National Centre for Disability Advocacy

Advocacy Sector Workforce Survey

Results Report

January 2026

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Abbreviations

ART	Administrative Review Tribunal
Auslan	Australian Sign Language
CALD	culturally and linguistically diverse
CLCA	Community Legal Centres Australia
CRM	customer relationship management
DANA	Disability Advocacy Network Australia
DASH	Disability Advocacy Support Helpline
DHDA	Department of Health, Disability and Ageing
DRC	Disability Royal Commission
DRO	Disability Representative Organisation
DSP	Disability Support Pension
DSS	Department of Social Services
EAP	Employee Assistance Program
FTE	full-time equivalent
IDAO	individual disability advocacy organisation
ILC	Information, Linkages and Capacity Building
IT	information technology
JAWS	Job Access With Speech
NCDA	National Centre for Disability Advocacy
NDAF	National Disability Advocacy Framework
NDAP	National Disability Advocacy Program
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme
NSDS	National Standards for Disability Services
SCHADS	Social, Community, Home Care and Disability Services Award

Definitions

Disability advocacy funding stream	refers to funding specifically for disability advocacy, such as the National Disability Advocacy Program (NDAP), NDIS Appeals Program, and state-based advocacy funding programs.
Individual disability advocacy organisation	is an organisation funded by the Commonwealth or a state/territory program to advocate with individuals.
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

In August 2025, the National Centre for Disability Advocacy (NCDA) conducted its third annual Advocacy Sector Workforce Survey, continuing its effort to capture the realities of those working within the individual disability advocacy sector. This survey series provides a vital evidence base for understanding workforce trends, identifying emerging challenges, and informing sector-wide planning.

The 2025 findings reveal a sector that remains steadfast in its mission, yet increasingly burdened by rising demand, funding uncertainty, and workforce pressures. While there are encouraging signs – such as improved workforce stability and stronger engagement with professional development – the challenges are significant and persistent.

Participation and scope

This year's survey drew responses from 140 individuals, representing approximately 35% of the estimated workforce, and 48 individual disability advocacy organisations (IDAO), equating to 66% of those invited. Responses were received from all states and territories, with Victoria and New South Wales most strongly represented. This breadth of participation provides a robust foundation for understanding sector-wide trends across Australia.

Career length and education

The profile of the workforce is shifting. Fewer newcomers and more staff in the 3- to 10-year range suggests improved retention. 1 in 5 respondents have been in the sector for 10 years or more. Employment is predominantly permanent (79%), yet the rise in contract roles reflects ongoing funding instability. The sector is highly qualified: 63% hold a bachelor's degree or higher, and most have credentials directly relevant to advocacy.

Demand continues to outpace capacity

Demand for advocacy services is accelerating. 73% of organisations reported increased demand, with spikes of 30% or more now common. Wait times have lengthened and fewer organisations operate without waitlists. To manage, services rely on triage frameworks, temporary intake closures, and scaled-back support during peak periods. Key drivers include National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) complexity, housing shortages, cost-of-living pressures, and systemic service gaps.

Recruitment and staff retention

Recruitment challenges have eased markedly: 38% of organisations report difficulties, down from 71% in 2024. However, salary limitations and funding uncertainty remain major barriers. Retention risk persists: 26% of staff are likely to leave their current organisation within 12 months, and while 57% expect to remain in the sector for 2 years, nearly half are unsure or planning to exit. Sustainability remains a pressing concern.

Wellbeing under strain

The human cost of advocacy work is evident. 41% of respondents report negative health impacts weekly or more often, and 59% regularly work unpaid hours. Stressors include unmet demand, time pressure, and vicarious trauma. While most organisations offer employee assistance programs and flexible work arrangements, 1 in 5 staff feel they lack adequate support.

Training and development

Professional development is a clear strength. Most respondents attended training in the past year, with NCDA-hosted sessions rated highly. Priority areas for the next 2 years include trauma-

informed practice, cultural safety, advanced advocacy skills, and systemic advocacy. There is strong demand for practical, hands-on learning and resources to reduce administrative burden.

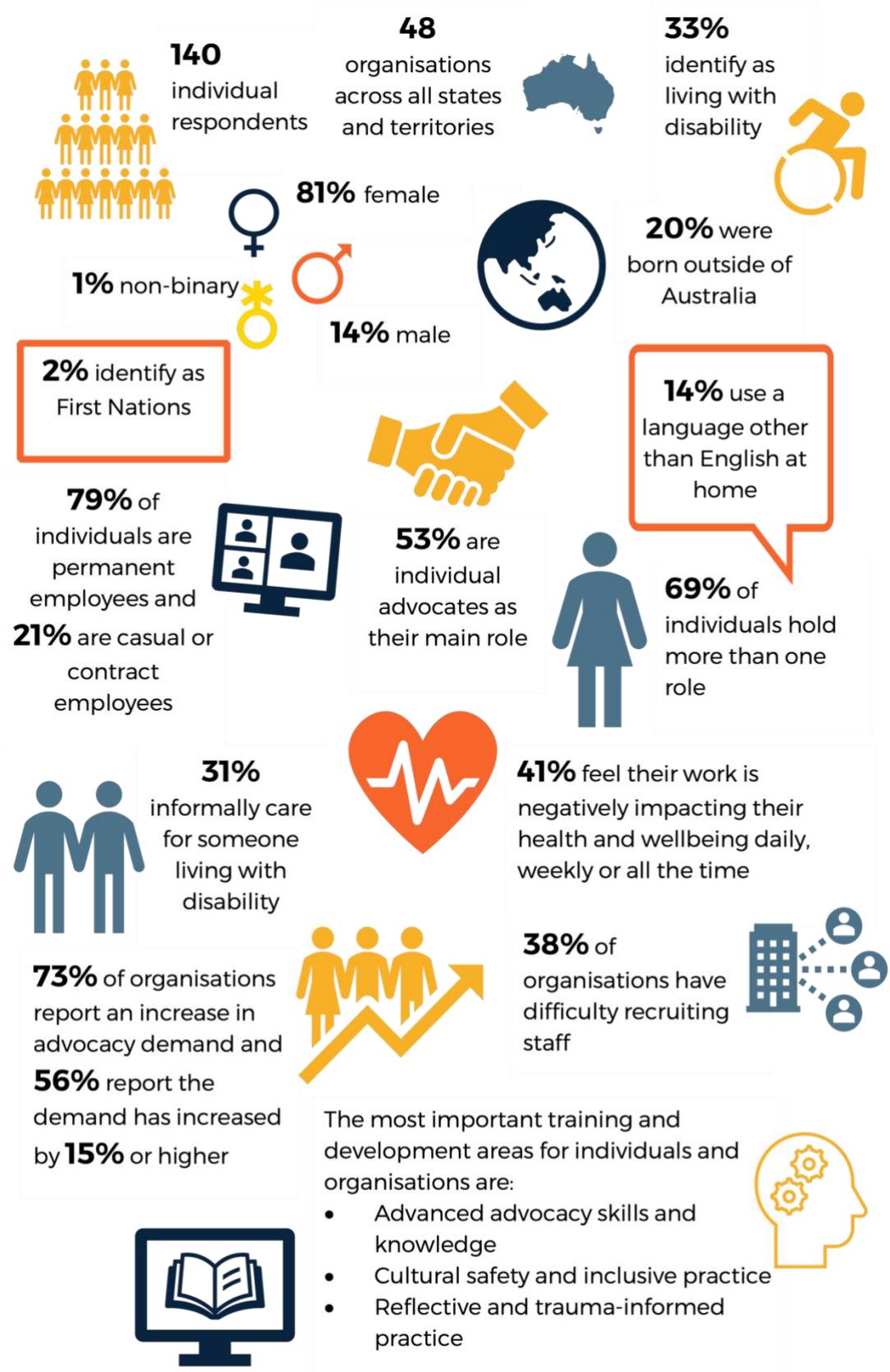
Systemic challenges

Respondents highlighted chronic underfunding, NDIS complexity, housing barriers, and inequities for First Nations and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities as critical issues. Workforce burnout and sustainability were recurring themes, alongside calls for stronger sector coordination and policy advocacy.

In summary

The sector is stabilising in experience and improving in professionalism, yet demand pressures, funding insecurity, and workforce wellbeing remain urgent challenges. There is clear support for collaboration, training, and systemic reform to ensure advocacy remains effective and sustainable.

INDIVIDUAL ADVOCACY WORKFORCE 2025 AT A GLANCE



Introduction

The National Centre for Disability Advocacy (NCDA) is an initiative delivered by Disability Advocacy Network Australia (DANA) as part of Australia's Disability Strategy 2021–2031.[1] The NCDA aims to improve access to and the quality of individual advocacy services by building sector capacity, identifying and addressing unmet demand and service gaps, and elevating systemic advocacy issues.

To support these aims, the NCDA conducts annual advocacy workforce surveys, which includes one survey to be completed by individuals and another completed by a representative on behalf of organisations. The surveys aim to gather insights from both individual staff and individual disability advocacy organisations (IDAO) across Australia. These survey data provide a critical evidence base for understanding workforce conditions, tracking sector trends, and informing the NCDA's activities and priorities. Findings are also shared with DANA to support its strategic planning and sector-wide leadership.

This report presents findings from the third annual sector-wide survey. The NCDA has continued its approach of consolidating responses from both individuals and organisations into a single, comprehensive report. This enables holistic analysis of the sector and facilitates comparison across the survey years of 2023, 2024, and 2025. The survey is based on a similar survey conducted by DANA in 2015, which continues to be the baseline.[2,3,4]

The 2025 survey was conducted in August and September and received responses from 140 individuals – representing approximately 35% of the estimated 400 full-time equivalent (FTE) workforce – and 48 organisations, or 66% of those invited. The survey explored key themes, including workforce composition and demographic information, demand and waitlist trends, recruitment and retention, training needs, sector support, and feedback on the NCDA's training and events.

The findings reveal the IDAO sector is marked by dedication and lived experience but is increasingly strained by rising demand, case complexity, limited resources, and funding insecurity. This report provides a detailed analysis of those challenges, highlights areas of opportunity, and offers insights to guide future investment in workforce development and advocacy systems strengthening.

[1] DSS, Australia's Disability Strategy 2021–2031.

[2] DANA, Advocacy Workforce Survey 2015 Results.

[3] NCDA, Advocacy Workforce Survey – Advocacy Organisations 2023 Results; NCDA, Advocacy Workforce Survey – Individual Workers (April 2024).

[4] NCDA, Advocacy Sector Workforce Survey 2024 Results.

Methodology

The 2025 Advocacy Sector Workforce Survey was designed using insights from previous years, particularly feedback from the 2024 survey. To improve usability, the NCDA streamlined the survey by reducing the number of questions, simplifying language, and updating response options. Likert scales (ranging from “Strongly disagree” to “Strongly agree”) were introduced to better track trends and measure respondent sentiment. While refining questions and improving survey design is important, the survey maintained alignment with previous surveys to ensure comparability where possible. Overall, the survey achieved a 76% completion rate among participants who began the process.

Although the NCDA primarily supports organisations funded under the National Disability Advocacy Program (NDAP), the survey targeted the broader individual disability advocacy sector. Invitations were extended to organisations delivering individual advocacy under NDAP and non-NDAP streams, including state-funded programs and the Commonwealth-funded National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) Appeals Program.

Eligible individual respondents were paid staff whose roles involved at least 50% disability advocacy work under an individual advocacy funding stream. This included advocates (all models), supervisors, team leaders, intake and administrative officers, managers, and executives.

The survey was hosted on Typeform, an accessible online survey platform. Autosave was enabled to allow respondents to pause and resume. It was open for 3 weeks (26 August to 19 September 2025), timed to avoid end-of-year pressures and maximise participation.

Responses included 48 organisations (up from 35 in 2024) and 140 individuals (down from 158), representing all states and territories. This reflects approximately 35% of the estimated 400 FTE advocacy workforce and 66% of invited organisations.

This methodology supports a robust, representative dataset for analysing workforce trends, challenges, and opportunities across the disability advocacy sector.

Limitations

While the 2025 Advocacy Sector Workforce Survey offers valuable insights, several limitations should be considered.

Sampling limitations

- **Representativeness**: The survey captured 140 individual responses from an estimated 400 FTE positions. While this is a strong proportion, it is slightly below the level recommended for highly precise results. Findings indicate overall trends but may not fully reflect all perspectives, particularly if some groups were under-represented.

