National Centre for Disability Advocacy

Advocacy Workforce Survey

Advocacy Organisations

National Centre for Disability Advocacy

2023 results

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Abbreviations

Acronym	Definition
AAT	Administrative Appeals Tribunal
CALD	culturally and linguistically diverse
CRM	client relationship manager
DANA	Disability Advocacy Network Australia
DEX	the Data Exchange
DRC	Disability Royal Commission
DRO	Disability Representative Organisation
DSP	Decision Support Pilot
DSS	Department of Social Services
FTE	full-time equivalent
ILC	Information, Linkages and Capacity Building
LOTE	languages other than English
NCDA	National Centre for Disability Advocacy
NDAP	National Disability Advocacy Program
NDIA	National Disability Insurance Agency
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme

Definitions

Term	Definition
Disability advocacy funding stream	refers to funding specifically for disability advocacy, such as the National Disability Advocacy Program, National Disability Insurance Scheme Appeals Program, and state-based advocacy funding programs.
Unmet demand	is defined as eligible requests for advocacy that are unable to receive support due to insufficient capacity of the organisation.
Unmet need	describes people who need an advocate, but they do not know of their existence, how to find them, or do not have access to them.

Executive summary

The National Centre for Disability Advocacy (NCDA) has been established with the purpose of improving access to and quality of disability advocacy services. One of the core functions of the NCDA is to provide capacity building[1] support to the sector through targeted professional development and resourcing. This is the first time the disability advocacy sector has a dedicated, national program that focuses purely on supporting the sector.

The disability advocacy sector is comprised of many organisations that all have a common purpose: to walk alongside people with disability as they exercise their rights. For the NCDA to fulfil its purpose of supporting such a unique sector, it needs to have insight into what organisations need to thrive.

To understand the sector and its needs, and to track trends and changes, the NCDA has developed a sector-wide survey that will be delivered annually. While advocacy organisations provide insights to Disability Advocacy Network Australia (DANA) through different mechanisms, such as meetings, forums and surveys, this survey intends to track similar information each year.

Insights from this survey include the impact of the cessation of the Disability Royal Commission advocacy funding and Decision Support Pilot program, which resulted in 42.5 full-time equivalent positions ending across 33 organisations. It also highlighted that while a third of respondents were providing advocacy assistance within 2–4 weeks of a person enquiring, another third of respondents' waitlists were 7 weeks or longer. One respondent's waitlist was in excess of 17 weeks.

The biggest issues driving demand are all related to the National Disability Insurance Scheme: external reviews at the Administrative Appeals Tribunal, assisting with access requests, and supporting participants with internal reviews. Subsequent significant issues relate to housing, and abuse, neglect, and violence.

From a training perspective, organisations see the most value in engaging with First Nations cultural competence training, developing trauma-informed practice skills, and learning about outcomes/impact measurements. Interestingly, organisations also value training for board/management.

By understanding the sector and its evolving needs, the NCDA will be able to ensure professional development activities satisfy the sector in real time. This report also shares the survey data with the sector so it can support individuals and organisations in decision making.

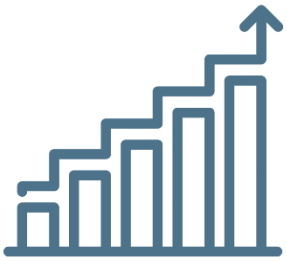
[1] These activities include both capacity and capability building.

Advocacy workforce survey for organisations at a glance

41 organisations responded

from 7 states & territories

90% deliver individual advocacy



61% saw an increase in demand for advocacy

80% undertake systemic advocacy

33% have waitlist times of 7 weeks or more

65% have difficulties recruiting

drivers of demand:
- NDIS appeals
- NDIS access
- NDIS internal reviews
- responding to abuse, neglect and violence

training most important to organisations:
- First Nations cultural competency
- trauma informed practice
- outcomes/impact measurement

Introduction

The National Centre for Disability Advocacy (NCDA) has been established to improve access to and quality of individual advocacy services across Australia. The NCDA's forward work plan outlines the NCDA's objectives, including surveying the disability advocacy workforce to gain an understanding of organisations' staffing and operations and to identify resources, good practices, and training needs.

This is the first survey the NCDA has undertaken to understand the disability advocacy organisations that it supports since Disability Advocacy Network Australia (DANA) sought responses for a similar survey in 2015.[2] This survey will provide the foundation for a yearly sector-wide survey distributed to organisations to track trends and inform the NCDA's work to ensure activities meet the sector's needs.

This survey coincides with a sector-wide workforce survey that individual workers completed in 2023. The results from this survey can be found on the NCDA website.

Methodology

The survey was developed using the 2015 DANA Advocacy Organisational Survey as a base. A survey draft was circulated to the National Data Working Group[3] to seek feedback, and some modifications were made to the questions asked.

The NCDA's remit is to provide support to National Disability Advocacy Program (NDAP) providers; however, as this survey seeks to understand the disability advocacy sector in its entirety, organisations that deliver individual disability advocacy services under non-NDAP funding streams (including state/territory-based disability advocacy funding and the National Disability Insurance Scheme [NDIS] Appeals Program) were invited to participate.

Information regarding the survey was distributed via the NCDA's email newsletters. Additionally, every eligible disability advocacy organisation (and key contact where known) was contacted individually via email inviting them to complete the survey.

The survey was conducted using SurveyMonkey and was open from Monday 30 October 2023 until Saturday 2 December 2023. Responses were received from 41 organisations; however, not all 41 organisations answered every question.

[2] Disability Advocacy Network Australia, 2015, Advocacy Organisational Survey 2015 results.
[3] The NCDA chairs and convenes the National Data Working Group. The working group consists of at least one disability advocacy organisation from every state and territory and represents every model of disability advocacy.

Caveats and limitations

The survey was designed to capture a series of data points to understand the challenges disability advocacy organisations were facing at a set point in time. This resulted in a long, time-consuming, and complex survey that experienced "drop off" on a number of questions. Subsequently, some questions did not receive enough responses to draw strong conclusions. Information about responses received has been included in this report; however, caution should be exercised when using some of these results to make informed decisions. Where possible, analysis between the 2015 and 2023 surveys has occurred and been noted.

While 41 responses were received, nothing was submitted by organisations that operate in the Australian Capital Territory. Additionally, organisations that operate in Victoria had the highest number of respondents (representing 37%) meaning the results do not equally reflect all states and territories.

