

Submission on the National Disability Advocacy Framework 2022-2025

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Overview

Volunteering plays an important role in disability advocacy in Australia. Volunteers participate in both individual and systemic advocacy, and people with disability engage in disability advocacy as volunteers through advocacy organisations.

Volunteering Australia welcomes the acknowledgement of volunteers in the draft National Disability Advocacy Framework 2022-2025 (the NDAF). However, the NDAF omits the important role that volunteers play in 'systemic advocacy' and 'self advocacy,' with the current draft only making reference to the role of volunteers in 'individual advocacy.' Further, the role of volunteer involving organisations should be more explicitly included in the responsibilities, reform and policy directions included in the NDAF.

Volunteering Australia makes the following recommendations on the draft NDAF:

- In the definitions of 'systemic advocacy' and 'self advocacy,' specify that these activities may be undertaken in a paid or voluntary capacity.
- Under the responsibilities, reform and policy directions of the NDAF, specify volunteer involving organisations in the following point: *Improving coordination and communication between disability advocacy organisations, disability services, the National Disability Insurance Agency, mainstream services, community-based services, [volunteer involving organisations] and governments to develop the overall capacity of the disability sector, including promoting linkages between individual and systemic advocacy.*

Introduction

About the National Disability Advocacy Framework

The first National Disability Advocacy Framework, published in 2012, established key outcomes to guide the provision of advocacy for people with disability and promote greater consistency across government funded advocacy programs. The 2012 Framework is currently being revised in consultation with people with disability, to support the implementation of Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031.

The National Disability Advocacy Framework 2022-2025 (the NDAF) is designed to support the Safety, Rights and Justice Outcome Area of Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031, which aims to ensure that the rights of people with disability are promoted, upheld and protected, and people with disability feel safe and enjoy equality before the law.¹

¹ <https://www.disabilitygateway.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2021-11/1786-australias-disability.pdf>, 14

About this submission

This submission outlines the contributions of volunteering in disability advocacy in Australia, and suggests that volunteering be specified in the definitions of ‘systemic advocacy’ and ‘self advocacy’ included in the NDAF.

It also responds to the following question from the submission guide:

4. *Are the responsibilities, reform and policy directions of the NDAF relevant or should different ones be included?*

Volunteers and disability advocacy

Volunteers contribute extensively to disability advocacy. A study by the University of Melbourne identified ‘advocacy’ as one of seven key models of volunteer-supported programs in the disability sector.² This work was found to support the key aims of the NDIS Information, Linkages and Capacity Building Program relating to the protection of the rights and welfare of people with disability, including increased community understanding of rights and barriers for people with disability, positive change in individual attitudes and community culture, and increased understanding of rights, obligations and barriers surrounding disability within mainstream services.³

Volunteering Australia welcomes the NDAF’s acknowledgement that ‘individual advocacy’ can be undertaken by a volunteer.⁴ However, as outlined above, volunteers also contribute to ‘systemic advocacy’ (advocacy for long-term social change to ensure the collective rights and interests of people with disability are served through legislation, policies and practices).⁵

Volunteering through advocacy organisations is also an important means for people with disability to be directly involved in decision-making and policy development. The organisation ‘Voice at the Table’ aims to increase the number of people with cognitive disabilities sitting on boards, committees, and advisory groups within community organisations, local government, and service providers.⁶ Board and committee roles are usually undertaken by volunteers.

Therefore, the role of volunteering in ‘systemic advocacy’ and ‘self advocacy’ should also be specified in the NDAF.