Response bias

- **Non-response bias**: Certain organisations or staff may have opted out, potentially skewing results.
- **Social desirability bias**: Respondents may have answered in ways they perceived as expected or acceptable rather than fully candid.

Survey design limitations

- **Question wording**: Despite efforts to simplify language, some questions may have been interpreted differently by respondents.
- **Format and accessibility**: The survey was delivered via Typeform. While generally accessible, some participants using screen readers (e.g. JAWS [Job Access With Speech]) reported navigation difficulties, which may have limited participation and inclusiveness.
- **Length and fatigue**: Longer surveys can lead to rushed or incomplete responses and increased drop-off rates.

Generalisability

- **Workforce size uncertainty**: The exact number of workers in the disability advocacy sector is unknown. While approximately 400 FTE positions are funded, survey data suggest that 51% of staff work part-time, meaning the actual workforce is likely larger.
- **Geographic representation**: Responses were received from all states and territories, but Victoria and New South Wales were over-represented (46% of organisation responses and 39% of individual responses, respectively). Tasmania had no individual responses, and the Australian Capital Territory and Northern Territory had fewer than 4 each. This may affect the extent to which findings reflect national experiences.
- **Organisational coverage**: Of the 58 NDAP-funded organisations and 21 state-funded organisations, 73 organisations were invited to complete the survey (66% participated). Disability Representative Organisations (DROs) and advocacy-like activities funded under Information, Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) grants were excluded.
- **Scope of respondents**: The survey focused on paid staff. Citizen advocates (unpaid individuals supporting people with disability) were not surveyed directly; instead, responses were gathered from program coordinators.
- **Timing**: The 2025 survey was conducted during a time when DANA was undertaking sector consultation for a new Commonwealth individual disability advocacy program. A separate survey and consultations were in circulation at the time. This may have impacted the number of individuals completing the survey.

Data presentation

The percentage results have been rounded to the nearest whole number and therefore some results may not add up to 100%. At times, data will exceed the total number of respondents as certain questions allow multiple answers. For these findings, unless stated, the percentages are based on the number of respondents and findings may exceed 100% when combined.

FINDINGS

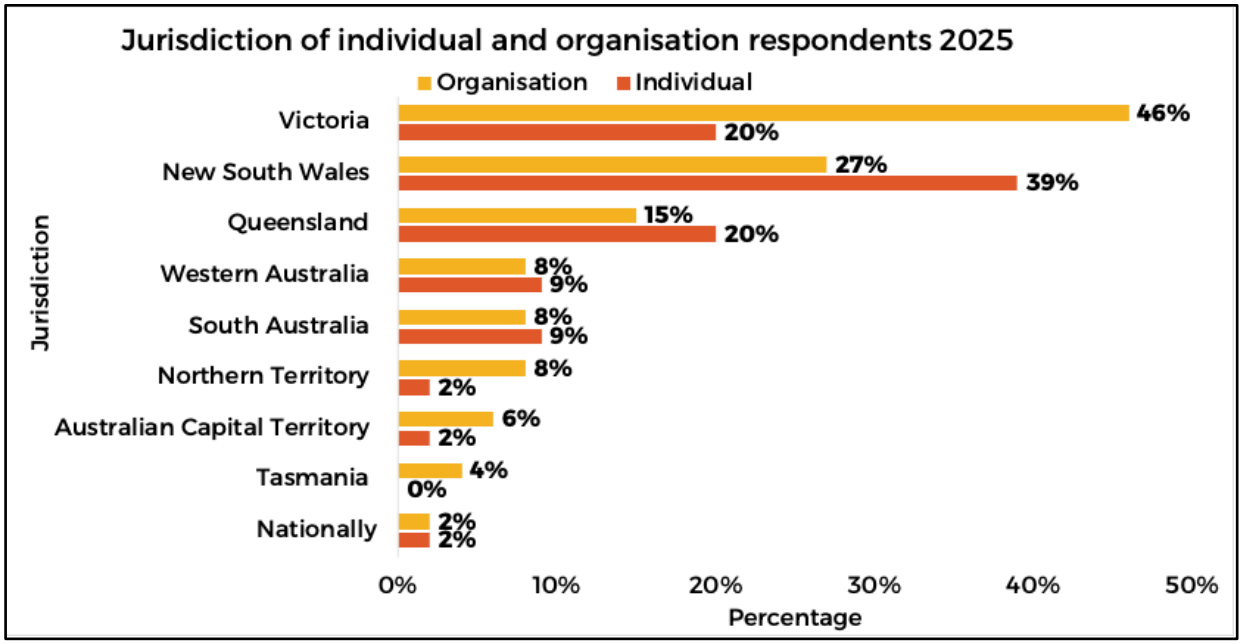
Demographics

Jurisdiction and location

Individual respondents were asked where they perform the majority of their role. With the exception of Tasmania, individual respondents were identified from all states and territories. The highest percentage of respondents by state/territory is New South Wales (39%), followed by Victoria (20%), Queensland (20%), Western Australia (9%), South Australia (9%), Northern Territory (2%), Australian Capital Territory (2%), and Tasmania (0%).

IDAO respondents were asked where they provide disability advocacy services. The results showed most respondents provide services in Victoria (46%); followed by New South Wales (27%); Queensland (15%); South Australia, Western Australia and Northern Territory (all 8%); Australian Capital Territory (6%); and Tasmania (4%). Services were provided in more than 1 jurisdiction by 5 organisations.

Figure 1: Jurisdiction of individual and organisation respondents 2025



When asked where individual respondents primarily perform their work duties, the majority said a major city (54%) or regional centre (24%).

The remainder of respondents said:

- large rural town (9%)
- medium rural town (6%)
- small rural town (4%)
- other (2%) includes services that are state- or nation-wide
- very remote community (1%).

In terms of working from home, we heard:

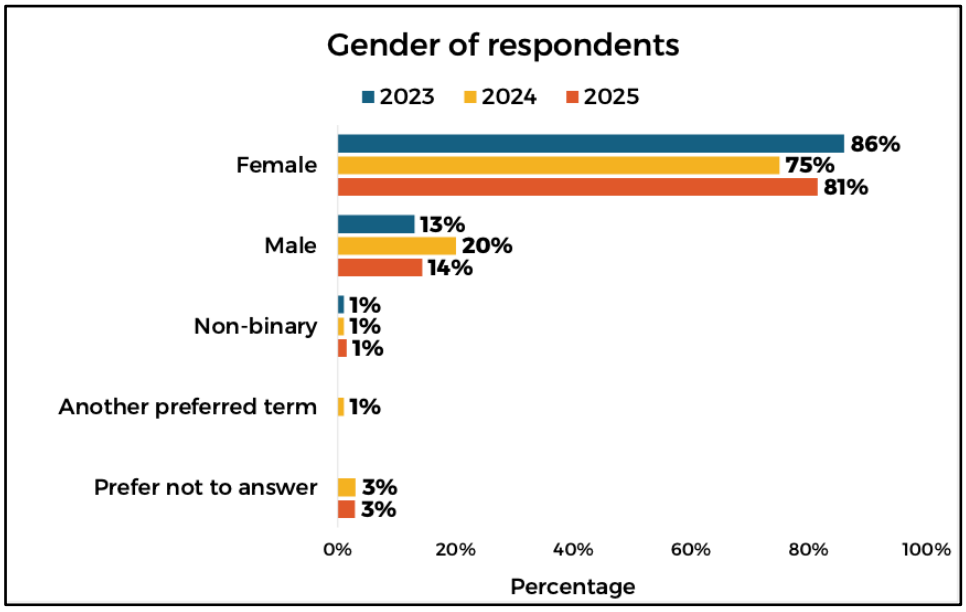
- 64% or respondents work from home part of the time
- 21% never do
- 14% work from home all the time.

These results show consistency with findings from 2024. However, working from home part of the time has increased (64% up from 58% in 2024).

Gender

81% of respondents identified as female (up from 75% in 2024), 14% identified as male (down from 20% in 2024), 1% identified as non-binary (same as 2024), and 3% preferred not to answer.

Figure 2: Comparison – Gender of respondents



Age

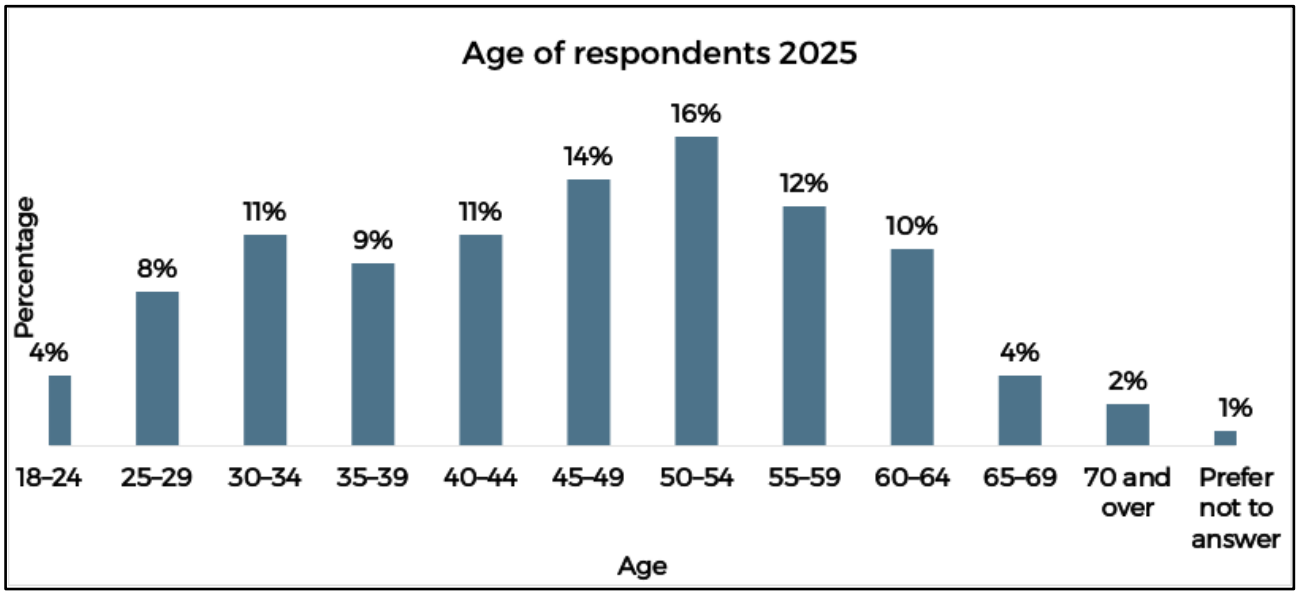
The majority of respondents fall within middle-aged groups, between 45 and 54 years of age.

Key findings:

- **Largest representation**: Ages 50–54 account for 16%, making this the most common age group among respondents.
- **Strong presence**: Respondents aged 45–49 (14%) and 55–59 (12%) were also highly represented, indicating a concentration in the mid-to-late career stage.
- **Lower representation**: Younger respondents (18–24) are under-represented, with 4% representation.

These data suggest that disability advocacy roles are most prevalent among individuals aged 30–59, with a clear peak in the early 50s. This may reflect the experience and professional stability often associated with midlife.

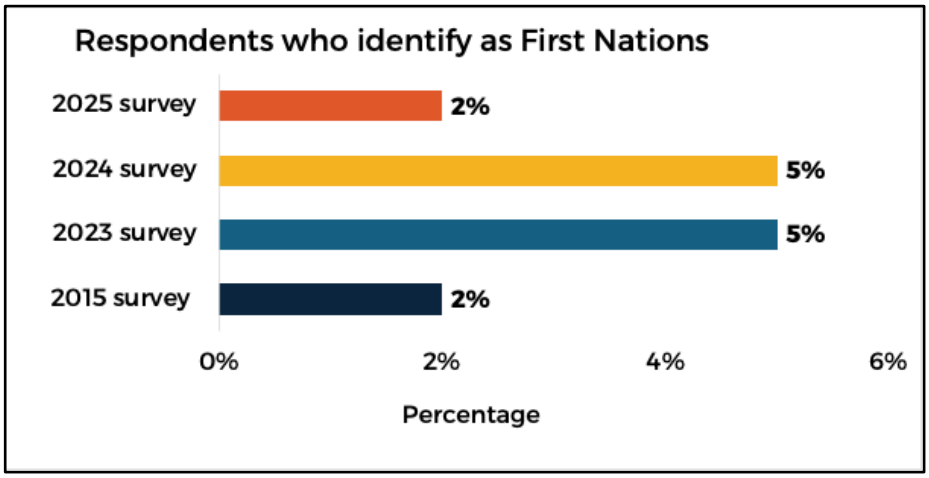
Figure 3: Age of respondents 2025



Diversity and representation

In relation to diversity, 2% of respondents identified as Aboriginal (down from 5% in 2024) and 0% as Torres Strait Islander. Figure 4 shows the comparison of First Nations representation in the disability advocacy sector over time. Note that the reduced number may be a result of decreased participation in the 2025 survey by First Nations respondents, and not a representation of less staff within the sector.

