



Queensland Independent
Disability Advocacy Network

QIDAN Budget Submission

To Queensland Treasury

January 2025

About the Queensland Independent Disability Advocacy Network

The Queensland Independent Disability Advocacy Network (QIDAN) is a group of organisations that provide individual advocacy services to Queenslanders living with disability. These organisations are funded under the Queensland Disability Advocacy Program (QDAP). The member organisations include Aged and Disability Advocacy; AMPARO Advocacy Inc; Capricorn Citizen Advocacy; Mackay Advocacy Inc; People with Disability Australia; Queensland Advocacy for Inclusion (QAI); Rights in Action; Side by Side run by Aged and Disability Advocacy; Speaking Up For You; and TASC.

QIDAN has three aims:

- Systemic advocacy: coordinated action to address systemic issues experienced by people with disability,
- Member support: a collaborative space for the exchange of information, resources and issues affecting disability advocacy organisations, and
- Sector advocacy: to promote the importance and value of independent disability advocacy on a local, state, and national basis.

The members of QIDAN offer various independent disability advocacy services across Queensland, including general disability advocacy, specialised individual advocacy (including National Disability Insurance Scheme appeals), citizen advocacy and systemic advocacy. QAI coordinates the Disability Advocacy Pathways Hub ('Pathways') to provide information and referrals to people with disability, their families and supporters.

QIDAN describe independent disability advocacy as working alongside people facing disadvantage to promote, protect, and defend human rights, interests, and wellbeing.

Independent advocates do this by:

- Supporting will and preference
- Being partisan, remaining loyal and accountable
- Being professional, culturally safe, and vigorous in pursuit of fundamental needs, and
- Avoiding conflicts of interest.

Note on Language

Language is a powerful tool for building inclusion. We use person-first language by using the term 'people with disability' but recognise that many people with disability prefer identity first language (i.e. a disabled person). The term 'people with lived experience' is used for people with disability, as well as their family members, carers and kin.

For the purpose of this Budget Submission, we use the term 'client' to describe a person with disability engaging with disability advocacy, and the terms 'service' and 'issue' interchangeably to describe when a person is provided with advocacy assistance to address an advocacy issue. We note that the sector typically does not like to use language like 'client' and 'service' to describe our work and the community that we work for.

However, we are using this language for the ease of the reader.

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Key Asks

In 2023-2024 QIDAN received over \$3.8 million and provided advocacy to 0.3% of people with disability in Queensland. There was a temporary increase of \$5 million in September 2024. The temporary nature of this new funding means disability advocacy will be cut by 45% on 1 July 2025 without further investment.

In the 2023 to 2024 financial year, QIDAN helped **1,579 people** with **3,278 issues** over **22,624 hours**.

There is an urgent need for State funding to:

- Meet the growing need and demand for disability advocacy in Queensland
- Adequately address social issues and the impact of the disability reform (including the NDIS Review and the Disability Royal Commission) on an individual and systemic level
- Sustain our organisational operations
- Continue to meet the needs of Queenslanders with disability who were able to access independent disability advocacy due to increased funding for the 2024 to 2025 financial year
- Save the jobs of advocacy staff members whose roles will no longer be funded after 1 July 2025.

QIDAN has 2 key asks:

Ask 1: Do not cut our \$5 million uplift funding received late 2024. Sustain this funding on a permanent and ongoing basis, raising the sector's funding to \$11 million per annum from 2025 onward

Ask 2: Provide an additional \$9 million in funding per annum on an ongoing basis to allow the sector to begin meeting the unmet need in Queensland, raising the total funding to \$20 million per annum

Introduction

QIDAN is pleased to present this budget submission, which highlights the critical need for securing increased and ongoing funding for the Queensland independent disability advocacy sector in the upcoming Queensland Budget. This submission provides an analysis of QDAP and Pathways' data, offering insights into the needs of Queenslanders with disability, and spotlights the incredible hard work delivered by our state's advocacy staff. The submission also covers the constraints and challenges faced by the sector, particularly the strains on our organisation's operational sustainability.

In the 2023 to 2024 financial year, the Queensland disability advocacy sector received approximately \$3,858,897.00 in State funding, which was expected to fund the cost of delivering advocacy services, staff costs, operational costs, and other expenses for the entire state of Queensland. Under this current funding provision, the sector is only able to provide advocacy assistance to 0.3% of the population of people with disability in Queensland.

In July 2024, the Queensland Government announced an additional \$5,000,000 of funding for the sector for the 2024 to 2025 financial year in response to the Disability Royal Commission's final report¹. This additional funding, combined with other temporary uplift State funding, raised the sector's state funding to \$11,000,000 in total for the 2024 to 2025 financial year. Though this increased funding is welcomed by the sector, its temporary nature has made it difficult to utilise. What is more, the sector did not receive the funding until September 2024, leaving only nine months to recruit, train and action advocates. There is not yet data showing the impact of this uplift money.

The Disability Royal Commission (DRC) reported on the value and cost-benefit of disability advocacy². The DRC determined that the cost ratio of advocacy is at a minimum \$2.21 of

¹ Queensland Government (July 2024). *Miles doing what matters: disability reforms top agenda at roundtable*. Retrieved from <https://statements.qld.gov.au/statements/100838>

² Queensland Independent Disability Advocacy Network (2024). *2022 to 2023 Budget Submission*. Retrieved from <https://disabilitypathways.org.au/qidan-submission-disability-advocacy-funding/>

benefit for every \$1 spent on funding³. The value of advocacy extends far beyond monetary benefit. Over the 2023 to 2024 financial year, advocacy has supported the disability community to navigate the reform triggered by the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) Review and the DRC, whilst also addressing larger systemic problems like the housing crisis and cost-of-living crisis.

The valuable role of disability advocacy was repeatedly spotlighted by the DRC and the NDIS Review. The NDIS Review final report acknowledged that disability advocacy “plays a critical role in promoting, protecting a defending the human rights of people with disability”⁴, and further recommended that all levels of government should jointly invest in nationally consistent access to individually disability advocacy service⁵. Likewise, the Disability Royal Commission referred to disability advocacy as “essential in many situations”⁶, and stated “additional funding is needed to ensure people with disability can access advocacy supports”⁷.

Though the value of disability advocacy is widely acknowledged, QIDAN faces increasing systemic challenges and funding constraints that impede our ability to sustain operations and advocate for our communities. While disability advocacy has played a pivotal role in instigating and navigating the disability reform, the time and work required to keep up with the many associated changes far exceeds the capacity of the sector. Advocates are faced with constant changes to legislation, policy, and procedures, as well as the growing number of enquiries for advocacy from those who have been impacted by the reforms.

