



**ADACAS**  
A D V O C A C Y  
CELEBRATING 30 YEARS



**ADACAS**

Annual Report  
2020-2021



## Acknowledgment of Country


We acknowledge the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land on which ADACAS works: the Ngunnawal, Yuin and Dharawal peoples of Canberra and NSW South Coast regions.

We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging, and to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across our communities.

## Acknowledgement of Community Diversity

We acknowledge the diversity of our community.

We acknowledge LGBTIQ+ people's right to self-expression and self-determination. We celebrate the rich diversity of peoples bodies, genders, sexualities and relationships. We recognise the contribution people from culturally, ethnically and linguistically diverse backgrounds have and continue to make to our society. We value and strongly support the inclusion and participation of people with lived experience of disability and mental ill-health, and Carers in every part of community life. We offer our respect to older persons and recognise the life experience and wisdom they provide.



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## ABOUT ADACAS

The A.C.T Disability, Aged and Carer Advocacy Service (ADACAS) is an independent, non-for-profit human rights organisation supporting people living with a disability, people with mental ill-health, older people, and informal carers. ADACAS provides free advocacy information and support as well as specialised services in the ACT and across areas of South Coast, NSW.

Our dedicated staff offer a range of services and resources that enable a person seeking additional assistance to be heard, supported in their decisions, and have their human rights upheld. We stand beside people where the systems of our society are unjust and/or have undue impacts - supporting their needs, wishes and human rights. Our focus is on advancing social justice and building a community that is more inclusive and responsive to diversity.





## ● Purpose:

To assert, promote and protect the rights of people with disability, people experiencing mental ill-health, people who are older and people who are informal carers.

## ● Vision:

A community in which everyone may exercise their rights and responsibilities, lead lives of value and dignity, and pursue their dreams.

## ● Objectives:

- **Service Quality** - Respond to the changing needs of our clients through excellence in advocacy and service delivery.
- **Human Rights** - Advance human rights and social justice for population groups in the areas we serve.
- **Diversity and Inclusion** - Contribute to building a community more inclusive and responsive to diversity.

## ● Culture Charter:

- **Integrity** - We are transparent, authentic and ethical in our work and guided by human rights principles.
- **Pursue Excellence** - We are continuously learning and working in collaborative and innovative ways to effect positive change and meaningful outcomes.
- **Reflective in our Practice** - We are working to build trust, increase self-awareness, and improve our practices through respectful and constructive dialogue.
- **Social Justice** - We advocate for equitable access and fair and just outcomes via individual and systemic advocacy.





## CHAIRPERSON'S MESSAGE

ADACAS celebrated its 30th birthday this year; created through the commitment of governments and community working together to make advocacy services available. From day one, our mission was to promote and protect the rights of people with disability, people who are ageing and people who care for them. Individual advocacy remains our focus – ensuring the voices of people are heard and their human rights upheld.

The Board has changed, but constantly comprises of committed individuals. In May and June 2021 our two longest-serving Board directors, Kym Duggan and Stephen Still, retired. The year was again dominated by COVID-19 which meant many virtual Board meetings.

In November 2020, our CEO Michael Bleasdale left Canberra to be closer to his family in Sydney. On behalf of the Board, I would like to acknowledge the contribution of Michael Bleasdale, and former senior staff, Deshawn Wattanatassi and Katie Bulenda.

In December 2020, we welcomed Wendy Prowse as our CEO. Wendy has led positive and significant change and developed strong stakeholder relationships with a focus on our strategic priorities. The Board recognises the challenges that COVID has taken on our staff over the last year and congratulates them for their flexibility, resilience and commitment to supporting our clients through this most difficult of times.

Looking ahead, the challenges for our clients, our staff and for the sector remain significant. ADACAS has a 30-year legacy of supporting people whose voices are too often not heard or heeded in the decisions that affect their lives. It is with this in mind that ADACAS will continue to advocate for the rights of our clients, and as an organisation move forward safely and with a clear sense of purpose.

**Helen McDevitt**



## CEO'S MESSAGE

I begin by acknowledging the outgoing CEO, Michael Bleasdale, who led with determination for two years, and a heartfelt thanks to the staff for the warm welcome that I received when I joined ADACAS in December 2020. I quickly witnessed the great passion and skill of the staff, and the impact they achieve with our diverse community of clients.

It cannot escape mention that 2020 and 2021 have been years like no others in recent history. The global pandemic has created additional barriers and challenges. The work of ADACAS does not take a break, so both staff and clients have had to innovate and adapt. I want to acknowledge the significant achievements of our staff in continuing to provide professional services and programs, during challenging times.

In January we celebrated ADACAS's 30th birthday at the ACT Legislative Assembly. This milestone represents thirty years of active advocacy in our communities, over which time ADACAS has stood beside approximately 18,000 people needing our support - responding to their issues and giving them a voice.

We have continued to provide a suite of in-demand advocacy, disability and carer support services across communities. It is the diversity and inclusion which has struck me most about the work we do, and it was further complemented by the launch of our Reconciliation Action Plan in June 2021. This work is just one of our commitments to promoting respect, equity and dignity for all.

I am delighted to share with you this review of our work over the 2020/2021 financial year.

**Wendy Prowse**



## OUR COMMUNITY

ADACAS promotes and protects the rights of people with disability, people experiencing mental ill-health, older people, and informal carers. This is achieved through individual advocacy, systemic advocacy and NDIS support coordination. We support people who are made vulnerable and marginalised due to the barriers they face in society – standing beside our clients to ensure their voices are heard and needs are met. We provide supports to enable individuals to have active participation in the decisions that impact their life. Our efforts contribute to improving equitable access and quality of services, and enable human rights to be respected. As part of achieving this, we acknowledge that every person is an individual with their own life story.