This survey excluded those engaged in Disability Representative Organisation (DRO) advocacy and advocacy-like activities funded under Information, Linkages, and Capacity Building (ILC) grants.

Survey results

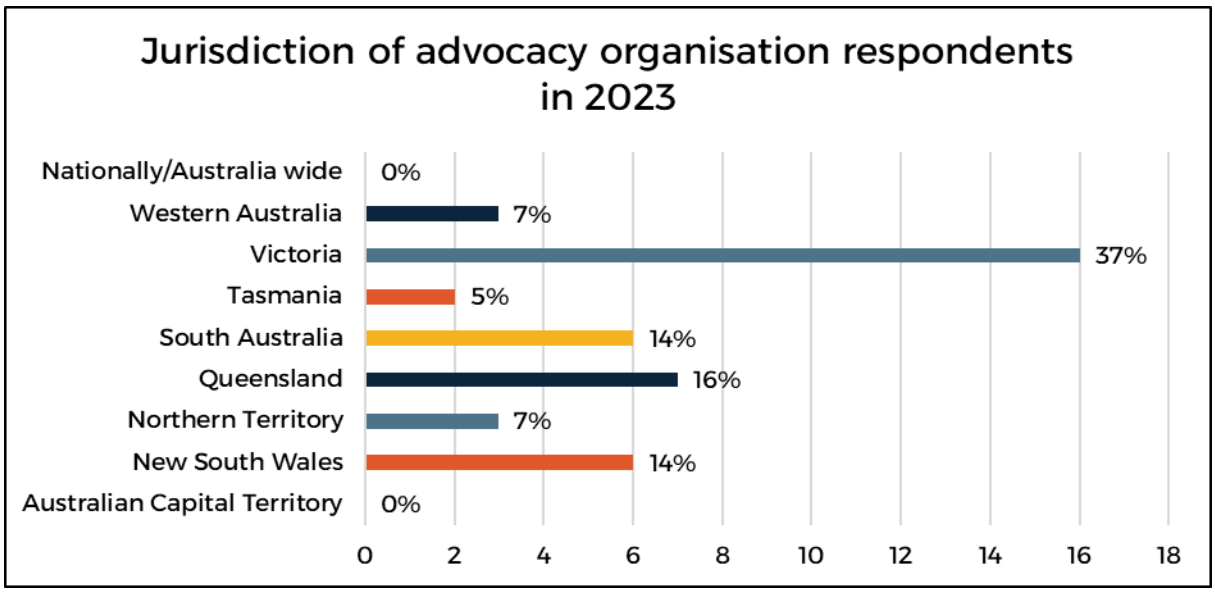
Survey results have been rounded to the nearest whole number for percentage breakdowns, which may mean some results exceed 100%. At times, data will exceed the total whole number as respondents were able to select multiple answers for certain questions.

Location of respondents

All respondents identified the state or territory they provided advocacy within, and 2 respondents advised they worked across more than one jurisdiction. The largest response was received from organisations operating in Victoria (37%), followed by organisations operating in Queensland (16%), New South Wales (14%), South Australia (14%), Western Australia (7%), Northern Territory (7%), and Tasmania (5%). No responses were received by organisations operating in the Australian Capital Territory.

The response rate based on the location of respondents for the organisational survey was similar to those received in the 2023 individual worker survey. Victorians provided more responses than any other jurisdiction, followed by Queensland, New South Wales, and South Australia. It is important to keep this in mind, as it means the data are somewhat Victorian-centric.

Figure 1: Jurisdiction of advocacy organisation respondents in 2023



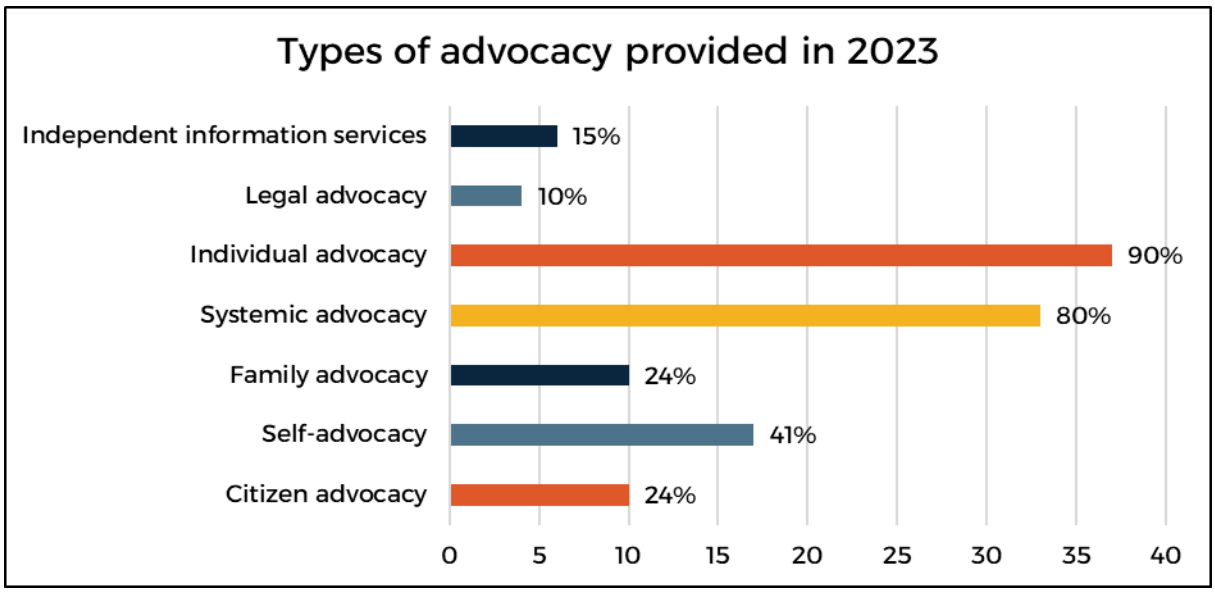
Type of advocacy and other services delivered

All respondents identified the types of advocacy they provide. Respondents overwhelmingly delivered individual advocacy (90% of respondents) and systemic advocacy (80% of respondents).

