Disability and Carers Group

Department of Social Services

disabilityadvocacy@dss.gov.au

Re: Review of the National Disability Advocacy Program

Down Syndrome Australia (DSA) supports the maintenance of the National Disability Advocacy Program (NDAP). However, it is our view that knowledge of the program needs to be much more widespread. Indeed, the need for the program will become greater as more and more people gain access to the supports and services they need to become active participants in society through the NDIS.

DSA, along with the state and territory associations, is actively involved in supporting family, individual and self-advocacy, along with systemic advocacy. On the whole we do this without access to government funding and outside of NDAP.

Access to and support from funded and professional advocacy services are vital if people with disability are to achieve and enjoy full and equal access to human rights. Although our community has come a long way on the journey of respecting and including people with disability, there are still many barriers to their full participation.

In keeping with the rights, choice and control principle of the NDIS, it is our strong belief that information about NDAP services and how to access them must be made available in an Easy Read format. It is disappointing to us then when you visit the link on the DSS website to find an NDAP provider in your area, none of the information is in Easy Read. This excludes most people with Down syndrome or other intellectual disabilities from being able use the site for themselves and connecting directly with the advocacy support they need.

It would also be useful if the department could provide an annual overview of the areas where NDAP providers have had to advocate on behalf of people with disability – ie employment, housing, etc. This information would be useful for government at all levels in informing future funding, legislative and other priorities and to representative disability organisations.

Information from NDAP would help inform organisations like ours when developing our priorities for systemic advocacy and in determining topics for the development of information, resources and guides to services for people with Down syndrome and their families and supporters.

There is also a need both for the Advocacy Framework to be more regularly evaluated and reviewed and NDAP to be well resourced. In order for Australia to become the open and inclusive society that is our aspiration, access to independent advice and advocacy is essential.

Down Syndrome Australia would welcome the opportunity to further discuss NDAP and how we can promote its existence amongst people with Down syndrome, their families and supporters.

Yours sincerely

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Ruth Webber   
CEO

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