**People we support:** ADACAS embraces diversity and inclusion. We celebrate differences and the unique strengths of individuals. We seek outcomes that respond to intersectional needs and amplify the voices of our clients. We acknowledge the strength and challenges that many of our clients from Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, LGBTQIA+, and culturally and linguistically diverse communities experience. We take a trauma informed and restorative practice approach when working with our clients:

- People with a disability
- People experiencing mental ill-health
- Older people
- Informal carers

COVID-19 has necessitated a significant change in the way we have supported clients. Staff have worked with governments and other organisation to fight for the best outcomes for our clients, especially with regard to COVID-19 protections, access to family and support workers, and access to vaccinations.



**Where we operate:** ADACAS has a head office in Canberra and provides free and independent information, support and advocacy to clients across the Canberra region and South Coast NSW. ADACAS has a number of specialty services that are specific to regions in which we operate. The jurisdiction where we can support people is determined by the funding body.



## SNAPSHOT OF OUR IMPACT 2020/2021

### Reach and Outcomes:

Demand for services increased by **27%** on previous year

**30** clients supported to make submissions to the Disability Royal Commission.

Over **1266** clients supported

**90** NDIS support coordination clients supported

More than **2241** issues addressed (advocacy, enquiries, education)

**4%** of clients were First Nations People

**500** people with disability and/or mental ill-health supported

**10%** of clients were from a CALD background

**577** older people supported

**25** people supported to submit an application to the National Redress Scheme.

**600+** hours of support for appeals to the NDIS

“My advocate was absolutely wonderful with her assistance and advice. She made a stressful situation for us so much easier. Thank you ADACAS for being there.”

– Client Experience.



## SNAPSHOT OF OUR IMPACT 2020/2021

### Client Experience:

**90%** of clients surveyed stated that ADACAS acted professionally, productively, and their views, decisions and needs were respected

**90%** of clients surveyed would use ADACAS again or recommend us to others

“Very grateful for the result from my NDIS plan that has helped me move forward for the next two years. Now I can start to really live my life.”

- Client Experience.

“Keep on doing the fabulous work that you do. The community would be lesser without you.”

- Client Experience.



## MAJOR EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES 2020/2021

### 30 years of advocacy and impact!

On 29 January 2021 we celebrated our 30th Birthday with an event at the ACT Legislative Assembly. This celebration was attended by long standing community partners, government officials and keynote speaker, Minister Emma Davidson MLA. The event celebrated the importance of advocacy with recognition from the Australian Government and ACT Government (who initially established ADACAS to meet a community need and promote human rights). Since it was founded ADACAS has dealt with more than 18,000 advocacy issues.



### Reconciliation Action Plan

On 3 June 2021, ADACAS launched its first Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) in dedication of our commitment to reconciliation and support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across the communities in which we serve. A launch event was held at the Yarramundi Cultural Centre with Auntie Jannette Philips conducting a Welcome to Country. Special attendees and speakers included Ian Hamm, Chair of the Healing Foundations Stolen Generation Reference Group, Maurice Walker, a member of the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body, and key members of the Aboriginal community in Canberra. It was a great opportunity to listen to Elders and leaders of the Aboriginal community, and to share our journey towards reconciliation.



The RAP process included engagement with Aboriginal community-controlled entities in the ACT such as: Clybucca Dreaming; Yurbay, Gugan Gulwan; and Our Booris Our Way. Follow-up meetings, referral and outreach activities have included collaboration with the United Ngunnawal Elders Council and First Peoples Disability Network (FPDN). Annual planning was initiated to begin working collaboratively in the ACT/South Coast Regions. Special thanks to our cultural mentors, Julie Moore and Deborah Eades for sharing their wisdom and culture, and supporting us on our journey. We could not have achieved the authenticity and accountability without them.

*We acknowledge Kelvin Carriage who was commissioned for the artwork for our RAP titled 'ADACAS Dreaming'. This painting represents the connection and roads travelled between Canberra and the South Coast. Further information about this work and our RAP can be found on our website.*



## Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety

ADACAS has been actively participating in the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, seeking to ensure that the voices and experiences of older people were heard, and calls for change acted upon. ADACAS supported individuals to share their stories and lodge submissions to the Royal Commission. ADACAS also lodged systemic submissions highlighting concerns about topics such as access to and quality of care, human rights, and health/ mental health. In addition, ADACAS lodged a submission on Capacity, Guardianship and Supported Decision Making in partnership with the Older Person's Advocacy Network (OPAN) the National peak body for older person's advocacy (ADACAS is the ACT representative of OPAN).

ADACAS welcomed the final report and the suite of reforms recommended, and continues to advocate in relation to implementation of the reforms and findings.





## YEAR IN REVIEW:

### Intake, Mental Health and Disability in the ACT

The Intake, Mental Health and Disability Team continued to see growth as Intake Officers and Advocates resumed fortnightly outreach sessions at the Adult Mental Health Unit, with an expansion into the facility for short stay patients. Common advocacy requests centered around Psychiatric Treatment Orders, the NDIS, Disability Support Pension, child protection and housing support. The year also included considered efforts to increase our presence in hospitals, to inform clinical professionals of the value of advocacy and the role Advocates can play. We established key collaborative relationships with additional allied health professionals and emergency departments.

#### Major achievements:

- 500 people with disability were provided with advocacy.
- High success rate with internal reviews for NDIS clients e.g. access granted, home and vehicle modifications or more funding for supports in individual plans.
- 90% of clients stated they experienced dramatic positive change from their support.
- Trauma informed support for clients at psychiatric treatment orders hearings, case conferences and with external services e.g. Housing ACT and the NDIS.
- Fortnightly presence at the public Mental Health Wards of Canberra – offering information, referrals, and individual advocacy support.

***“ADACAS is seen as the organisation of last resort for many people with disability who are at risk or experiencing homelessness and require information and advocacy support...everyone needs to have a sense of safety, security and to live with dignity,”***  
– ADACAS Advocate

#### Case Study: Housing security in the time of COVID-19 (One Family's Story)

The global pandemic has created additional challenges for people with disability. As well as the obvious barriers created by health restrictions and social isolation, there have been flow-on effects from economic downturn and a scarcity of resources. In 2020/2021 there has been a slump in the availability of affordable housing and rental properties– alongside high demand for public housing. Problems with ‘rent bidding’ (people offering above market rate to secure homes) and unemployment have further exacerbated the issue. This situation can put individuals and families at risk of homelessness, and greatly impacts security and wellbeing.

