



Frontline advocates call for urgent gap funding to support Victorians with disability

Victorian frontline disability advocates have written to the Victorian Minister for Disability, the Hon Lizzie Blandthorn MP, urging the provision of emergency funding to ensure people with disability can access help.

The Victorian budget, released in May, maintained the funding provided to disability advocacy organisations in recent years. But advocacy services report they have run down their savings to emergency levels because demand, inflation and the cost of delivery have risen while funding has not.

“People with disability have the right to expect advocacy support from advocates with the skills to support them through a crisis, provide advice and support if they are experiencing disadvantage or discrimination, and to stand up for their rights. Our frontline workers are dedicated and hard working professionals. They are not volunteers,” said Denise Boyd, Executive Officer, STAR Victoria.

The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability, also known as the Disability Royal Commission (DRC) found that immediate action is needed to address the shortfall in funding for disability advocacy providers and the extent of people being turned away who need support.

At the same time, a review into the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) warned that costs must come under control and recommended state governments return to providing “foundational supports” – including disability advocacy - to ease pressure on the NDIS.

“Smaller numbers of advocates working fewer hours are being forced to prioritise urgent and critical cases, which means we can’t step in to help less severe cases before they reach a crisis point. Every second person with a disability is being turned away due to lack of available advocates. Lack of advocacy support is leaving people with disability in crisis, with their supports for housing, health, and disability daily living at risk,” said Fionn Skiotis, CEO, VALID.

“Those of us operating in remote areas must cover large areas with a single advocate and face severe limits on how much we can spend on travel, accommodation, and the vehicles necessary to meet with people and solve problems. Not everything can be done online.” said Ben Foley, Executive Officer, RDAS.

“We strongly believe in a disability advocacy sector where there is certainty through investment and yearly indexation to continue providing our services and support to CALD people with disability to speak up for themselves, be empowered and independent, live in the general community free from any abuse and neglect,” said Christian Astourian, Diversity and Disability Program Coordinator, Migrant Resource Centre North-West Region.

Disability Advocacy Victoria (DAV) is the peak body for disability advocates in Victoria. Many of the organisations listed in this statement are members of DAV.

“With enough funding we can stop problems before they get bigger and more expensive to solve. Having an advocate to turn to supports people with disability to build their own capacity to self-advocate, establish trusted relationships over time, and better use their NDIS funding. It also helps prevent NDIS exploitation by supporting people with disability to advocate for their rights and address unfair treatment,” said Dr Sandy Ross, DAV Board Member and CEO of RIAC.

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