³ Taylor Fry and the Centre for International Economics (2023). *Increased funding to meet demand for disability advocacy services*. Retrieved from <https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/system/files/2023-09/Increased%20funding%20to%20meet%20demand%20for%20disability%20advocacy.pdf>

⁴ National Disability Insurance Scheme (2023). *NDIS Review: working together to deliver the NDIS*. Pg. 57. Retrieved from <https://www.ndisreview.gov.au/resources/reports/working-together-deliver-ndis> pg. 57

⁵ Ibid. pg. 61

⁶ Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (2023). *Enabling autonomy and access*. Pg. 255. Retrieved from <chrome-extension://efaidnbnmnibpcjpcglclefindmkaj/https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/system/files/2023-09/Final%20Report%20-%20Volume%206%2C%20Enabling%20autonomy%20and%20access.pdf> p255

⁷ Ibid. Pg. 255

Social issues like housing and homelessness, financial stress and disadvantage, and domestic and family violence have also contributed to the growing demand for individual and systemic advocacy. QIDAN has noticed a rise in enquiries associated with these social issues and more, but limited organisational capacity often restricts the sector's ability to meet these demands for advocacy. In fact, **over the 2023 - 2024 financial year QIDAN reported an unmet demand rate of 44%**. While disability reform and social issues drive an increased need for disability advocacy throughout Queensland, the funding received by the State government does not allow the sector to meet the growing demand for services. Disability advocacy not only addresses timely issues like the impact of the NDIS reform, the sector also plays an essential role in advancing long-term systemic change like fostering a safer Queensland for all. Disability advocacy promotes and safeguards the rights of people with disability, influences positive attitudes about disability throughout our communities, and challenges discrimination, violence, segregation and exploitation of people with disability on individual and systemic levels. By advocating for inclusion, the disability advocacy sector serves as an early intervention and prevention tool, promoting safer and more inclusive communities. For instance, advocates who intervene early to mitigate an issue with a person's social housing situation can help to prevent that person from experiencing homelessness. Likewise, advocates who support children with disability with child safety or education issues can help to prevent the risk of engagement in the youth justice system.

The role that disability advocacy plays in creating safer communities is demonstrated by the following case study:

Case study – Matthew's reengagement with school

Matthew* is a thirteen-year-old boy with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and psychosocial disability. In primary school, Matthew was provided with the reasonable adjustments that he required, including

one-on-one support from a teacher's aide, and he excelled in all aspects of his schooling.

Once Matthew entered high school, the reasonable adjustments he received significantly reduced, and he no longer received support from a teacher's aide. Consequently, Matthew began disengaging from school. Matthew stopped completing his classwork and assessments and regularly skipped classes by running away from the school to a park across the road. Matthew also had difficulties regulating his emotions and would often become visibly upset when he was disciplined by teachers.

As a response to Matthew absconding from school, the school principal made the decision to call the police. Matthew's parents grew very concerned by the police intervention and felt there was a high risk of Matthew being arrested and entering the youth justice system.

Matthew's parents contacted the specialist youth advocacy service for education advocacy. The advocate met with Matthew, his family, and his psychologist on several occasions, and learned about the types of reasonable adjustments worked for Matthew in the past, and what he hopes for in the future. With this information, the advocate organised a meeting with Matthew's school to talk about his strengths and goals, reasonable adjustments, and alternative approaches to dealing with Matthew's absconding that didn't involve the police. The advocate also obtained a report from Matthew's psychologist which detailed different approaches that can be taken by staff when discipline is required. After meeting with the school's principal, inclusion teacher, and primary teacher, Matthew's high school initiated new reasonable adjustments, including access to a teacher's aide. Matthew's performance at school noticeably improved, and he no longer absconds from his classes.

****Name has been changed for confidentiality purposes***

QIDAN Data Analysis

The data analysed in this submission relates to advocacy services delivered under Queensland State funding. The Queensland Disability Advocacy Program (QDAP) is a key funding stream for each QIDAN member organisation's individual advocacy services.

In the 2023 to 2024 financial year, QIDAN addressed 3,278 advocacy issues (services) for 1,579 individuals with disability. This means that, on average, each individual accessed advocacy to address two separate issues.

An advocacy service happens when a person with disability seeks assistance from an advocate for an advocacy issue. This may involve an advocate supporting a person with disability to navigate an appeals or complaints process, navigate a service system to receive supports, express their views or concerns about something impacting their lives, or address discrimination or unfair treatment. An advocate can also provide tips, suggestions, and information to support a person with disability make informed decisions.

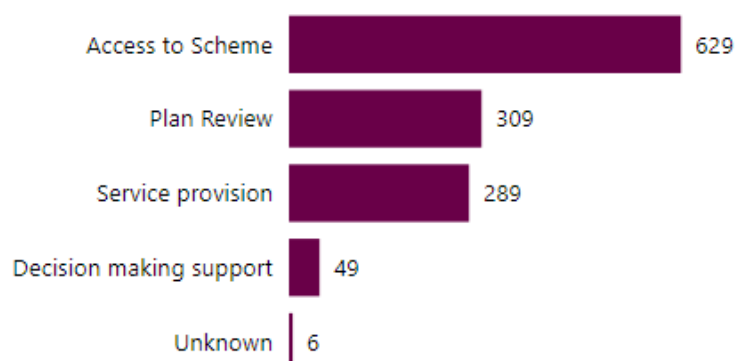
Primary issue types

QIDAN reports that 60.9% of services delivered over the financial year addressed mainstream issues (or a non-NDIS issue), and 38.9% addressed NDIS-related issues. Similar to last financial year, NDIS access was the most common issue type, accounting for 19.2% of services. Housing and tenancy related matters was the second most common issue with 9.7% of services, followed by NDIS Plan Reviews with 9.4%, and NDIS service provision with 8.81%.

53.4% of services were provided to people with NDIS access, and 42.1% were provided to people who do not have NDIS access. The remaining 4.5% of services did not identify if they had NDIS access or not.

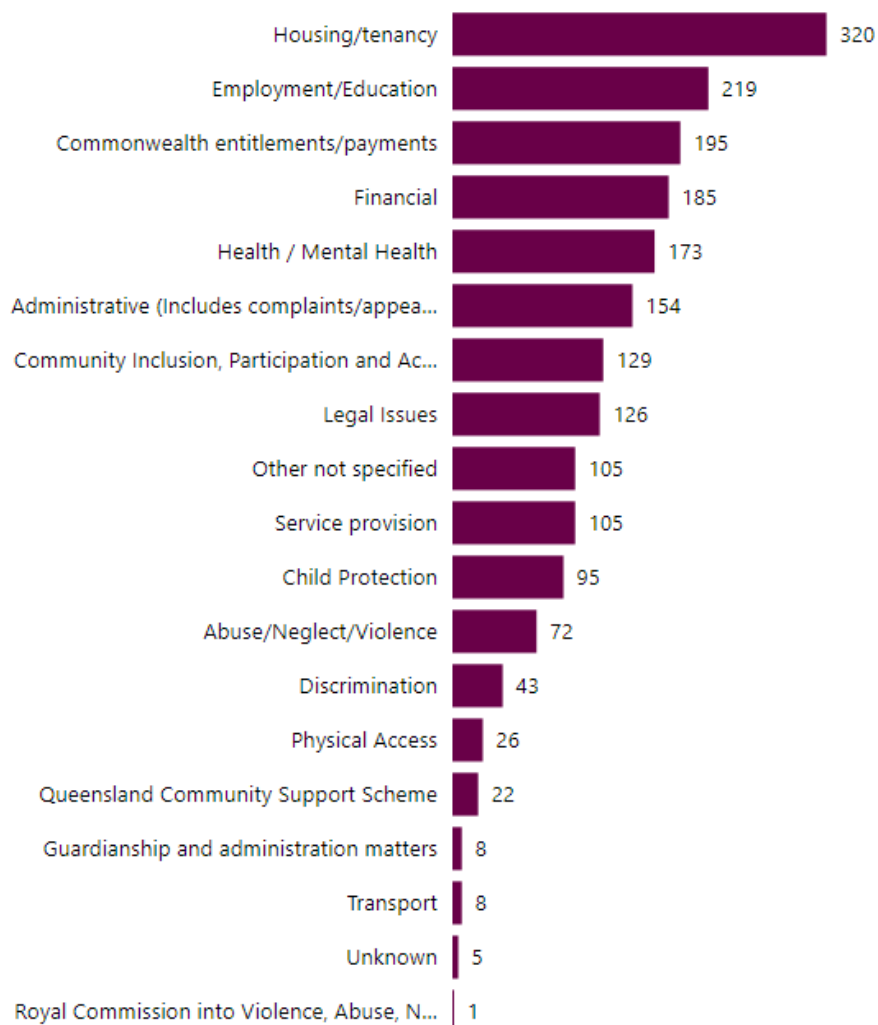
Total Activity

BY TYPE OF ISSUE:NDIS RELATED



Total Activity

BY TYPE OF ISSUE:MAINSTREAM ACCESS RELATED



Time spent

A total of 22,624 hours were recorded for the delivery of advocacy services over the financial year. It is important to note that it appears some organisations have underreported the amount of time spent delivering services, which means the total time recorded is much lower than the actual time spent delivering advocacy services. Using the available data, we calculate that an average of 6.9 hours was spent on each service. A total of 12,610 hours were recorded for mainstream issues, and a total of 9,954 hours were recorded for NDIS related issues. There were some services that did not have an issue type recorded, accounting for the remaining 60 hours.