Many of the individuals who approach ADACAS for support have complex needs and are on either low-income, unemployed, or receiving Centrelink benefits to get by. Many also fall into a gap of being unable to compete with the high-priced market yet being assessed as being beyond the threshold that enables access to public housing prioritisation.

One such family, with two children living with a disability, was living in a private rental property and faced with eviction -when their landlord chose to sell. They struggled to find a rental property and were facing homelessness, with no family networks or other options to lean on.

ADACAS worked with the family to negotiate more time with their landlord and connected them with One Link, Legal Aid and CHC Affordable Housing, to cover all bases and expediate their claim. They have been fortunate to be able to secure an affordable rental property which has provided them with a greater sense of security for the future.

## Disability Advocacy, South Coast NSW

The demand for individual advocacy support for people living with disability across the South Coast region, continues to grow. The team addresses issues such as education, housing, advocating for people with disability to gain access to the Disability Support Pension, and advocating on clients' behalf with the NDIS – from Nowra to Shoalhaven, down to Dalmeny.

ADACAS staff work with local individuals, services, and broader communities to deliver advocacy services and address gaps in support. Many clients living in regional or rural communities need to travel to larger metropolitan areas to access services and resources, which has been particularly problematic during the pandemic. In 2020/2021 much of our work was moved online due to COVID-19, and despite the general preference for face-to-face support, feedback about service continuity and quality has been highly positive.

The team has also been responding to issues in the aftermath of the recent bushfires such as hardships caused by additional service and resource limitations, emotional and financial distress, and a scarcity of affordable housing.

### Major achievements:

- 69 issues for South Coast based clients addressed.
- 950 hours of advocacy support.
- Increased engagement with the local Aboriginal community over the last year.

***ADACAS embeds its advocacy efforts within local communities to identify and understand needs, strengths, resources, and opportunities. Localised knowledge and broader networks are harnessed to support each individual client where they live.***

### Case Study: Supporting young people for positive life outcomes (Amber's Story)

The process of finding a diagnosis and accessing subsequent supports for a child or young person with a disability or complex needs, can be overwhelming for parents and carers. Often the complexity of the systems can result in delays in securing the right mix of services, resources and therapies that could be positively life-altering. ADACAS Advocates seek to help in streamlining this process, and assist families to undertake the steps to gaining support, such as access to the NDIS.

Amber is a fifteen-year-old client experiencing anxiety, and challenges with language and communication. Her parents initially approached ADACAS as their request for support from the NDIS had previously been declined. They needed help to advocate for their daughter's needs.

For several years, Amber's school had been providing individual learning plans to try and address her unique requirements, but without formal diagnosis, clinical guidance and wrap-around supports, there had been few educational or behavioural improvements. Working with the school's counsellor, Amber's determined mother identified a suspected intellectual disability.

An ADACAS Advocate worked with Amber, her family, the school and Amber's General Practitioner to provide the evidence of a formal diagnosis, making her eligible to access the NDIS. The process was a success and they have been able to gain ongoing supports through the NDIS plan. This has shifted the trajectory of Amber's education and social participation, and she is now experiencing positive improvements across many areas of her life.

*\*Name changed for privacy*

## YEAR IN REVIEW

### Disability Advocacy in Justice & NDIS Appeals

In 2020/2021 ADACAS supported a record number of people with a disability and their carers at the Administrative Appeals Tribunal regarding appeals on decisions by the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA). The team assists people with: understanding the process; making an application; access to Legal Aid; and attendance at case conferences and hearings – through to the final stage of the process. This process is based on trauma informed practice that supports wellbeing and embraces lived experience, while amplifying a client's voice through a challenging process.

In the past year, the team have had successful outcomes regarding family child protection matters. There has been growing demand for advocacy from families who have been engaged with the ACT Child and Youth Protection Services (CYPS).

ADACAS also works with people with disability and/or mental ill-health, who are living in very difficult circumstances such as those in closed institutions e.g. individuals serving custodial sentences or

people in mental health wards. This includes First Nations people who may experience additional barriers and vulnerabilities. We advocate for clients to access safe accommodation, psychological care, high quality support from service providers, and wrap-around supports.

#### Major achievements:

- A record number of 39 clients supported with NDIS Appeals – 600+ hours of support.
- Access gained to closed institutions to support clients experiencing intersectional disadvantage.
- Fortnightly presence in public mental health wards.
- Advocacy and awareness – increased outreach and networking with external providers.

***ADACAS walks beside individuals and families without judgement, during a vulnerable time – assisting them to understand their rights and options.***





### Case Study: Accessing life changing support for a First Nations client (Daniel's Story)

Daniel\* is a First Nations person with a psychosocial disability and intergenerational trauma. He had a limited support network and, like many, was not aware of all his rights and the support options available. Daniel's lawyer contacted ADACAS to assist with liaison with the NDIA. There was concern about Daniel's likelihood of reoffence, given his housing situation, and his lack of wrap-around supports. Questions about whether he had ever received adequate treatment and care for his conditions were also raised

ADACAS will often liaise with an individual client, and with the client's permission, also work with carers and legal representatives, to ensure their voice is being heard. An ADACAS Advocate met with Daniel in a correctional facility to assess his situation and explain the options available. With permission, the Advocate liaised with the justice system and NDIA, and facilitated a meeting with a senior planner from the NDIA.

The outcome was astounding. Daniel had previously never received any support or therapy for his psychosocial disability. He had been living with limited capacity to support daily needs and wellbeing. The NDIS has now enabled him to secure funding for housing with 24/7 support upon pending release from detainment. This case highlights the often-unseen gap in support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with complex needs. With adequate supports and advocacy efforts, the transformational recovery process can be life changing.