The NCDA routinely meets with organisations funded under the NDAP and often discusses the models of advocacy in which organisations deliver. A consistent theme is the various approaches to advocacy and the interpretation of models of advocacy. This means that although, for example, 41% of respondents identify they deliver self-advocacy[4] as a service, the way in which this is delivered may be quite different depending on the organisation, the jurisdiction, and the systemic issues people with disability face in that location.

[4] Self Advocacy is a disability rights movement where people with disability work together to speak up about shared issues, take action, and make change. This is different to the self-advocacy many organisations have shared they undertake with the NCDA, which is providing a person with disability information and tailored advice on how to resolve a specific matter affecting them. More information on the Self Advocacy movement can be found at https://www.voicestogether.com.au/self-advocates/what-is-self-advocacy/.

Figure 2: Types of advocacy provided in 2023



Seven respondents (17%) only delivered 1 type of advocacy, which was either citizen advocacy or individual advocacy. The majority of respondents delivered 2, 3, or 4 types of advocacy (27%, 29%, and 10%, respectively). Three respondents (7%) delivered 5 and 6 types of advocacy, and 1 respondent provided all types of advocacy listed as options.

Organisations were asked whether they provide advocacy for specific target groups, including advocacy to people based on their age, gender, disability type, or cultural background. Thirty-seven organisations responded, and 15 organisations (41%) confirmed they do not deliver targeted advocacy. The remaining 22 organisations that responded indicated they delivered targeted advocacy.

Table 1: Targeted advocacy

Field	Percentage of respondents 2023
First Nations people	11%
Culturally and linguistically diverse people	8%
Young people	5%
People living in remote areas	3%
People living with complex disability	3%
Parents and carers	3%
People living with acquired brain injuries	11%
People living with intellectual impairments	24%
NDIS participants	3%

Abbreviations
NDIS = National Disability Insurance Scheme

To understand organisational structures, respondents were asked whether they deliver other services that are similar to disability advocacy, such as aged care advocacy, veterans advocacy, community legal centre services, and NDIS ILC. Organisations were also asked about fee-for-service offerings

and were provided with an opportunity to list "other" services. Twenty-four respondents identified they delivered services in addition to disability advocacy. The most common was NDIS ILC, with 10 respondents (42%) confirming they deliver these projects.

Other services listed were state-funded disability home-care services and state-funded projects supported by departments responsible for guardianship and safeguarding.

Table 2: Other services delivered

Field	Percentage of respondents 2023
Aged care advocacy	8%
Veterans advocacy	4%
Community legal centre services	25%
Financial counselling	4%
Disability Representative Organisation	8%
NDIS ILC (including DSO peer support)	42%
NDIS coordination of supports	8%
NDIS plan management	13%
NDIS direct supports (including core and capacity building supports)	8%
Other	8%

Abbreviations
DSO = disability support organisations;
ILC = Information, Linkages and Capacity Building;
NDIS = National Disability Insurance Scheme

Funding breakdown

Disability advocacy has traditionally been funded by the Commonwealth and state and territory governments. This funding, delivered as grants, is provided to organisations to deliver advocacy to individuals based on a series of criteria. The funding body usually sets targets (or deliverables) as part of the grant agreement, and at times, these targets are negotiable. Because advocacy organisations receive these grants, people with disability (and in some circumstances, their supporters) access disability advocacy at no cost.

Anecdotally, the funding landscape for disability advocacy has remained relatively unchanged for many years; the NCDA sought to understand organisations' funding sources to confirm this assumption. There has also been anecdotal evidence that organisations are increasingly trying to diversify their funding sources (such as engaging with philanthropists) to meet unmet demand and undertake discrete project work.

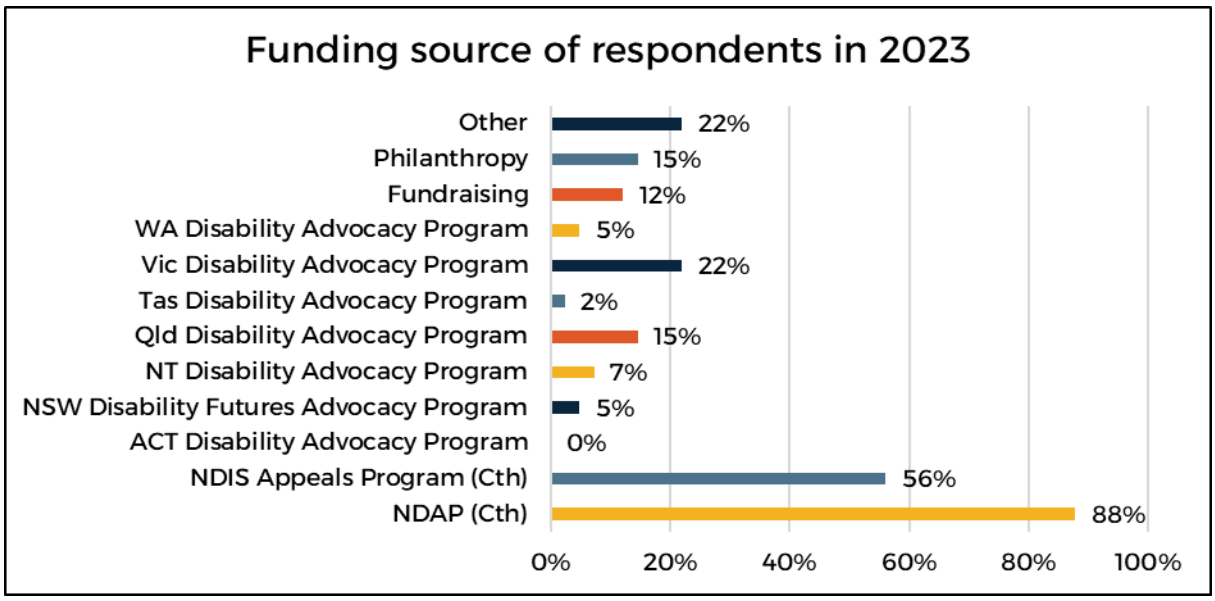
All respondents identified their disability advocacy funding sources. The largest funding source for respondents was the NDAP, with 88% of respondents receiving NDAP funding, followed by the NDIS appeals program, with 56% of respondents receiving this funding.

The “other” funding sources listed by respondents include:

- donations and charitable contributions
- project funding from state governments to support guardianship diversion projects and resource development
- project funding from local councils to develop training and resources
- NDIS ILC project funding.