The most protracted mainstream issues related to child protection (average 12.77 hours per service), abuse/neglect/violence matters (average 7.75 hours) and housing and tenancy (average 7.20 hours).

Of the NDIS-related services, NDIS access matters were the most protracted (average 7.9 hours per service), followed by plan review matters (average 7.5 hours), and NDIS decision-making support matters (average 6.8 hours).

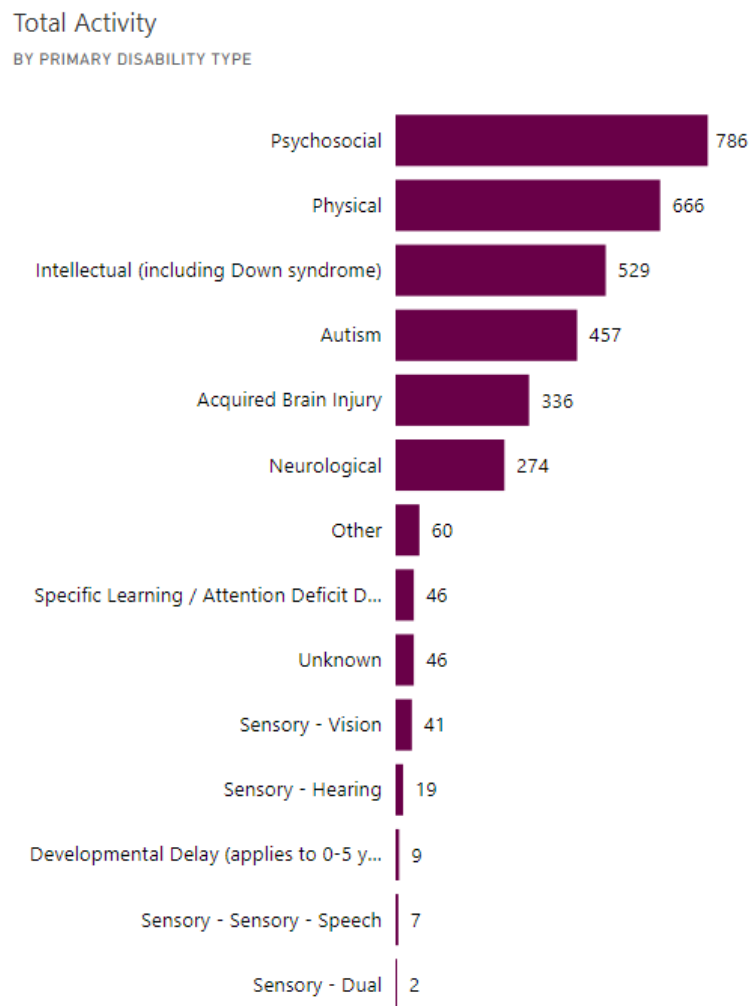
We reiterate that these average times are not an accurate representation of the time each advocacy service takes to deliver. Issues like child protection, housing, NDIS plan reviews, and decision-making support are generally very time-consuming matters, and we believe the average time spent on these matters was significantly higher than what has been recorded. The underreporting of time can occur for many reasons, including the limited capacity experienced by many advocates to perform data input activities.

Primary disability types

The most common primary disability type recorded by QIDAN was psychosocial disability, recorded against 24% of advocacy issues. This was followed by physical disability with 20.3%, and intellectual disability with 16.1%.

Psychosocial disability, physical disability and intellectual disability are also the most common types of primary disability recorded for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

clients and clients who disclosed experiencing, or being at risk of experiencing, domestic and family violence.



Gender identity

Over the financial year, 50% of services were provided to women, and 47.7% were provided to men. Only 12 services were provided to intersex persons, 7 services were provided to non-binary persons and 1 service was provided to a transgender person. QIDAN interprets the lack of advocacy delivered to non-cisgender persons with disability in several ways. Firstly, QIDAN is aware that the individual disability advocacy sector has historically had little engagement with the LGBTQIA+ community. QIDAN has received one-off temporary funding for an LGBTQIA+ pilot project, which will be discussed in detail

later in the submission. Additionally, QIDAN is concerned that LGBTQIA+ people with disability may not feel safe or comfortable disclosing their gender identity to advocacy organisations that they may engage with due to previous bad experiences, including with other disability-related services. The disability advocacy sector must work toward creating a safer space for LGBTQIA+ peoples with disability, which will involve additional funding for ongoing training, outreach, and relationship building.

Age

QIDAN most commonly provides advocacy services to people aged 50 to 64, accounting for 27.6% of services. Of this cohort, 48.6% did not have NDIS access, and the most common problem types were NDIS access, housing and tenancy matters, and plan reviews. For the 0 to 18 age group, the most common mainstream problem types were education, child protection, and health and mental health matters. For those over the age of 65, the most common problem types were NDIS plan reviews, housing and tenancy, and commonwealth entitlement and payment matters.

Intersectionality

People with disability can belong to many different backgrounds, including cultural, ethnic, gender, sexuality, and socio-economic. The intersection between disability and other identities can influence the types of barriers and marginalisation faced by these individuals.

Over the financial year, 15.3% of services were provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with disability. The most common types of problems that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples sought advocacy for were access to NDIS and housing and tenancy matters. The most time-consuming type of service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients was service provision of mainstream services, with an average of 20.88 hours per service, which is 14.58 hours more than mainstream service provision matters provided to non-Indigenous Australian clients.

21.9% of services were provided to people with disability from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, delivered to 180 distinct clients. This means that individuals with disability from CALD backgrounds had an average of 4 different advocacy issues (services) each. The most common types of issues reported for culturally and linguistically diverse clients are housing and tenancy and NDIS access. The most protracted type of issue for clients from CALD backgrounds was housing and tenancy, with an average of 9.42 hours per annum.

QIDAN provided only 60 services to self-identifying LGBTQIA+ people with disability. Currently, the sector is engaging in work around the community of LGBTQIA+ people with disability, including sector education and capacity building, and relationship building with the community. This work is discussed later in the Budget Submission. The most common problem types for LGBTQIA+ people with disability were NDIS access and community inclusion, participation, and access. The most protracted type of service for LGBTQIA+ clients was child protection, with an average of 82.50 hours per service.

At-risk communities

Over the 2023 to 2024 financial year, QIDAN has observed how certain cohorts of clients experienced increased barriers and challenges, including greater risk of social isolation, discrimination and inadequate service provision. QIDAN's previous Budget Submission focused on people requiring decision-making support, people involved in the child protection system and the Queensland Community Support Service (QCSS)⁸, and how the experiences of people with disability in these circumstances and systems can lead to increased risk of harm. Whilst these cohorts continue to experience greater risk harm, there are other cohorts that must be highlighted in this submission.

