Australian Government
Department of Health, Disability and Ageing

# A new Commonwealth individual disability advocacy program

## Consultation paper

# Executive summary

The Department of Health, Disability and Ageing (the department) wants your feedback on a new program to support individual disability advocacy (new program).

The Australian Government committed to develop a new individual disability advocacy program as part of its response to the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (Disability Royal Commission): Read the government's response to the Disability Royal Commission.

Individual disability advocacy is where a person gets one-on-one support to resolve an instance of unfair treatment or abuse. This support can be delivered by a professional advocate, or a family member, friend or volunteer with support from an advocacy organisation.

We know that individual disability advocacy is important. It supports people with disability to make their own choices and have equal rights.

The community has told us that individual disability advocacy:

- provides trusted information and helps people build skills
- is an important safeguard
- helps people access support, uphold their rights and participate in their communities
- can be needed for lots of reasons
- needs to be delivered by organisations that are stable and around long-term
- needs to be able to be accessed face-to-face
- needs to be culturally safe.

We think the new program should support people with disability, especially those at most risk of harm, to get the support they need to make their own choices and stand up for their rights.

To do this, the program should:

- help people with disability, their families, carers and kin get individual disability advocacy support when they need it
- deliver more culturally safe advocacy
- help organisations build their skills to provide high-quality, inclusive and responsive advocacy
- support advocacy that addresses discrimination, improves policy and practice and reduces barriers to inclusion.

We want to know if you agree with what we have heard and if you think our plan will help people with disability.

We want to hear from:

- people with disability, their families, carers and kin
- disability advocacy organisations and advocates
- disability service providers.

Your feedback will help us understand your views.

We also have a draft program policy framework. It explains how the government plans to fund and run a new advocacy program to support people with disability. If you work for an advocacy organisation, you may want to read it and provide feedback. Read our draft program policy framework on the Consultation Hub.

# How to have your say

You can respond by answering the consultation questions on our Consultation Hub or by sending us a written submission.

Respond to our consultation on our Consultation Hub

To send a written submission or ask a question:

Email: disabilityadvocacyreforms@health.gov.au

Write to:

Disability Advocacy and Inclusion Reforms

Advocacy and Inclusion Programs Branch

Department of Health, Disability and Ageing

GPO Box 9848

Please send your feedback by **16 January 2026**.

# Background

On 31 July 2024, the Australian Government (the government) announced it will develop a new program to support individual disability advocacy. The new program will replace:

- National Disability Advocacy Program (NDAP)
- Indigenous Community Advocates pilot (ICA pilot)
- Disability Advocacy Support Helpline (Helpline)
- National Centre for Disability Advocacy (NCDA).

The new program will help the government respond to the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (Disability Royal Commission). The Disability Royal Commission found:

- independent advocates are needed in many situations, especially where people don't have informal supports or need special skills
- current funding for disability advocacy programs isn't meeting demand
- there isn't enough data about how much advocacy is needed
- some specialist advocacy services exist for First Nations and culturally diverse groups, but coverage isn't nationwide and doesn't meet everyone's needs.

The Disability Royal Commission said more reliable funding will help people get the individual disability advocacy support they need.

The new program will help advocacy work well with other changes happening in disability supports. It will help people with disability protect their rights.

# What we are talking about

Disability advocacy helps people with disability by making sure their rights are upheld and respected. It supports them to make decisions about their lives and helps protect their interests.

Individual disability advocacy is a one-on-one approach, undertaken by a professional advocate, relative, friend or volunteer, to prevent or address instances of unfair treatment and abuse. This definition comes from the National Disability Advocacy Framework 2023–2025. Read the National Disability Advocacy Framework 2023–2025.

Government funding for disability advocacy is important. It helps Australia meet its obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The government currently funds disability advocacy organisations to support people with disability, their families, carers and kin through programs like:

- NDAP
- ICA pilot
- Helpline
- NDIS Appeals Program.

The government also funds the NCDA to:

- support disability advocacy organisations by providing training and development for their staff
- use evidence and data to improve advocacy services
- work with government and community organisations to address big-picture (systemic) issues for people with disability.

# What we have heard so far

## What we have heard from the community

People with disability, their families, carers and kin have shared their experiences and expertise through:

- the Disability Royal Commission
- Independent Review of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS Review)
- Foundational Supports consultations.