Figure 4: Comparison – Respondents who identify as First Nations

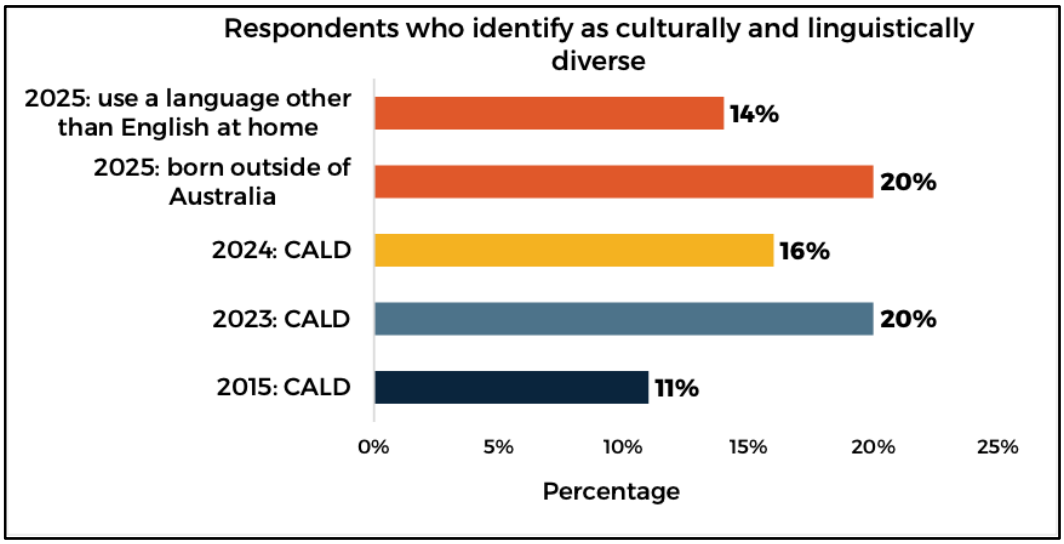


In the 2025 survey, a question around identifying as CALD was replaced by asking respondents 2 questions: “What country were you born in?” and “Do you use a language other than English at home?” 20% of respondents were born outside of Australia, and 14% use a language other than English at home. These data give us more insight into diversity within the sector and offer an opportunity to include Auslan as a language used at home.

Countries of birth included Brazil, Samoa, Peru, Singapore, Colombia, Zambia, Scotland, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Germany, Singapore, Finland, Indonesia, Kenya, Japan, England, India, Nepal, New Zealand, Vietnam, China, and South Africa.

Besides English, languages spoken at home included Portuguese, Spanish, Greek, Tamil, Malay, Hindi, Dari, Portuguese, Hausa, Yoruba, Nupe, Tagalog, Assyrian, Nepali, Shona, German, Indonesian, Swahili, and Japanese.

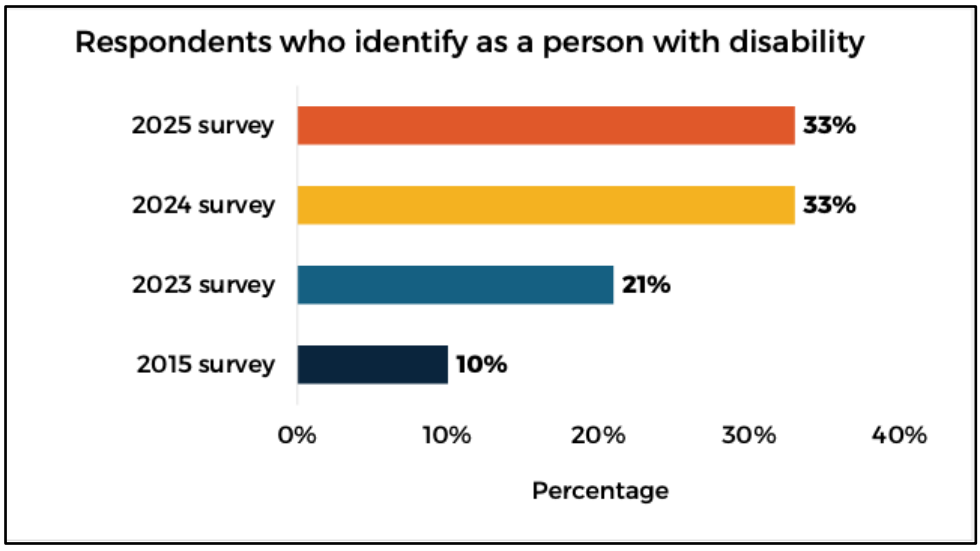
Figure 5: Comparison – Respondents who identify as culturally and linguistically diverse



In 2025, 33% of respondents identified as a person with disability (same as 2024). This number has stabilised after an upward trend from 21% in 2023 and 11% from 2015 data.

31% of respondents advised they are an unpaid carer of a person with disability (compared to 37% from 2024 data).

Figure 6: Comparison – Respondents who identify as a person with disability



Education and previous employment

62% of respondents have completed a qualification directly applicable to their role in the disability advocacy sector. When asked about their most relevant formal training or qualification, 63% of respondents reported holding a bachelor's degree or higher (a significant increase from 55% in 2024), and 79% reported holding a diploma qualification or higher (up from 77% in 2024). These data show an increase in the number of people entering the sector with formal qualifications related to their work in the disability advocacy.

Table 1: Comparison – Formal training and qualifications related to disability advocacy work

Level of education	Percentage of respondents 2023	Percentage of respondents 2024	Percentage of respondents 2025
Certificate III/certificate IV	21%	11%	14%
Diploma/advanced diploma/associate degree	19%	22%	16%
Bachelor's degree	33%	32%	38%
Graduate certificate/graduate diploma	10%	8%	9%
Master's degree/doctoral degree	15%	15%	16%
Unaccredited training	-	4%	3%
Other	6%	3%	2%
Prefer not to answer	-	2%	1%

Respondents were asked to name the qualification most relevant to their role in the disability advocacy sector. The free-text responses reflect the diversity of educational backgrounds across the sector.

The most common responses were an educational background in community services (24%) or social work (21%). Other frequently mentioned qualifications included:

- law (16%)
- social sciences (including psychology, criminology, sociology) (16%)
- disability studies, aged care or mental health (12%)
- education or education support (5%)
- additional qualifications included health sciences, business, and management.

Respondents also identified their previous field of work prior to entering the disability advocacy sector (multiple responses could be selected).

The most common background was in the disability field (38%), which includes roles such as support work, disability employment services, support coordination, case management and more. The second most common background was in other services/community work (18%), followed by law (10%). These previous fields align with findings from 2024. 10% provided further detail under the "Other" category, most often describing community-focused roles in aged care, counselling, community engagement, and education. A small number reported backgrounds in other fields such as farming, sports coaching, interior design, mining, arts, and commerce.

Service delivery

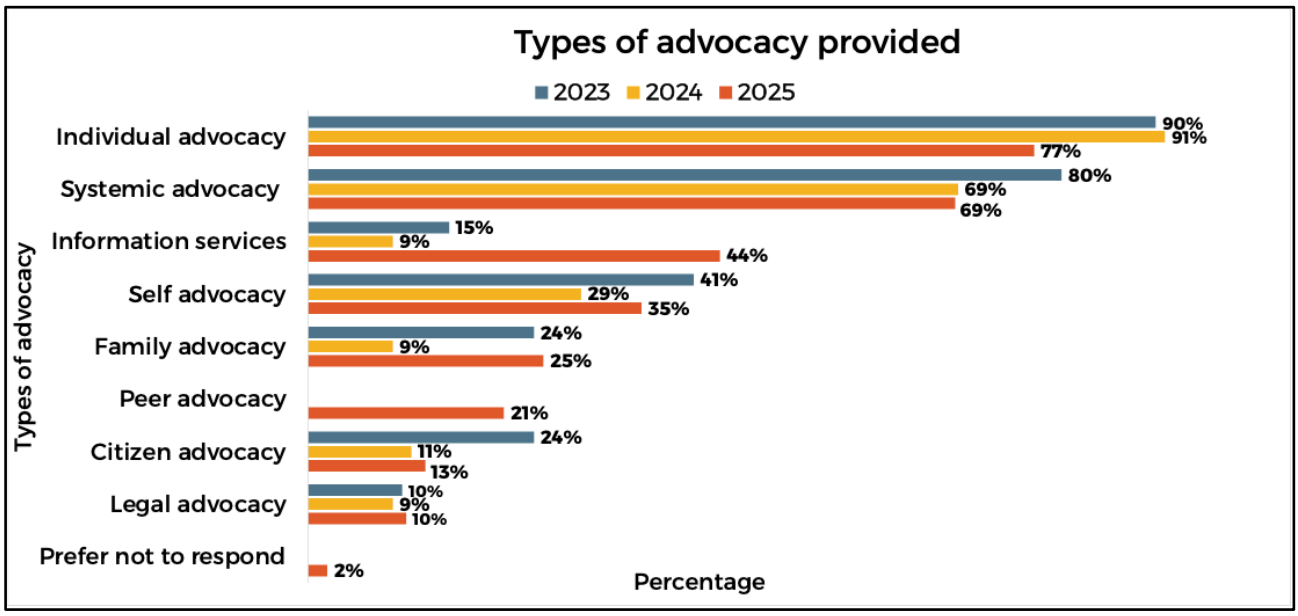
Types of advocacy and other services delivered

Organisations were asked to identify the types of advocacy they provide. The majority of organisations provided individual advocacy (77%) and systemic advocacy (69%). Notably, there was a significant increase in the provision of information services from 9% in 2024 to 44% in 2025. Peer advocacy was also included as an option in 2025.

In 2025, 28% of organisations only provided 1 type of advocacy, 23% provided 3 types, and 21% provided 4. Notably, there were 3 organisations who provided 6 types of advocacy and 1 who provided 7.

Organisations may interpret advocacy types differently, particularly systemic and self advocacy.[5] For this reason, a guiding definition of each advocacy type was included in the 2025 survey. It is still important to note that findings may include different understanding or definitions of these advocacy types by organisations.

Figure 7: Comparison – Types of advocacy models provided



Targeted advocacy

Organisations were asked whether they provide advocacy to specific target groups, including advocacy to people based on their age, gender, disability type, or cultural background.

- 58% of organisations responded “Yes”.
- 42% responded “No”.

Respondents who answered “Yes” could select more than one target group.
As shown in Table 2, among the 28 organisations that indicated they provide targeted advocacy, 33% support people with intellectual and/or cognitive impairments.

Table 2: Comparison – Advocacy provided to targeted cohorts

Targeted advocacy group	Percentage of respondents 2024	Percentage of respondents 2025
Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) people	36%	17%
First Nations people	50%	15%
People with neurological disability	-	8%
Parents and carers	18%	8%
People living in remote and isolated locations	36%	13%

[5] 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/.

People with acquired brain injuries (ABI)	46%	13%
People with complex support needs	31%	17%
People with intellectual disability and/or cognitive impairments	55%	33%
People with physical disability	-	8%
People with psychosocial disability	-	13%
People with sensory disability	-	8%
Young people	14%	10%

Organisations were also asked whether they deliver other services. 44% do not provide additional services aside from disability advocacy, and 52% do. The most common additional service is NDIS ILC (including disability support organisations peer support) (23%). “Other” responses included tenants’ legal advice, educational advocacy, home and community care access, and aged care (Commonwealth and Home Support Program and Home Care Packages).