13.4% of QIDAN's services involved a client who disclosed an experience of, or were at risk of, domestic and family violence (DFV). This number is likely much higher, as 86.6%

⁸ Queensland Independent Disability Advocacy Network (2024). *2022 to 2023 Budget Submission*. Retrieved from <https://disabilitypathways.org.au/qidan-submission-disability-advocacy-funding/>

of services recorded that it was unknown if DFV was occurring. Matters involving DFV took on average 9.7 hours each. The most common issues that people experiencing DFV sought advocacy for were access to the NDIS, child protection matters and housing and tenancy matters. Evidence has consistently shown that people with disability are significantly more likely to experience DFV compared to people without disability and are also more likely to experience barriers to accessing help and support.⁹ Individual advocacy plays a pivotal role in advocating for the rights, inclusion, safety and access of people with disability experiencing DFV.

Another at-risk cohort are individuals with disability who do not have access to the NDIS. Over the 2023 to 2024 financial year, 42.1% of QIDAN's services were provided to people who do not have access to the NDIS. People with disability who do not have access to the NDIS are at risk of having no access to any support or services at all. For those who do not have family or other informal support networks, daily life activities may not be possible. People who do not have NDIS access and who experience financial disadvantage may not have the ability to access treatments they require. People with disability from CALD backgrounds continue to be underrepresented in NDIS access, significantly impacting their access to culturally safe and responsive support¹⁰. Without NDIS access, many people with disability cannot participate in their communities, which can lead to social isolation and loneliness. Currently, Queensland's mainstream system does not always adequately address the needs of people with disability. Furthermore, the state still does not have a Foundational Supports system in place. As such, the cohort of people with disability without NDIS access is significantly disadvantaged. Unsurprisingly, the most common issues type for this cohort is NDIS access, followed by Commonwealth entitlement and payment matters and housing and tenancy issues. The most common disability types

⁹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2024). *Family, domestic and sexual violence – people with disability*. Retrieved from <https://www.aihw.gov.au/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/population-groups/people-with-disability>

¹⁰ National Disability Insurance Scheme. *Cultural and Linguistic Diversity Strategy*. Retrieved from <https://www.ndis.gov.au/about-us/strategies/cultural-and-linguistic-diversity-strategy>

reported in this cohort were physical disability, psychosocial disability, and acquired brain injury.

Pathways Data Analysis

Pathways (established as the 'Hub') is a service that provides information and referrals to people with disability, their families and support networks. Pathways aims to prevent the constant "referral-round-about" often experienced by people seeking disability advocacy. Due to the underfunding of the disability advocacy sector, the sector consistently experiences low-to-limited capacity. As such, Pathways often makes referrals to alternative services, like health services, community services and community legal centres. While these services can provide advice and discrete assistance, they often cannot provide holistic or ongoing support. They also do not replace the specialist knowledge and skills of individual disability advocacy.

Types of referrals

Pathways make simple and facilitated referrals. A simple referral is when Pathways provide a person with information on, and contact information for, an organisation or service suitable to their situation so that the person can contact them independently. A facilitated (or warm) referral is when Pathways connects a person directly with an appropriate organisation or service. This connection is made by completing an intake process on behalf of the person, whether by email, phone, or online portal.

During the financial year, pathways received 987 enquiries. Pathways made 861 simple referrals to a variety of different service types. Most simple referrals were made to QDAP-funded services, community legal services, and community support services.

Pathways made 45 facilitated referrals over this period. Of the facilitated referrals, 29 were accepted and 9 were not accepted. In most cases where the referral was not accepted, services advised this was due to capacity issues. The 45 facilitated referrals

were made to a range of services, including QDAP-funded services (78%), community legal services (16%), and other services (4%).

Of the total number of Pathways services, 8% resulted in 'no referral' which is a decrease from the previous financial year which had 13% of 'no referral'. In situations where no referral is possible, Pathways provide valuable information and resources with the intention of promoting self-advocacy. However, it does not provide the ongoing assistance that individual advocacy can, and it should be noted that many of these enquiries received by Pathways meet advocacy criteria.

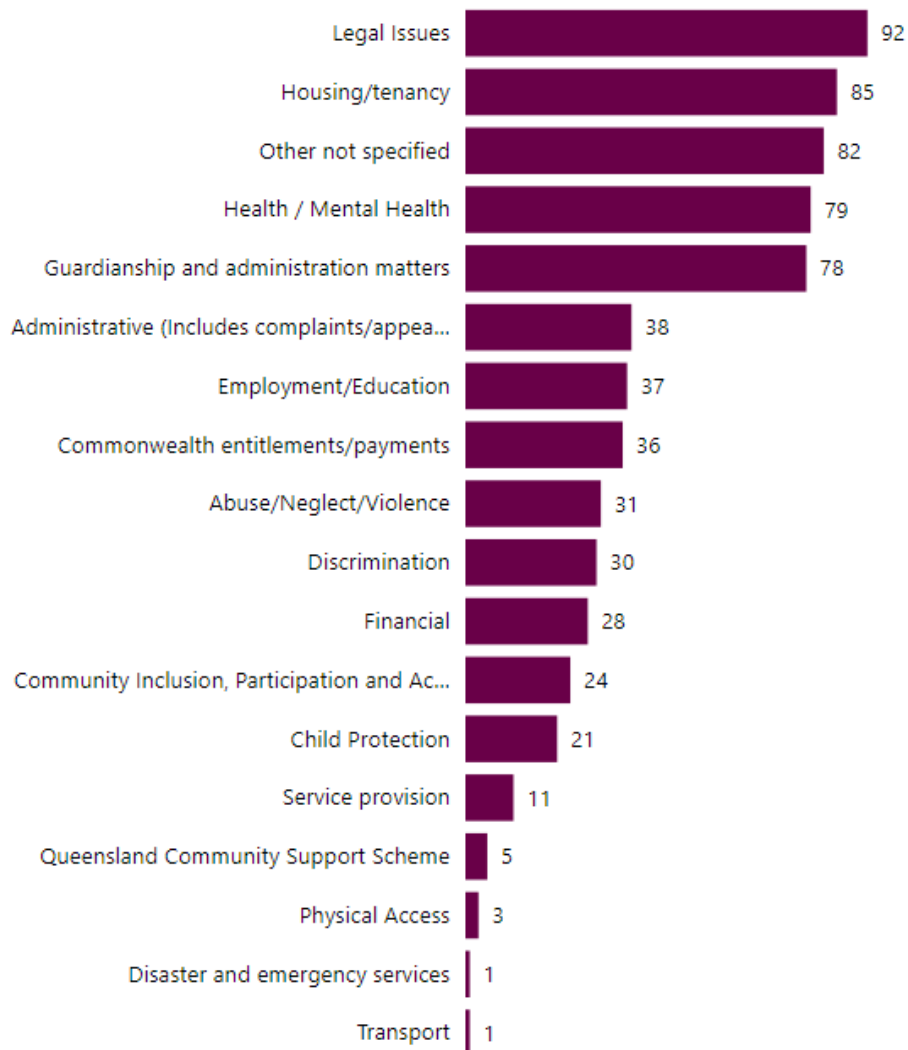
Pathways view times where no referrals can be made due to capacity constraints or lack of services as an indication of unmet demand.