*\*Name changed for privacy*





## YEAR IN REVIEW

### Disability Royal Commission – ACT and South Coast NSW

ADACAS has continued to work with vulnerable clients and their informal Carers to liaise with the Disability Royal Commission (DRC). The DRC was established in 2019 as a response to community concern about widespread reports of violence, neglect, abuse and exploitation of people living with disability. Experiences include those that have happened both recently and in the past. ADACAS supports people in the ACT and NSW South Coast to make a submission to the DRC. Additional funding has enabled further supports for First Nations clients, including the provision of a specialised Aboriginal staff member who collaborates with the broader network. External partnerships allow representation of a diverse profile of clients, including those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

In 2020/2021 the DRC Team conducted outreach information sessions with community and service providers. This included work with Your Story - a dedicated legal advisory service, and external agency Relationships Australia, who provide free counselling. The year was complicated by a necessary shift to more online and phone-based consultations due to the pandemic, yet staff continued to provide clients with channels for their participation, and to facilitate the freedom of choice in how and when individuals make a submission. ADACAS has continued to be with existing and new clients every step of the way.

#### Major achievements:

- Support for 30 clients to make submissions to the Disability Royal Commission.
- Working with DRC to enable 10 clients to have private sessions with a Commissioner in Canberra.
- Working in collaboration with Your Story Legal Support, Relationships Australia (Canberra), First Peoples Disability Network to cover all legal, counselling and equity needs in an accessible and inclusive way.

***A trauma informed Partnership Approach model assists clients to write, record or paint submissions in line with their unique needs, strengths, abilities and cultural requirements.***



**Case Study: Complex advocacy – supporting multiple issues through personalised support (Kip's Story)**

The process of making a submission to the Disability Royal Commission can of itself be confronting for people who have experienced trauma or injustice. Additional challenges, such as cultural differences, language barriers, resource issues, and the burden of restrictions posed by the current pandemic, have further complicated the process for many who wish to participate in a submission. ADACAS is on hand to offer support.

Kip\* was one of the first clients to approach ADACAS wishing to engage with the Disability Royal Commission. He had a specific vision for how he wanted to participate and some limitations in resources that would mean he could not access video sessions in order to participate.

Two ADACAS Advocates supported Kip through a lengthy process that also included a concurrent complaint to the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission. Both his submission and complaint were finalised in May 2021. ADACAS has not only supported Kip but also maintained contact between the two commission entities. Kip has expressed his satisfaction at finally being able to tell his story, his own way, and now awaits the outcome.

ADACAS provides issue-based advocacy through often complex and challenging work, such as when working with people who have intersectional disadvantage. Our Advocates are professional and committed in their unwavering support from introduction to outcomes.

*\*Name changed for privacy*



## YEAR IN REVIEW

### Older Persons Support and Advocacy

The ADACAS Older Person's Team has worked tirelessly in 2020/2021 with increased demand and additional challenges brought by the pandemic. Lockdowns and restrictions to home visitors has disproportionately impacted older people and their ability to have access to loved ones, care and supports. Elderly clients have often felt isolated, living at home without adequate supports, or in care facilities without regular contact. ADACAS has continued to inform residents on the Aged Care Charter of Rights, and promoted human rights and dignity of risk, whilst acknowledging adherence to public health directives. The team assisted our peers in Victoria to respond to COVID-19 and collaborated nation-wide, as part of the Older Persons Advocacy Network (OPAN), to support residents in aged care facilities to receive information and advocacy during the pandemic.

Other priorities included: continued support of older people in accessing the Commonwealth Home Support Program; advocacy for people experiencing older persons abuse (e.g. physical, emotional, verbal or financial abuse); and advocacy and support around a high frequency of matters involving Enduring Power of Attorney. ADACAS Advocates have also represented a number of clients at an ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal (ACAT) session held within the hospital system.

#### Major achievements:

- 520 older people were provided with advocacy, addressing more than 570 individual issues.
- Assisted 187 Victorian Older people over a 2-month period during COVID-19 crisis.
- Continuity of welfare checks and outreach with socially isolated clients during lockdown/social distancing.
- Launched Aged Care Service Navigator Trial with strong results (detailed on next page).

#### **Case Study: Advocating for safe, supported and dignified living for the elderly (Bill's Story)**

Elderly clients often require advocacy to voice their living preferences, and ensure they are supported to remain independent, with autonomy over their decision making, when it is practicable. Not only does this assist with dignified ageing, but it enables older people to remain active participants in community life for longer – with benefits for individuals and their networks.

ADACAS received a referral for an elderly gentleman in hospital named Bill\*. Bill's medical care team were concerned about his living arrangements upon discharge. They were worried about his ability to care for himself and to remember to take important medications. They were strongly suggesting that Bill be put into a residential aged care facility. Bill however was determined to return to the home he was familiar and comfortable with, and to remain in touch with the community where he had felt safe and connected for the past 30 years.

The ADACAS Advocates listened to Bill's wishes and advocated on his behalf, actioning pathways for home-based care. A plan was put into place for Bill to spend some recovery time in a respite facility after which he was transitioned back into his own home with CHSP supports and a 4 MAC Package. His daily routine including medications were built into a schedule, and he was linked up with supportive family, friends and neighbours who would further complement his clinical care and formal supports. Bill was very happy with this outcome, and is continuing to enjoy life in his own home.

*\*Name changed for privacy.*



## Aged Care Service Navigator (ACSN) Trial

The Navigator Program sits within the Older Persons Team and was established by the Federal Government to help people navigate the complexity of the current aged care system and support them to gain access to the services they need. The ADACAS Navigator provides free, independent and confidential services to older people, families and informal carers. They are supported to: understand the types of subsidised aged care services available and how to access them; be informed of their rights and responsibilities; and register for My Aged Care services. The program commenced at ADACAS during the first Canberra COVID-19 lockdown period and was extended in October 2020.

