

NSW DISABILITY NETWORK FORUM

Representation, Independent Advocacy & Independent Information:

The forgotten pieces of support for people with disability

Representation, independent advocacy and independent information* give people with disability a 'voice' and the capacity to be actively involved in decisions that affect their lives.

They are low cost and high value – they assist people with disability to successfully negotiate the service and support system; and enable the network of generalist and specialist services, supports and resources to work effectively for people with disability. They save time, resources and effort for people and systems.

But representation, independent advocacy and independent information for people with disability in NSW are at risk.

The issue

The NSW Government currently funds representation, independent advocacy and independent information under the NSW Department of Family and Community Services division of **Ageing, Disability and Home Care (ADHC)**. All disability funding under ADHC will be transferred to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) by 1 July 2018.

However, representation, independent advocacy and independent information will not be funded by the NDIS.

While the NDIS is transforming disability service provision across Australia, many services and supports remain NSW responsibility and beyond the scope of the NDIS. People with disability in NSW are still entitled to have a say in NSW government decision making processes, to access a range of quality specialist and generalist State-based services and supports and to have their human rights fulfilled.

People with disability in NSW still need representation, independent advocacy and independent information to support this. For example, they will need representation to ensure their views and concerns are heard in law and policy making processes; independent information or advocacy support with everyday issues, such as housing, education, employment; support with personal decision making and accessing professional supports; assistance in preventing and responding to violence and abuse; and capacity building to facilitate skills development and self-advocacy.

What will this mean?

Withdrawing funding for representation, independent advocacy and independent information will lead to unintended risks for:

- **People with disability:** they will not have a representative 'voice' in decision-making processes that affect their lives; they will not have assistance in dealing with everyday problems and crises; they will not have support to make decisions and choices in all aspects of their lives.
- **NSW service system:** there will be few independent safeguards to ensure that people in NSW can effectively use the service and support system; broad systemic issues will not be identified; there will be no informed input to ensure seamless, accessible and interconnected NSW services and supports.
- **NSW Government:** obligations to consult with people with disability, ensure accessibility of service provision and promote the rights and inclusion of people with disability will be difficult to meet –

NSW Inclusion Act, State Disability Inclusion Plan and NSW agency Disability Action Plans, the NSW Implementation Plan for the National Disability Strategy and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

What needs to happen?

Representation, independent advocacy and independent information must be maintained and strengthened to support people with disability in NSW. The NSW Government must commit to:

- **Ongoing funding** of \$6.25 million annually for organisations engaged in representation, independent advocacy and independent information; and
- **Growth funding** commensurate with growth in the number of people with disability in NSW.

*What do representation, independent advocacy and independent information involve?

Representative organisations: have a membership and governance made up of people with disability. They exist to provide a voice for people with disability, to express views on priority issues, identify system-wide problems and provide solutions, promote public awareness and advocate for systemic reform to realise the rights of people with disability.

Independent advocacy: involves taking action to promote, protect or defend the rights, interests or well-being of a person or group. Independent advocates inform people about their options, listen to them, and support them to get their choices across to others. Independent advocacy is free from any other interests, including government, service providers, or other persons.

Independent information: “seeks to facilitate knowledgeable, connected and capable individuals and communities”.¹ It involves sourcing, collecting, collating, filtering and disseminating information to assist people with disability. Independent information is provided to people with disability when and how it suits them, to support them to make informed decisions.

About the NSW Disability Network Forum

Initiated in June 2011, the NSW Disability Network Forum comprises non-government, non-provider representative groups, advocacy and information organisations whose primary aim is to promote the interests of people with disability. The aim of the NSW Disability Network Forum is to build capacity so that the interests of people with disability are advanced through policy and systemic advocacy. NCOSS provides secretariat support to the NSW Disability Network Forum.

NSW Disability Network Forum Member Organisations:

Aboriginal Disability Network NSW	Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association of NSW
Association of Blind Citizens of NSW	NSW Consumer Advisory Group - Mental Health
Brain Injury Association NSW	NSW Council for Intellectual Disability
Deaf Australia NSW	NSW Disability Advocacy Network
Deaf Society of NSW	People with Disability Australia
DeafBlind Association NSW	Physical Disability Council of NSW
Deafness Council (NSW)	Positive Life NSW
Information on Disability and Education Awareness Services	Self Advocacy Sydney
Institute For Family Advocacy	Side By Side Advocacy Incorporated
Intellectual Disability Rights Service	NSW Council of Social Service

¹ NSW Ageing, Disability and Home Care, [NSW Information Program Guidelines \(Disability\)](#), October 2010.