Table 3: Comparison – Other services delivered

Other service	**Percentage of respondents 2023**	**Percentage of respondents 2024**	**Percentage of respondents 2025**
Aged care advocacy	8%	14%	8%
Veterans’ advocacy	4%	0%	0%
Community legal centre services	25%	14%	13%
Financial counselling	4%	6%	2%
DRO	8%	11%	15%
NDIS ILC (including disability organisations peer support)	42%	31%	23%
NDIS coordination of supports	8%	9%	2%
NDIS plan management	13%	3%	4%
NDIS direct supports (including core and capacity building supports)	8%	6%	6%
Other	8%	34%	13%
No other services are provided	-	-	44%

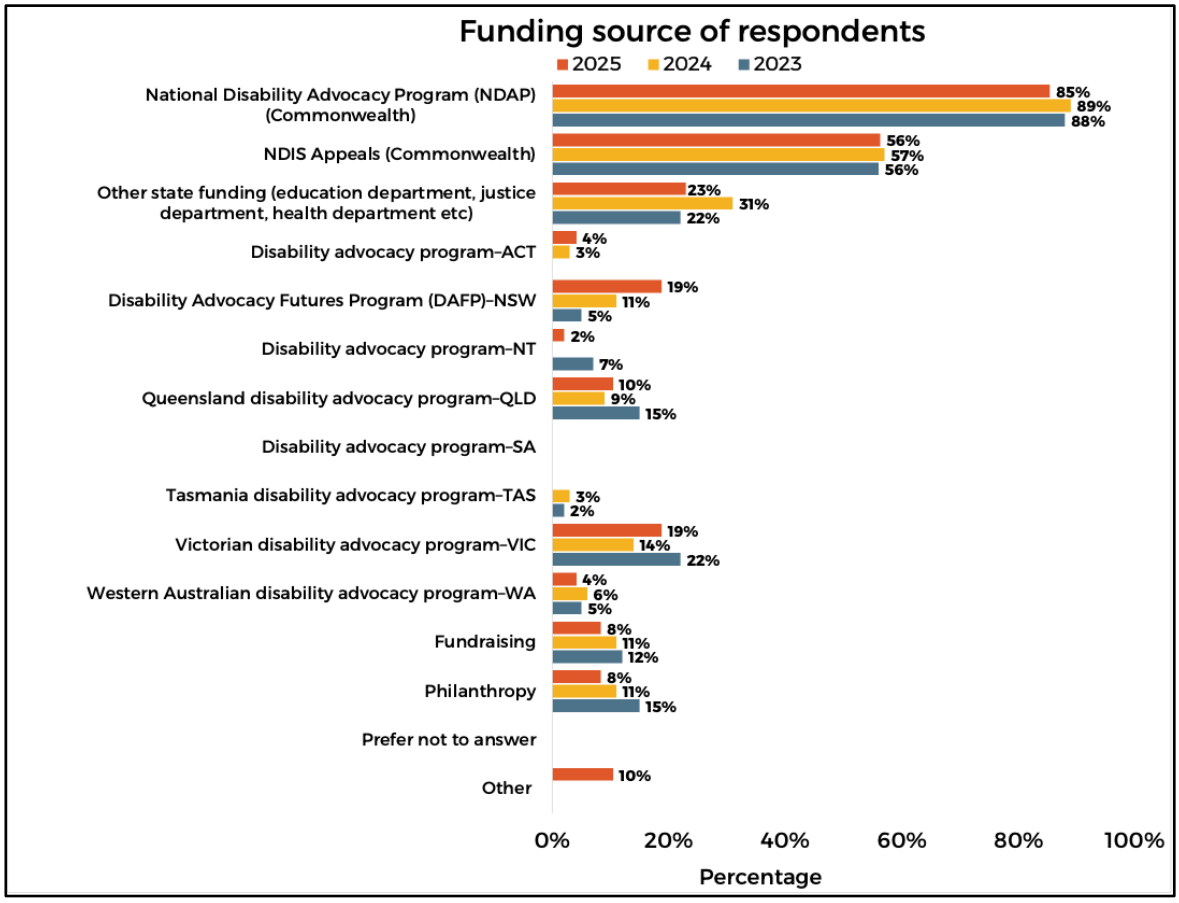
Abbreviations
DRO = Disability Representative Organisation, ILC = Information, Linkages and Capacity Building, NDIS = National Disability Insurance Scheme

Funding breakdown and accreditation

Independent disability advocacy is primarily grant-funded by Commonwealth and state/territory governments, with targets often set by the funding body. These grants allow people with disability, and sometimes their supporters, to access advocacy free of charge.

The largest disability advocacy funding source identified by respondents was the NDAP (85%), followed by the NDIS Appeals Program (56%); this aligned with 2024 results. For respondents who indicated that they receive other funding, those sources included Disability Advocacy Support Helpline (DASH), local councils, ILC funding, program and project specific funding, and donations for service.

Figure 8: Comparison – Funding source of respondents



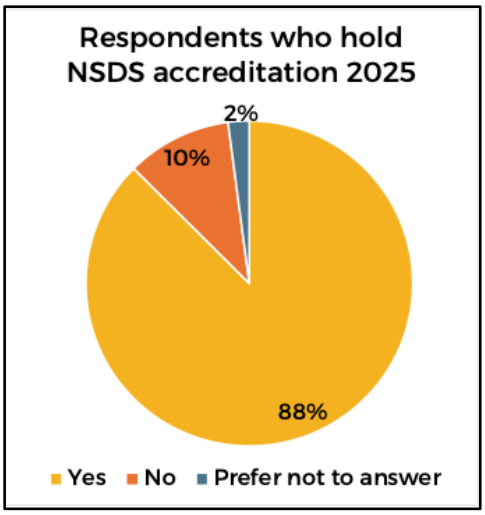
Accreditation

This year, the organisation survey included a new question asking whether organisations held accreditation against the National Standards for Disability Services (NSDS).[6]

[6] Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care. (Endorsed 18 December 2013). *National Standards for Disability Services*. https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/national-standards-for-disability-services.

In response to this question, 88% of respondents selected “Yes”, 10% said “No”, and 2% answered “Prefer not to respond”.

Figure 9: Respondents who hold accreditation against the National Standards for Disability Services in 2025



Below is a summary of other accreditations held by organisations and shared via “Other” free-text responses:

- Human Services Quality Framework (HSQF) – a Queensland Government quality assurance system applying to disability and broader human services
- Aged Care Quality Standards
- NDIS Practice Standards.

Workforce qualifications and employment breakdown

Current role and role breakdowns

It is common for staff in advocacy organisations to hold multiple roles due to funding distribution.[7] The survey asked individuals what their main role is, if other roles are held or whether tasks are performed frequently outside of their main role.

The majority of respondents’ main role was individual advocate (53%, down from 58% in 2024), followed by NDIS Appeals advocate (11%), and team leader/manager (11%). Under “Other”, respondents listed peer support, self advocacy program officer, sports inclusion officer, promotions, operations manager, leadership and peer support program officer, and other program officer related roles for specific programs.

[7] Funding for advocacy is often calculated by population data, meaning that an organisation may receive funding that equates to less than a full-time position. Organisations create “dual roles” from different funding streams to stretch funding and resources.

Table 4: Main role of individual respondents

Main role	Percentage of respondents 2024	Percentage of respondents 2025
Individual advocate	58%	53%
NDIS Appeals advocate	12%	11%
Team leader/manager	9%	11%
Intake/information and referral officer	4%	7%
Executive leader	3%	3%
Solicitor	4%	3%
Administration	3%	2%
Citizen advocacy coordinator	2%	2%
Systemic advocate	1%	2%
Policy/research officer	-	1%
Other	3%	6%

When asked about additional roles, 69% of respondents reported holding more than one role, while 31% had no additional roles. Among those with multiple roles:

- 36% had 1 additional role
- 19% had 2
- 8% had 3
- 4% had 4 or more.

Notable findings about additional roles include:

- 8% of respondents hold both individual advocate and NDIS Appeals advocate roles
- 4% combine individual advocacy with team leader/manager responsibilities
- 28% also perform intake/information and referral work
- 10% hold both individual and systemic advocacy roles
- 4% juggle all 3: individual, systemic, and NDIS Appeals roles
- 2 out of 3 executive leaders also perform individual advocacy.

These results highlight the overlapping responsibilities within the sector, with individual advocate roles central to many role combinations.

Table 5: Additional role of respondents

Additional role	Percentage of respondents 2025
No additional role	31%
Individual advocate	21%
NDIS Appeals advocate	22%
Team leader/manager	11%
Intake/information and referral officer	19%
Executive leader	2%
Solicitor	1%
Administration	11%
Citizen advocacy coordinator	1%
Systemic advocate	21%
Policy/research officer	4%
Finance officer/bookkeeper	1%

Other	11%
Prefer not to answer	1%

Employment type

The largest employment group in the 2025 survey was permanent full-time staff (40%), followed closely by permanent part-time (39%), making a combined 79% of respondents in permanent roles (a slight decrease from 81% in 2024).

In contrast, 21% of respondents reported being employed on a contract or casual basis, slightly up from 18% in 2024. A notable finding is the increase or doubling of contract part-time roles from 6% in 2024 to 12% in 2025.

Table 6: Comparison – Employment status of respondents

Employment status	Percentage of respondents 2023	Percentage of respondents 2024	Percentage of respondents 2025
Permanent full-time	29%	42%	40%
Permanent part-time	40%	39%	39%
Contract full-time	11%	9%	8%
Contract part-time	17%	6%	12%
Casual	3%	3%	1%
Volunteer	0%	1%	0%
Other	1%	0%	-

Workforce experience

Respondents were asked how long they have been working in the disability advocacy sector. The 2025 results highlight an experienced workforce, with many staff demonstrating strong long-term commitment to the sector. Notably, **over 1 in 5 respondents (21%) have worked in disability advocacy for more than 10 years**, reflecting a solid base of highly experienced practitioners. There was also a meaningful rise in those with **20+ years of experience**, increasing from **6% (2023)** to **10% (2025)**, suggesting that the sector continues to retain deeply knowledgeable and highly engaged long-term staff.

Growth in mid-career tenure also contributes to this strengthening experience base. Staff with **6–10 years in the sector increased from 16% to 21%**, and those with **3–5 years rose from 22% to 33%**, indicating a healthy number of advocates progressing into longer-term roles. Meanwhile, respondents with **less than 1 year** dropped from **18% (2023)** to **9% (2025)**, and **1–2 years** fell from **25% to 16%**, pointing to reduced turnover or fewer new entrants.

Overall, the sector is benefiting from a growing depth of experience, with a substantial and committed group of long-term staff complemented by a strong mid-career cohort.

Table 7: Comparison – Length of time working in the disability advocacy sector

Length of time	Percentage of respondents 2023	Percentage of respondents 2024	Percentage of respondents 2025
Less than a year	18%	11%	9%
1–2 years	25%	23%	16%
3–5 years	22%	32%	33%
6–10 years	16%	13%	21%
11–15 years	12%	9%	5%
16–20 years	1%	5%	6%
More than 20 years	6%	8%	10%

Recruitment, redundancy, and resignation of staff

Recruitment

Organisations were asked whether they have difficulties recruiting staff. The response options were updated in the 2025 survey to include a scale from “Strongly disagree” to “Strongly agree”. This was done to gauge the extent to which recruitment was a challenge. 38% of organisations reported recruiting difficulties (13% “Strongly agree” and 25% “Agree”), which is a significant decrease from 71% in 2024. 50% of respondents do not have recruitment difficulties and 13% were neutral.

When asked to identify the main causes of recruitment difficulties, the top 3 challenges were **lack of candidate experience**, **skills or relevant qualifications** (29%), **unable to offer competitive salaries** (24%), and **unable to offer permanent or full-time roles** (22%). “Other” responses included lack of funding and a workforce shortage of senior lawyers.

Table 8: Main causes of recruitment difficulties

Recruitment challenges	Percentage of respondents 2025
Lack of candidate experience, skills, or relevant qualifications	29%
Unable to offer competitive salaries	24%
Unable to offer permanent or full-time roles	22%
Difficulty recruiting in rural, remote, and regional areas	17%
Other	5%
Prefer not to answer	2%

New positions

Between 1 July 2024 and 30 June 2025, 13 organisations reported that **34.7 new FTE roles** in total were created due to new or increased funding. Of those 13 organisations, the majority had between **0.5 to 2 new positions created**, except for 2 organisations that had **8 and 14 FTE positions created**, respectively.

Redundancy

Between 1 July 2024 and 30 June 2025, 26 organisations (52%) reported that **33.53 FTE positions** across advocacy funding streams **ended due to funding cuts**. The majority of organisations saw between **0.2 and 2 FTE redundancies**, except for 2 who had **4.5 and 5.5**, respectively.

Resignations

Between 1 July 2024 and 30 June 2025, 27 organisations (56%) reported that **66.2 FTE staff across advocacy funding streams resigned**. 20 organisations (74%) had between **0.6 FTE and 2.0 FTE staff resign**, while other organisations had 3, 4, 4.8, 5, 8, and 13, respectively.