One respondent listed Disability Royal Commission (DRC) advocacy funding and Decision Support Pilot (DSP) funding; however, both of these programs ceased in 2023.

Figure 3: Funding source of respondents in 2023



Abbreviations
ACT = Australian Capital Territory;
Cth = Commonwealth;
NDAP = National Disability Advocacy Program;
NDIS = National Disability Insurance Scheme;
NSW = New South Wales;
NT = Northern Territory;
Qld = Queensland;
Tas = Tasmania;
Vic = Victoria;
WA = Western Australia

Workforce profile

Based on known funding that existed across Australia in 2023, it is hypothesised there are approximately 400 full-time equivalent positions across all funding streams.[5] Organisations were asked how many people they had employed by role; Social, Community, Home Care and Disability Services Industry Award 2010 (SCHADS) level; and employment status (full-time, part-time, casual). While there were not enough data collected to build a full profile of the sector, some themes were present.

1. Only 2 respondents reported having trainees on staff. Both these organisations employed their trainees at SCHADS level 1.
2. Respondents' rates of pay for those employed in administration, advocate, and supervisor roles varied significantly.
    a. Respondents advised that their administration employees were employed at SCHADS levels 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6, and some were outside of the award. Most were employed at levels 3 and 4.
    b. Respondents advised that their advocates were employed at SCHADS levels 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8. Most were employed at levels 4 and 5. The next largest cohort was those employed at level 6, which may represent senior advocate status.
    c. Respondents advised that their supervisors were employed at SCHADS levels 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8. Most were employed at levels 6 and 7.
3. Most respondents' executive leaders are remunerated outside of the SCHADS award, with the next largest cohort being those employed at a SCHADS level 8.

Recruitment, redundancy, and resignation of staff

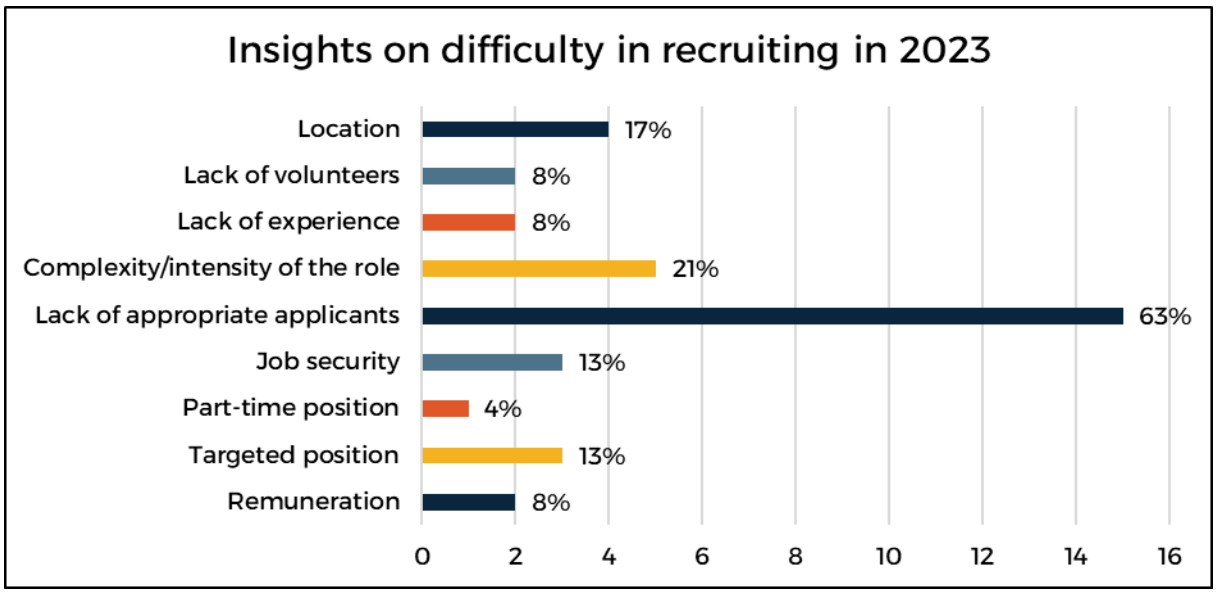
Organisations were asked whether they have any difficulties with recruiting staff/advocates and were asked to expand on their response regarding difficulties (if any) or what works for them. Thirty-seven organisations responded, with 24 respondents (65%) advising they had difficulties and 13 respondents (35%) advising they did not. The difficulties organisations had in recruiting new staff/advocates had a similar theme of lack of appropriate applications, including lack of experience in working with the level of complexity that advocacy brings. Organisations in rural and remote locations also had difficulty filling roles due to the location.

Those who advised that they did not have difficulties in recruiting new staff/advocates explained that having a positive profile in the community and strong networks in the community resulted in suitable applicants. One organisation noted that they classify advocates as SCHADS level 6, which

[5] DANA is aware of approximately $60 million per year of total advocacy funding spread across federal, state, and territory government funding. An operating cost of $150,000 per year per advocate has been used to determine the amount of full-time equivalent positions. Disability Advocacy Network Australia, 2023, *Submission:* A strong, sustainable future: addressing capacity shortfalls for a strengthened disability advocacy sector, p. 4.

ensures they are competitive regarding pay. They offer full-time, part-time, and hybrid working-from-home models.