Primary issue types

The most common issues Pathways received enquiries about include NDIS access accounting for 14% of enquiries, NDIS plan review with 11%, legal issues with 9%, and housing and homelessness with 9%. Pathways Information and Referral Officers report that the most common legal issues that people access Pathways about are family law matters, and child protection matters. Some of the common secondary issues that Pathways observe include issues with accessing home modifications, domestic and family violence, carer fatigue, and poor availability of non-NDIS services and supports, like the Queensland Community Support Scheme (QCSS).

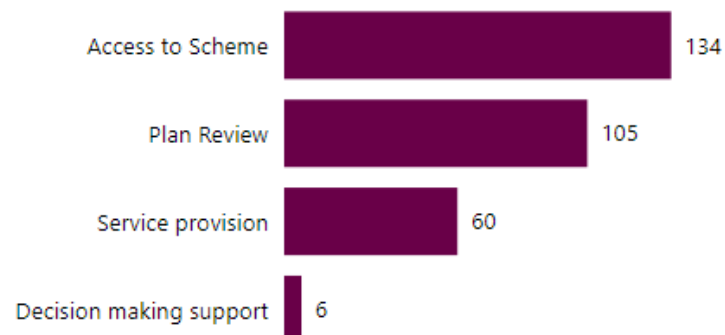
Total Activity

BY TYPE OF ISSUE:MAINSTREAM ACCESS RELATED



Total Activity

BY TYPE OF ISSUE:NDIS RELATED

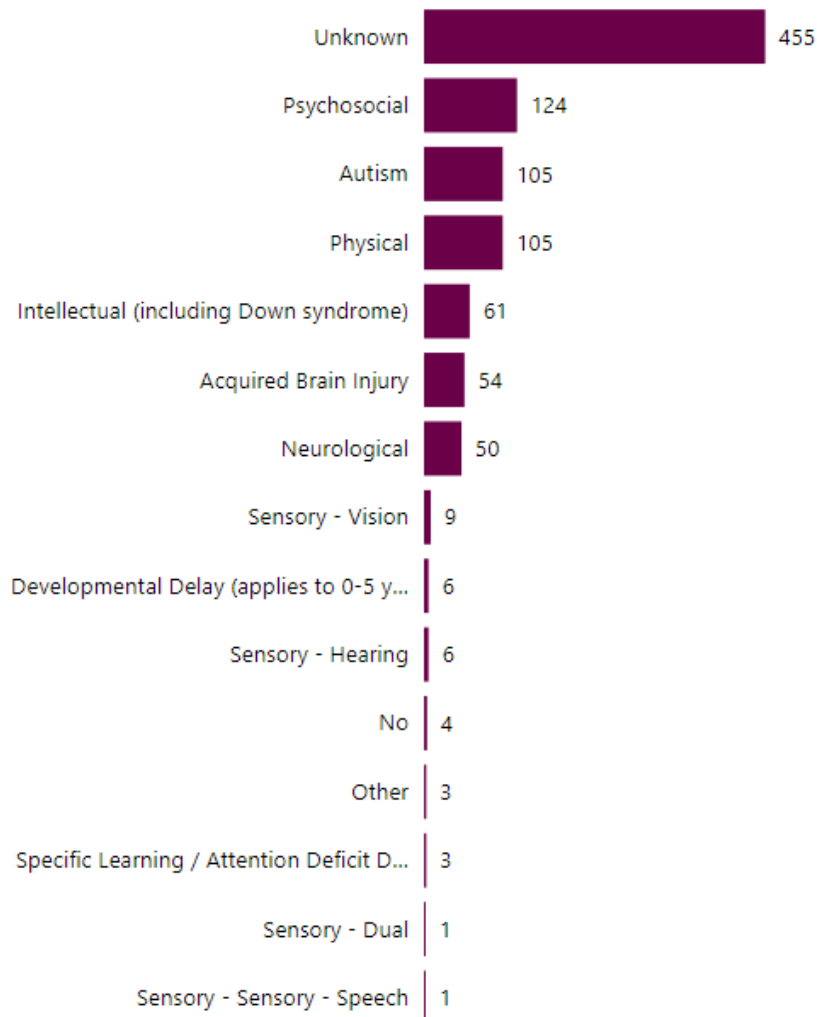


Disability Type

The most common primary disabilities of Pathway’s service-users were psychosocial disability accounting for 13% of enquiries, autism spectrum disorder with 11%, physical disability with 11%, and intellectual disability with 6%.

Similar to the previous financial year, psychosocial disability, autism spectrum disorder, and physical disability were three of the leading disability types where people have identified additional risk indicators, including domestic and family violence, financial disadvantage, and homelessness.

Total Activity
BY PRIMARY DISABILITY TYPE



Intersectionality and key demographic indicators

During the 2023 to 2024 financial year, Pathways reports:

- At least 4% of enquiries involved people who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
- At least 1.2% of enquiries involved people from a culturally and linguistically diverse background
- At least 10% of enquiries involved people who identified a risk of, or an experience of, domestic and family violence
- At least 40% of enquiries involved people experiencing financial disadvantage
- At least 15% of enquiries involved people who identified a risk of, or an experience of, homelessness.

Over the financial year, Pathways Officers noticed a steady rise of enquiries involving violence and disadvantage. During the July to September 2023 quarter, there were 20 enquiries where domestic and family violence was indicated. By the April to June 2024 quarter, that number has more than doubled, with 48 enquiries indicated. Likewise, the indicators for both homelessness (and risk of) and financial disadvantage both more than doubled between the first and last quarters of the financial year. The increase of matters involving DFV and disadvantage illustrate the impact of the cost-of-living crisis and housing crisis on Queenslanders with disability. Whilst Pathways Officers will always strive to connect people in these situations to the most appropriate and helpful services, organisations like mainstream homelessness services and women's shelters often experience their own capacity issues and are not always safe, accommodating or accessible to people with disability.

The scope of Pathways

The role of Pathways Information and Referral Officers extends beyond addressing enquiries. During the financial year, Pathways Officers engaged in community engagement

and fostered strong connections with other services. Pathways engaged with Open Doors Youth Service in response to a support gap with LGBTQIA+ youths which was identified in Pathways data. Pathways also connected with Local Area Coordinators (LACs) like Carers Queensland in response to internal and external confusion surrounding the changing role of LACs. Pathways community engagement also prioritised groups of people known to experience barriers accessing services, and Officers performed outreach in supported accommodation settings.

Pathways Officers also developed online social media resources and self-advocacy resources with the aim of informing the online community about topical issues, processes, important dates, and changes to systems.

Case Study – Hafsa's call with Pathways

Hafsa* is a twenty-three-year-old woman with Ehlers Danlos Syndrome. Hafsa recently escaped an abusive relationship that she was in with her ex-partner who was also her primary carer. She now resides in a share house and has no access to disability-related supports. Hafsa resides in Queensland on a protection visa, and due to her visa status, Hafsa is unable to access the NDIS.

Hafsa contacted Pathways to learn about her options for support with housework and community access, as well as information on domestic family violence services. A Pathways Information and Referral Officer spoke to Hafsa about her situation and obtained her verbal consent to reach out to services on her behalf. The Pathways Officer reached out to Hafsa's local neighbourhood centre, who advised they can link community members with local volunteers who can help people with tasks around the house and who can also provide transport. The Pathways Officer provided the neighbourhood centre with Hafsa's contact details, and they confirmed that they would reach out to her in the next week. The Pathways Officer also located a

domestic family violence service who provide several free programs and who also facilitates a peer network for domestic family violence survivors with disability.

Several weeks after her initial call, Hafsa contacted Pathways and advised that she is now receiving four hours a week of support around the house through the neighbourhood centre and has also engaged in several programs through the domestic family violence service.

