



Submission to Department of Social Services discussion paper - Improving the delivery of advocacy for ATSI people with disability

June 2017

Aged and Disability Advocacy Australia (ADA Australia) and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Disability Network of Queensland (ATSIDNQ) have prepared a joint response to the discussion paper *Improving the delivery of advocacy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People with disability*.

About ADA Australia

Aged and Disability Advocacy Australia is a not-for-profit, independent, community based advocacy and education service with more than 25 years' experience in supporting and improving the wellbeing of older people and people with disability.

Headquartered in Brisbane, ADA Australia has regional offices in Cairns, Townsville, Mackay, Rockhampton, Hervey Bay, Toowoomba, and the Gold Coast and are active in providing advocacy services in metropolitan, regional, rural and remote communities across Queensland.

ADA Australia employs two specialised Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) advocates to ensure culturally appropriate engagement within Indigenous communities. Regular outreach trips allow ADA Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advocates to build a presence within local communities and increase the visibility and accessibility of ADA Australia's advocacy services. In 2015/16 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advocates delivered advocacy support and education during visits to the remote communities of Palm Island, Mornington Island, Weipa, Mapoon, Napranum, Doomadgee, Normanton, Hopevale, Wujal Wujal and Lockhart River. ADA Australia also provides the auspice for the ATSIDNQ.

About the ATSIDNQ

The ATSIDNQ is a growing network of over 500 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability, their families, carers and supporters.

The Network offers a culturally safe space for members to connect, share and raise awareness of issues they are facing. The Network gives members the opportunity to celebrate their strengths, share their stories and contribute to the conversation about disability in positive ways. The Network employs Indigenous staff who work with members to understand the variety of issues Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability face and ensure this information is fed back to government policy makers.

Discussion Paper Questions

Of the possible strategies provided, what do you consider to be the most important?

ADA Australia and the ATSIDNQ suggest that improvements in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander access to disability advocacy can be achieved through the adoption of a holistic approach combining all of the proposed strategies.

ADA Australia and the ATSIDNQ recommend that *Strategy 1 – Cultural competence for all agencies funded under NDAP* and *Strategy 2 – Population based Identified positions* be viewed as a priority. Both strategies, if adopted appropriately, will influence the success of the remaining strategies proposed in the discussion paper.

ADA Australia and ATSIDNQ consider it essential that adequate time be assigned to the implementation of each strategy. The ATSIDNQ notes that it takes time for services new to build trust within communities. It also takes time for new information to be processed and understood and for change to occur. The implementation of new strategies cannot be rushed. There must be provisions for flexibility in meeting deadlines.

Do you consider the possible strategies to be feasible? Can you identify any problems?

ADA Australia and the ATSIDNQ provides the following comments in relation to each of the proposed strategies:

1 – Cultural competence for all agencies funded under NDAP

- Reconciliation Action Plans (RAP) must be specific about the actions the NDAP agencies will deliver and offer tangible outcomes for communities. It is essential that NDAP agencies be held accountable for the delivery of agreed outcomes. Without accountability, the RAPs are meaningless.
- Cultural awareness training should be a mandatory requirement for all mainstream NDAP agencies. An acknowledgment that there is diversity within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture should be an essential component of any training program delivered.
- NDAP agencies should be required to demonstrate an understanding of local protocols as well as broader protocols such as the acknowledgement of traditional owners and welcome to country.
- Engagement strategies must include local Elder and community group.

2- Population based Identified positions

- All NDAP agencies should be required to employ Identified positions to work specifically with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. In ADA Australia's experience, the employment of identified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advocates increases the visibility and accessibility of advocacy services within Indigenous communities. In general, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients feel more comfortable sharing their story and seeking assistance from an identified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advocate. Identified positions also allow for targeted training and support to be offered within organisations on an ongoing basis, which in turn leads to increases in the ability of organisations to provide consistent and effective service delivery to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Where the service size does not allow for the engagement of Identified advocates, resources should be available to broker the necessary skills and expertise on a case by case basis.
- NDAP agencies will be more successful in attracting, employing and maintaining Identified positions if they are culturally competent and can demonstrate that cultural sensitivities have been embedded into their policies and practice.
- NDAP agencies must receive adequate funding to support the employment of identified positions. Funding must take into account the added costs associated with travelling to rural and remote Indigenous communities on a regular basis. If meaningful engagement is to occur, Larger state-wide organisations should be supported to employ multiple identified positions which are regionally based. For example, ADA Australia employs an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advocate in both Brisbane and Cairns and ideally would benefit from an additional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advocate in Central Queensland.

3- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander run NDAP agencies

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations that are suitably equipped and have an interest in the delivery of NDAP should have the opportunity apply for NDAP funding through an open tender process. Successful applicants should be appropriately supported to establish and deliver advocacy services.
- Where mainstream NDAP agencies do not employ Identified advocates, resources should be available to broker the necessary skills and expertise on a case by case basis. In these instances, it is essential that formal Memorandums of Understanding are in place and the local services are appropriately funded.
- There are some concerns about brokering advocacy support services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations based in smaller communities where

confidentiality and professional boundary concerns may discourage potential advocacy clients from accessing supports from services where kinship and blood ties exist. It is essential that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability are able to access culturally appropriate advocacy support that is free from conflict of interest.

- Brokerage to local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisations could be particularly useful in the delivery of culturally appropriate education on NDAP services and disability rights.

4- Separate approaches for Central Australia and Top End

- Each community is diverse and will require unique approaches. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and community groups should lead the discussions about what is needed to increase the accessibility of NDAP services amongst the individual communities in Central Australia and the Top End.
- Face to face interactions are the most culturally appropriate method for delivering advocacy support. Central Australia and the Top End both have a largely decentralised population spread widely over vast land areas which presents challenges for the delivery of face to face advocacy. As such, it is essential that any strategies adopted to address accessibility in these areas must be appropriately funded.

5- Human Rights Literacy

- Capacity building projects should prioritise face to face discussions over written materials. Face to face workshops that are flexible in their delivery may be the best approach. As previously suggested, brokerage arrangements with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisations could be particularly useful in the delivery of culturally appropriate education on disability rights.

6 -Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Coordinator/Liaison

- There are already many well-established and trusted groups that collate and report on issues affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability. The ATSIDNQ fulfills this role in Queensland. It is suggested that the NDAP build on these existing networks, rather than creating new mechanisms for engagement/consultation. Existing mechanisms can be strengthened through formalized MOUs and appropriate funding. Funding should make provisions for community events that draw in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with a disability and provide them with an opportunity to engage in a relaxed and culturally safe atmosphere.
- It is imperative that communities that engage in consultation and offer suggestions for improving the accessibility of NDAP service receive feedback on the consultation

outcomes. This important demonstrates to communities that their voice has been heard and valued and the intent of the consultation was sincere. It also provides communities with a reference when following up on the implementation of agreed actions.

Are there important strategies or options we have missed when it comes to providing advocacy to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability and their families and communities?

ADA Australia and the ATSIDNQ believe that the current NDAP funding arrangements impact on the provision of advocacy services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability.

NDAP funding has historically been unplanned, recurrent funding which is not necessarily based on economies of scale or efficient models of service delivery. ADA Australia and the ATSIDNQ suggest that Advocacy funding in the disability sector should go to an open market tender similar to the tender process recently finalised for the National Aged Care Advocacy Program.

ADA Australia and the ATSIDNQ also note that in Queensland, a significant block of disability advocacy funding (under the Queensland Community Care Program and Disability Programs) will disappear in 2019 and will not be picked up by the NDIS. This loss of funding will present as a major problem to people with disability post 2019 and will create further disadvantage for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability requiring advocacy support.

ADA Australia and the ATSIDNQ have particular concerns about the lack of advocacy support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with a cognitive and/or psychosocial disability entering the NDIS. The uptake the scheme has been low for this group, and for those who do enter the scheme, there are concerns that their inability to adequately articulate their needs results in them getting a support package which is much smaller than what they are entitled to. The end result of this will be that people with cognitive and/or psychosocial disability will bounce back into the state based child protection, health and corrective services systems.

ADA Australia's Guardianship Advocacy Service in Townsville has been working closely with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advocate based in Cairns to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with a cognitive and/or psychosocial disability, who are subject to guardianship, to successfully transition to the NDIS. However, the state based funding for this valuable program has also ceased.

ADA Australia and the ATSIDNQ recommend that NDAP funding be increased to address the gaps created by the cessation of valuable State funded disability advocacy services.