Figure 4: Insights on difficulty in recruiting in 2023



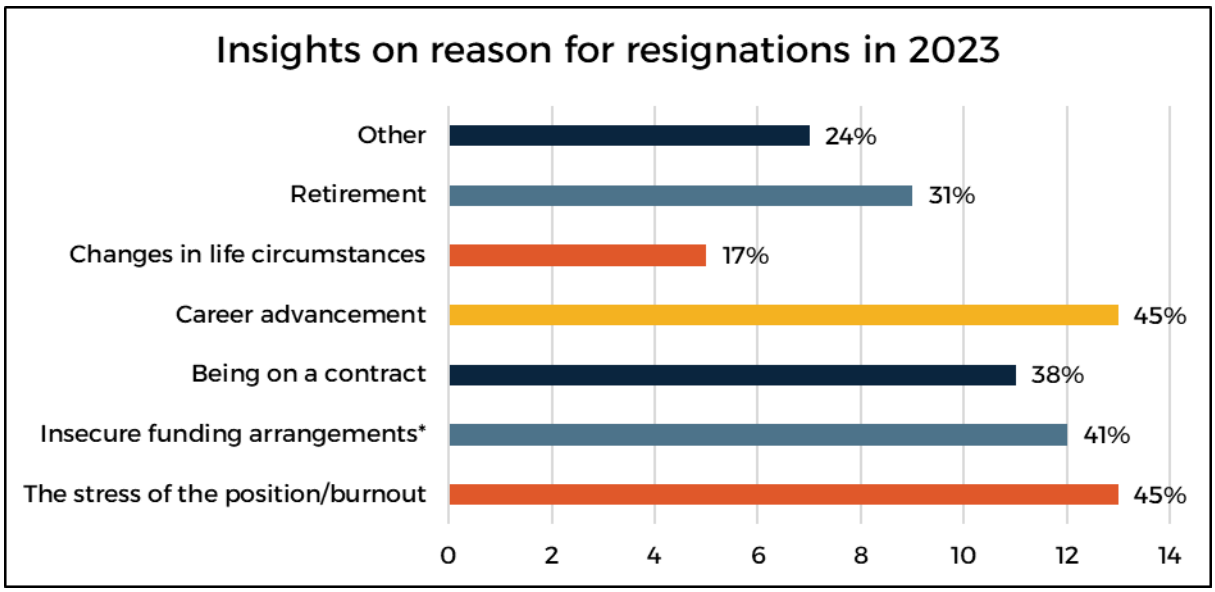
Two significant funding streams for disability advocacy ended in 2023: Disability Royal Commission advocacy funding and the DSP program. The cessation of these 2 funding streams left advocates and advocacy staff with no option but to leave the sector around the middle of 2023.

Between September 2022 and September 2023, 42.5 full-time equivalent (FTE) positions were made redundant or had contracts ceased due to funding ending across 33 organisations. On average, 1.3 FTE positions were ended across the responding organisations. While staff redundancy/contract ending was low for most organisations (1–3 FTE positions), one organisation lost 4 FTE positions and another lost 6 FTE positions during this time.

Between September 2022 and September 2023, staff resigned from 53.6 FTE positions across 31 organisations. While the staff resignation rate was low for most organisations (0.6–3 FTE), there were 4 organisations who had 5, 6, or 7 FTE positions resign. It is unknown whether these positions were refilled.

Understanding why individuals resign helps organisations to assess whether there is anything that can be done to retain trained and experienced staff. Twenty-nine organisations shared insights into why staff resigned. While career advancement was one of the top reasons (45%), the stress of the position/burnout was also significant (45%). The “other” reasons listed as to why staff resigned included the person not being happy in the role, a change in contract conditions, and looking for better pay.

Figure 5: Insights on reason for resignations in 2023



Notes
Insecure funding arrangements include not knowing whether funding will be renewed.

Delivery of service

The NCDA acknowledges that many organisations have trialled different workload management approaches over time to suit their unique needs. We sought to understand how organisations are managing their workloads to share these insights with the sector. There were some consistent themes that came through from the 27 respondents about how they manage workloads. The most common method was to assess individual caseloads among advocates regularly. Having a strong intake/triage process to support the organisation was next. Respondents also noted that focusing on supervision (both internal and external) and well-being strategies was important. Only 2 respondents noted that closing waitlists was how they managed workloads.

We also sought to understand what client relationship manager (CRM) organisations use to understand whether there are any trends and benefits. Twenty-nine organisations identified the system they use, and 15 (52%) of those respondents specified use of IVO .

Table 3: Client relationship manager system used

Field	Percentage of respondents 2023
IVO 1024	52%
Nightingale	3%
Community Data Solutions	3%
CLASS	3%
Salesforce	10%
ActionStep	10%
Fixus	3%
Custom CRM	3%

Nil CRM in use	10%

Abbreviations
CRM = client relationship manager

Waitlists

An ongoing issue reported by disability advocacy organisations is being unable to provide assistance to a person when they seek it. This is known as unmet demand. This results in organisations holding waitlists and applying triaging frameworks to provide advocacy to those most in need. Some report that this approach has changed the way advocacy organisations operate, as they are now more consistently supporting people experiencing crisis.

Of the 27 respondents who answered the question "On average, how long do you expect people to remain on your waitlist before receiving assistance?", 9 said 2–4 weeks (representing 33%). It is important to note that this figure is affected by organisations' philosophies about waitlists, as some will not add a person seeking advocacy assistance if they know it will take them longer than 4 weeks/a month to assist. The other most common note made about waitlist times was that urgent enquiries are prioritised, and this can extend the wait time for non-high-risk referrals.

A concerning trend is that 9 respondents (33%) reported that people seeking advocacy assistance were expected to remain on their waitlist for 7 or more weeks. One respondent noted that their average waitlist time is 17 weeks or longer.

Table 4: Average time spent on a waitlist

Field	Percentage of respondents 2023
1–2 weeks	22%
2–4 weeks	33%
5–6 weeks	11%
7–8 weeks	11%
9–10 weeks	0%
11–12 weeks	11%
13–14 weeks	0%
15–16 weeks	4%
17 weeks or longer	4%
Unable to calculate	4%

Demand

To understand waitlists, it is also important to understand demand. Demand refers to the amount of people seeking assistance from an organisation. Respondents were asked, "Between September 2022 and September 2023, has there been an increase or decrease in the number of people seeking assistance from your service?". Twenty-eight organisations responded: 17 respondents (61%) reported an increase in demand, 9 respondents (32%) reported demand had remained about the same, 1

respondent (4%) reported a decrease in demand, and 1 respondent (4%) reported that they did not know. No respondents reported a decrease in demand.

Respondents were asked what the increase in demand was in 5% intervals. The responses to options were evenly distributed; however, 3 respondents (18%) noted that their demand had increased by 31% or more.

Table 5: Increase in demand: September 2022 – September 2023

Field	Percentage of respondents 2023
Increase of 5–10%	18%
Increase of 11–15%	18%
Increase of 16–20%	24%
Increase of 21–25%	12%
Increase of 26–30%	0%
Increase of 31% or more	18%
No answer	12%

In 2015, 60% of organisations who responded to the DANA workforce survey advised that there was an increase in demand by 11–20%. This shows that demand appears to continually be trending upwards.