In 2020/2021 the team harnessed their relationship and networking skills to establish connections with a variety of consortium allies and community partner organisations that could progress the trial and help individuals in the community to better understand and navigate the My Aged Care system.

The trial has been community-led and co-designed with older people, through public outreach activities, information sessions, seminar presentations and face-to-face consultation meetings in a variety of locations. It has demonstrated the need for people to have the supports and information provided to them in meaningful ways, in order to reduce the risk of being marginalised and not seeking supports. This empowers older people to stay well and live dignified lives.

### Major achievements:

- Strong first-year take-up and reach with over 1200 people gaining access to information through outreach activities across community groups, shopping centres and organisations.
- 330 people received individual support.
- 95% of participants surveyed stated that the information made them feel more confident in accessing help.
- 98% of participants surveyed would recommend Navigator to a friend or family member.
- 98% of participants surveyed found information provided useful to their situation.

***"I found the ADACAS navigator to be very empathetic and kind. He provided extensive support and followed through with providing extra information. I found myself feeling much more confident about My Aged Care services and reassured I have somewhere to get help."***  
- Client Experience





## YEAR IN REVIEW

### National Redress Scheme

The National Redress Scheme is part of the Australian Government's response to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. ADACAS continues to promote our free and independent support to people wishing to access the Redress Scheme in the ACT and across the South Coast of NSW. Clients are supported through a trauma informed and restorative practice approach. This includes support to: gain free legal advice; complete official documentation; access suitable counselling support; and access the Direct Personal Response (DPR) component of the scheme.

ADACAS tailors its Redress support to clients with additional needs including: people with a disability; LGBTQIA+ clients; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients; and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse clients. ADACAS also continues to work with the Government and service providers to offer informed input and feedback into the scheme, to ensure clients have access to the healing and supports they need.

#### Major achievements:

- 25 clients supported and applications for 13 new clients submitted.
- 9 clients received redress outcomes - financial payments consistent with national average.
- Participation in Redress Round Table with DSS and service providers - March 2021.
- Submission to the Redress Scheme - 2-Year Review -September 2020.

***ADACAS provides services in line with the recognised Australian Gold Standard for redress supports***

#### **Case Study: Facilitating individual healing through the Redress scheme (John's Story)**

John\* came to ADACAS via a referral from the adult mental health service in Canberra. He had experienced abuse in a school setting and was seeking support. Initially, like many clients, John was unaware of what the scheme could offer. ADACAS was able to provide this information and inform John of the options available, and to guide him through the process when he was ready. He subsequently worked with ADACAS to submit a redress application - a process he found emotionally challenging. An ADACAS Advocate supported John to liaise with the scheme, receive the outcome, understand the offer, and complete the acceptance documentation.

After the outcome, the Advocate liaised with Victim Services ACT to initiate suitable counselling to assist John on his path towards healing. The Advocate also worked with the institution to obtain a Direct Personal Response (DPR) that John would be satisfied with. This is a part of the process that is often highly emotive and important to victims of abuse. It can come in many forms such as a letter, a plaque, face-to-face mediation, or ceremony. The individual DPR process allows clients to feel heard, understood and acknowledged for the wrong and hardships they have faced. It can provide an element of closure needed for the recovery process. John received his DPR in the form of a letter, which addressed specific questions and concerns that he had around his experience with the school at the time his abuse occurred.

John has conveyed that while his abuse will always remain with him, the DPR and counselling process are assisting his mental health and recovery. Overall, John feels that ADACAS assisted him to feel empowered, acknowledged and to receive the compensation he was eligible for.

*\*Name changed for privacy.*

## NDIS Support Coordination

The Support Coordination team support over 90 people and have the hearts of Advocates and the unique skills and networks to build client capacity in accordance with their NDIS plan. This includes understanding client needs, looking for solutions, and liaising with the NDIS/NDIA to meet specific needs and ensure high quality support.

The team have a diverse group of clients that they engage with regularly, supporting them to access the necessities of a good life and to achieve their goals, in alignment with their NDIS plan.

In 2020/2021 some of the unique client outcomes have included:

- A younger client living in a residential aged care facility successfully transitioned to home sharing with a similar-age peer, with 24-hour supported independent living.
- Two people with disability celebrated their first Christmas living in the community, after moving into their new home early in 2020, following a long stint living in an aged care facility and hospital.
- A client living with Huntington's Disease transitioned from poor-quality government housing into brand-new Specialist Disability Accommodation. A notable transformation has been made in her increased quality of life, decision making and social participation.
- A client with low mobility and high support needs, and her son with a disability, were assisted to travel to Sydney to attend a musical production. The client was grateful for making the logistics seamless and they had a wonderful time.
- A client with intellectual disability and mental ill-health has been supported to move from hospital to a SIL property with a good-home environment of staff and housemates. The support coordination team were tenacious in getting the mental health and capacity building supports added into the client's plan, with positive outcomes.

### Case Study: Responding to the challenges of living with an invisible disability (Jessie's Story)

Jessie\* is a young person living with a significant intellectual disability (ID) and childhood trauma. Previously she was underdiagnosed, as no current assessments had been undertaken. Jessie has learned to 'cover up' her disability and does not always present with having an ID. This has led to many difficult situations, including inability to successfully complete studies at CIT, maintain a tenancy in a rental and hold down a job.

Since Support Coordination came on board, with disclosure to her employer, she has managed to stay in her current retail position for well over a year. Additional funding from the NDIS enabled a series of assessments to be completed, which helped identify Jessie's support needs. With approval from the NDIS, Jessie has been able to move forward with a *Change of Circumstance* funding request.

Her Support Coordinator created a team of engaged stakeholders to support Jessie in her everyday life, including obtaining support through a SIL (Supported Independent Living) and ongoing one-on-one individualised support to ensure a successful completion of her CIT course.