****Name has been changed for confidentiality purposes***

Unmet Demand

Unmet demand occurs when a person tries to access disability advocacy but is turned away and is unable to access the service at that time. As mentioned in our previous Budget Submission, there are several reasons why unmet demand occurs, but it is largely caused by the underfunding and the under-resourcing of the sector¹¹. In the 2023 to 2024 financial there were 2,551 times when unmet demand occurred, or a rate of 44%. This is similar to the previous financial year, where there was an unmet demand rate of 47%. The rate of unmet demand slowly grew each quarter in the 2023 to 2024 financial year, with 663 times of unmet demand reported in the first quarter and 730 recorded in the last quarter.

The average time recorded for each occurrence of unmet demand was 2.5 hours. This indicates that, even when an advocacy organisation is unable to provide advocacy to a person seeking advocacy support, the intake team or advocates are still spending an average of 2.5 hours speaking with a person, providing information, and offering referrals – possibly facilitated. This also indicates that the persons who are unsuccessful in accessing advocacy, whether that be for a lack of organisational capacity or another reason, likely

¹¹ Queensland Independent Disability Advocacy Network (2024). *2022 to 2023 Budget Submission*. Retrieved from <https://disabilitypathways.org.au/qidan-submission-disability-advocacy-funding/>

require assistance and support in obtaining information and understanding processes. In other words, they are likely to meet the eligibility criteria for advocacy.

Pathways data also demonstrates unmet demand. The majority of referrals were made to non-QDAP-funded services, and only 34% of referrals were made to QDAP-funded organisations. Though almost all enquiries received by Pathways meet the eligibility criteria for disability advocacy, Pathways Information and Referral Officers report that the sector's lack of capacity means that referrals to alternative services (non-QDAP services) are necessary to ensure that people seeking help receive some form of assistance.

Unmet demand demographic information

The most common types of primary disability reported in unmet demand were psychosocial disability which accounted for 21.5%, physical disability with 21.4%, and autism spectrum disorder with 15%.

8% of unmet demand enquiries were from people from CALD backgrounds, and 5.2% were from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Only 22 unmet demand services were recorded for LGBTQIA+ persons, and autism was the primary disability recorded for over half of those enquiries (54.5%).

5.6% of unmet demand matters involved a person experiencing DFV, and these matter took on average took 2.9 hours to address. Certain disability types in this cohort took significantly longer to resolve. For example, unmet demand matters involving a person experiencing DFV who has an acquired brain injury took on average 12.8 hours to address each. This is comparatively much higher than the average time taken for other unmet demand matters, suggesting that certain matters and personal circumstances are complex enough to warrant access to advocacy.

Unmet demand issue types

The most common type of issue recorded for unmet demand are NDIS access to scheme accounting for 14.1%, legal issues with 10.6%, and NDIS plan review with 8.4%.

The most protracted issue type in the unmet demand matters was child protection, taking on average 4.6 hours for each enquiry. QIDAN interprets this data to mean that some issues can be far more complex than others, and the time an intake worker or advocate takes to speak to a person about these issues demonstrates these people require significant support in understanding their rights and options.

The cost of meeting demand

As of July 2023, the Queensland disability advocacy sector received a total of **\$3,358,897.00** total for the 2023 to 2024 financial year. An additional \$1,100,000.00 of temporary uplift funding for a fourteen-month period was received by the sector in January 2024, so we can estimate that just under half of that funding (\$500,000) was used in the financial year. This means that the sector received a total of **\$3,858,897.00** for the 2023 to 2024 financial year.

We can estimate the funding required to meet the 2023 to 2024 financial year unmet demand by using the funding figures and QIDAN's unmet data in the following formula:

1. **Average cost per hour**

- a. the total funding for Queensland in the 2023 to 2024 financial year was \$3,858,897, and the total number of service hours was 22,624
- b. Average costs per hour = $\$3,858,897 \div 22624 = \170.56 per hour

2. **Average hours per service**

- a. the total number of services delivered was 3,278, and the total number of service hours was 22,624
- b. average hours per service = $22,624 \div 3,278 = 6.9$ hours per service

3. **Formula to estimate funding = (number of unmet services) x (average hours per service) x (average cost per hour)**

Using this formula, we have determined that the **minimum** funding amount to cover the 2023 to 2024 financial year unmet demand alone is **\$3,002,180.00**. This amount would be in addition to the \$3,858,897 received in the 2023 to 2024 financial year. With that said, there are several other costs required in addition to the costs to deliver direct advocacy services that must be considered, which include:

- The cost of recruiting additional staff to meet increased demand for advocacy
- Overhead costs and operational costs associated with increased workforce and workloads, including training and wellbeing costs
- Travel costs associated with delivering in-person advocacy
- Loading attributed to travel for in-person advocacy in remote and very remote areas (NDIS Pricing Arrangements stipulate a loading of 40% to 50%)¹²

Unmet Need

In addition to unmet demand, there is also the issue of unmet need. Unmet need refers to the cohort of people who would benefit from advocacy but do not, or cannot, access advocacy. There are many barriers to advocacy, such as a person not knowing what advocacy is, or not having the means to contact an advocacy service. Some people may also be in a situation where it is not safe to reach out to advocacy services. QIDAN and the Disability Royal Commission have identified specific groups of people that are more likely to be affected by unmet need, including:

- People with disability living in rural and remote locations
- LGBTQIA+ people with disability, particularly transgender persons and those who live in locations or situations where it is not safe to disclose their identity
- People with disability living in segregated and closed accommodation, like group homes and boarding houses
- People with intellectual disability

¹² National Disability Insurance Scheme (2024). *Pricing arrangements and price limits 2024-25*. Pg. 30. Retrieved from <https://www.ndis.gov.au/providers/pricing-arrangements>

- People with disability from CALD backgrounds, particularly non-English speakers
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with disability, particularly those living in rural and remote locations
- Adults and children with disability who are involved in the justice system
- Children with disability who are involved in the child safety system, particularly those in residential care settings
- People who do not have NDIS access, particularly those who do not meet the NDIS eligibility criteria
- People with disability experiencing domestic family violence.

Understanding the extent of unmet need in Queensland is a difficult task, so in November 2024, QIDAN conducted an Unmet Need Survey to begin assessing the unmet need of people engaged in community and disability-related services. The survey was sent to all Community Legal Centres and Peak Bodies in Queensland, and 13 organisations responded at the time of writing this submission. The organisations who have responded to the survey reported that 60% of their services are provided to people with disability. On average, these organisations report that each month they observe that approximately 700 of their service-users likely would require disability advocacy, particularly for supported-decision making, support to understand their rights, self-advocacy skills, and meeting basic needs. Other common problem types include guardianship, NDIS navigation, education, housing, Centrelink, and justice system issues.

Another way QIDAN tries to measure unmet need is through outreach to places where unmet need is known to occur, however, most advocacy organisations do not have the funding nor workforce capacity to engage in ongoing and meaningful outreach. To begin addressing this, the sector received temporary one-off funding in the 2024 to 2025 financial year for a Remote Locations Pilot and an LGBTQIA+ Pilot. Select advocacy organisations have received this funding to engage with rural and remote communities and the LGBTQIA+ community respectively – communities that have historically experienced

unmet need. The pilots are currently in process, and some of the ways in which the involved organisations are implementing the pilots include:

- Travelling to rural and remote communities to raise awareness of individual advocacy and assess community needs
- Facilitating workshops to build community member's self-advocacy capacity
- Consulting LGBTQIA+ people with disability and hearing about what makes services unsafe and how to make them safer.