We also sought to understand what the issues were that drove demand. The categories used as answer options were the ones used by the Department of Social Services (DSS) in the Data Exchange[6] to provide some consistency and enable cross analysis between NDAP Data Exchange (DEX) data.

The issues driving demand the most were:

- NDIS external reviews
- NDIS access
- NDIS internal review
- housing/homelessness
- abuse/neglect/violence.

[6] NDIS issues are largely reported together in DEX. They were separated out for this survey to provide more nuanced information.

Table 6: Main issues causing an increased need for advocacy

Field	Percentage of respondents 2023
Abuse/neglect/violence	8%
Access to non-NDIS services	0%
Child protection	5%
Community inclusion (social/family)	0%
Disability services (complaints)	6%
Discrimination/rights	4%
Education	4%
Employment	0%
Equipment/aids	0%
Finances (excluding government payments)	1%
Government payments	7%
Health/mental health	2%
Housing/homelessness	8%
Legal/access to justice	6%
NDIS access	11%
NDIS planning	7%
NDIS support implementing plan/accessing services	6%
NDIS internal reviews	8%
NDIS external reviews	13%
Transport	0%
Vulnerable/isolated	1%
Other (please specify)	2%
Abuse/neglect/violence	8%

Abbreviations
NDIS = National Disability Insurance Scheme

In 2015, the NDIS was still in "trial site" mode, meaning it was mentioned in the DANA advocacy workforce survey but did not take up the majority of the focus. The main issues driving demand were disability support pension, housing, and responding to abuse. It is extremely disheartening that responding to abuse continues to drive demand for advocacy; however, it also highlights the important role advocates play in supporting people to have their rights upheld.

Organisational challenges

Advocacy continues to undergo changes, so we sought to identify the most important challenges advocacy organisations will face in the coming 2 years. All 28 respondents listed sustainability (in either financial or human resources) as one of their biggest challenges. One organisational response that encompassed most other responses about upcoming challenges was:

> *Ability to meet advocacy needs – due to limited funding and extra time needs of specialist advocacy (face to face/supported decision making/time/communication partner). Ability to continue to fund overheads. Support psychosocial safety of staff – high levels of pressure due to scarce demands. Fund systems and processes so that quality advocacy can [be] provided in a way that maximises use of scarce advocacy resources.*

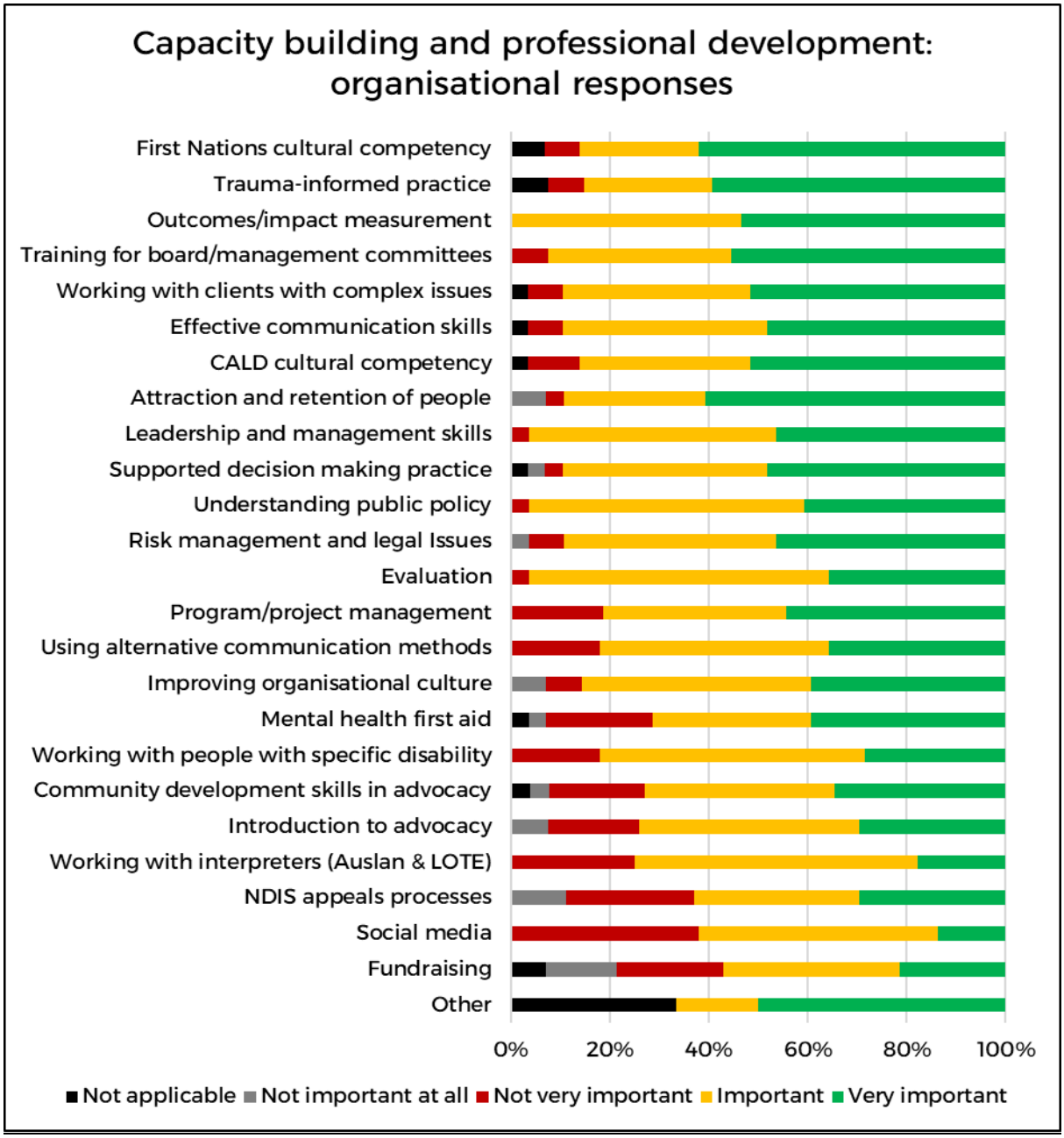
Another key area of concern is responding to unmet demand and the retention of staff. Organisations are concerned about the impact unmet demand is having on the psychological well-being of their staff, including preventing and managing burnout. This is because the number of people seeking advocacy has increased, but the resources have not kept pace.

