



ASU Submission

Australian Government Department of Social Services

National Disability Advocacy Framework 2022-2025

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Date:	8 July 2022

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The ASU

The Australian Services Union ('**ASU**') is one of Australia's largest unions, representing approximately 135,000 members. Relevantly, we represent more than 50,000 workers in the community and disability sector (including mental health and aged services).

National Disability Advocacy Framework

Advocacy is an essential service. Our society needs independent voices for vulnerable Australians who will promote their needs and solutions for their problems. If a community can't speak for itself, it won't receive the support and funding that it needs.

Australian governments must support advocacy services to speak out about individual and systemic issues. They can do so by:

- Removing 'gag clauses' from community and disability sector funding contracts;
- Ensuring the sustainability of the sector with appropriate and long-term funding arrangements; and
- Distribute funding to ensure that the full diversity of the community is represented amongst advocacy groups.

We have had the opportunity view the Disability Advocacy Network Australia before filing its submissions and we support its recommendations.

Removing gag clauses from contracts

Funding contracts should not come with caveats and restrictions that limit what our community leaders can say and do about our governments. Unfortunately, some Australian governments have imposed restrictions on what advocacy providers can do and say about certain issues through their funding contracts. No further restrictions should be imposed advocacy providers and other services and all current contracts should be reviewed to remove existing restrictions.

Supporting the sustainability of the advocacy services

A commitment to appropriate long-term funding for advocacy is needed to ensure the sustainability of advocacy services. We welcome Labor's commitment to double existing support for disability advocacy, investing an additional \$10 million over four years and to match existing provider advocacy funding for AAT appeals. This additional funding should be provided through long-term funding contracts. Long-term funding arrangements will allow advocacy groups to make plans, develop capabilities, and build long lasting relationships with the communities they serve.

Supporting a diverse range of advocacy services

No single advocacy group can speak for all people with a disability. Any approach to funding must recognise the diversity of the community by funding a wide range of services to support people with different disabilities and life-experiences.