Service demand

73% (down from 77% in 2024) of organisations reported an **increase in the number of people seeking assistance** from their service compared to the previous financial year. 21% of organisations said demand was "About the same", 4% said there was "A decrease in demand", and 2% said "We do not keep records on this".

Demand for disability advocacy services keeps climbing. The share of respondents reporting high **increases (31% or more)** jumped from **18% in 2023** to **24% in 2025**, showing growing pressure on services. At the same time, **smaller increases (5–10%)** dropped from **18% to 15%**, meaning fewer organisations are seeing only modest growth in service demand.

The middle ground was more mixed. Growth of **16–20%** bounced back to **21% in 2025** after dipping in 2024, while **26–30% growth in demand** spiked in 2024 (12%) but fell to just 3% in 2025.

Uncertainty is shrinking. "Not sure" responses dropped from **19% in 2024** to **9% in 2025**, which could indicate organisations are getting better at tracking and reporting demand.

Table 9: Comparison – Increase in demand for disability advocacy services over a 12-month period

Field	Percentage of respondents 2023	Percentage of respondents 2024	Percentage of respondents 2025
Increase of 5–10%	18%	19%	15%
Increase of 11–15%	18%	12%	15%
Increase of 16–20%	24%	15%	21%
Increase of 21–25%	12%	4%	9%
Increase of 26–30%	0%	12%	3%
Increase of 31% or more	18%	23%	24%
Not sure	12%	19%	9%
Prefer not to answer	-	-	6%

For the 2 organisations who reported a **decrease** in demand for their services, 1 organisation saw a decrease of 5–10% while the other saw a 21–25% decrease.

Organisations were asked to share the causes of increased service demand. A thematic summary of the free-text responses is provided below.

Key drivers of increased demand

NDIS-related issues

- Policy and legislative changes, funding cuts, and stricter eligibility criteria
- Increased complexity in navigating NDIS processes (reviews, appeals, access requests)
- Growth in NDIS Appeals and Administrative Review Tribunal (ART) matters.

System complexity and inaccessibility

- Difficulty accessing disability services across housing, health, education, and justice systems
- Lack of trauma-informed and culturally appropriate approaches.

Economic and social factors

- Housing crisis and rising cost of living disproportionately affecting people with disability.

Awareness and outreach

- Increased awareness of advocacy services through advertising, outreach, and word of mouth
- Expansion into rural and remote areas.

Unmet needs

- Persistent systemic failures and thin markets in disability services leading to higher advocacy demand.

Minor mentions

- Lack of mainstream resources and culturally appropriate knowledge
- False sense of security due to NDIS coverage
- Increased referrals from additional grant activities.

Waitlists

Organisations were asked: “On average, in July 2025, how long did people remain on your waitlist before receiving individual advocacy assistance?” A comparison with 2024 data is provided in Table 10. Unmet demand continues to rise, with wait times remaining similar to 2024 levels.

Organisations reported increasing demand for advocacy services, which often limits their ability to provide support when it is needed. As a result, many have implemented measures such as waitlists, triage frameworks to prioritise those in greatest need (often in crisis), and temporary intake closures. During peak periods, some organisations can only offer advice and resources rather than complete advocacy support.

Key insights

- Longer wait times in 2025
- Significant increase in respondents reporting waits of 5–6 weeks (from 6% in 2024 to 17% in 2025) and 7–8 weeks (from 9% to 13%)
- 11–12 weeks rose slightly (6% to 8%)
- Extended waits (13 weeks or longer) decreased slightly (6% to 4%), suggesting fewer extremely long delays
- Organisations without waitlists reduced from 23% in 2024 to 15% in 2025, suggesting more organisations now have waitlists.

Free-text comments highlighted the ongoing pressure organisations face in managing waitlists. Several respondents noted that demand for advocacy services is high and increasing, with some programs reporting significant growth.

- Many IDAOs currently have waitlists, which is frustrating for clients and staff.

- Some services have had to close waitlists or intake temporarily due to capacity limits, particularly for NDIS Appeals, which often open briefly and then close for weeks.
- Others do not maintain formal waitlists but still experience delays of several weeks before support can begin. Triage and prioritisation based on urgency, risk, or vulnerability are common strategies.
- Managing waitlists is described as time-consuming, and referrals to other services are often difficult because demand is high everywhere.
- Some organisations offer information sessions to help clients while waiting.
- Wait times vary widely, and some services cannot backfill staff leave, causing delays of 3–6 weeks.
- There are reports of regional differences, with waitlists in the Australian Capital Territory being longer than those in New South Wales. A few services operate models (e.g. phone-based or citizen advocacy) that do not require formal waitlists, though delays of a few days can still occur.
- Legal services cannot maintain waitlists and refer to legal aid instead. Under-resourcing and inability to meet demand are recurring themes, and organisations cannot measure unmet need because intake closes when capacity is reached. A sample of responses around waitlists is provided below via direct quotes from respondents.

Table 10: Comparison – Average time spent on waitlist

Time spent on waitlist	Percentage of respondents 2024	Percentage of respondents 2025
Less than a week	3%	2%
1–2 weeks	11%	13%
3–4 weeks	20%	19%
5–6 weeks	6%	17%
7–8 weeks	9%	13%
11–12 weeks	6%	8%
13 weeks or longer	6%	4%
We do not hold a waitlist	23%	15%
We do not deliver individual advocacy	-	2%
Prefer not to answer	-	2%

"This year [we] had to close our waitlist for the first time ever, due to the increase in referrals and increase in complex advocacy issues."

"Our waitlist numbers don't reflect the full extent of unmet demand. Our intake process includes – taking a call – assessing suitability for advocacy – accepting a client's matter – assigning to [an] advocate with capacity to take on the case. Our waitlist consists of those accepted clients who don't yet have an advocate. When demand is too great, we close intake and have no measure of those clients that don't contact us during that time."

"All of our advocates currently have waitlists. It is a source of frustration for people that require advocacy services and staff."

"To manage service demand, we close the service when it is at capacity. NDIS Appeals generally opens for 3 or 4 days and then closes for 3 weeks."

"ART waitlist was closed due to time to support the process through the tribunal & not wanting to provide false expectation of service."

"We do not operate an official waitlist but once accepted we sometimes cannot support someone for 5–8 weeks.
If no capacity, we ask them to reapply in 6 weeks."

"Constant challenge, sometimes only short-term advocacy support can be provided due to lack of capacity."

Client management systems

Organisation respondents were asked what customer relationship management (CRM) system they use. The top 3 systems included:

- IVO (40%)
- Salesforce (19%)
- custom-built CRM (15%).

"Other" CRMs shared via free-text comments included CLASS, AIIM, Care Manager, and custom-built Salesforce systems.

Table 11: Customer relationship management systems used by organisations in 2025

Customer relationship management (CRM) system	Percentage of respondents 2025
IVO	40%
Salesforce	19%
Custom-built	15%
Other	6%
Actionstep	6%
Fixus	4%
No CRM in use	4%
Community Data Solutions	2%
Nightingale	2%
Prefer not to answer	2%

Advocacy practice and wellbeing

Unpaid hours

Advocates were asked: "During an average week, how many, if any, unpaid hours do you work?" 40% do not work unpaid hours, and 1% said "Prefer not to answer". This means 59% of respondents are working unpaid hours most weeks. Of those who frequently work unpaid hours, 64% said this was usual for them, 25% said they usually work fewer unpaid hours, and 2% said they usually work more.

The top responses were:

- none (40%)
- 3–5 hours (24%)
- 1–2 hours (21%).

Table 12: Comparison – Number of unpaid hours worked in an average week

Unpaid hours worked	Percentage of respondents 2024	Percentage of respondents 2025
None	47%	40%
1–2 hours	19%	21%
3–5 hours	18%	24%
6–7 hours	4%	4%
8–10 hours	5%	3%
More than 10 hours	4%	6%
Prefer not to answer	2%	1%

Most satisfying and challenging aspects of work

Respondents shared the most satisfying aspects of their work, with the option to select more than one answer. Aligning with the 2023 and 2024 surveys, the top 2 responses were "Knowing I have made a positive difference on an individual level" (72%) and "Empowering people with disability to exercise their rights" (69%).

"Other" free-text comments included:

"Encouraging people to fight for their rights, and for a fair go", and

"Delivering an effective service [and] fostering the development of advocates".

Table 13: Comparison – Most satisfying aspect of work

Most satisfying aspect	Percentage of respondents 2023	Percentage of respondents 2024	Percentage of respondents 2025
Knowing I made a positive difference on an individual level	77%	68%	72%
Knowing I made a difference on a systemic level	42%	28%	31%
Empowering people with disability to exercise their rights	70%	65%	69%
Assisting an individual at the Administrative Appeals Tribunal for a positive outcome	25%	31%	-
Resolving an issue/achieving a desired outcome	67%	57%	57%
Interactions with clients and colleagues	62%	41%	59%
Other	4%	1%	1%
Prefer not to answer	-	-	3%

In the 2025 survey, the response options for "the most challenging aspects of work" were updated to include more detail and more options to select from. This was done to ensure a better understanding of the pain points and challenges individuals face in their work. Results for 2023 and 2024 have been presented separately to accommodate the difference and enable comparison where possible. Respondents were able to select multiple options.

The top issue, consistent with the 2023 and 2024 survey, was unmet demand, with 68% selecting "Number of people seeking assistance exceeds capacity (unmet demand)".

The other top challenges included:

- "The complexity of advocacy matters" (54%)
- "Complexity and inaccessibility of systems and programs" (26%).

Free-text responses under "Other" highlighted additional challenges such as:

- instability and underfunding
- work cultures
- inaccessibility
- interpersonal tension and conflict while advocating
- client behaviours
- not reaching those who are most vulnerable (e.g. in closed environments)
- legal representatives being uninformed about NDIS policies
- limited ability to plan outreach

- lack of knowledge within the sector and society of intersectional barriers faced by people with disability
- abuse of staff.

Table 14: Comparison – Most challenging aspect of work 2023 and 2024

Most challenging aspect	Percentage of respondents 2023	Percentage of respondents 2024
Number of people seeking assistance exceeds capacity (unmet demand)	68%	69%
Increased reporting and compliance requirements	33%	26%
Complexity of matters	49%	52%
Meeting expectations of governing bodies	19%	23%
Repeated advocacy for the same issue	65%	42%
Inaccessibility of systems and programs	-	49%
Lack of time/resources for professional development	34%	28%
Maintaining a good work–life balance	18%	25%
Behaviour of service providers	-	32%
Client demands	-	27%
Prefer not to answer	-	2%
Other	16%	6%

Table 15: Most challenging aspect of work 2025

Challenging aspects of disability advocacy work	Percentage of respondents 2025
Demand for advocacy being more than we can meet (unmet demand)	68%
Complexity of advocacy matters	54%
Complexity and inaccessibility of systems and programs	26%
Increased reporting and compliance requirements	24%
Length of time it takes to get a decision or response	22%
Completing advocacy for the same issue repeatedly	14%
Managing client expectations	11%
Meeting the expectations of governing bodies	11%
Behaviour of service providers	11%
Supporting clients through difficult appeals processes	9%
Lack of time or resources to engage in professional development	7%
Having a good work–life balance	3%
Other	9%
Prefer not to answer	1%

Health and wellbeing

In 2025, respondents were asked: “How often do you feel your work is negatively impacting your health and wellbeing”, a slight change from the 2024 survey to specify the **negative effects**. Notably, 41% of respondents reported that their work negatively impacts their health and wellbeing “Daily”, “Weekly”, or “All the time”.

“Other” free-text comments included 6% of respondents who said their work impacts their health and wellbeing “sometimes” or “occasionally”. Other comments included rarely, when there is a

tough file that requires debriefing, or having vicarious trauma, which can be triggered by certain situations.

Table 16: Comparison – Frequency of negative impacts of work on health and wellbeing

Frequency	Percentage of respondents 2024	Percentage of respondents 2025
All the time	5%	6%
Daily	10%	6%
Weekly	32%	29%
Monthly	22%	28%
Never	15%	17%
Prefer not to answer	4%	5%
Other (e.g. occasionally and when there are complex matters)	11%	9%

Respondents were also asked to select the causes of stress/overwhelm in their role. Multiple options could be selected.

The top 3 reported causes were:

- “Not enough capacity to assist everyone who needs advocacy” (55%)
- “Not having enough time to complete all tasks” (41%)
- “Trauma or vicarious trauma” (38%).