² <https://www.interchange.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Value-Added-Volunteer-Supported-Services-and-the-Challenge-of-the-NDIS.pdf>, 8

³ <https://www.interchange.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Value-Added-Volunteer-Supported-Services-and-the-Challenge-of-the-NDIS.pdf>, 110

⁴ <https://engage.dss.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Draft-New-National-Disability-Advocacy-Framework.pdf>, 6

⁵ *ibid*

⁶ <https://voiceatthetable.com.au/about-us/vatt-community-organisations/>

Volunteering and people with disability

People with disability contribute significantly as volunteers in Australia. According to the General Social Survey, more than 1.4 million, or 25.7 per cent of people with disability, volunteered through an organisation or group in 2019.⁷ In comparative studies, volunteering has been found to equally benefit people with and without disability.⁸ Volunteers with disability report that volunteering improves their connections to others and the community, fosters a sense of belonging, social acceptance, and empowerment, improves confidence, and develops practical and managerial work skills which lead to employment.⁹

Given the benefits of volunteering and the significant involvement of people with disability as volunteers, it is important that volunteers and volunteer involving organisations have access to advocacy services to ensure that the rights of people with disability are respected during their involvement as volunteers. Improving coordination and communication between volunteer involving organisations and other key actors in the disability sector is therefore critical to empowering people with disability to access advocacy services through these organisations, to volunteer in advocacy roles themselves, and to ensure that the rights of people with disability are promoted, upheld, and protected in their capacity as volunteers.

Volunteers are currently involved in the disability sector in a number of key service areas, providing social support and community participation, supported activity, skills development, out-of-home support, practical support, organisational support, and advocacy.¹⁰ Further, people with disability are engaged as volunteers across sectors. Therefore, improving coordination between volunteer involving organisations and the broader disability sector, and connecting volunteers with disability to individual and systemic advocacy, is essential to advancing the aims of the NDAF.

Recommendations

Based on available data on the role of volunteers in disability advocacy, the value of volunteer organisations in supporting self advocacy, and the importance of advocacy for volunteers with

⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics (September 2020) 'Table 4.1 Persons aged 15 years and over, Social Experiences—By Sex and Health Characteristics, estimate' [data set], *General Social Survey 2019*, <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/general-social-survey-summary-results-australia/2019>

⁸ Kimberly D. Miller, Stuart J. Shleien, Cecilia Rider, Crystal Hall, Megan Roche, and James Worsley, "Inclusive volunteering: Benefits to participants and community," *Therapeutic Recreation Journal* 36, no. 3 (2002), 247-259

⁹ Aneta Marková, "Volunteering of people with disability," *Kontakt* 22, no. 3 (2020): 205, doi:10.32725/kont.2020.013; Sally Lindsay, Emily Chan, Sara Cancelliere, and Monika Mistry, "Exploring how volunteer work shapes occupational potential among youths with and without disabilities: A qualitative comparison," *Journal of Occupational Science* 25, no. 3 (2018): 322-336, doi: 10.1080/14427591.2018.1490339

¹⁰ <https://www.interchange.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Value-Added-Volunteer-Supported-Services-and-the-Challenge-of-the-NDIS.pdf>, 8

disability, Volunteering Australia makes the following recommendations on the draft National Disability Advocacy Framework 2022-2025:

1. In the definitions of 'systemic advocacy' and 'self advocacy,' specify that these activities may be undertaken in a paid or voluntary capacity.
2. Under the responsibilities, reform and policy directions of the NDAF, specify volunteer involving organisations in the following point: *Improving coordination and communication between disability advocacy organisations, disability services, the National Disability Insurance Agency, mainstream services, community-based services, [volunteer involving organisations] and governments to develop the overall capacity of the disability sector, including promoting linkages between individual and systemic advocacy.*

Authorisation

This submission has been authorised by the Chief Executive Officer of Volunteering Australia.



Mr Mark Pearce
Chief Executive Officer

Endorsements

This submission has been endorsed by the seven State and Territory volunteering peak bodies.



About Volunteering Australia

Volunteering Australia is the national peak body for volunteering, working to advance volunteering in the Australian community. The seven State and Territory volunteering peak bodies work to advance and promote volunteering in their respective jurisdictions and are Foundation Members of Volunteering Australia.

Volunteering Australia's vision is to promote strong, connected communities through volunteering. Our mission is to lead, strengthen, promote, and celebrate volunteering in Australia.

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