Training and development

A key focus for the NCDA is to gain an understanding of the areas that organisations feel are important in relation to training and development. Organisations highlighted First Nations cultural competency, trauma-informed practice, and outcomes/impact measurement as the most useful training and development areas.

A similar question was asked in the individual worker survey and the results from both surveys were compared. The most notable difference is the higher weighted averages provided to “outcomes/impact measurement” and “training for board/management committees”. As a result, the NCDA is incorporating these topics into its Manager Peer Network, as mainly managers and those in executive level positions completed the organisational survey and are involved with these areas.

Figure 6: What training and professional development would your organisation find useful if it were available in the next 2 years?



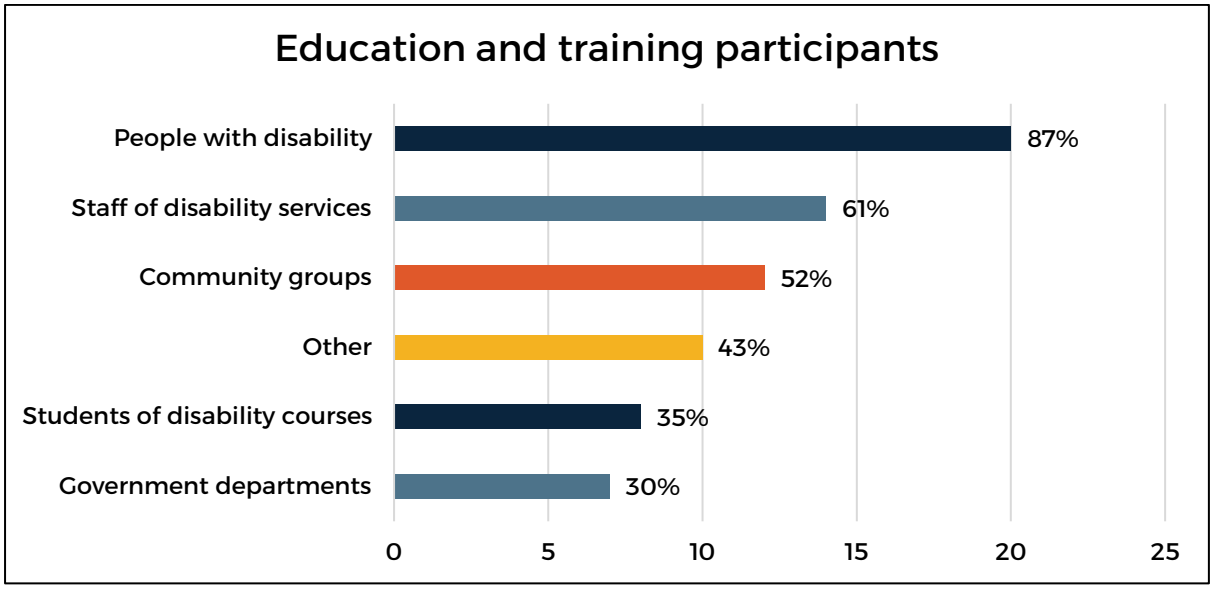
Abbreviations
CALD = culturally and linguistically diverse;
LOTE = languages other than English;
NDIS = National Disability Insurance Scheme

We also asked organisations whether they provide any training and education services. Of the 30 organisations that responded, 22 (73%) advised us that they did offer training and education services. Almost all organisations (21) provide free training, and 5 provide fee-for-service training. Four organisations deliver accredited training.

Education and training were most often delivered to people with disability, staff of disability services, and community groups. Other participants

included health professionals, other advocates and lawyers (including staff of community legal centres), and family members.

Figure 7: Cohorts of participants of education and training delivered by advocacy organisations



A smaller number of organisations also provided information on the areas of training they offer. The most common was disability advocacy (78%), followed by disability awareness/confidence (65%). Other topics included:

- understanding acquired brain injury
- access to the NDIS and Disability Support Pension for health professionals
- advocating at school
- decision support, and how to work with people with disability
- inclusion on boards and committees
- IT skills training for people with disability.

Table 7: Areas of training and education provided by disability advocacy organisations

Field	Percentage of respondents 2023
Disability advocacy	78%
Disability awareness/confidence	65%
Human rights	57%
Self-advocacy	57%
Other	43%
Prevention of abuse	39%
Decision making	35%
Complaints processes	35%
Disability standards	26%
Accessibility	22%

Cultural competency training for working with culturally and linguistically diverse people	9%
Cultural competency training for working with First Nations people	4%

Placements

Many organisations throughout the disability advocacy sector offer placements for those undertaking formal study. We sought to understand the prevalence, study areas, and benefits of offering placements.

Of the 30 organisations that answered the question on whether they offer placements for students, 18 (60%) stated that they did. The institutions from which they most likely received placements were universities (83%), technical and further education colleges (39%), and other registered training organisations (17%); 11% also receive placements from those still at school.

The study areas that advocacy organisations receive placements from are those studying social work (67%), community services (56%), law (39%), and disability services (22%). Two organisations also report hosting students studying communications and allied health (such as occupational therapy, speech pathology, and physiotherapy).

The benefits of hosting students include building the workforce pool, training future professionals to understand the issues affecting people with disability, and obtaining assistance to develop resources – something advocates sometimes do not have time to do. One organisation noted that they feel they have a moral obligation to support workforce development.

These insights are consistent with those found in the 2015 advocacy workforce survey.

Systemic changes

It is not the role of the NCDA to coordinate or undertake systemic activities but to collect information and analyse emerging systemic issues that are informed by the disability advocacy sector. The NCDA is uniquely placed to gather information relating to systemic issues as it engages with practising advocates and advocacy staff regularly. The NCDA has shared the full free-text responses to the final 3 questions of the organisational survey with the Policy and Advocacy team at DANA to assist them in understanding the views of organisations in relation to the systemic issues DANA is currently working on. Advocacy organisations are invited to contact the NCDA about the systemic work they are undertaking to see whether the survey results provide any related insights.