Free-text responses under “Other” frequently highlighted themes of inaccessible or broken government systems and insufficient funding.

Responses also highlight **significant stressors and challenges in advocacy work**, including:

- gaps in foundational supports
- NDIS complexity
- slow response times
- lack of transparency
- ineffective regulatory systems
- repeated client issues
- systemic barriers
- physical fatigue
- chaotic work structures
- abuse from upper management
- uncertainty about job security
- limited resources for administration
- high caseloads
- lack of funding.

While a few respondents reported not feeling stressed, most emphasise **disheartening workloads and growing demand without adequate support**.

Table 17: Comparison – Causes of stress and overwhelm at work

Cause of stress/overwhelm at work	Percentage of respondents 2024	Percentage of respondents 2025
Unsustainable workloads	31%	28%
Managing client expectations	42%	35%

Unmet demand (2024 survey) Not having enough capacity to assist everyone who needs advocacy (2025 survey)	41%	55%
Vicarious trauma	37%	38%
Not having enough time to complete all tasks	42%	41%
Relationships within the organisation (2024 survey) Challenging relationships within the organisation (2025 survey)	20%	21%
Managing staff	6%	9%
Prefer not to say	5%	6%
Other (free-text)	15%	13%

Respondents were asked whether their organisation provides adequate support to help employees manage stress and overwhelm at work. 66% of respondents "Agreed" or "Strongly Agreed" (down from 78% in 2024), 21% "Disagreed" or "Strongly Disagreed" (up from 13% in 2024), and 14% were "Neutral". This indicates that around 1 in 5 respondents do not feel their organisation provides enough support to manage stress and overwhelm in the workplace.

Table 18: Comparison – Type of support provided in dealing with stress and overwhelm at work

Type of support provided	**Percentage of respondents 2024**	**Percentage of respondents 2025**
Employee assistance program (EAP)	80%	76%
Internal supervision	63%	70%
External supervision	38%	32%
Professional development opportunities	56%	49%
Supportive workplace practices	65%	62%
Flexible workplace practices (2024 survey) Flexible work arrangements (e.g. varied hours, remote work) (2025 survey)	79%	76%
Staff/team wellness activities	34%	35%
Subsidised wellness membership/s	0%	4%
Additional paid time off	17%	22%
Prefer not to answer	0%	2%
Other	4%	1%

Respondents were also asked to describe any other supports they would find helpful in dealing with stress/overwhelm at work. Free-text comments responding to this question included:

- increased funding to ensure job security and access to necessary resources
- more advocates/adequate staffing
- external/clinical supervision and peer supervision
- increased number of EAP sessions or other subsidised mental health support (better psychological assistance)
- sector wellbeing opportunities
- decreasing administrative tasks/requirements
- increased access to resources
- additional paid leave
- improved workplace environments
- promoting social connection within workplaces
- reduced workloads
- more training or increased professional development budgets
- better management (upskilling and support from team leaders).

Looking for other employment

About **1 in 4 respondents** say they're likely to look for another job in the next 6–12 months, split evenly between "Very likely" (13%) and "Likely" (13%). That's down from roughly **1 in 3** in 2023 and 2024. Just over half (**53%**) plan to stay put, while **19%** are still unsure, and **2%** preferred not to answer.

The undecided group is worth noting; it shows that perceptions are still forming and retention isn't guaranteed. While overall sentiment looks better than previous years, the **"Very likely"** group remains a risk for turnover.

Fewer people are planning to leave compared to past years, but retention challenges haven't disappeared.

Respondents were asked to provide free-text comments regarding their current employment. The responses reveal **deep commitment to advocacy work and appreciation for supportive environments**, but underscore **serious concerns about funding instability**, **job insecurity**, **high turnover**, **burnout**, **and lack of progression**. Many mention **stressful workloads**, **inadequate resources**, **and uncertainty about tenders and future roles**, alongside **limited career development and emotional strain**, making long-term sustainability uncertain despite strong passion for the work.

Table 19: Likelihood of respondents looking for a role outside of their organisation in the next 6–12 months 2025

Likelihood	Percentage of respondents 2025
Very likely	13%
Likely	13%
Not sure	19%
Unlikely	24%
Very unlikely	29%
Prefer not to answer	2%

"High staff turnover due to limited job security increases the overall workload of long-term/permanent staff members. Unethical and opaque hiring practices and bloated administration teams instead of adequately staffed advocacy teams."

"The work is good, but the number of people needing help is beyond our capacity. Clients' understanding of the ART process is often limited, and their expectations of a 'good outcome' are sometimes too high. Operating in a legal environment against lawyers working for large firms is a routine necessity. Increasingly, I am assisting clients at hearings where barristers representing the Agency are involved. I like my job, but there is room for improvement. Also, I'm tired and I need a break."

"I work in appeals. The relentlessness of the work is having significant effect of my health and mental health. I care about this work and I enjoy most of it, however the vicarious trauma and overwhelming demand are having significant impacts. I know I cannot sustain for much longer."

"My workload is consistently overloaded and I am underpaid for the level of work and responsibility I undertake. It would make a huge difference if each organisation does not have to 'reinvent the wheel' for organisational policies and other standard requirements of advocacy organisations."

"The future of our funding is uncertain and this has a bearing on whether I will be looking for alternative employment options. I love my role and the work that we do is the most rewarding of my entire career, but the uncertainty of what the future holds for our organisation and the tenure of my role is very hard to cope with when I have a mortgage to pay and a family to support."

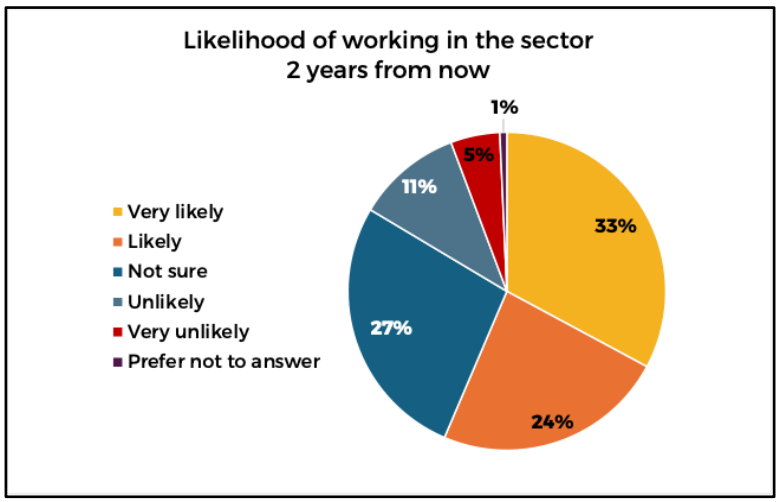
"So many persons with Disability from CALD backgrounds are in [dire] need of advocacy support due to so many barriers, I feel quite satisfied assisting them and enabling them to be heard, navigate the system by building their capacity and knowing their rights and privileges."

"The future of the advocacy sector is very uncertain. Our organisation is doing great, innovative work that changes lives and has a great team but is under great pressure. We also know we could be defunded by this time next year. I may be forced to find a new job. The same applies for the whole team. There is no support program or initiative in the world that can remove that feeling of responsibility for people with intellectual disability and for respected colleagues."

"I truly love the work and the people I support. Advocacy is not just a job, it's a passion. Every day is different, and every person I work with teaches me something new. That's what keeps me here."

Respondents were also asked how likely it is they would be working in the disability advocacy sector 2 years from now. 57% said "Likely" or "Very likely" (up from 46% in 2024), 27% said "Not sure" (down from 41% in 2024), and 16% said "Unlikely" or "Very unlikely" (up from 13% in 2024).

Figure 10: Respondents' likelihood of working in the disability advocacy sector 2 years from now



Respondents were asked to provide free-text comments regarding their career in the disability advocacy sector. The comments express **strong passion for advocacy work**, especially in disability services, but highlight **major concerns about sustainability**, **funding uncertainty**, **emotional demands**, **lack of recognition, limited career progression**, and **the sector's uncertain future**. This is despite **deep personal commitment**, **purpose**, **and fulfilment** experienced within the workforce.

While it is encouraging that nearly half intend to remain in the sector, the fact that 54% either plan to leave or are unsure highlights a need for organisations to ensure staff feel supported amid ongoing challenges.

"[It's] been my dream role as I am a person living with a disability and I'm very passionate about protecting people's rights and building their confidence and capacity."

"At the moment, it appears bleak. Not because the work is unimportant or lacking, but because of already emerging trends within the NDIS creating less and less opportunities for people with disability to utilise an advocate."

"The NDIS appeals through ART are so stressful and demoralising. It is a learn on the job role, and while it can be satisfying in this regard, it is still very stressful that there isn't a 'manual' to assist. The workload is insane for these cases and if there is not a good outcome for the individual it is hard not to feel responsible for letting the family down and not getting them across the finish line. NDIS Appeals are by far the most stressful of all the advocacy work I do."

"The work is excellent, but the demands are high."

"There seems to be little opportunity for career progression outside of senior advocate or management of an organisation."

"I genuinely enjoy this work and value the opportunity to support people with disability to have their rights upheld. The advocacy itself is deeply meaningful and rewarding, and I'm proud to contribute to positive outcomes for clients."

"Working in the advocacy sector allows for me on an individual level to see a difference in people's lives and feel like I can support people during difficult times, but the space is not the easiest to work in. With the increased in ART matters and their complexity, it's become hard to take on more matters and it's sad having to say no to individuals purely because we do not have the capacity to take on the matter. At times because we take on more matters than we should, I feel stressed at work as I am not able to get everything done within my work hours and at times feel very stressed or emotionally drained."

"I love the advocacy sector but it is continually changing for the worse. There are more funding cuts and increased caseloads, I think this will make it difficult to retain staff. Clients are also becoming more challenging and this has an impact of advocates mental health."

"Thoroughly enjoy the actual advocating role but coming up against seemingly impenetrable systems takes its toll – I feel the most important thing we can do is upskill and support new advocates for the future."

Training and development

A key focus for the NCDA is to gain an understanding of the areas that organisations and staff feel are important in relation to training and development.

Individuals

The 2025 survey asked respondents whether they attended any advocacy-related training in the last 12 months. Response options were amended from the 2024 survey to focus on the attendance of **advocacy-related** training only (multiple options could be selected).

56% reported attending "NCDA-hosted training" (an increase from 49% in 2024), 39% "their organisation-hosted training", 45% attended a training "hosted by another organisation", and 13% said they had not attended any training (similar to 15% in 2024).

Table 20: Advocacy-related training attended in the last year

Training type	Percentage of respondents 2025
I attended training hosted by the NCDA	56%
I attended training organised by my organisation	39%
I attended training hosted by another organisation	45%
No	13%
Prefer not to answer	2%

Respondents who indicated they had attended training hosted by the NCDA were invited to share, via free-text comments, any aspects of the training they liked and areas for improvement in a follow-up question.

The responses highlighted **positive feedback for NCDA and related advocacy training**, noting that sessions are **informative**, **well-run**, **and relevant to advocacy skills**. Many valued **specific topics like trauma-informed practice**, **communication**, **mediation**, **and legal aid**, and appreciated opportunities for **peer engagement and capacity building**.

However, some mentioned **limited recent training availability** and a desire for **more targeted**, **practical**, **and diverse offerings**. Suggestions included **more specific topics**, **additional Q&A opportunities**, **and flexibility for part-time staff**, while some noted **difficulty attending sessions and desire for more training options**.

Training and professional development needs

Both organisation and individual respondents were asked to rate the importance of several capacity building and professional development topics over the next 2 years. The topics were categorised under "advocacy practice" and "management".

Table 21 provides an overview of the results in order of priority. The average of the organisation and individual results are presented as a percentage to provide a combined insight into the importance of the topics provided.

Respondents were also asked to provide free-text comments around what other topics or areas are important for professional development over the next 2 years. The responses from individuals suggested **strong interest in advanced and diverse training topics**, including:

- financial literacy, funding, and sustainability
- trauma-informed and culturally safe practice
- systemic advocacy
- policy influence and leadership development
- legal training (NDIS, guardianship, social security law)
- AI and digital accessibility
- time management
- climate justice and disability
- supported decision-making
- building confidence
- setting boundaries
- addressing systemic gaps in the advocacy sector.

Responses from organisations emphasised **systemic improvements and sector support**, including:

- advocating for better funding
- improved working conditions
- recognition of advocacy's vital role
- national coordination of systems advocacy.