*\*Name changed for privacy*

## YEAR IN REVIEW

### Systemic Advocacy

Systemic advocacy seeks to influence broader policy, practice and service outcomes to improve the lives of people with disability, people experiencing mental ill-health, older persons, and informal carers. ADACAS systemic advocacy works together with clients and others to advocate for system reform. In 2021 we welcomed the Government's response to the Aged Care Royal Commission, including its commitment to: the rights of older people; supported decision making; and strong recognition of advocacy in supporting older people to engage with, and benefit from, aged care services in a way that responds to their wishes and needs.

ADACAS has been focused on systemic advocacy efforts across a range of issues encountered by our clients, including (but not limited to):

- NDIS Legislative Reform and proposed Independent Assessments;
- National Disability Strategy Review;
- Older Persons Mental Health;
- Child Protection Reform (as it impacts parents with disability/ parents with mental ill-health and/or children with disability/ mental ill-health);
- Housing and homelessness (in relation to the disproportionate impacts for people with disability);
- ACT Disability Health Strategy;
- Aged Care Royal Commission and Government Response;
- Disability Royal Commission;
- ACT Carers Recognition Strategy;
- Improved supports and pathways for women (and other people) with disability, and older people, experiencing family or domestic violence and the prevention of this violence;

- COVID-19 response planning; and
- Income support adequacy.

ADACAS lodged submissions in relation to many of the above topics (our submissions are available on the ADACAS website). Submissions are just one mechanism to highlight areas of social policy that require change and acknowledge the voices of lived experience that are often missed. ADACAS also participates in consultations related to human rights, such as protection of rights review, external merits review of child protection, and operations of the Disability Royal Commission.

ADACAS was also able to amplify a human rights message to broader audiences, including by the:

- CEO and Systemic Advocacy Team Leader presenting to the Joint Standing Committee on NDIS' public hearing into Independent Assessment -20 May 2021; and
- CEO presenting on the outcomes of the Aged Care Royal Commission as part of OPAN webinar series - 16 March 2021.

ADACAS also advocated directly with Ministers and governments, and via participation in committees and networks, including: the ACT Disability and Carers Policy Group; ACT Legal Assistance Forum (Child Protection); and Elder Abuse Network.

During 2020/2021, we welcomed outcomes of joint advocacy including reforms arising from the Aged Care Royal Commission which saw the proposed NDIS Independent assessments process stopped. The universal housing design principles embedded in the National Construction Code was also achieved through joint advocacy.

## SUPPORTED DECISION MAKING

**ADACAS has continued to undertake a wide variety of projects focused on educating professional services on the model of Supported Decision Making and assisting individuals to make decisions using the My Decision toolkit. This work has been highly regarded by all the organisations and individuals involved.**

**Supported Decision Making Project:** In 2020/2021 ADACAS was funded to provide Decision Making Support training to people working in healthcare settings and those in school communities in the ACT. A total of 46 training sessions were delivered to 161 people. This project educates on supported decision making, which provides scaffolding between those in leadership or frontline care roles and those with a physical, mental or psychosocial disability, for improved outcomes. Research demonstrates that when a person is empowered to make their own decisions, there are better outcomes for both the individual and care provider involved.

**Supported Decision Making in the Aged Care Sector Forum:** Over the last five years, ADACAS has organised a Supported Decision Making event with a different theme. The theme in 2020 was Supported Decision Making in the Age Care Sector *"Enabling Consumer Dignity and Choice."* Panel members included: Helen Connolly, Deputy Public Trustee and Guardian, and Senior Director of Guardianship Unit with ACT Government; Patricia Mackey, Deputy Public Advocate with the ACT Human Rights Commission; Professor Diane Gibson, Distinguished Professor of Health and Ageing at the University of Canberra; Mandy Donley, Senior Practitioner ACT; Dr Kasia Bail, Associate Professor of Nursing at the University of Canberra; Nicholas Brown, Acting Chief Executive Officer of

the Aged Care Guild; and Elizabeth Samra, Older Persons ACT Legal Service at Legal Aid ACT. Issues addressed under a lens of lived experience included: capacity; dignity of risk; lifestyle preferences and choices; financial agency; retribution; and respect.

**Supporting People with No Informal Supports to Access the NDIS:** ADACAS is funded to deliver a Decision Support Pilot over four years and this has provided ADACAS with the opportunity to make a significant difference in the lives of people with disability who have no supports in the community, and limited or no capacity to apply to the NDIS. The NDIS was built off a framework of choice and control, and this program delivers on this objective. In 2020/2021, ADACAS assisted nine people to apply to the NDIS and/or realise their NDIS plan. The application process can take a significantly long time if the person does not have an active network of supports. Many of the clients in this program are at a point of crisis at the time of their referral to ADACAS. Building rapport and trust is a critical element of success, and this has been particularly challenging due to COVID restrictions, but positive progress was made.

**Growing Decision Makers:** In May 2021, ADACAS was engaged to undertake a project to support young people with disability to build their capacity around decision making, working with their family and informal supports, with the aim of reducing substitute decision making, such as guardianship, in the future. ADACAS has reached out to the Woden School and has been working with seven students, and will continue developing the program with students and families in the coming financial year.



## ADACAS TRAINING, EDUCATION AND ENGAGEMENT

**Disability Justice Training:** As part of implementing the ACT Government's Disability Justice Strategy, ADACAS has worked with Advocacy for Inclusion, to develop and pilot a training session for people working across the justice sector. People with disability are over-represented in the justice system. The objective of the training is to raise awareness and visibility of people with disability, and to inform staff about the reasonable adjustments and personal mindsets needed to ensure people with a disability have access to the supports they need, and that their rights are being upheld. Further training sessions will be delivered by ADACAS into the next financial year.

**Better Practice for Inclusive Futures:** ADACAS delivered 12 sessions of disability awareness training to over 100 workers, focused on embracing inclusion and better practice. These training sessions were delivered to workers who provide counselling and direct support to clients with disability. In 2020/2021 this included delivery to over 20 counsellors. The training included follow-up with participants about real life practice and experience, providing the opportunity for ongoing support and troubleshooting that improves the systemic response to clients with disability support needs.

