

**National Disability Advocacy Program (NDAP) Review**

**Discussion Paper Feedback**

June 2016

Submitted by:

The Committee of Management of the North East Citizen Advocacy Program in Melbourne, Victoria.

**The North East Citizen Advocacy (NECA) Program:**

The NECA program delivers independent INDIVIDUAL ADVOCACY using the Citizen Advocacy model. The program is contracted to deliver advocacy for people with an intellectual disability. Our focus is on actively finding vulnerable people who do not have adequate independent support and/or capacity to speak for themselves.

NECA is not a service provider, a disability service, or a friendship program. It is a community program providing individualized cost free advocacy, run by the community for the community. Most people in the program receive ongoing advocacy by the same advocate year after year after year.

Advocates are carefully matched with the person with disability and then receive ongoing support and training from NECA program staff. This includes tailored training about the NDIS and its impact on the individual for each advocate in a match.

The type of relationship/match that is thus created does not lend itself to a fee for service “market economy” funding model. There is no clear means by which NDIS funding could flow into the NECA program. We also argue that advocacy should be funded independently of the NDIS.

**Response to the KEY ISSUES in the NDAP Discussion Paper:**

**1. Models of Advocacy**

1.3 How do we value and support the various models of advocacy while ensuring equitable access to individualized, fit-for-purpose advocacy, regardless of location?

Over the time the NDAP has functioned a variety of Advocacy Models have developed in response to the diverse needs of people with disability.

All the models are valuable and should be retained, because different advocacy situations may require different types of advocacy expertise.

The particular knowledge and expertise has been acquired by each of the models and we are concerned that this would be lost in a generalist agency that may lose focus and become overwhelmed by having to understand and operate in widely divergent systems and areas of need.

Not all models will be able to be provided across Australia, because of cost and lack of human resources, but that does not mean that the diverse types of advocacy be amalgamated into generalist advocacy centers that tried to cover all regions of the country.

### 2. Improving access to advocacy supports

*2.1How do we improve access for:*

* *People who are very socially isolated including those with communication difficulties and those in institutional care?*

The Citizen Advocacy model is well equipped to respond to this group of people who need advocacy support. Because this is a prime focus of the CA model, people who often ‘slip through the cracks’ and can be easily ignored are able to have their rights & needs represented.

The CA Programs have annual Recruitment plans to target vulnerable people and the coordinators proactively recruit people who are socially isolated and have no natural supports.

This model of advocacy is community based, and should to be generated from the grass-roots, so funding needs to be provided to seed new groups across the regions of Australia that don’t currently have access to this model.

The NDAP program still needs to provide BLOCK FUNDING to Advocacy groups, as a lot of people with disabilities will not be engaged in the NDIS. These people do not need direct supports but still require advocacy when dealing with problems they are facing, such as housing, employment, community access or legal issues.

### 3. Improving the advocacy evidence base and coordination on systemic issues

3.2How can we help disability advocacy organizations work with a wide range of other organizations with similar aims.

The NDAP program can help disability advocacy organizations work with others by facilitating networking and information sharing. This could be in the form of a monthly newsletter, inviting programs to participate in providing specific information and feedback on issues that other organizations are working on.

Funding agreements of community advocacy organizations, however, do not adequately support this type of collaborative work.

Previously, the Federal Govt. has funded demonstration projects to support advocacy organizations such as the Citizen Advocacy Victoria Resource Unit, and more recently the Disability Advocacy Network Australia. NECA would like to see this level of resourcing and support reintroduced and maintained.

### 4.The interface with the NDIS and addressing conflict of interest

4.1 What steps or organizational structures should be put in place to ensure conflicts of interest do not arise, or are minimized?

NECA’s view is that community advocacy programs should not engage in service delivery, as it creates conflict of interest and conflicting functions that undermine the independence of advocacy.

Advocacy organizations should be outside the service system, as effective advocacy REQUIRES independence, both perceived and real. This is so the advocacy is an effective critique and uncompromising representation of the issues.

Advocacy and service delivery need to remain separate to ensure that both are not competing for the same resources. The advocacy program should not be confused with the service organization, or that advocacy is part of the service delivery.

Advocacy organizations should not engage in providing a service and advocacy to the same person.

4.3 What policies and strategies do we need to protect the rights of people with disability?

NECA supports the Productivity Commissions’ recommendation that the Australian Government continues to fund independent advocacy outside the NDIA, as a crucial NDIS safeguard. Funding should remain separate from the scheme and be funded under the NDAP.

The rights of people with disability should be reflected in all policies of the NDAP Framework. If organizations wish to become registered providers of individualized supports under the NDIS, the mechanisms they put in place to avoid potential conflict of interest should be rigorously and regularly reviewed by the NDAP.

### 5. Understanding and improving access to justice

5.2 What barriers prevent people with disability from accessing justice?

Like interpreters for people who cannot speak English, advocates who know and understand the person well can be the spokesperson or interpreter for the person with disability to ensure most effective representation.

The advocates cannot be the legal representatives because legal representation must come from legal professionals (via well -resourced legal aid and community legal services) working together with the advocate and person with disability.