Key priorities included **advanced training on complex advocacy areas (NDIS Appeals, housing, mental health), peer support for managers of small not-for-profit organisations**. Suggestions highlighted:

- induction basics
- staff self-care
- governance training
- IT support
- resources for rural/remote advocacy.

There was also interest in **data sharing for self-evaluation**, and **professional development opportunities**, alongside **continued forums**, **videos**, **and practical workshops**.

Table 21: Training and professional development needs for organisations and individuals 2025

Training section	Top 3 important topics for individuals	Top 3 important topics for organisations
Advocacy practice	1. Cultural Safety and Inclusive Practice – Building respectful, accessible, and inclusive approaches for diverse communities (89%) 2. Advanced Advocacy Skills and Knowledge – Specialised approaches for supporting people in complex situations (86%) 3. Soft Skills – Relational skills that support and enhance advocacy practice (86%)	1. Reflective and Trauma-Informed Practice – Supporting safe, ethical, and self-aware advocacy (94%) 2. Cultural Safety and Inclusive Practice – Building respectful, accessible, and inclusive approaches for diverse communities (92%) 3. Advanced Advocacy Skills and Knowledge – Specialised approaches for supporting people in complex situations (85%)
Management	1. Project and Program Delivery – Planning, managing, and delivering effective advocacy programs (71%)	1. Monitoring, Evaluation and Impact – Measuring what matters and demonstrating the value of advocacy (94%)

	2. People and Culture – Attracting, supporting, and retaining great people in a positive workplace (70%) 3. Risk, Compliance and Legal Responsibilities – Ensuring safe, ethical, and legally compliant practice (68%)	2. People and Culture – Attracting, supporting, and retaining great people in a positive workplace (89%) 3. Project and Program Delivery – Planning, managing, and delivering effective advocacy programs (88%)

Figure 11: Advocacy practice capacity building and professional development training topics in order of importance over the next 2 years

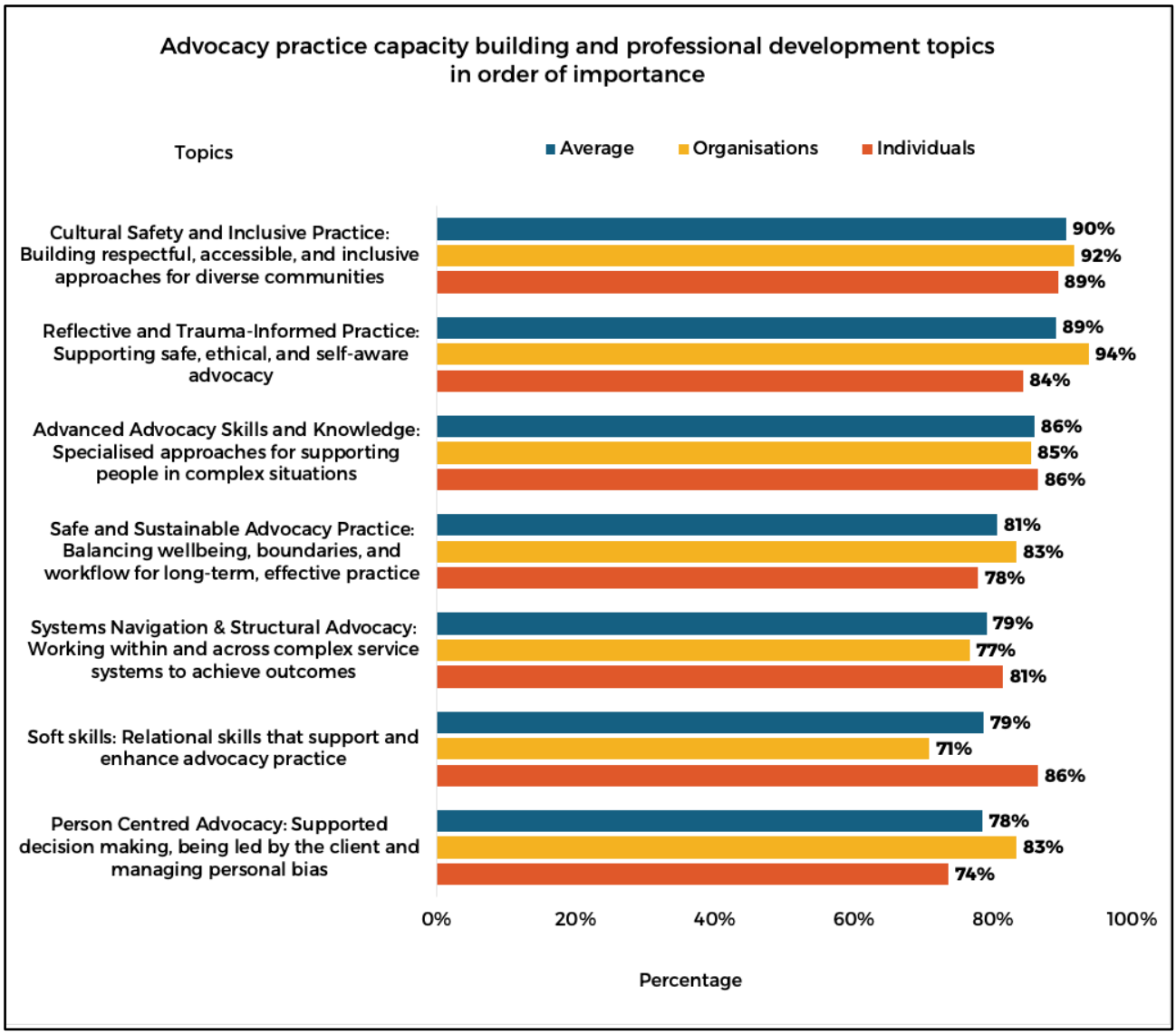
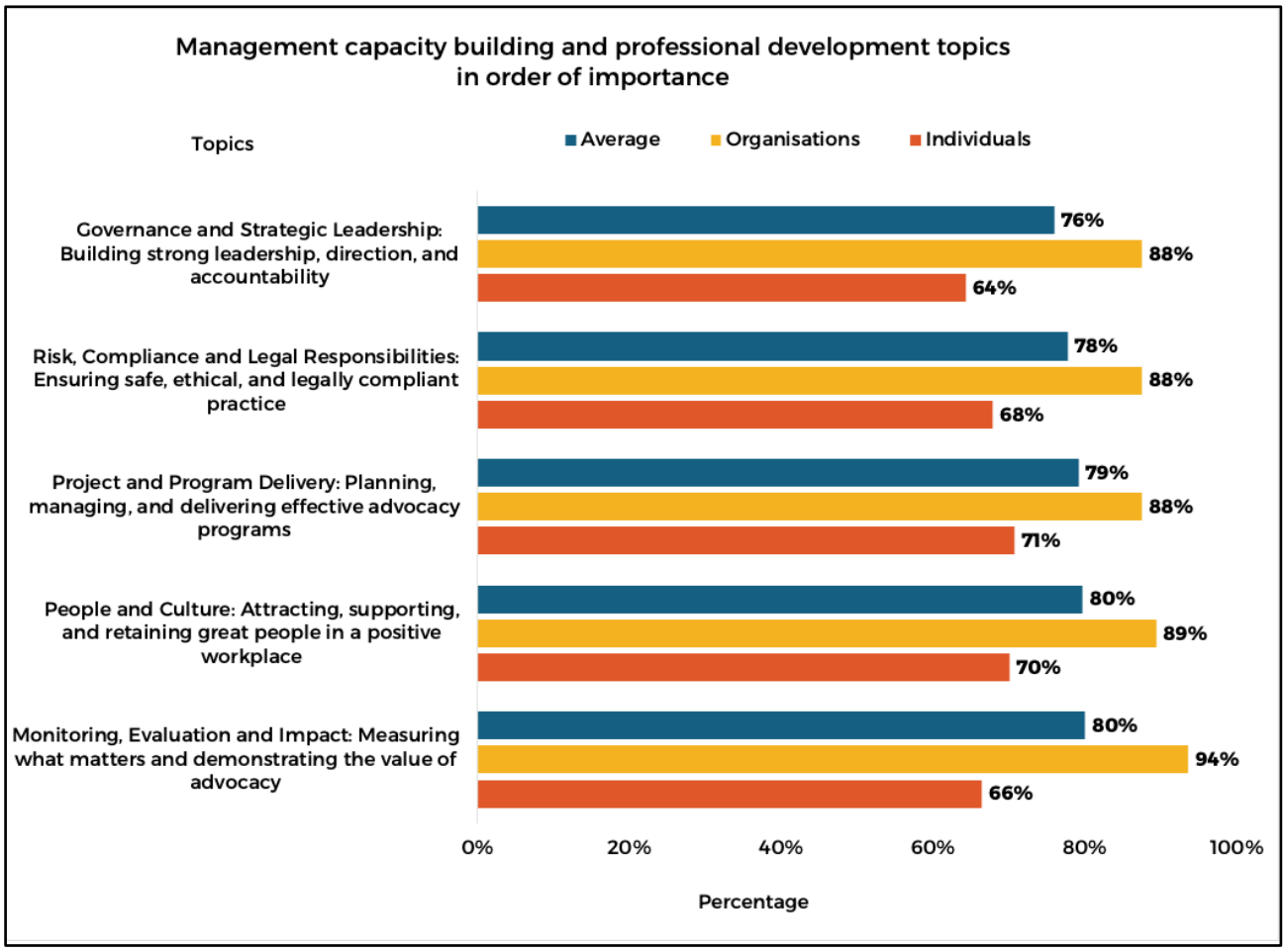


Figure 12: Management capacity building and professional development training topics in order of importance over the next 2 years



Respondents were also asked what type of support they would like the NCDA to provide over the next 2 years. The responses emphasised **networking**, **collaboration**, and **professionalisation of the advocacy sector**, including **peer support networks**, **sector-wide forums**, and **opportunities to connect with policymakers**. There was strong interest in **accessible training**, **short courses**, **legal training**, **Easy English communication**, and **practical tools for NDIS and Disability Support Pension evidence gathering**. Other priorities include **measuring impact**, **induction basics**, **supporting rural/remote communities**, **improving administrative support**, and **advocating for increased funding and sector credibility (e.g. formal qualifications)**. Suggestions also included **workbooks for webinars**, **confidential counselling, and targeted support for smaller organisations navigating funding changes**.

Other resource needs

Respondents were asked: “What resources, apart from additional funding, would help you to do your work more effectively?” More than one type of resource could be selected.

The most requested resource was “Advocacy-specific professional development or resources” (58%), followed by “Advocacy-specific templates and guides” (52%). A “More effective client record management system” ranked third at 34%, while “Improved intake process” (29%) and “Updated ICT” (24%) are mid-level priorities. Lower priorities include “Improved office environment” (19%), “Motor vehicle fleet” (13%), and “Other” (9%). Very few respondents indicated “None – we are well resourced” (8%), suggesting most see clear gaps or a need for more resources within their organisation.

In “Other” free-text responses, suggestions included **more staff and time**, **consistent quality standards**, **better leadership engagement**, **greater government responsiveness**, **dedicated liaison lines**, **access to the NCDA portal**, **stronger networks**, **increased funding**, and **standardised internal documentation** to improve effectiveness.

Individual respondents were asked a follow-up question about what advocacy-specific professional development resources or topics would be most beneficial to improve effectiveness in their work. A summary of the free-text responses is presented in Table 22.

Table 22: Summary of beneficial advocacy-specific resources and training topics

Advocacy-specific resources	Advocacy-specific training
• Subsidised training at a qualification level • Regular supervision and communities of practice • NDIS-related resources • Employment and fair work resources • Guidance on easy-to-read documents • Policy and legislative updates • Resources for managing workload, vicarious trauma, and stress • Standardised documentation and templates • Access to online record-keeping/file systems • Resources specific to advocacy issues (e.g. child safety and financial abuse)	• Consent and complex advocacy • Accessibility issues across social, cultural, economic, health, and housing practices • Mediation, counselling, domestic and family violence training • Advocacy negotiation skills for case conferences • Managing vicarious trauma and burnout • Networking and interagency collaboration • Cultural awareness and inclusive practices • Professional education led by experts • Current legislation and legal processes • NDIS Appeals handling, guardianship roles • Decision-making, boundaries, and clear practice guidelines • Common foundational advocacy courses • Mental health first aid and trauma-informed practice • Understanding NDIS, SACAT, and related systems • Accredited advocacy courses and decision-making skills • Upskilling in informed practice and policy changes • Explanations of key legislation and appeals processes • Advocacy dispute resolution skill development

NCDA impact

Sector support

Organisations were asked whether anyone in their organisation had accessed NCDA programs, training or events in the past. 81% responded “Yes”, 13% “No”, and 6% “Prefer not to respond”.