**National Community Connectors Program:**

ADACAS was engaged by National Ethnic Disability Advocacy (NEDA) to provide assistance for people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds to apply to the NDIS. In 2020/2021, 11 people were assisted to apply for access to the NDIS. Education and information sessions were also provided to 177 workers in the community who provide direct services to people from CALD backgrounds. In addition to this, three information sessions were held across ACT Westfield Shopping Centres engaging approx. 130 members of the public.



## OUR LEADERSHIP AND PEOPLE

### ADACAS Board of Directors 2020/2021

**Helen McDevitt**, Chairperson  
**Andrew Cameron**, Treasurer

**Alana Fraser**, Board Member  
**Andrew Mathieson**, Board Member  
**Chris Potter**, Board Member  
**Gregory Mahony**, Board Member  
**Margot Harker**, Board Member  
**Kym Duggan**, Board Member  
(outgoing, May 2021)  
**Stephen Still**, Board Member  
(outgoing, June 2021)

#### Changes to our Board and Corporate Structure

This year two of our longest serving Board Directors retired. Kym Duggan had served on the Board for a total of 13 years, and Stephen Still for 11 years, and both had served multiple terms as Board Chair. Both

Kym and Stephen brought terrific expertise in human rights and discrimination law, and a deep commitment to advocacy and social justice.

The Board also acknowledges the ongoing dedication and support of individual volunteers who are members of our sub-committees. Lillian Lam who is a member of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee, Jessica White who is a member of the Governance Committee, and Kym Duggan as the Board representative on the Reconciliation Action Working Group.

In 2020/2021, the Board finalised its application to become a company limited by guarantee and drafted a new constitution and policies to support this. This is an important foundation for our future, including our refreshed strategic plan.



*ADACAS 30th Birthday Celebration: (L-R) Chris Potter, Gregory Mahony, Helen McDevitt, Minister Emma Davidson, Kym Duggan and Andrew Cameron*

## Leadership Team

**Wendy Prowse**, CEO

**Carolyn Murphy**, Business Manager

**Darren Carr**, Service Delivery & Quality Manager

## Our Staff

Our professional and highly skilled staff work tirelessly in supporting our clients and the community. ADACAS has 26 staff working directly with clients or providing a critical service to support our operations.

2020/2021 represented a particularly challenging year in which demand for services was high, and our staff had to adapt to constantly changing environments and circumstances. We thank our staff for their professionalism, commitment, ingenuity and hard work in supporting the human rights of people in the Canberra region and South Coast NSW.

ADACAS acknowledges the contribution that outgoing staff have made to the organisation and a special thanks to those in leadership positions, Michael Bleasdale (former CEO), Deshawn Wattanatassi (former Business Manager), Katie Bulenda (former Operations Manager), and Daniel Loh (former Finance Officer).





## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ADACAS would also like to acknowledge our supporters and collaborators:

- **The Commonwealth and ACT governments** who have supported us for thirty years.
- The **Older Persons Advocacy Network (OPAN)** – our membership has contributed to a strong national voice for older people, and an efficient channelling of resources to national projects and to the local level to allow ADACAS to provide advocacy for older people.
- The **Disability Advocacy Network Australia (DANA)** – our membership enables us to reflect our clients' voice to national advocacy and the ongoing fight for improved rights and services for people with disability.
- **Proximity** law firm, who have been generous in their expert pro bono work with the Board on a new corporate structure and constitution.
- **Justice Connect**, who provide valuable guidance and assistance with our constitutional changes.
- **Vincents** who have provided an efficient and professional service through their auditing services over the year and providing support and assistance to our team.
- **OPC IT** who have been instrumental in supporting us to have a continuity of service for our clients and prompt assistance with staff IT support.
- **IVO** for their assistance with our CRM.

A special thank you is reserved for our cultural mentors Julie Moore and Deborah Eades who guided us with their wisdom and knowledge as we developed and started to implement our first Reconciliation Action Plan. Julie stepped away from the RAP working group in June due to her work commitments however has remain a regular support. We are pleased to welcome Dulcie Ritchie who will join the working group in the new financial year. We also thank Aunty Janette for her warm and heartfelt Welcome to Country at 30th birthday celebration and launch of our Reconciliation Action Plan.

To our many community partners, the ongoing collaboration and camaraderie we share is instrumental to achieve significant positive change. A special thanks to:

- **ACTCOSS**
- **Advocacy for Inclusion**
- **Carers ACT**
- **COTA ACT**
- **Gugan Gulwan**
- **Mental Health Community Coalition**
- **National Disability Service**
- **Women with Disability ACT**

We also acknowledge the sad passing of Sue Salhouse who remains an inspiration to so many people across the ACT for her leadership and tireless effort to address the inequalities for people with disability.

*Thank you to all the organisations and individuals who have worked with us across the last year. We look forward to what we can achieve together over the coming years.*



## KEY FINANCIALS

### Financial Sustainability

ADACAS has achieved a surplus of \$444,551 in 2020/2021 compared to \$27,120 in 2019/2020. This is a positive result given the ongoing challenging environment for staff and clients during this time. The COVID-19 financial stimulus packages provided by both the ACT Government and Federal Government has been a welcome support to the organisation and has assisted in our ability to adapt quickly.

Financial sustainability is also being supported through our NDIS Support Coordination service, which saw an income of \$214,736 compared to the previous year of \$159,310.

The main increase in revenue has come from Government grants with an overall increase of \$660,916 to the previous year.