National Disability Insurance Scheme

We asked organisations what 2 things about the NDIS they would change (if it were possible) for people with disability. The responses received from 27 organisations were similar to those received in the individual worker

survey; 41% of respondents said that the NDIS should be simpler to access, and 26% said there should be transparent decision making and accessible information (including plans) available to participants. Organisations also noted that the role of an advocate should be better understood and acknowledged by the NDIA. One organisation responded:

> *For the whole system to be designed with less complexity and more accessibility, and implemented from a Human Rights Based Approach, rather than being driven by a medical model approach. Where appropriate for independent decision-making support, advocacy [should] be offered and accessible to NDIS participants at all stages of NDIS interactions.*

Other organisations noted that the skills and knowledge of NDIS decision makers should be improved to provide better insights into the needs of people with complex disabilities. One organisation went as far as to say that the local area coordinator should be removed to enable participants and their supporters to have direct access to a qualified planner.

NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission

We asked organisations the same question regarding the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission; that is, what 2 things would they change, if it were possible? The themes that came through were similar to the individual worker survey, which reiterate the sentiments across the sector. Of the 25 organisations that provided responses to this question, 28% want the Commission to be more responsive to complaints and for there to be standards for complaint-handling processes, including timeliness. Application of real consequences for those who do the wrong thing was important to 24% of respondents. Some responses that highlighted the themes were:

> *Participant complaints with the Q&SC need to have an audit trail, knowledge on timeliness standards and guidance on what penalties are applicable, including how the NDISQ&SC assess matters for formal investigations to prevent or exacerbate significant harm to PWD i.e what is their threshold on serious complaints; or provide complainant advice if there is an alternative course of action i.e. civil, criminal or administrative and refer case/participant to obtain free legal advice.*
>
> *Greater transparency of decisions. Better feedback mechanism for those raising complaints, as this is often very limited.*
>
> *The response time is very slow, this needs to be greatly improved. The actions taken by Q and S need to be stronger to safeguard people.*

Two organisations also noted that they would like to see sufficient resources allocated to the Commission. Other changes that fell outside the general themes included the Commission's development of an outreach strategy and the provision of proactive training for service providers.

Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (also known as Disability Royal Commission [DRC]) recommendation implementation

We asked organisations what their top 3 recommendations from the DRC were that should be prioritised for implementation. It should be noted that the DRC findings, which comprise 222 recommendations across 12 volumes, were handed down only weeks earlier, and the sector was still taking time to analyse the findings in detail.

Of the 23 organisations that responded, 65% saw the recommendation for additional funding for advocacy programs as a priority for implementation. This was the most listed recommendation for implementation. Other recommendations that were identified for priority implementation related to ending segregated settings such as housing, employment, and education (30% of respondents) and addressing issues with group homes (22% of respondents). A response that highlighted these themes was:

> *Recommendation 5.1 National Agreements and Strategies – priority needs to be given to ensuring the State and Federal governments are working in conjunction to create a platform and strategy for how all persons with disabilities are supported. Especially those who aren't on the NDIS. Recommendation 6.21 – Advocacy funding. Recommendation. 10.1 Embedding human rights in design and delivery of disability services. Recommendation 10.5 Advocacy program to be developed for those living in supported accommodation – ensuring this is funded adequately. Recommendation 11 Independent Oversight and complaint mechanism "one stop shop".*

Given the sheer number of recommendations contained within the final report for the DRC, it is unsurprising that organisations have different priority focuses. Recommendations also listed for priority implementation by respondents included:

- raising minimum employment wages for people with disability
- ending forced sterilisation
- eliminating restrictive practices
- building inclusive communities
- reforming guardianship laws
- having disability-led decision-making mechanisms
- providing better opportunities to students with disability in mainstream schools
- establishing a Disability Rights Act and a Disability Commission.

These priority areas highlight the different individual and systemic advocacy efforts this sector is undertaking at all levels.

Lessons learnt

Survey questions

As discussed in caveats and limitations, the survey was long and complex. This resulted in "drop off" as the survey progressed and had an impact on the reliability of the findings. The next organisational survey should be reassessed to make the process as simple and streamlined as possible, removing overly complex data points. The NCDA will explore alternative ways to gather evidence about nuanced and complex areas.

There were also a number of free-text spaces available. While this provided important information, future surveys should assess common responses to support respondents to select predetermined answers; this will lift some of the burden on respondents as they complete the survey. Areas for free text should remain to ensure respondents can share additional information where they see fit.

Question 4, which seeks to understand the funding sources for disability advocacy, should be updated to include an option for "other state funding (education department, justice department, health department etc.)" to understand whether specific state government departments are investing in disability advocacy to support people with disability to have their rights upheld.

This survey asked about staff redundancy and resignation only. The next survey should include space for organisations to share information on whether they were able to hire additional or replacement staff due to new or increased funding.

Survey logistics

The NCDA received feedback that a sector-wide survey being conducted during November caused undue stress to some due to the number of competing priorities, including preparing and executing annual general meetings, grant applications, and reporting. Late 2023 was also a particularly difficult time for the sector as the final report for the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability was handed down weeks prior, and the sector was awaiting the outcomes of the NDIS Review. Feedback was received that it would have been of benefit for the survey to remain open for longer to help balance the workload.

In acknowledgement, the NCDA proposes that the sector-wide survey be conducted in August 2024. Additionally, the lead-in time will be increased to ensure as many people as possible are provided with information about the survey in advance. The survey will also remain open for 3 weeks instead of 2 weeks.

The survey host platform will be changed from SurveyMonkey to Typeform. Although the NCDA enabled settings for respondents to be able to pause and resume responding to the survey at different times (known as

autosave), some respondents advised that this did not work for them. By hosting the survey on Typeform, respondents will be able to use autosave with confidence. Typeform is also Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 Level AA compliant.

Conclusion

The NCDA sincerely thanks all organisations that participated in this survey. The NCDA acknowledges that the survey was long and sometimes complex and appreciates the time and effort respondents set aside to provide this valuable information. The NCDA now has baseline data that can continue to be built upon.

The NCDA is also grateful to those who provided feedback about the survey. This information has been collated and will be actioned in the sector-wide surveys to come.

In commitment to continuous improvement, the NCDA welcomes feedback in relation to all its activities. If there is specific feedback concerning the workforce survey, please email **ncda@dana.org.au.**

Appendix 1: Survey questions

A copy of the survey questions can be viewed in both word and PDF via the following links:
Advocacy Workforce Survey – Organisational (Word 141KB)
Advocacy Workforce Survey – Organisational (PDF 218KB)

Version control

Version	Summary of changes	Approval date	Approved
1.0	Approval of document		NCDA Manager

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