When asked what type of NCDA events organisations had accessed, the top 3 included:

- webinars (75%)
- advocate peer network (69%)
- manager peer network and forums (both 56%).

Table 23: Type of NCDA events accessed by organisations

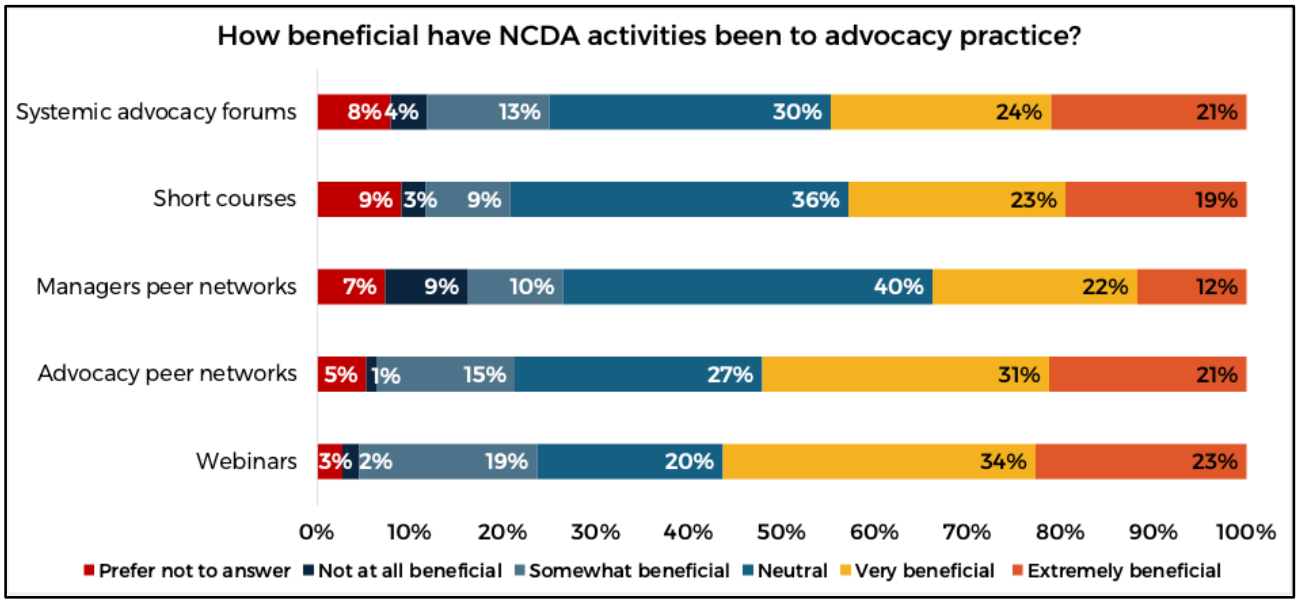
Type of event	Percentage of respondents 2025
Webinars	75%
Advocate peer network	69%
Forums	56%
Manager peer network	56%
Extended workshops	29%
Prefer not to respond	2%

Individuals were also asked how beneficial NCDA activities have been to their advocacy practice. Respondents were able to select “Did not participate”, so Figure 13 only presents indications from respondents who attended each activity.

Overall, most activities were rated positively, with the bulk of responses in “**Very** or **Extremely beneficial**”. **Webinars** performed best; **57%** rated them “Very or Extremely beneficial”, with the **lowest** “**Neutral**” **(20%)** and **low** “**Not at all**” **(2%)**. **Advocate peer networks** are also strong at **52%**. **Systemic Advocacy Forum (45%)** and **short courses (42%)** show solid but more mixed impact, reflected in higher “**Neutral**” shares (**30%** and **36%**, respectively). **Manager peer networks** are the weakest performer with **34%**, the **highest** “**Neutral**” **(40%)**, and the highest “**Not at all**” **(9%)**, indicating a need to tighten outcomes, increase practical application, and tailor content by role while scaling what’s working in webinars and advocacy networks.

High neutral responses (up to 40%) indicate that some activities lack clear impact or relevance for participants. This suggests a need to **increase practical application and role-specific tailoring** to move participants from neutral to highly beneficial.

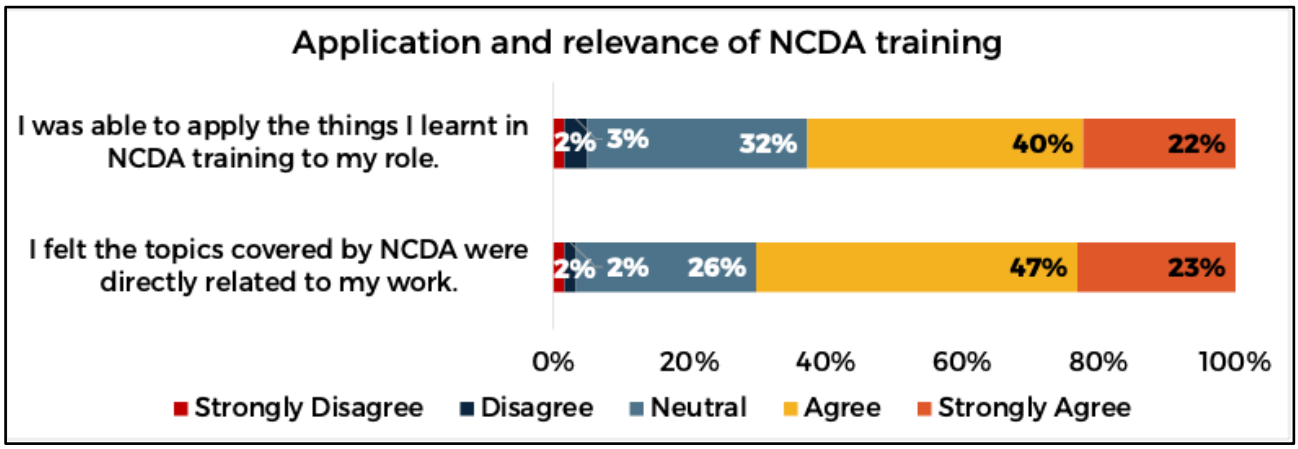
Figure 13: Benefit of NCDA activities to individual respondents' advocacy practice in 2025



Individual respondents were also prompted to think about NCDA training they had participated in and indicate the extent to which topics were directly related to their work, and whether they were able to apply training content to their role.

These data show that NCDA training is perceived as highly relevant, with **70%** of respondents "Agreeing" or "Strongly agreeing" that topics were directly related to their work, and only **4%** "Disagreeing". However, practical application was weaker: while **62%** felt able to apply what they learnt, **32%** were neutral and **5%** disagreed. This gap suggests that while content alignment is strong, translating learning into action remains a challenge. The high neutrality on application points to an opportunity to strengthen hands-on components, contextual examples, and post-training support to ensure skills are embedded in day-to-day roles.

Figure 14: Respondents views on application and relevance of training delivered by the NCDA



Systemic issues

While the NCDA does not coordinate or undertake systemic advocacy, its role includes gathering insights and analysing emerging systemic issues through engagement with the disability advocacy sector.

The 2025 surveys asked both organisations and individuals: “Are there any specific issues emerging from your work that you would like the NCDA to inform DANA of?”

Organisations’ **most frequent themes** included **funding/sustainability**, **NDIS operations/appeals**, and **workforce burnout**.

High-risk cohorts: CALD people, people with intellectual disability, children, and rural/remote communities.

System pinch-points: appeals processes, specialist report costs, housing access, reporting burden.

Individuals highlighted systemic failures, resource shortages, and increasing complexity.

There were strong calls for **increased funding**, **systemic reform**, and **better support for advocates and vulnerable cohorts**.

All free-text responses have been shared with DANA’s Policy and Advocacy team to help inform their work. Advocacy organisations are also encouraged to contact the NCDA directly to share systemic issues they are facing and or addressing.

Key themes emerging from survey responses have been summarised under themes and presented in Table 24.

Table 24: Systemic advocacy issues identified by individuals and organisations in the 2025 survey

INDIVIDUALS		
Theme	**Issues**	**Impact**
Funding and Resource Constraints	Insufficient funding for advocacy services; lack of resources in community languages; thin markets; foundational supports	Burnout among advocates; inability to meet demand, especially in rural/remote areas
Systemic Barriers and Complexity	Complex NDIS rules; high administrative burden; outdated systems; systemic complexity across sectors (NDIS, housing, child protection, health)	Increased workload; inefficiencies; reduced time for direct advocacy
Access and Equity Challenges	Barriers for First Nations people, CALD communities, and people with complex communication needs; discrimination in education; interpreter gaps	Exclusion from services; misunderstandings; inequitable outcomes
NDIS and Policy Concerns	Lack of movement on foundational supports; misuse of funds; fraud; ongoing NDIS changes; ART delays; lack of accountability	Participants experience delays, deteriorating functional capacity, and increased reliance on advocates
Housing and Tenancy Barriers	Inaccessible housing processes; systemic ableism; tenancy issues	People with disability face insecure housing and systemic discrimination
Ethical and Safety Concerns	Bullying of advocates; unsafe environments; unethical practices	Compromised service quality; advocate wellbeing
ORGANISATIONS		
Theme	**Issues**	**Impact**

Funding and Sustainability	Chronic underfunding; insecure tenure; competitive tendering; program cost squeeze; lack of funding for NDIS Appeals and new Commonwealth Individual Disability Advocacy Program	Organisations face financial instability; staff experience job insecurity; advocacy services cannot meet demand; sector relationships are strained
NDIS Operations, Planning and Appeals	Inconsistent planning (especially for CALD); lack of clear engagement pathways for advocates; ongoing delays; costly specialist reports; adversarial appeals process	Clients experience barriers to access and prolonged delays; advocates spend excessive time navigating complex systems; inequity and stress increase during appeals
Access and Equity	Over-representation of children with disability in child protection; rollback of Individual Education Plans; barriers for people with intellectual disability; CALD inequities; rural/remote access gap	Vulnerable cohorts face systemic exclusion; advocacy becomes resource-intensive; rural clients experience reduced service availability
Housing and Education	Lack of affordable, accessible housing; limited mental health services; rollback of inclusive education practices	Clients struggle to secure safe housing and appropriate education supports, increasing risk of isolation and poor outcome
Workforce Capacity, Burnout and Professional Development	High burnout risk in small organisations; lack of training pathways; challenges supporting neurodiverse staff; wellbeing risks for staff with lived experience	Reduced advocacy capacity; increased staff turnover; compromised quality of support for clients
Data, Reporting and Systems Burden	Onerous reporting requirements; systemic delays across NDIS/housing/complaints	Advocates spend excessive time on compliance rather than direct client support; delays reduce timely outcomes for clients

Final comments

Both organisation and individual respondents were asked if they would like to provide any further comments.

The free-text organisation responses expressed overall appreciation for the NCDA and DANA's role in providing learning opportunities and sector support, noting the challenge of uniting diverse advocacy approaches. Key themes included maintaining focus on core advocacy principles and human rights, greater collaboration on sector changes (e.g. Social, Community, Home Care and Disability Services Award [SCHADS]), and addressing uncertainty around competitive tendering and funding stability. There was strong emphasis on continued advocacy for longer contracts and more funding, as well as recognition of advocacy's vital role. Some comments raised concerns about internal organisational leadership and high staff turnover, while others praised the NCDA as a "game changer" for workforce development.

The individual responses expressed **strong appreciation for the NCDA's support, training, and networking opportunities**, noting that these resources help strengthen advocacy practice and connect the sector. Key concerns included **advocate burnout due to lack of support and poor policies**, **funding challenges**, and **employment contract issues impacting staff retention**. There was also mention of **NDIS-related workload overshadowing other advocacy priorities**, **housing issues**, and a need for **centralised resources (e.g. policies and procedures)**. Overall, feedback was constructive and emphasised **continuing the NCDA's role in promoting effective, human-rights-focused advocacy**.

CONCLUSION

Thank you to all the individuals and organisations who took the time to participate in the 2025 Advocacy Sector Workforce Survey. Your insights are invaluable in shaping sector priorities, understanding challenges, and contributing to the sector's evidence base.

If you have any questions about this report or would like to provide feedback, please contact the NCDA team at ncda@dana.org.au.

VERSION CONTROL

Version	Summary of changes	Approval date	Approved
1.0	Approval of document	18/3/2026	NCDA Manager

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