We continue to demonstrate financial security through a disciplined focus and commitment in our stewardship, and responsibility in managing our resources and risks to ensure the organisation's long-term sustainability. Our cash reserve has been increased from \$793,120 in 2019/ 2020 to \$1,163,222 in 2020/2021. This adequately meets our short term needs and will give ADACAS the ability to invest into IT systems in the coming year. Our audited financial statements can be found at [www.adacas.org.au](http://www.adacas.org.au)

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<b>Revenue</b> (money received to do our work)	<b>\$3,565,654</b>
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<b>Expenses</b> (money spent to do our work)	<b>\$3,121,143</b>
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<b>Surplus</b> (money left over)	<b>\$444,511</b>
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<b>Reserves</b> (money in the bank)	<b>\$975,357</b>
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#### WHERE WE GET OUR MONEY FROM

Commonwealth Government	<b>\$2,111,393</b>
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ACT Government	<b>\$684,409</b>
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NDIS Support Coordination Service	<b>\$214,736</b>
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Other	<b>\$555,116</b>
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#### WHAT WE SPENT OUR MONEY ON

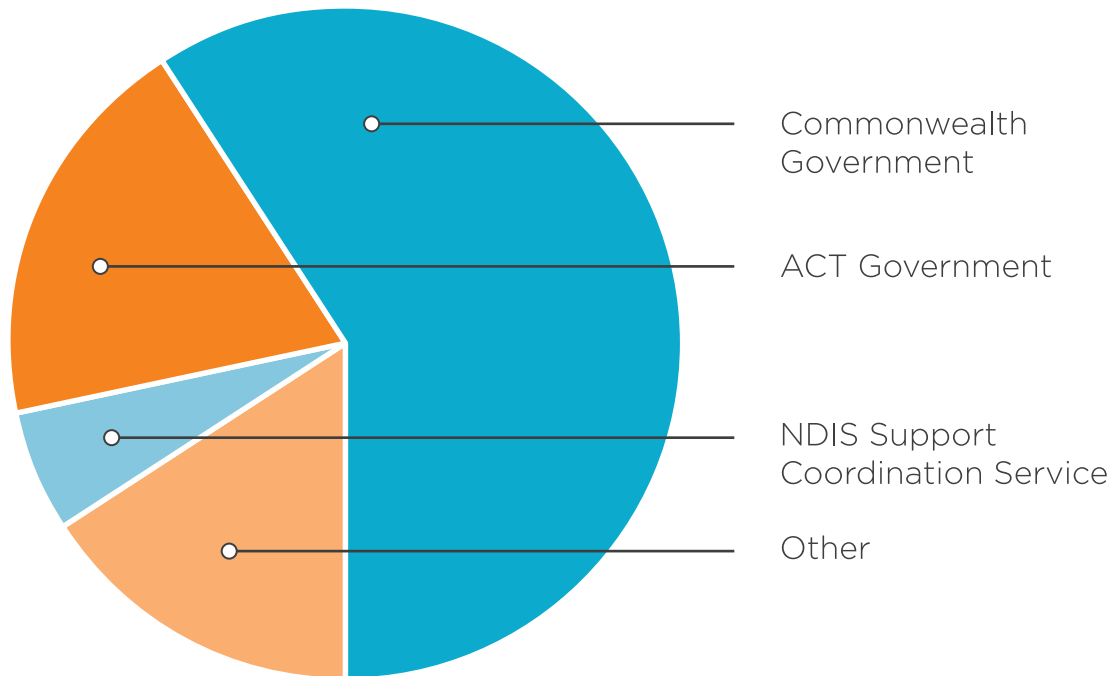
Staff wages, oncosts and their wellbeing	<b>\$2,610,999</b>
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Operating costs	<b>\$387,352</b>
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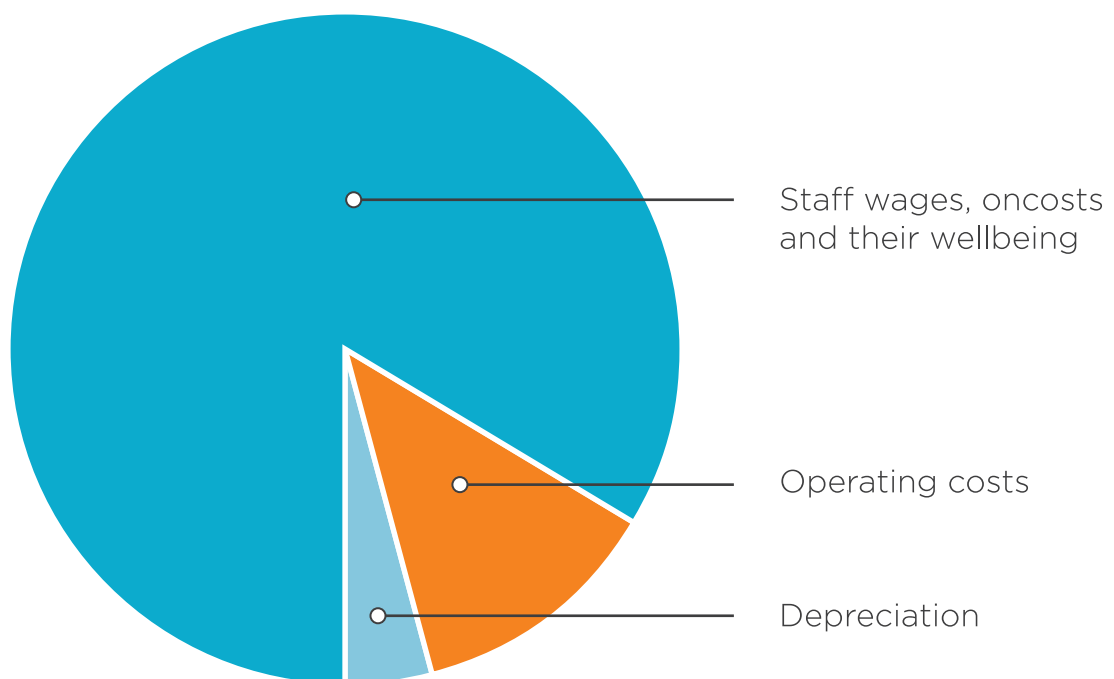
Depreciation	<b>\$122,792</b>
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## WHERE WE GET OUR MONEY FROM



## WHAT WE SPENT OUR MONEY ON





## CONTACT US

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