Here is some of what people have said about individual disability advocacy:

- Individual disability advocacy services are valued. They provide trusted information and help people build skills.
- Advocacy is an important safeguard. It helps people stay safe from harm.
- Advocacy services help people access support, uphold their rights and participate in their communities.
- People may need a professional advocate if they don't have other support, need special knowledge or skills, or aren't being listened to.
- Advocacy services need to be stable and available long-term, so people can build connections.
- People should be able to talk to someone face-to-face if they want to.
- Advocacy services need to be culturally safe.

## What we have heard from Disability Representative Organisations

The Disability Representative Organisations (DROs) are organisations for people with disability to share their views with us. Here is some of what DROs have said about individual disability advocacy:

- Advocacy services should recognise that people with disability often face several overlapping challenges.
- Many people who need help from a disability advocate don't know that support is available or how to get it.
- Advocacy should reach people living in closed or segregated settings, using targeted approaches to connect with them.

- It should be easy for anyone supporting a person with disability - like Community Visitors or health professionals - to refer them to advocacy services.
- It's important that advocacy services can help people make their own decisions and support people with complex communication needs.

## What we have heard from individual disability advocacy providers

We have heard from organisations that deliver individual disability advocacy supports and services. Here is some of what individual disability advocacy services have said:

- Advocacy services struggle to do their best work with short-term funding.
- Advocacy should be provided separately to other types of supports or services.
- It can be helpful if advocates know about the local area and community.
- Sometimes advocates need special skills or knowledge, such as understanding different disabilities, how people communicate, or how systems like education or justice work.
- There are many ways to deliver advocacy support. The new program should help the different parts of the advocacy system to work well together.

# Our plan for a new program

We have developed a plan based on what we have heard. The plan includes:

- aims
- partners
- activities
- outcomes.

## Our aims

**Goal**

The goal of the new program would be that individual people with disability, especially those most at risk of harm, get the support they need to make their own choices and stand up for their rights.

**Program objectives**

To reach this goal, the program aims to:

- Help people with disability, their families, carers and kin get individual disability advocacy support when they need it.
- Promote more culturally safe advocacy.
- Help organisations build their skills to provide high-quality, inclusive and responsive advocacy.
- Support advocacy that addresses discrimination, improves policy and practice and reduces barriers to inclusion.

# Our partners

Disability advocacy organisations and advocates will continue to deliver advocacy supports and services.

The department and the government's Community Grants Hub will work together to provide funding and guidance to disability advocacy organisations.

# Our activities

To achieve the objectives, we will need to:

- Fund a diverse network of independent disability advocacy organisations nationwide, including access for rural and remote communities, people facing intersecting inequalities and people in segregated settings.
- Support outreach to people with disability facing intersecting inequalities, such as:
    - Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people
    - people of different ages, sexes, gender identities, sexual orientations or intersex status
    - people from different ethnic, religious, cultural or linguistic backgrounds
    - people with different socioeconomic status
    - experiences of trauma and or abuse.
- Provide training and professional development opportunities for advocates.
- Build strong relationships between the department and funded organisations.
- Use information from the program to guide broader action.
- Collect and evaluate data to track access, performance, outcomes and unmet service demand.

**Inputs**

To do these activities, we will need:

- government funding and grants
- workforce of advocates (paid and volunteer)
- partnerships with and between disability advocacy organisations
- training and professional development
- monitoring and evaluation systems.

## Our outcomes

If we do these activities, we expect:

- People with disability and their supporters:
    - can access nearby individual disability advocacy services easily, when needed
    - know about and understand what individual disability advocacy supports are available
    - can access individual disability advocacy services that are culturally safe and support their individual needs.
- Individual disability advocacy organisations:
    - are better equipped to respond to complex and intersecting needs
    - are easy to connect with, well-designed, and high quality
    - operate sustainably and locally, including in regional and remote areas
    - have stronger partnerships with other community organisations
    - can recruit and keep skilled and accomplished advocates.
- Australian and state and territory governments:
    - use advocacy data to improve policy and practice.

Some outcomes will happen soon; others will take longer.

# How we will transition to the new program

Change will happen over time. We are planning carefully to minimise impacts on clients of existing services. We will make sure organisations have enough time to change how they work or help clients move to other advocacy providers if needed.

# More information

If you have questions, email disabilityadvocacyreforms@health.gov.au.

The public consultation will be open from 17 November 2025 to 16 January 2026.

The department may publish submissions to this consultation.

If you make a written submission, you can choose to have it:

- published under your name
- published anonymously
- not published at all.

For more about your privacy, read our privacy policy.

**Health.gov.au**

All information in this publication is correct as at November 2025