *Consistency of service across the sector (not just NDAP)*
- *The tools template resources that will help advocates*
- *Everyone is doing a lot of great work but there is not a lot of connection between agencies*
- *Recruitment/ induction templates – really helpful*
- *Community of practice – building on this to keep people feeling safe and supported in their roles (broader shared experiences) to ask for assistance with an advocacy issue/ case study.*

Identifying and addressing unmet need/ unmet demand

- *Develop a directory of organisations (positions and work focus)*
- *Understanding unmet demand (not fixing it!)*
- *Mapping the sector (who is funded for what/ where)*
- *Data analysis, interpretation and then prioritising*
- *Pulling together data from across the country so that we can get a big picture not just little pockets.*

Identifying and elevating systemic issues

- *Systemic – forum to exchange ideas and opportunities to co-ordinate*
- *Data analyses around system advocacy.*

Other ideas

- *Be realistic – things will change, grow and improve*
- *Lobby government for a bigger investment in advocacy (this may be DANA)*
- *How can we work with DARU so that we are doing different things, we do not want to see duplication.*

Appendix 1: Sample Agenda



Consultations on National Centre for Advocacy Melbourne

Wednesday 12 October 2022

9:30 – 4:00 PM

Wayi Djerring Room

Queens Victoria Women's Centre

210 Lonsdale Street Melbourne

Agenda

9 am	Arrivals Coffee & registration
9:30 am	Session 1: Introduction <u>Welcome</u> Acknowledgment of Country Introductions Purpose of the day Background and funding Overview and context
10:00 am	Session 2: Building sector capacity/workforce development <u>NCA Outline</u> The proposal Current state of play Evidence base <u>Questions/issues/topics (illustrative)</u> What are your priorities for the NCA? What does you or your organisation most need from the NCA re capacity building? How can the NCA help you or your organisation to build capacity? What should be the focus of the NCA for the next 9 months? What should be its focus over 3 years?

	<p>What do you or your organisation most need from an NCA? How can the NCA best educate and increase awareness of independent advocacy? What tools would you or your organisation find most useful? Webinars Pre-recorded videos Fact sheets Quick tips /FAQS Issue based resources (dealing with difficult clients, going to the AAT, writing file notes, ethical dilemmas) Seminars Expert sessions on “How to get heard” or influence decision-makers</p>
11:00 am	Morning tea
11:20 am	<p>Session 3: Addressing unmet demand <u>NCA Outline</u> The proposal Current state of play Evidence base <u>Questions/issues/topics (illustrative)</u> How is unmet need/capacity currently dealt with? Why and how should the NCA collect data? How can the NCA gather up-to-date, ongoing information on capacity of your organisation? What are the service gaps?</p>
12:30 pm	Lunch
1:30 pm	<p>Session 4: Systemic advocacy <u>NCA</u> The proposal Current state of play Evidence base <u>Questions/issues/topics (illustrative)</u> How do you currently do systemic advocacy? How do you currently report on systemic advocacy? How can the NCA meaningful capture your systemic advocacy issues? How can the NCA do this in a seamless way? What tools do you currently use in systemic advocacy? e.g. submissions, media, proactive reports, discussion papers, campaigns What will the NCA do with the data?</p>
2:30 pm	<p>Session 5: Wrap up Other issues Summary of main findings Next steps</p>
3:00 pm	Finish