The feedback obtained in the Remote Locations Pilot so far shows how people with disability living in rural and remote locations have limited to no access to disability-related services. Often, when support and services are available, there are very few options of service providers, which limits a person's choice and control. Service providers have reported that 100% of their clients with disability would prefer in-person services and note that online services and support are often not appropriate due to limited internet access in rural and remote areas and low rates of online literacy. 86% of service providers state that the barriers impacting their clients are exacerbated due to their locations. Individuals with disability have also provided feedback, advising that the most common issues advocacy could help with include navigating supports and services, support making informed decisions, and ensuring that their fundamental needs are met. Other issues identified include experiences of stress and mental health issues and social isolation, which are likely exacerbated by their location.

In the LGBTQIA+ Pilot, we have so far heard how LGBTQIA+ people with disability can feel unsafe openly identifying their gender identity and sexuality to health and disability-related services, and we have heard reports of service providers deliberately misgendering transgender people with disability and denying care to people due to them being LGBTQIA+. We have heard that LGBTQIA+ with disability often are made to feel like they can only identify as either queer or as disabled, as services do not recognise or accommodate intersectionality. This can leave people feeling as though they are missing part of their identity and are not seen as a whole person. We have also heard that the

LGBTQIA+ community generally has little understanding of what disability advocacy is and how it is accessed.

So far, the Remote Locations Pilot and the LGBTQIA+ Pilot have not only highlighted the need for targeted advocacy within these communities, but those involved in the pilots have also initiated and strengthened relationships within these communities. As previously mentioned, funding for these pilots is limited to the 2024 to 2025 financial year, and there is a significant risk that the work commenced by these pilots will not be able to continue once funding has ceased.

It is essential to maintain the pilot funding on a permanent basis in order to meet the needs of people with disability living in regional, rural and remote locations. The disability advocacy sector struggles to provide services to those living in remote and rural locations under the current funding provisions. Considering that Queensland has the most decentralised population in all of Australia, with 51% of the population living outside of capital cities¹³, there is a large number of people with disability who are unable to access advocacy when they need it.

Funding for the LGBTQIA+ Pilot must also be maintained to meet the advocacy needs of LGBTQIA+ people with disability. As previously discussed, intersectionality can exacerbate the issues faced by people with disability, and LGBTQIA+ people with disability can experience unique forms of discrimination, inaccessibility, and other challenges.

Maintaining the funding for this Pilot provides the opportunity for the Queensland disability advocacy sector to explore a specialist LGBTQIA+ disability advocacy service, which would otherwise not be possible.

In addition to the Remote Locations Pilot and the LGBTQIA+ Pilot, another portion of the temporary uplift funding received by the sector in 2024 has been used by Queensland Advocacy for Inclusion to create a Community Engagement Officer role under the

¹³ Queensland Government (2023). *Queensland's regions*. Retrieved from <https://www.statedevelopment.qld.gov.au/regions/queenslands-regions#:~:text=It's%20the%20most%20populous%20state,with%2068%25%20in%20other%20states.>

Pathways service. The Community Engagement Officer role began in the 2024 to 2025 financial year, but it is important to note in this submission that the role involves engaging in outreach to communities like rural and remote communities, closed settings like group homes, and many other places. The outreach and community engagement performed by this role will support the mapping of unmet need, however, it is only funded on a short-term basis which limits its potential.

The cost of meeting unmet need

As QIDAN has yet to determine a method to assess the full scope of unmet need in the sector, it is not possible to determine the full cost of meeting unmet need. However, we can use the cursory feedback received from the QIDAN Unmet Need Survey to begin understanding the situation. It is important to emphasise that we have only received 13 responses so far, and we anticipate 36 additional responses from the remaining Community Legal Centres and Peak Bodies that are yet to respond. The 13 respondents report that approximately 700 service users required individual disability advocacy *per month*. We can use this figure to estimate the funding required to provide advocacy to these 700 people alone with the following formula:

1. Average cost per hour

- a. the total funding for Queensland in the 2023 to 2024 financial year was \$3,858,897, and the total number of service hours was 22,624
- b. Average costs per hour = $\$3,858,897 \div 22624 = \170.56 per hour

2. Average hours per service

- a. the total number of services delivered was 3,278, and the total number of service hours was 22,624
- b. average hours per service = $22,624 \div 3,278 = 6.9$ hours per service

3. Formula to estimate funding = (the number of people experiencing unmet need x 12 months) x (average hours per service) x (average cost per hour)

Using this formula, we can estimate that the cost to support the 700 individuals per month who need disability advocacy is **\$9,885,657.60**. Using the rate of 700 individuals per month requiring advocacy, we can assume that there would be an additional 2,100 individuals requiring advocacy for the remaining organisations that have yet to respond to the Unmet Need Survey. Under this assumption, the additional funding to meet this demand would be **\$29,656,972.80**.

Case Study – Community Engagement with Simone and Paul

At a community expo in remote Queensland, the Pathways Community Engagement Officer connected with the grandparents of two First Nations children with disability. Simone* and Paul*, the grandparents, explained that they were the primary caregivers of their two grandchildren who both had an advocacy issue. The eldest child was facing a suspension at school due to not having the right reasonable adjustments in place at school, while the youngest requires support to access the NDIS.

The Community Engagement Officer provided tailored simple referrals, connecting Simone and Paul with the specialist disability advocacy program for young people for the school issue and their Local Area Coordinator for NDIS access. Contact details for these organisations were written down for the Simone and Paul, and a follow up email was sent which included Pathways contact details for any further referrals.

****Name has been changed for confidentiality purposes***

Sector Sustainability

The sustainability of the disability advocacy sector requires our organisations to have strong connections with our communities, work environments that promote the wellbeing of our staff, and operational sustainability. To ensure our sector can achieve these factors, we require adequate State funding and resourcing.

Community connections

Connecting with our communities allows advocates to build relationships, promote community safety and accessibility, provide education, build self-advocacy skills, and understand the type of systemic issues community members with disability are faced with. As we explored in the unmet needs section of this submission, QIDAN is utilising temporary additional funding to expand our connections to community through activities like outreach and community engagement. However, these activities are difficult to sustain, as they often involve many costs, including travel costs (with the cost loading for travel to remote and very remote communities), vehicle costs, accommodation costs, staffing costs, and overhead costs. We further emphasise that outreach and community engagement is more difficult for organisations who provide services in rural and remote communities, as the cost to reach these locations often far exceed the funding provisions of the regional and State-wide organisations.

Other ways the disability advocacy sector can engage with communities include by:

- Maintaining a presence in community, and building strong relationships with key community stakeholders
- Developing and facilitating community engagement programs
- Developing self-advocacy training and resources
- Providing advocacy for issues that typically sit outside the traditional advocacy role, like NDIS access
- Developing or sustaining alternative forms of advocacy, like Citizens Advocacy

For the advocacy sector to continue connecting with our communities and reaching individuals with disability, we require adequate long-term funding. Though the uplift funding received by the sector for the 2024 to 2025 financial year period is very helpful in the short term, it does not allow advocacy organisations to connect communities in long-term meaningful ways.

Staff outcomes

Maintaining positive staff outcomes is a constant challenge for the disability advocacy sector. Outcomes including staff wellbeing, staff retention and job satisfaction continue to be a focus of the sector, but without adequate funding these outcomes are difficult to sustain. In 2024, the National Centre for Disability Advocacy (NCDA) undertook the Advocacy Workforce Survey with individual advocacy employees and advocacy organisations across the Nation, and 23 individual responses were received from Queensland staff and organisations. Queensland advocacy staff reported that the leading forms of work-related stress in advocacy sector were vicarious trauma, dealing with unmet demand, and not having enough capacity to keep up with workloads. Furthermore, 30% of respondents stated that their mental health is impacted by their work on a monthly basis, and 21% reported that their mental health is impacted weekly. Wellbeing safeguarding practices, like access to counselling, external supervision, and time-off are large expenses that the sector does not always have the capacity to meet under the current State funded arrangements.

