
Summary Report

NDIS Review: Supported Decision Making

Advocates and supported decision making
for people with disability.



DANA

Disability Advocacy
Network Australia

What are the problems?

The discussion paper identified that advocacy organisations lack capacity and capability for supported decision making, including:

1. Funding and resources
2. Training and professional development
3. Recognition and support for the role of advocates
4. Supported decision-making for people with disability outside the NDIS

DANA's engagements on this focus area included surveys for advocates, online forums, and written feedback.

Surveys

Most advocates thought that decision makers and decision supporters were not particularly well supported or not supported at all. Advocates identified the leading solutions to improve supported decision making as:

- Support from advocacy and disability organisations who are experts in supported decision making
- Capacity building resources and development for people who need support for decision making

What we heard

Advocates confirmed many of the findings of the original discussion paper and added specific examples.

Problems most impacting supported decision making for advocates

- Supported decision making is extremely complex, time and resource-intensive
- Advocates are undervalued and under resourced for supported decision making
- Advocates face barriers to accessing people with disability who need supported decision making, such as in group homes
- Advocates protect the person's right and capacity to make decisions
- Decision support program is no longer funded by the Department of Social Service for States (National Decision Support Pilot 2018-2023) leading to loss of staff and knowledge
- Lack of data and analysis of the cost and benefit of supported decision making
- Lack of capacity-building and skills training for the person with disability
- Lack of capacity-building and skills training for decision supporters, disability sector, NDIA/NDIS Planners and Local Area Coordinators (LACs)

"I can't do supported decision making if I can't get the person I'm meant to be supporting into the room, and they're locking them out of the room by refusing to come into the room." - Advocate, online forum

"We've seen a lot of complex guardianship cases where family members could benefit from training and supported decision making, and we sort of started to look around to see what's out there. But we were kind of saying, no-one should be appointed a guardian unless they have that knowledge and skillset." - New South Wales Advocate, online forum

"Without an outcomes framework, without accountability, without real recognition of roles and responsibilities, nothing will change, and the organisations that are set up, or will be set up as part of policy, that are meant to hold other organisations to account, have to have the authority to do that. Have real bite." - South Australia Advocate, online forum

Solutions to improve supported decision making for advocates

What do independent disability advocacy organisations need?

Advocates strongly endorsed the need for formal recognition of the role of advocacy and significant investment in funding and resourcing advocacy organisations for supported decision-making, including funding streams for:

- Comprehensive awareness campaigns within the disability sector and across the community
- Co-designing strategies, resources and tools to be used for supported decision making
- Systemic advocacy to increase awareness and understanding of supported decision making
- Collaboration and connection with NDIA to address the potential impact of the Supported-Decision Making Policy
- Designing, testing and implementing capacity building programs for people with disability and their families and supporters
- Awareness training and capacity-building for decision supporters, agencies, organisations, including the NDIA, NDIS Planners, LACs and providers
- Data collection and tracking on determining the cost of delivering support for decision making

How should advocacy organisations be funded to deliver support for decision making for the NDIS?

All advocates agreed that the federal government needs to make a significant investment in supported decision making. While some advocates supported funding through the NDIS and NDIA, most advocates did not support the NDIS playing a direct role in funding advocacy through individual budgets or plans for supported decision making to preserve the independence of advocacy.

Advocates discussed mechanisms to fund individual and systemic advocacy for supported decision making through:

- Funding through the Department of Social Services (DSS) under the Australian Disability Strategy (ADS) or another appropriate strategy or initiative
- Funding through the Information, Linkages & Capacity Building (ILC) for self-advocacy and capacity-building
- Disability Inclusion Legislation

"We do need advocacy services to continue being funded. Since that funding has been removed from the states, where we used to get it from, the NDIS needs to make sure that they're delivering funding to advocacy organisations for that." - Queensland Advocate, online forum

"[F]or independent advocacy organisations, having block-funded advocacy that people can access apart from their program and plans. I think it is very important. The independence of advocacy is really important." - New South Wales Advocate, online forum

"There could be grants around particular programs that could come from the Agency, but certainly the Agency communicating with other government departments could be helpful around the [means] for advocacy to be funded via other pathways." - New South Wales Advocate, online forum

Our solutions

An overarching Disability Inclusion Agency (DIA) should coordinate and lead government engagement with people with disability, and encompass all disability-focused knowledge and projects into one agency, including disability advocacy funding for supported decision making for people with disability both in and outside the NDIS:

- Delivery of supported decision-making capacity-building for people with disability and their families and supporters
- Resources, training and ongoing capacity to support an expanded role for advocacy organisations in supported decision making
- Capacity-building, resources and training for decision supporters, disability services and providers, NDIA staff, NDIS Planners and Local Area Coordinators (LACs)
- Greatly enhanced opportunities for professional development, training, and policy development

The DIA would be funded by contributions from all government agencies, including the NDIA. This would ensure that advocacy exists independently of the NDIA, the government, and disability service provision, and ensure ongoing funding for advocacy sector development.