Staff retention and job satisfaction are closely interlinked with the promotion of staff wellbeing, but unfortunately the underfunding of the sector often makes this difficult. Over the financial year, several staff members have left the Queensland disability advocacy sector. Individuals responding to the NCDA survey provided feedback on whether they would leave the sector in the next 12 months, with some responding that they “cannot keep doing this role, if the disability sector remains the way it is”, that they may leave the sector due to “burnout” and exhaustion, and that they fear they will lose their jobs when the current uplift funding ends. The survey also asked for general feedback on employment in the advocacy sector, and Queensland staff advised they experience “high levels of stress” due to workloads, and concerns that experienced staff members will begin to leave the sector.

Additionally, QIDAN has experienced increasing challenges attracting new staff members when positions become available. Three Queensland advocacy organisations who completed the NCDA organisational survey. Of these three, 100% indicated that they experienced difficulty recruiting new staff over the financial year, for reasons including the challenge of finding qualified candidates, particularly for short-term and temporary roles. The temporary uplift funding from the State government has forced advocacy organisations to hire people for six-to-twelve-month contracts, which is not only unattractive to many applicants, but also creates stress for new staff and organizations alike. These challenges are exacerbated by the costs related to hiring new staff, such as costs of onboarding and staff training.

Operational sustainability

Advocacy organisations in Queensland struggle to keep up with operational costs under the current State funding provisions. Costs such as overheads and rent cause constant stress throughout the sector, particularly for the smaller, regional organisations. Similarly, the sector is burdened by mounting staff-related costs such as salary increases, increased superannuation contributions, and training.

Another important operational cost is the cost of delivering services. As previously mentioned, most advocacy organisations prefer to provide advocacy services in-person. In-person advocacy is critical for many people with disability, and can contribute to the development of strong worker-client relationships. Face-to-face advocacy can also be essential for people with communication differences, including those with limited or no English language proficiency are who require the assistance of interpreters. In-person advocacy is especially important within communities that value personal relationships, such as certain culturally and linguistically diverse communities. However, in-person advocacy involves many costs, such as staff costs, travel costs, and the costs associated with working with interpreters.

One of the most important factors of operational sustainability is organisational capacity to deliver advocacy services and meet advocacy demand. As we have explored, the sector is constantly experiencing capacity issues. During the 2023 to 2024 financial year, QIDAN member organisations reported that they had no capacity to take on new clients 25% of the time and had limited capacity for new clients 48% of the time. Limited capacity typically refers to when an organisation has reduced capacity to provide advocacy services and are unable to provide advocacy to the extent necessary to meet the needs of clients. To manage limited capacity, some advocacy organisations utilise wait lists to keep track of new referrals and enquiries, and at some points over the 2023 to 2024 financial year certain waitlists great to 13 weeks. Often having limited capacity also requires organisation to use a stricter triaging process where on people in crisis situations are prioritised. Though advocacy services are not intended to be crisis-oriented, many organisations do not have the funding nor workforce capacity to address less urgent matters. This situation is problematic because a crisis could be avoided by addressing issues before they snowball into larger and more complex problems. Unfortunately, as we have addressed, early intervention is rarely possible due to capacity issues.

Future of advocacy and funding discussion

Current funding

For the disability advocacy sector to remain sustainable and effectively promote community safety throughout Queensland, we urgently need the Queensland Government to commit to a permanent increase in funding. According to the 2021 QDAP funding guideline, and with the addition of the temporary increase to statewide funding received in January 2024, the sector's funding for the 2023 to 2024 financial year was only **\$3,858,897**. Using the following formula, we can determine how many services that this funding allows us to provide in a year (we note that indexation has been applied since the State funding was released):

Number of services = \$3,858,897 (total funding) ÷ 6.9 (average hours per service) ÷ \$170.56 (average cost per hour)

With this formula, we have determined that we are funded to provide 3,279 advocacy services per year with the current funding, which includes the temporary uplift. This is only **56.25%** of all the enquiries that we received over the 2023 to 2024 financial year.

Furthermore, using current census data on disability, we have determined that the current State funding only allows us to provide advocacy services to only **0.3%** of the population of people with disability in Queensland¹⁴.

The future of funding

In July 2024, the Queensland State Government announced in its budget that the disability advocacy sector would receive an additional \$5,000,000 in funding temporarily for the 2024 to 2025 period. The purpose of this funding was stated to “expand individual and systemic disability advocacy”¹⁵. Though this funding has been welcomed by the sector, its temporary and one-off nature has caused several challenges for disability advocacy organisations. For the sector to utilise the funding to expand disability advocacy services, much of it would need to be used to increase the workforce. Hiring new staff for a less than twelve-month period has been tremendously difficult for all organisations, particularly in rural and remote areas. What is more, funding was not received by the sector until September 2024, which again reduced the time to utilise the funding and hire staff. Many of the short-term roles that have been filled will likely not continue after the funding ends in July 2025, meaning that several dozens of advocacy staff will lose their

¹⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2022). *Disability, ageing and carers, Australia: Summary of findings*. Retrieved from <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/disability/disability-ageing-and-carers-australia-summary-findings/latest-release>

¹⁵ Queensland Government (2024). *Miles doing what matters: disability reform top agenda and roundtable*. Retrieved from <https://statements.qld.gov.au/statements/100838#:~:text=%245%20million%20in%202024%E2%80%9325,people%20with%20disability%20in%20Queensland>

jobs. Additionally, a large portion of the funding has gone toward meeting the emergency needs of the sector, like operational costs, rather than toward individual and systemic advocacy. For this type of funding increase to be utilised by the sector in a meaningful way, it must be ongoing. With this in mind, we have two funding asks:

Ask 1: Do not cut our \$5 million uplift funding received late 2024. Sustain this funding on a permanent and ongoing basis, raising the sector's funding to \$11 million per annum from 2025 onward

Ask 2: Provide an additional \$9 million in funding per annum on an ongoing basis to allow the sector to begin meeting the unmet need in Queensland, raising the total funding to \$20 million per annum.

As demonstrated throughout this submission, the sector cannot meet the demand or need for disability advocacy in Queensland, nor can it sustain the jobs of advocacy staff, under the current State funding. We hope that with our state funding proposal we will be able to achieve outcomes such as:

- Address unmet demand and begin to address the unmet need for advocacy
- Sustain healthy operational functions of our organisations across Queensland
- Save the jobs of several dozen advocacy staff in Queensland
- Continue our remote location pilot project on a permanent basis, ensuring that Queenslanders with disability in rural and remote communities have access to advocacy and receive outreach and advocacy engagement on a consistent basis
- Develop a LGBTQIA+ specialist advocacy service to ensure that LGBTQIA+ peoples with disability receive advocacy that addresses their intersectional needs
- Promote community safety by improving systems, like the domestic family violence system and youth justice system, on an individual and systemic level

- Participate in systemic advocacy surrounding the ongoing disability reforms, with a particular focus on Foundational Supports, the role of navigators, and the implementation of the Disability Royal Commission recommendations
- Promote inclusion and accessibility throughout Queensland, and continue to influence positive community attitudes toward disability, particularly leading up to the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

By providing the disability advocacy sector with **\$20,000,000** in annual State funding, the Queensland Government can support our sector to make Queensland safer for people with disability.